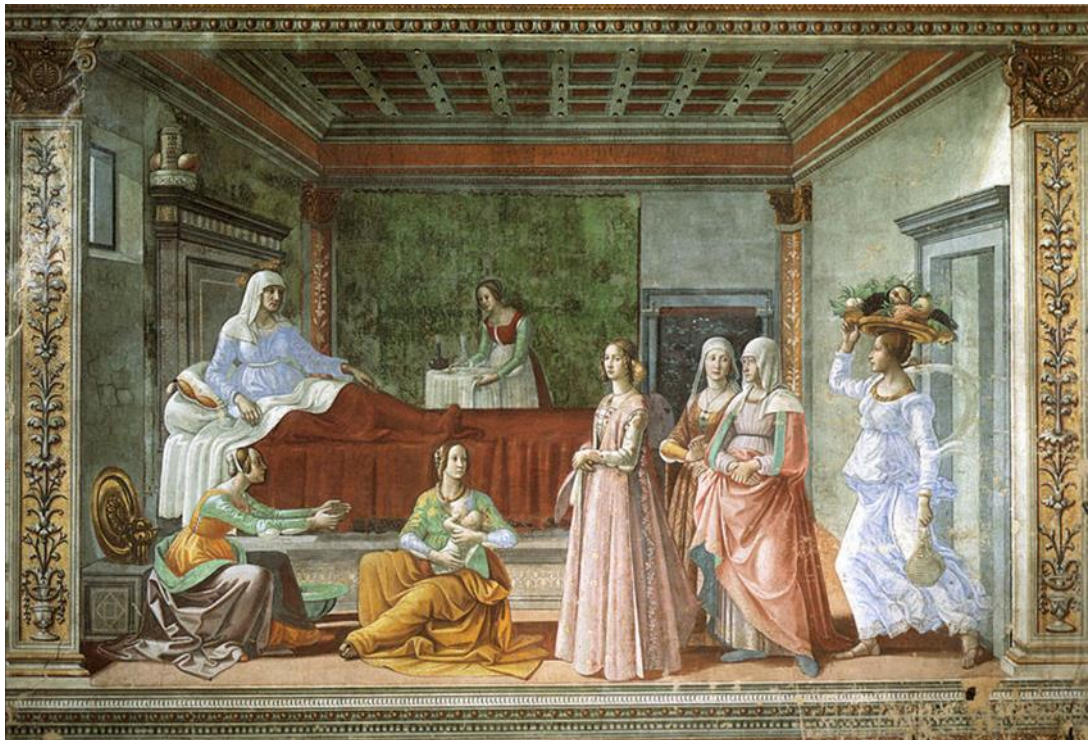


Fashioning Female Identities: Embodying Learned Values in Renaissance Florence

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Abstract

This study of Florentine rhetoric from the mid-fourteenth to the late-fifteenth centuries interrogates the cultural landscape against which men encouraged women to internalise and embody values related to gender, religion, status and kinship. The dissertation considers a range of settings in which cultural values were debated, taught, learned and embodied. The study begins by considering Renaissance perceptions of the internal gendered body, its moral qualities and sensory capabilities for developing identity. It progresses to consider bodily identity in relation to nudity, moral behaviour, community, etiquette, education, and sartorial expression. These were all domains that marked transitions of female domesticity from daughter to wife, to mother to widow. The embodied expression of virtue was most important for women because their bodies were read as extensions of masculine identities. The study examines philosophical ideals expressed in humanist treatises and weighs them against prescriptive texts and allegorical images that indicate how values *should* be expressed, and sources including sermons, diaries and letters that reflect on how those expressions *were* observed and interpreted. The dissertation builds on the work of historians of art, gender, Florence and theology, as well as sociological and neuro-psychological research, to demonstrate the rhetorical role of adornment, comportment and contemplation for fashioning women's nuanced identities in Renaissance Florence.

This Work has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

Signed:

Acknowledgments

I thank my Supervisor Dr. Nicholas Scott Baker for his encouragement, advice, suggested reading, proof-reading, and the many references and letters of introduction he has written to support this research.

I acknowledge the *Australian Centre for Italian Studies* with enormous gratitude, for having awarded me the *Cassamarca Foundation* Scholarship in 2011 which enabled me to carry out essential primary research.

I owe thanks also to Prof. Marea Mitchell for stepping in as my associate supervisor for the last few months of 2013.

Thank you to my friend and fellow-PhD candidate Dr. Elisa DeCourcy for many thesis-related conversations over the years.

Finally, I thank my parents Anna and Peter for their academic and emotional support and oceans of proof-reading and wine.

Dedicated to the memory of my grandmother,
my namesake, inspiration, painting student and history teacher,
Elizabeth Ward (Nov. 1939 - Nov. 2014).

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Introduction

Religious, secular and domestic rhetoric from the mid-fourteenth to the late-fifteenth centuries shaped the cultural landscape within which Florentine women learned to internalise and expressively embody values related to gender, religion, status and kinship. Bram Kempers describes Florentine civilisation as “rooted in several interlaced cultures” each of which imposed “codes or social standards, expressed in moral attitudes, legislation, religious observance and reinforced by constant exposure to images” which people first engaged with, learned and practiced as children, in their homes.¹ Despite this, research of Renaissance Florence has tended to disaggregate these “interlaced cultures” in order to develop specialised knowledge of specific cultural languages (for instance the religious, artistic, literary or political). By contrast, this study takes an innovative approach by focusing on rhetorical concepts that carried across cultural languages and thereby provides a richly textured, horizontal reconstruction of Florentine historical experience, rather than a vertical excavation of a particular aspect of that experience. By revealing and tracing the existence of a rhetoric of embodied morality across these interlaced cultures, this thesis presents a systematic, broad-scale study of the experience of elite women in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Florence. Women’s identities were formed in negotiation with diverse values, the significance of which could increase or decrease in response to changing settings or circumstances. The values deemed appropriate for a woman to exhibit shifted according to her context and to overarching factors including her social and marital status. Adornment (clothing and accessories) and comportment (posture, movement, eye-contact and speech) provided significant means for experiencing, learning and communicating the values that shaped a woman’s evolving identity. This process of embodying culturally legible meaning is what Bourdieu terms *habitus*.² This thesis considers the ways that cultural values, predominantly expressed and structured within masculine religious, intellectual and mercantile communities, came to be filtered down into the daily lives, experience and expression of patrician women.

¹ Bram Kempers, 1987. *Painting, Power and Patronage, the rise of the professional artist in Renaissance Italy*, London: Penguin Books, p.209.

² See: Pierre Bourdieu, 1979. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Translated by Richard Nice. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

This study examines a variety of materials rarely viewed together, from humanist treatises that expressed philosophical *ideals*, weighed against prescriptive texts and allegorical images that indicated how values *should* be expressed, to sermons, diaries and letters that reflected on how those expressions *were* observed and interpreted. It is by examining this range of materials intended for diverse audiences and settings in Florence that this thesis reveals a common rhetoric concerning embodied morality, which was deeply embedded in the community's psyche. As well as identifying common rhetoric, the sources highlight the sometimes conflicting teachings of humanist philosophy and Christian preachers to which the elite had simultaneous access and which they negotiated in their social and domestic behaviour. While interpreting and contextualising these sources, I consult the work of historians of art, Florentine culture, women's history and theology, as well as contemporary sociological and neurological studies, to demonstrate the moral and social importance of adornment and comportment. Although studies of Renaissance Florence tend to focus on discrete types of cultural products, lived experiences or values, according to the discipline in which the scholar specialises (be it the experience of plagues, the rise of the merchant economy, religious rituals, domestic life, charitable practices, fashion trends, or humanist philosophy), it remains important to recognise that these experiences and values were not discrete or mutually exclusive. The thesis demonstrates the ways in which values were reinforced, learned and carried from one context to another across society and across generations. It thereby identifies overarching cultural concerns relating to the meanings expressed by the adorned female body.

Adornment and comportment were essential to the experience and expression of identity and they took on special significance for women, who had few expressive outlets. Physical beauty was highly valued in elite women for both biological and philosophical reasons. From a fourteenth- to fifteenth-century philosophical point of view, beauty resulted from virtue, and truth overcame deception. People, therefore, expected that true identity should be legible through observation of the body. However, social etiquette, self-will and conflicting definitions of beauty challenged this theory. Additionally, changes in social and marital status were marked by a change in attire. For women these changes could be particularly dramatic. Women's appearance expressed their character and status, and the wealth and virtue of their male guardians, whether father, husband or son. Despite women's bodies

being the surrogate extension of masculine identities, Florentine women bore the brunt of accusations of vanity, a vice believed to elicit divine punishment. Conversely, rejecting material wealth and giving alms would be divinely rewarded. Mundane material was thereby imbued with spiritual significance; dressing oneself was connected with the question of eternal salvation or damnation, while being governed by social restrictions and expectations.

Throughout the thesis, then, I discuss identity as the intersection of the social, familial, visible, cognitive, emotional and sensory selves. Florentine social practices from public ritual to private use of domestic objects employed sensory stimulus to communicate, recall and reinforce the dictums of Christian morality. Paintings of human figures lent physical form to moral concepts, intended to be emotively animated in the mind and imitated in the body of the viewer. Imitation of Christ, of one's parents, or of allegorical figures was an essential feature of pedagogical practice. People of varying educational backgrounds derived culturally informed and nuanced meanings from written and visual sources, including the attired body. The negotiation of diverse external input results in individual identity being a subjective amalgam of internal experiences including memories, desires and sensations. Throughout a lifetime, mnemonic associations between visual, textual and sensory experiences accumulated and informed people's sense of self.³

This study focuses on the period 1348 to 1498 because it offers a coherent, relatively stable period in the religious, political and social cultures of Florence. The mid-fourteenth century is traditionally identified as the beginning of the Renaissance. The Black Death of 1348 serves as a useful starting point for studying this period as the experience, aftershock and recurrence of the plague lent particular immediacy to cultural debates regarding the negotiation of secular and religious values. Across this period humanist philosophy gained ground and ancient rhetoric increasingly informed contemporary values expressed through text, speech and art. The execution of Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola (b.1452) in 1498 marks a climactic point in the debate between diverse cultural values that shaped the visually expressive nature of Florentine women's identities. The turn of the century, following this point, saw tremendous political and religious change in Florence due to the

³ For a discussion of the multiple converging, simultaneous Renaissance conceptions of selfhood see John Jefferies Martin, 2004. *The Myth of Renaissance Individualism*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan. See also: Edward Muir, 2007. *Cultural Wars of the Late Renaissance: Sceptics, Libertines and Opera*. The Bernard Berenson Lecture on the Italian Renaissance, Harvard University Press, pp. 5-7.

institution of the Medici Principate and the reformations of the church. The 150 years under discussion experienced relative religious stability (by comparison with successive centuries) while grappling with immediate challenges including plagues. It experienced gradual yet significant cultural changes through the articulation of, and debate regarding, the role of observation and embodied imitation for instilling cultural values and expressing virtue.

Investigations of the innately subjective issue of selfhood, let alone historical selfhood, presents certain challenges. I have sought to address these challenges through a combination of historical and sociological methodologies. I examine the cultural and historical context of written and material evidence, while investigating intersections between biological, psychological and social components of identity formation according to both Renaissance philosophy and neuro-psychology. The last 500 years have unquestionably witnessed significant alterations in the cultural values by which adorned bodies are viewed and experienced. Therefore, discussing historical emotions and their embodiment requires a strong understanding of cultural context, conditioning and symbolism. However, although culturally removed from twenty-first century experience and values, early-Renaissance observational knowledge concerned with ways values should be learned, remembered and engrained through emotive and embodied practice align with the findings of recent studies in psychology and neurology. To consider what we share in our systems of identity creation, not only the ways in which we are different, I have sought support from neurological research. Recent studies utilise Bourdieuan practice theory to investigate relationships between cognition, embodiment, emotion, and selfhood within society.⁴ I have considered the role of observation and imitation as discussed in approaches to practice theory when interpreting prescriptive texts, *ricordi*, letters and sermons that advised their early-Renaissance audience on how to generate religious emotion, to raise children to be virtuous and to how express their virtue. I engage with contemporary sociological studies to open a new window through which to understand the experience and perspectives of those living in fourteenth- to fifteenth-century Florence.

In discussing identity (which is at once social and personal) it is important to consider the emotive influence of spatial and material experiences. As Carolyn Ellis and Michael Flaherty

⁴ For example: William M.Reddy, 2009. "Saying Something New, Practice Theory and Cognitive Neuroscience." *Arcadia Band – International Journal for Literary Studies*. 44 (1): 8-23.and see: J.A.C.J. Bastiaansen, M. Thioux, and C. Keyers. 2009. "Evidence for mirror systems in emotions." *Philosophical Transactions B* 2391-2404.

problematize in “An Agenda for the Interpretation of Lived Experience,” social sciences traditionally derive their arguments about society from the rationalisation of external experience without associating the external self with the internal, emotional, developing self. Studies rarely explore the cohesive internal relationship of emotion with cognition and sensory experience or the cultural conditioning that influences people’s emotional responses to given situations. Ellis and Flaherty argue that one reason for limited research in this field is a distrust of the study of emotion for its unscientific, un-quantitative nature.⁵ Nevertheless, emotions are essential to the way humans experience their surroundings. The kinds of emotions we experience are often shaped from the associations we have learned to make between certain events, values, physiological responses and social reinforcement.⁶ Understanding behaviour requires a consideration of actions’ emotional motivations which, in turn, requires an investigation into how emotional meanings and behaviours are taught and learned.

Marcia Morgado has demonstrated, through a survey of the measures, contradictions and challenges posed by key values theorists, that although sociologists have long held that people fashion their appearance with reference to their values, the concept of values and the correlation between values and behaviour has proved too allusive for categorical study.⁷ She discusses the 1973 work of Levitin that defines values as “central clusters of beliefs, thoughts, and feelings which [...] influence judgements and actions.”⁸ I examine the intersections of core beliefs relating to the virtue of the adorned sensate body from religious, social and familial standpoints, considering the way emotive culturally meaningful stimulus shaped the ways people dressed and comported themselves and judged the appearance of others. Morgado also notes Eduard Spranger’s (1914) insight that “if every human being were a chaos of changing tendencies... here would be no possibility of interpreting the historical world.”⁹ It is therefore important to acknowledge the human and

⁵ Carolyn Ellis and Michael G. Flaherty. 1992. “An Agenda for the Interpretation of Lived Experience.” In *Investigating Subjectivity: Research on Lived Experience*, 1-16. London: Sage Publications, pp. 2-3.

⁶ Chris L. Kleinke, 1978. *Self-Perception: The Psychology of Personal Awareness*. San Francisco: W.H. Freeman and Company.

⁷ Marcia A. Morgado, 1995. “Personal Values and Dress: The Spranger, Hartmann, AVL Paradigm in Research and Pedagogy.” *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* (Sage) 13 (2): 139-149.

⁸ Levitin (1973) as quoted in Morgado, p. 140

⁹ Spranger (1914) as quoted in Morgado, p.142

cultural consistencies that might aid the historian in identifying and so building on an understanding of the past.

In the remainder of this introduction I discuss the historiography of seven central ideas that I engage with throughout this thesis. These include: 1) the traditional association between the fifteenth century and the rise of the individual in Italy; 2) the sociological and academic treatment of the concept of embodiment and its value in relation to studying Renaissance female identity; 3) the use of adornment to forge and judge identities; 4) material culture as a conduit for self-reflection and a means through which house-bound elite women engaged with cultural ideals; 5) the pedagogic practices through which women learned their culture's values and expectations of who they should be; 6) Renaissance perceptions of the way memory functioned and therefore how it could be utilised to reinforce learned values, 7) the way conceptual dualism, evident in Renaissance thinking, has been carried across into historiographical practices and the limitations this presents when considering the way learned values permeated both sides of many of these divisions. The introduction concludes with an outline of the thesis structure.

1) Individuality and Identity

The study of individuality is important in framing my discussion of women's identities. While there are valid and significant arguments for an increased sense of internal individuality during the Renaissance, there is cause to doubt that this conceptual shift became significantly manifest in the lived experience of women. This very question has been posed in Joan Kelly's article "Did Women Have a Renaissance?"¹⁰ Limitations placed on women's education, the centrality of hierarchy in sartorial expression, and the fact that women's identities were continually framed in relation to men indicate that female identities were judged and experienced as a complex of communal relationships and that the concept of an autonomous internal voice did not dominate the ways people understood identity.

Nevertheless, historic enquiries have attempted to shed light on the foundations of contemporary Western ideals by taking their lead from Jacob Burckhardt's claim in *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* that modern individualism was born of the Italian

¹⁰ Joan Kelly, 1999. "Did Women Have A Renaissance?" In *Feminism and Renaissance Studies*, edited by Lorna Hutson, 21-47. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Renaissance. For Burckhardt, the Renaissance encompassed the development of an elite humanist approach to intellectual thought, a rebirth of the philosophy and aesthetics of antiquity, and the deconstruction of the medieval-hierarchical self.¹¹ Although Burckhardt provided an influential starting point for the investigation of modern identity, many of the grounds for his claims, particularly his assumptions of gender equality, have been largely discredited.¹² This thesis will further demonstrate the continued relevance of the hierarchy as a means of understanding one's place in society, in the family and in heaven.

Thomas Leahey's *A History of Psychology* argued that the modern concept of the individual began to emerge among the upper merchant classes in the Renaissance as evidenced through the creation of cultural products including diaries, portraits and mirrors, that allowed people to see, scrutinise and alter themselves.¹³ From the mid-fourteenth century, the flourishing mercantile urban city of Florence abounded with amateur authors who recorded local politics, their ancestry, and their economic affairs; they provided advice for running the household, and reflected on philosophy, Christianity and methods of meditation.¹⁴ People living in Florence fashioned their social identities through their involvement with religious confraternities, guilds and musical companies. The educated elite further defined themselves through demonstrating their eclectic interests from politics, business, art and literature, and they broadened their networks beyond the city through letter-writing.¹⁵

Stephen Greenblatt's influential work *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* argues that individuality stemmed from people reacting against their demanding civic structure by engaging in private meditation and introspection.¹⁶ He further argued that moments which may feel

¹¹ Jacob Burckhardt, (1860), 1990. *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*. Translated by S. Middlemore. Penguin Classics.

¹² For instance see: Jonathan Woolfson, 2005. "Burckhardt's Ambivalent Renaissance." In *Palgrave Advances in Renaissance Historiography*, edited by Jonathan Woolfson, 9-26. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, and see: Martin, p. 5.

¹³ Thomas Hardy Leahey, 2013. *A History of Psychology: From Antiquity to Modernity*. 7th. USA: Pearson, pp 112-117.

¹⁴ For a discussion of Florentine Zibaldoni, or notebooks, see: Dale Kent, 2005. "Personal Literary Anthologies in Renaissance Florence: Re-Presenting Current Events to Conform to Christian, Classical and Civic Ideals." In *Rituals, Images and Words, Varieties of Cultural Expression in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, edited by F.W. Kent and Charles Zika. Turnhout: Brepols.

¹⁵ For instance, see the profiles outlined in: Blake McD Wilson, 1997. "Madrigal, Lauda and Local Style in Trecento Florence." *The Journal of Musicology* (University of California Press) 15 (2): 137-177. pp149-153

¹⁶ Stephen Greenblatt, 1980. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*. paperback edition 1984. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press., p.46.

original or autonomous for an individual are necessarily informed by previous experiences and values, whether secular, religious or familial.¹⁷ In my work, I maintain that identity is constructed by engaging, remembering and responding to one's material and social surroundings, while foregrounding various simultaneously held values.

Other studies react against historians who intend from the outset to understand twenty-first century selfhood and thus project twenty-first century expectations through their historic lens. For instance, Caroline Walker Bynum's *Fragmentation and Redemption* warns against relying on modern suppositions to interpret textual and visual renditions of holy figures' bodies, lest we fail to appreciate the nuanced symbolism and the fluidity with which medieval people treated concepts like gender.¹⁸ Michael Calabrese addresses the problems of reframing historic texts, in particular male constructions of the female voice, as evidence of feminism in an attempt to hear the silenced voices of the past, as this distorts the context of the works' creation as well as the meaning of the twentieth-century term. However he acknowledges that there are significant points of recognition between cultural experiences that make historical works, treated in a scholarly and contextualised manner, meaningful in modern societies.¹⁹

John Martin's *Myths of Renaissance Individualism* attempts to understand Renaissance identity 'on its own terms' by studying the trials of heretics in the sixteenth-century, which he considers as expressive of people's true beliefs.²⁰ Although such an approach as a sustained practice may understate the importance of continuity and development in human cultures, it does indicate a desire in the researcher to avoid colouring the past with contemporary expectations. Martin identifies five key traits in the Renaissance treatment of identity: conformity (identifying with a community), prudence (guarding or concealing convictions), performativity (perfecting the ritual behaviours assigned to a socially defined identity), porosity (being influenced by astral or supernatural power), and (from the mid-sixteenth century) sincerity.²¹ The idea of concealing religious convictions was not as

¹⁷ Greenblatt, p.257.

¹⁸ Caroline Walker Bynum, 1992. *Fragmentation and Redemption, Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion*. New York: Zone Books, p 116.

¹⁹ Michael A. Calabrese, 1997. "Feminism and the Packaging of Boccaccio's Fiammetta." *Italica* (American Association of Teachers of Italian) 74 (1): 20-42, pp. 23-25.

²⁰ Martin, pp. 7-8.

²¹ Martin, pp. 30-38.

significant a component of selfhood in the late-fifteenth century. Nevertheless, the porous, conforming, performative and even sincere aspects of selfhood are important interweaving categories for discussing identity.

I would argue that the ways in which diverse (culturally contextualised) categories for understanding selfhood interacted within a single body can be better understood by considering more recent sociological categories in a historic context. In “The Self, Its Voices, and Their Discord” John Gagnon defines modern individualism as the greater identification of the self with the internal monologue. This internal monologue becomes more consciously distinguished from the multiple external roles performed (for example that of employee, spouse, parent or friend), and hence is a composite of many internalised and continually negotiated voices.²² He argues that the range of roles one was expected to play, and the range of voices available to be incorporated, began its most significant increase from the nineteenth century.²³ Although the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries displayed an increased awareness of selfhood, people (especially women) had fewer opportunities to travel or to read, which limited the density of alternative voices or narratives through which to negotiate and interpret their roles and behaviours. The fifteenth century may represent a significant step towards individualism as it is understood in the twenty-first century but its cultural framework was still deeply rooted in its hierarchical, feudal foundations.

An examination of both celestial imagery and sumptuary laws indicates a continuity of hierarchical perceptions even as people developed a more nuanced sense of self. As an alternative to viewing the development of the individual as internal and exclusive, Richard Trexler’s *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* argued that Florentine identity relied on social experiences, particularly religious rituals that touched on communal responsibility. Trexler broadened the discussion of Florentine identity to include the less-privileged members of the society by considering evidence of communal experience. He demonstrated the continuing relevance of a spiritual and a civic self.²⁴ The unstable republic of Florence was built on multiple communities of kin, confraternities and guilds. Men’s identities, and possibility for social mobility, depended on the strength, wealth and reputation of their

²² John Gagnon, 1992. “The Self, Its Voices, and Their Discord.” In *Investigating Subjectivity: Research on Lived Experience*, 221-243. London: Sage Publications, pp.222-223.

²³ Gagnon, p.227.

²⁴ Richard Trexler, 1980. *Public Life in Renaissance Florence*. New York: Academic Press.

networks. Women's identities were informed first and foremost by their kinship relationships as the daughters, wives, mothers or widows of men.²⁵

Therefore, to investigate Florentine embodied identities from the mid-fourteenth to late-fifteenth centuries one must consider the dynamic, social construction of layered identity. This means examining the simultaneously held cultural values that shaped domestic, political and religious experiences. A range of materials is necessary to shed light on these diverse aspects of identity creation, including treatises that demonstrate the philosophies that underpinned cultural attitudes, sermons by preachers that advised listeners of the values to which they should adhere, paintings in churches that allegorically and mnemonically related biblical narratives to cultural values, accounts of communal rituals, sumptuary laws that demonstrate a connection between wealth, status and social acceptability, diaries that reflect on people's experiences and aspirations, decorated domestic furniture that allegorically reinforced religious and familial expectations of the home's inhabitants, and the letters exchanged by humanists and the mercantile aristocracy that reflected on experiences and shared ideas across the Italian peninsula. Relating recent knowledge about human psychology to the observational and philosophical knowledge of the fifteenth century allows one to further extrapolate on the psychological and emotional impact of more tangible evidence of identity.

2) *Embodiment and Sociology*

Embodiment encompasses the conscious and unconscious bodily enactment of values-driven behaviour. The body is the most immediate tangible expressive, and yet, ephemeral vehicle of identity. The meanings attached to the body shape the ways people experience their lives on a sensate, social and emotional level. It is therefore pertinent to consider how people of the Renaissance learned to understand, experience, express and interpret their bodies. As Sharon Strocchia eloquently states in her *Death and Ritual in Renaissance*

²⁵ For a discussion of public family identity as politically and visually expressed in Florence see: Michael Lingohr, 2006. "The Palace and Villa as Spaces of Patrician Self-Definition." In *Renaissance Florence: A Social History*, edited by Roger J. Crum and John T. Paolletti, 240-272. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 240-272.

Florence “the body was both the mirror and the maker of its historical and natural environment.”²⁶

Fernando Vidal argues that the concept of the ‘embodied self’ is anachronistic because from an early-Christian perspective there was no concept of the body as an entity distinct from the soul and that the concept could only arise from a philosophical standpoint that habitually viewed the self as a mind that possessed a body.²⁷ Yet, this seems at odds with evidence, for example, fourteenth-century letters between religious figures. Consider St. Catherine of Siena’s 1376 statement “I am, poor wretch, living in my body, yet in desire constantly outside my body!”²⁸ A hundred years later, in 1473, the Florentine neo-Platonist philosopher and priest Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) wrote a condolence letter that contemplated the possibility that “the soul is the man himself and the body but his shadow.”²⁹ Bynum argues that the Platonic concept of a mind-body division was challenged throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries as theologians contemplated the Christian hope of a bodily resurrection. She demonstrates that this line of thinking developed a broader scope for bodily miracles, including miraculous lactation, the receipt of stigmata, and miracles being granted through contact relics. The rhetoric born of such stories obscured the distinction between body and soul. It perpetuated the idea that God created humanity to be wholly psychosomatic, yet it never entirely eradicated dualistic rhetoric.³⁰ This rhetorical dependence on the distinct treatment of body and soul even when making a case for their unity is evidenced in Ficino’s 1489 *De Vita Libri Tres* (*Three Books on Life*) which argued that:

It is wrong to cherish only the slave of the soul, the body, and to neglect the soul, the lord and ruler of the body, especially since the Magi and Plato assert that the entire body depends upon the soul in such a way that if the soul is not well, the body cannot be well.³¹

²⁶ Sharon T. Strocchia, 1992. *Death and Ritual in Renaissance Florence*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, p.30

²⁷ Fernando Vidal, 2002. “Brains, Bodies, Selves, and Science: Anthropologies of Identity and the Resurrection of the Body.” *Critical Inquiry* 28 (4): 930-974.

²⁸ Catherine, of Siena. 1988. *The Letters of St. Catherine of Siena*. Translated by Suzanne Noffke. Vol. 1. New York: Bringhamton. “Letter 70 To Frate Raimondo da Capua, In Avignon, 1376”, p. 221

²⁹ Marsilio Ficino, 1975. *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*. Translated by department of the school of economic science language. London: Attic Press, “Letter 15,” pp.54-55.

³⁰ Bynum (1992), pp. 222-224.

³¹ Ficino, (2002), p. 161. Also see: Cynthia Skenazi, 2013. *Aging Gracefully in the Renaissance*. Leiden: Brill, p. 30.

Furthermore, texts written in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Florence do demonstrate an awareness of the need to train the body from a young age to shape one's character, not only for social success but to improve the condition of one's soul. Ficino notes that "we are enjoined by Socrates to cultivate our mind by behaving in the best way" and that "as soon as the mind is purged of all fleshly perturbations through moral discipline and is directed towards divine truth" then one will feel joy.³² Training all aspects of the self through bodily action included learning to maintain the posture fitting to one's station, refining one's emotions by balancing the humours, and elevating the mind to the spiritual by mortifying the flesh. Amy Hollywood notes that parallels exist between the medieval belief in the construction of the internal through the external and modern theories, notably Sigmund Freud's theory that the ego develops its subjectivity through the experience of pain, and Jacques Lacan's theory that one learns of oneself through identification with the other.³³ Christian people in Florentine society drew their sense of self from the interaction of qualities including sensation, matter, appearance, emotion and memory, with social signifiers relating to piety, kinship, gender and class.

One of the most prominent twentieth-century researchers into the sociological phenomenon of embodiment, or practice theory, is Pierre Bourdieu. His book *Distinction*, analysed survey data he collected in the 1960s to investigate society members' "cultivated disposition and cultural competence", measured through correlations between the consumption of cultural goods (from high art to clothing, domestic objects, and eating habits), educational capital and social origin.³⁴ Bourdieu considered the way societies use embodied symbols (including adornment, comportment, vocal-tone and cosmetics) to accentuate the various values that were culturally associated to biological distinctions (such as male/female or young/old) as well as to economic and hierarchical distinctions.³⁵ The social context within which Bourdieu conducted his research and drew his conclusions is not equivalent to a fifteenth-century social structure. However, his overarching argument about learned and embodied identity, which he terms *habitus*, "necessity internalized and

³² Ficino, (2002) pp. 161-163.

³³ Amy Hollywood, 1999. "Inside Out: Beatrice of Nazareth and her Hagiographer." In *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters*, edited by Catherine Mooney, 78-98. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, pp. 92-93.

³⁴ Bourdieu, p. 13.

³⁵ Bourdieu, p. 193.

converted into a disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions,” does provide a valuable set of criteria through which to investigate tangible signs of social identity, legible in and on the historic body.³⁶ Indeed, historian and cultural anthropologist Monique Scheer recently theorised a means of understanding emotions as historical practice by building on Bourdieu’s *habitus*. Scheer argues that “Conceiving of emotions as practices means understanding them as emerging from bodily dispositions conditioned by a social context, which always has cultural and historical specificity.”³⁷ In order to examine historical emotions, Scheer advocates examining cultural practices that involve the body, mind, language, material, environment and society. As emotional experiences and reflections on the self are not always forthcoming in first-person accounts, the historian has to attempt to set aside subjective assumptions about the kinds of emotions experienced to consider the language used to discuss social and physical experiences in tandem with material objects including visual representations of those experiences from a wide range of perspectives in order to identify patterns in practice.³⁸ The emotional, rational and sensate self learns to operate in relation to recognised contexts and cultural expectations.³⁹ Therefore, the meaning society attributes to the physical appearance and comportment influences society members’ emotions, experiences, memories, self-perception and self-representation.

3) *Sartorial Literacy*

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, attire not only projected identity to onlookers but also defined and assured wearers of their own identities.⁴⁰ Appearance is one of the first points of reference utilised in inter-personal communication. Adornment is a cultural phenomenon whose meaning is developed through social interaction.⁴¹ Its importance as a visual signifier for identity is increased by the material’s close association with the body. The psychological meaning assigned to certain types attire and the physical constraints

³⁶ Bourdieu, p. 170.

³⁷ Monique Scheer, 2012. “Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (and is that what makes them have a history)? A Bourdieuan approach to understanding emotion” *History and Theory* 51: 193-220, p. 193.

³⁸ Scheer, pp. 193, 217-219.

³⁹ Ellis & Flaherty, p.4.

⁴⁰ Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass. 2000. *Renaissance Clothing and The Materials of Memory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 270.

⁴¹ Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins and Joanne B. Eicher. 1992. “Dress and Identity.” *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* (Sage Publications) 10 (1).

adornment placed on the body altered the way people moved, interacted and understood one another. As Ann Jones and Peter Stallybrass argued in their study *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, the tactile and temporal act of dressing, which for elite fashions involved many components and assistance and left the body somewhat compressed and weighed down, would have daily impressed people with the significance of attire to their identities.⁴²

Living in a wealthy textile-production and trade centre, Florentines were particularly receptive to sartorial alteration. In his 1905 *Philosophie der Mode*, sociologist Georg Simmel claimed that sartorial display developed when women were denied access to other forms of expression. He believed that no extravagant female fashions emerged during the Renaissance and so he concluded that elite women enjoyed equal education, opportunities and freedom of expression as men.⁴³ Simmel's argument ignores both the role of women's adornment as an expression of men's identities, and evidence of sartorial development in Florence, including continually updated sumptuary laws, and sermons that condemned contemporary fashion trends by claiming they were immodest and extravagant in comparison the virtuous past. The gradual transformation of fashion is more convincingly theorised in Roland Barthes' *The Fashion System* that argues "transformation is found on the frontiers of the system, without ever transgressing it"; however, "it remains dependent on the structure, since the utterance always unites the constant [...] and a variation."⁴⁴ Fashions therefore develop by making gradual, and thereby legible, changes to the sartorial language. Simmel's misreading of a continuity in the sartorial language of the Renaissance is indicative of a trend identified by fashion theorists that societies believe fashion in their own era is changing at an increased rate, but in hindsight those changes appear minimal.⁴⁵

Elite Florentine women's sartorial autonomy was limited due to the expectation that changes in their dependent status must be accompanied by changes in their attire. Men commissioned, paid for, and sometimes designed the clothing worn by their dependent

⁴² Jones & Stallybrass, p.23.

⁴³ Georg Simmel, 1997. *Simmel on Culture*. Edited by David Frisby and Mike Featherstone. London: Sage Publications, pp.196-7.

⁴⁴ Roland Barthes, 1983. *The Fashion System*. Translated by Mathew Ward and Richard Howard. Berkly, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press. p. 291.

⁴⁵ R. K. Pannabecker, 1997. "Fashioning Theory: A critical discussion of the symbolic interactionist theory of fashion." *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 15 (3): 178-183., p. 179.

women. While men's dress was more restricted to the attire of their profession, they could project their social aspirations on their wives' and daughters' bodies at moments of social exposure, such as weddings, baptisms, funerals or festivals. Women's bodies acted as men's canvas and husbands could be blamed for women's ostentatious attire.⁴⁶ When women were fined for a breach in sumptuary legislation (for wearing clothing forbidden by law either for someone of their social status or over a certain value) they were asked for their father's or husband's name rather than their own, and it was that male guardian who was issued a fine.⁴⁷ Apart from women not being legal citizens, this practice indicates that people responded to the sight of women's bodies as representative of their families' identity and honour. Satire and records concerning the enforcement of sumptuary legislation, however, did continue to suggest that women were gifted at seducing their husbands into spending unreasonable sums on their appearance, or in otherwise developing innovative means to imitate banned fashions.⁴⁸ Contemporary rhetoric held that women's vanity was to blame for diminishing their husbands' wealth, discouraging young unestablished men from marrying, and for dragging down society's moral character.

The sartorial language of Florentines combined with their religious heritage to form an indispensable guide for them to understand their place in both celestial and earthly society. Biblical references to attire legitimised, even necessitated, the Church's engagement with and clarification of adornment in relation to bodily rhetoric and practice.⁴⁹ The Observant Dominican preacher Giovanni Dominici (1356-1419) defined the ideal role of attire in the creation of Christian identity in his *Regola del Governo di Cura Familiare* (1405). He wrote nostalgically of the sartorial modesty that supposedly characterised the first followers of Christ and lamented the permanent loss of such sartorial expression in his own time:

⁴⁶ Pamela Joseph Benson, 1992. *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman*. Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press. p.52, Muzzarelli, p. 270.

⁴⁷ Alan Hunt, 1996. *Governance of the Consuming Passions: A History of Sumptuary Law*. New York: St Martin's Press, p. 223, Ronald E. Rainey, 1985. *Sumptuary Legislation in Renaissance Florence*. Doctoral Thesis, Columbia University, pp. 210-211

⁴⁸ Catherine Kovesi, 2002. *Sumptuary Law in Italy 1200-1500*. Oxford: Oxford Historical Monographs, Clarendon Press. p. 122-123

⁴⁹ For instance, the initiation of clothing (Genesis 3:11-22), A woman being healed by touching Jesus' clothing (Mark 5:25-35), and Jesus' instruction to clothe the naked (Mathew 25:36-40).

I believe that once Christians dressed in basic cloth, long, free of all vanity as befits a true religious people [...]. Now I know well, if you would like to reduce [attire to] the first state of the Church for your children, you could not.⁵⁰

Preachers feared that the loss of modest fashions reflected the wearers' vanity and threatened their salvation.⁵¹

Despite the Church's belief that garments were becoming more vice-ridden, it did not always conclude that people's virtue was diminishing. Some writers argued that the meaning of fashion was "brought up by custom" and so, as fashions developed, attire that had represented vanity in one generation could signify virtue in the next.⁵² Religious paintings of adorned bodies likewise had to function in different ways, for instance, to communicate the vice of luxurious attire on earth and the virtue of similarly luxurious attire awaiting the elect in heaven. Christian moralisers found that as fashion was not static and a wide variety of clothes were worn at a given time (depending on the wearer's social and marital status and on the weather), and that it was more efficient to argue against attitudes toward the adorned body rather than against specific adornments.⁵³ Similarly, this thesis concentrates particularly on attitudes to the adorned social body rather than focusing on the particular garments worn across the period.

An ideal upheld by both religious and secular authors was that appearance revealed truth. However, wearers constructed their appearance, anticipating the way viewers would judge them. Sartorial literacy relied on both wearers' and viewers' aesthetic conditioning which allowed them to make connections between visual signs, cultural attitudes and social contexts. Even within the one cultural sphere, people could expect their identities to be read differently when occupying different spaces. Instructions about adornment in conduct books

⁵⁰ Giovanni Dominici, 1860. *Regola del Governo di Cura Familiare del Beato Giovanni Dominici*. Firenze: Presso Angiolo Garinei Librario p.136 "*E credo già fusse vestimento cristiano panni vili, lunghi, d'ogni vanità privati, come si confà a veri religiosi ... Ora so bene, posto che volesse di ridurre il primo stato della Chiesa ne'tuoi nati, non potresti.*" [my translation].

⁵¹ Kovesi, p.1, Dominici frequently took this nostalgic tone, including in his reproaches on the topic of contemporary education, see Debby, p. 117.

⁵² In the early sixteenth-century Castiglione further asserted that "it be lawfull for us also to follow the custome of our times, without conrtolment of these olde men" and that "it is not to bee saide, that such as abstained from doing ill, because they knew not how to doe it, deserve in that case any prayse: for although they did but a litle ill, yet did they the worst they knew." in Baldessare Castiglione, 1974. *The Book of the Courtier*. Translated by Sir Thomas Hoby. London: J.M Dent & Sons.pp. 99-100.

⁵³ Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli, 1999. *Guardaroba Medievale: Vesti e Società dal XIII al XVI Secolo*. Bologna: Società editrice il Mulino, p 271.

outlined the ways people should meet society's sartorial and behavioural expectations of them. Controlling the body's appearance included matching attire with comportment and so wilfully fashioning a social self. This dissertation considers comportment, including posture, movement and speech, as an inseparable component of the legible body. When considering the body as a communicative object, I will use the term adornment, rather than clothing, as this term encompass garments and accessories including jewellery, shoes and hairstyles.

Fifteenth-century Florentines inhabited a world in which adornments were saturated with social and spiritual meaning. Dressing was informed by memories and feelings associated with social and divine judgment, with connotations of respectability, reward or damnation. The meanings attached to the adorned body were reinforced through allegorical exempla in multiple genres. The meanings attributed to the adorned body highlight tension between spiritual and social values, ideals and practices.

4) *Material Culture*

Humans are neuro-cognitively preconditioned to develop material culture, not only as a symbol of cultural experience but as an active extension of embodied knowledge, communication and of social meaning-making.⁵⁴ In historical studies, material culture can be viewed as being 'signs in history' (demonstrative of intentional, values-laden meaning-making) and 'signs of history' (representative of the ways knowledge of the past is recorded).⁵⁵ Material culture reflects the social, spatial and sensorial nature of human systems of knowing. A study of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century materiality indicates the ways in which cultural values were articulated and perpetuated, aiding in the construction of embodied identities. Religious and secular materials including relics, garments, mirrors, jewellery and depictions of the attired body in altarpieces, portraits and domestic furniture had influence due to their tangibility, their function and their allegorical decoration.

⁵⁴ Svend Østergaard. 2012. "Imitation, Mirror Neurons and Material Culture" in *Excavating the Mind, Cross-Sections through Culture, Cognition and Materiality*, Edited by Niels Johannsen, Mads Jessen, Helle Juel Jensen, Aarhus University Press: Denmark, 25-37. And: Mads D. Jessen. 2012. "The Hall and the Church during Christianization: Building Ideologies and Material Concepts." " in *Excavating the Mind, Cross-Sections through Culture, Cognition and Materiality*, Edited by Niels Johannsen, Mads Jessen, Helle Juel Jensen, 133-160. Denmark: Aarhus University Press.

⁵⁵ Robert W. Preucel, 2012. "Of God Stones and Dance Plazas: The Material Mediation of Historical Consciousness" in *Excavating the Mind, Cross-Sections through Culture, Cognition and Materiality*, Edited by Niels Johannsen, Mads Jessen, Helle Juel Jensen, 111-132. Denmark: Aarhus University Press.

Vision (of the physical eye or the mind's eye) played a role in shaping the religious landscape in which Florentine people constructed their identities.⁵⁶ Preachers created threatening mental images of demons tempting unwitting women with superfluous ornamentation, or encouraging them with visions of celestial attire. The society's reliance on sartorial cues and painted figures to express vice and virtue attests to the importance of visual analysis for historians. In *On Painting* (1436), Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472) advised that religious scenes or 'historia' must be "so charming and attractive as to hold the eye of the learned and unlearned spectator for a long while with a certain sense of pleasure and emotion" and that such emotion-inducing attention could be stimulated "when the figure of some well-known person is present [...] the face that is known draws the eyes of all spectators."⁵⁷ Personal identification with religious stories was further ensured by repetition in various public and domestic settings. People were encouraged to muse on the events described in the Bible as though they had occurred in their city, to tie the mysteries of the Bible to the familiar and personal and develop a deeper spiritual understanding than a single telling could offer.⁵⁸ Different renditions of a story demanded different levels of emotional involvement depending on the social possibilities of each context, and yet they related to and recalled one another, developing a series of interlocking mnemonic associations.

A number of art-historical studies have considered how gender might have effected viewers' interpretations of visual narratives.⁵⁹ Cristelle Baskins has demonstrated that objects in the Renaissance home would inspire a different reception from male and female members of the household.⁶⁰ Adrian Randolph argued that civic imagery of female personifications could simultaneously instil aspirations of duty tied to fecundity in women, while inspiring desire

⁵⁶ Melion, pp. 1-3.

⁵⁷ Leon Battista Alberti, 1972. *On Painting and On Sculpture, the Latin Texts of De Pictura and De Statua*. Edited by Cecil Grayson. Translated by Cecil Grayson. London: Phaidon.p. 79.

⁵⁸ Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale Firenze. Niccolò da Osimo, 1511. *Libro Devoto e Fruttoso a Ciascun Fedel Christiano Chiamat Giardino De Orationi*. Rari, Guice 9.5.21 ..

⁵⁹ See, for instance: Robert S. Sturges, 2010. "Visual Pleasure and La Vita Nuova, Lacan, Mulvey and Dante." *The Senses and Society: Pleasure and Danger in Perception: The Five Senses in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Berg) 5 (1): 93-105.pp. 93-105, and: Austin Harrington, 2004. *Art and Social Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press. p. 44-45, the essays in: *Picturing Women in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, 1997. Geraldine A. Johnson, Sara F. Matthews Grieco (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Simons, pp. 4-30.

⁶⁰ Cristelle Baskins, 1998. *Cassone Painting, Humanism, and Gender in Early Modern Italy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.p.185, and: Cristelle Baskins, 2008. "Triumph: An Introduction." In *The Triumph of Marriage, Painted Cassoni of the Renaissance*, 1-14. Boston: Gardner Museum. p.10.

and political pride in its male viewers.⁶¹ However, reading objects to derive a historic interpretation must be tempered, as Paola Tinagli has shown, by an awareness that the 'viewer' we discuss is an imagined amalgam of the available evidence. Direct accounts of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century viewers' responses to images tend to be written by upper-class men. Therefore, arguments about female viewers must be cautiously inferred from the visual, written and contextual evidence.⁶² Whether civic or domestic, tangible or imagined, images carried dynamic allegorical associations which built on a shared cultural foundation while remaining open for interpretation and application.

Details of lower-class people's contemplative lives and their relationship with material culture and embodiment are much less forthcoming than those of the wealthy and literate. The scope of this dissertation must be limited in the most part to the upper classes of Florentine society. Details of the broad experience of lower-class Florentines can be revealed through such records as the 1427 *catasto* (a government survey of all Florentine citizens carried out for tax purposes), as demonstrated by David Herlihy and Christine Klapisch-Zuber's *Tuscans and their Families*.⁶³ Female servants were raised, or at least sojourned, in wealthy homes and during that time they daily engaged with and handled material objects imbued with allegorical and spiritual significance. I am unaware of any existing evidence of the extent to which the meaning of such objects, created for the intellectual or emotional needs of the wealthy master and his family, held for the household servants, although it is likely that they did.

The fifteenth century saw religious materials and rituals encroach on domestic life. Trexler has shown that fourteenth-century courtesy books, including *Libro di buoni costumi* by Florentine merchant writer Paolo da Certaldo (1320-1370), advised a spatial division for the experience of the sacred and secular.⁶⁴ However, preachers and moral advisers of the fifteenth century, including Dominici and Savonarola, increasingly advocated private

⁶¹ Adrian W.B. Randolph, 2002. *Engaging Symbols, Gender, Politics and Public Art in Fifteenth-Century Florence*. New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. 73-74.

⁶² Paola Tinagli, 1997. *Women in Italian Renaissance Art: Gender, Representation, Identity*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 8-9.

⁶³ David Herlihy and Christine Klapisch-Zuber. 1978. *Tuscans and their Families: A Study of the Florentine Catasto of 1427*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

⁶⁴ Paolo da Certaldo. 1986. "Libro di buoni Costumi." In *Mercanti Scrittori: Ricordi Nella Firenze Tra Medioevo e Rinascimento*, edited by Vittore Branca, 1-100. Milano: Rusconi. *Buoni Costumi* literally translates as Good Costumes but in this context it means Admirable Customs/Morals. Phrases and words for clothing often inherit alternate meanings through cultural associations 'Good Habits' and 'Fashion' in English for instance.

domestic worship and the introduction of religious gestures, altars and paintings into the home.⁶⁵ Nirit Ben-Aryeh Debby states that Dominici demonstrated originality by encouraging mothers to use religious images in the church and in the home to teach children biblical stories and their applicable morals.⁶⁶ Innovative as it may have been to offer such advice to children, I would argue that Dominici tapped into existing linguistic and visual rhetoric, as preachers engaged their audiences by developing striking mental images, and domestic imagery frequently consisted of recognisable narratives and mnemonic symbolism that reflected and reinforced cultural ideals with the intention that the audience should learn from the examples.

5) *Learning values*

Texts from both religious and secular settings engage in an underlying social dialogue regarding observational and instructive education which differed according to the learner's rank and gender. Education in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries differed depending on the skills children were expected to require. In addition to their skills-based education, children learned and internalised culturally appropriate morals through observation and embodied imitation. Although people did not all have access to the same books, sermons and materials, certain Christian and social values were perpetuated through a wide range of materials and behaviours which increased the awareness of core cultural beliefs shown by people of different status. Early-humanist author Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374) wrote a treatise addressed to Francesco I da Carrara, Lord of Padua, on *How a Ruler Ought to Govern His State* in 1364 which indicated the importance of engraining practice for moral development, saying:

I had intended that I would exhort you, at its [the treatise's] end, to correct the morals of your subjects. Yet I now think this would be an impossible task, for it is always difficult to change what had evolved out of custom. It cannot be done by force of law or by kings.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Trexler (1980), p.160.

⁶⁶ Debby (2001), pp. 114 & 144.

⁶⁷ Francesco Petrarca, 1978. "How a Ruler Ought to Govern His State." In *The Earthly Republic*, edited by Benjamin G. Kohl, Elizabeth B. Welles and Ronald G. Witt, translated by Benjamin G. Kohl, 35 -78. Pennsylvania: University Pennsylvania Press, p.77.

Building on this principle, it is important to discuss a range of customs related to religious, secular and domestic experience in order to examine the fundamental values learned and embodied by Florentine women.

A wealth of information concerning the ways in which the upper-mercantile class of Florence thought about raising a family to be moral, respectable and economically secure is available due to the increasing practice of writing books of advice and *ricordi*. *Ricordi* were initially books of accounts; however, in the fourteenth century they began to evolve in various ways as writers recorded family stories and advice.⁶⁸ Their evolution is in part due to recurring plagues, which from 1348 orphaned many people who thereby lost their connection to their ancestry and role models. Wealthy merchants, including Bonaccorso Pitti and Giovanni di Pagolo Morelli, wrote *ricordi* to advise future generations in how to gain an education, how to behave and how to be successful.⁶⁹

Ideals regarding raising a virtuous family were also the subject of humanist study and debate. The masculine-dominated rhetoric of the intellectual elite shaped the cultural ideals against which elite Florentine families raised their daughters and judged their wives. This is exemplified in the significant work *De re uxoria (On Wifely Duties)* written in 1416 by Venetian humanist Francesco Barbaro (1390-1454) as a wedding gift for Lorenzo de' Medici the Elder (1395-1440). The treatise was written with the intention that it should be circulated amongst Florentine scholars from elite families; as Barbaro states in the introduction, addressed to Lorenzo "I am also attempting to teach several others of our age through you."⁷⁰ The treatise adapted the rhetoric of ancient philosophers to construct an ideal wife for the fifteenth century. It was intended to provide husbands with guidance in what to train their wives and daughters to aspire toward. Women learned through the combination of direct instruction, and observation and imitation. Barbaro quotes a Spartan woman who explained: "When I was still a girl, I learned to obey the dictates of my parents,

⁶⁸ For a discussion of the evolution *Ricordi* see Giovanni Ciappelli, 2014. *Memory, Family, and Self: Tuscan Family Books and Other European Egodocuments (14th-18th Century)*. Translated by Susan Amanda George. Leiden: Brill.

⁶⁹ Bonaccorso Pitti, 1986. "Ricordi." In *Mercanti Scrittori: Ricordi Nella Firenze Tra Medioevo e Rinascimento*, edited by Vittore Branca, 341-506. Milano: Rusconi. p.362 and: Giovanni Pagolo Morelli, 1969. *Ricordi*. Firenze: Felice le Monnier.

⁷⁰ Francesco Barbaro. 1978. "On Wifely Duties." In *The Earthly Republic, Italian Humanists on Government and Society*, translated by Benjamin G. Kohl. Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press. P. 190. Also on this work see: Carole Collier Frick, 1989. "The Downcast Eyes of the Women of the Upper Class in Francesco Barbaro's DE RE UXORIA." *UCLA Historical Journal* 9: 8-31.

and now I realize that it is best to follow the wishes of my husband if I want to be what I ought to be.”⁷¹ Ancient rhetoric (available to the wealthy, literate, and male elite) thereby influenced the cultural ideals against which women’s lives were constructed and assessed.

Similarly, in his *Books of the Family* (c.1432), Leon Battista Alberti, a humanist bachelor of illegitimate birth, built on Ciceronian foundations to express contemporary values of family life in Florence. As an art theorist, he also expressed a nuanced association between domestic life and the philosophical significance of its visual products.⁷² Alberti’s prescriptive text on managing the family is focused on social etiquette for economic success while advising continual suspicion of the women of the household.⁷³ While some rhetorical themes are shared, Alberti’s views often oppose those expressed by monastic authors, such as Giovanni Dominici.

Dominici, who was raised and educated by his noble widowed mother, dedicated *Regola* to Bartolomea degli Obizzi (whose husband had been banished from Florence), providing advice on raising her family from the perspective of spiritual rather than economic gain.⁷⁴ Although his text is not reflective of a typical Florentine experience, Dominici was an influential preacher and his advice on education provides a significant insight into the popular religious zeal which countered Florence’s increasingly secular values.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, the rhetoric used in both secular and religious advice on domestic life emphasises the importance of modelling moral behaviour for children to observe and imitate, asserting that the imitative practices of the youth would shape the values and behaviours of the adult.

Conduct books were predominantly written from a secular perspective by educated men. They insist on the male dominance at the head of the household and view women as subservient. Franco-Italian widow and author Christine de Pizan (1364-c.1430), who

⁷¹ Barbaro, p. 193.

⁷² Leon Battista Alberti, 1969. *The Family in Renaissance Florence*. Translated by Renee Neu Watkins. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.

⁷³ For a valuable discussion of the historiography surrounding the prescriptive nature of Alberti’s works and the parallels the works have with broader sartorial and comportmental ideals of fifteenth-century Florence see: Samantha Hughes-Johnson, 2012. “Fashioning Family Honour in Renaissance Florence: The Language of Women’s Clothing and Gesture in the Frescoes in the Oratory of the Confraternity of the Buonomini Di San Martino in Florence.” *Confraternitas* 23 (2): 3-31.

⁷⁴ Dominici, Giovanni. *Regola del Governo di Cura Familiare del Beato Giovanni Dominici*. Firenze: Presso Angiolo Garinei Librario, 1860.

⁷⁵ Debby, Nirit Ben-Aryeh. 2001. *Renaissance Florence in the Rhetoric of Two Popular Preachers: Giovanni Dominici (1356-1419) and Bernardino da Siena (1380-1444)*. Turnhout: Brepols, pp. 11 & 15.

specifically framed herself as *femme ytallienne*, was an exception to this rule.⁷⁶ Her *Treasury of the City of Ladies* (1405) is one of the few conduct books written by a woman for a female readership.⁷⁷ Although she reached orthodox conclusions, she provided insight into what masculine dominance meant in the daily lives of elite women, and how they were to orchestrate their interpersonal relationships. This text, a contemporary of Dominici's *Regola* is therefore an important female voice for historians engaging with gendered, embodied education of the fifteenth century despite its not being of Florentine origin.

The limited evidence of Florentine women writing direct reflections on their process of learning how to comport themselves can be explained somewhat by the society's attitude to female literacy. Florentine society expressed caution about teaching women to read (lest they read inappropriate material that would influence them into exhibiting bad behaviour), and even more so about allowing them to write. In this sense, the argument that men and women had equal educational and expressive opportunities seems easily discredited. Nevertheless, when the definition of literacy is expanded to reading visual symbols (expressed through paint or clothing), the question of equality allowing for individuality and expression becomes more complex. As with texts, what one brought to an art work affected what one could derive from it and so the limitation placed on women's reading may have minimised the narrative and moral store of memories which they could use to interpret art. However, ritual experiences, images displayed, sermons delivered in churches, and the social mechanism of interpreting the dressed body did belong to the wider community. Florence shared a strong aural culture and men and women regularly gathered in piazzas or in churches to hear stirring vernacular sermons about morality in their community.⁷⁸ Even those who read books valued the emotive, mnemonic power of sensory experiences as a form of education. The implications of fourteenth- to fifteenth-century attitudes to both experiential and instructive education for the development of the material and intellectual identities of Florentine women will be a sustained theme throughout this thesis.

⁷⁶ For a discussion of Christine's literary identity and its connection to her patrilineage, in particular her Italian father see, Sarah Gwyneth Ross, 2009. *The Birth of Feminism: Women as Intellect in Renaissance Italy and England*. London: Harvard University Press, pp. 19-31.

⁷⁷ Christine de Pizan, 1989. *A Medieval Woman's Mirror of Honour, The Treasury of the City of Ladies*. Edited by Madeline Perner Cosman. New York: Bard Hall Press, Persea Books.

⁷⁸ Peter Howard, 2012. *Creating Magnificence in Renaissance Florence*. Toronto: Center for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, p. 20. Also on the importance of sermons for disseminating significant ideas to a broad audience see Franco Mormando, 1998. "Bernardino of Siena, 'Great Defender' or 'Merciless Betrayer' of Women?" *Italica* (American Association of Teachers of Italian) 75 (1): 22-40.

6) Memory

Memory was an essential feature of early-Renaissance identity creation. Studies on the value of cultural memory as a field of historic enquiry indicate that memory is not simply a personal psychological phenomenon, but is socially learned and cultivated. The culture of memory as a feature of Florentine identity during the Renaissance has received increased attention in the last two decades, notably in the book *Art, Memory and the Family* with contributions by Patrick Geary, Giovanni Ciappelli, Patricia Lee Rubin and Alison Wright. Geary's chapter "The Historical Material of Memory" examines the stylisation of collective memory, and the value of the psychology of memory for interpreting Florentine commemorative culture. Ciappelli's "Family Memory" demonstrates the impact a revived interest in Republican Rome had on Florentine acts of familial commemoration, coupled with the increased influence of women in the shaping of family memory. Rubin's "Art and the Imagery of Memory" investigates the role of art and imagination in shaping Florentine spiritual and domestic identities. Wright's "The Memory of Faces" examines the use of portraiture in fifteenth-century Florence to honour the memory and the family of the dead.⁷⁹ These works show that Florentine cultural artefacts reveal the active construction of images and experiences aimed at developing morality through memory. Furthermore, women's adorned bodies acted as living testaments to masculine memory. Daughters' and wives' appearance reflected on their fathers' and husbands' honour, and widows' bodies were living monuments to their dead husbands.

Mary Carruthers' *The Book of Memory* identifies the significance of the concepts of *lectio* (reading) and *meditatio* (contemplation) to late-Medieval approaches to learning.⁸⁰ She has shown that directed recollection from literature to imagery led to the incorporation of ethical narratives into one's experience and identity.⁸¹ Similarly, Walter Melion has shown that as people manipulated their external (sensory) and internal (imaginative and

⁷⁹ Patrick Geary "The Historical Material of Memory." (pp.17 – 25), Giovanni Ciappelli, "Family Memory: Functions, Evolution, Recurrences." (pp.26 – 38), Patricia Lee Rubin, "Art and the Imagery of Memory." (pp. 67 – 85), Alison Wright, "The Memory of Faces: Representational Choices in Fifteenth-Century Florentine Portraiture." (pp.86 – 113), in *Art, Memory, and Family in Renaissance Florence*, edited by Giovanni Ciappelli and Patricia Lee Rubin, 2000. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁸⁰ Carruthers, Mary. 1990. *The Book of Memory in Medieval Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 162-163 & 186.

⁸¹ Carruthers, p. 179.

intellectual) experiences through recollection, contemplation and application, memory became a vehicle for cognition, emotion and self-awareness.⁸²

Jan Assmann argued that cultural memory is so substantive because it incorporates mimetic activities that achieve the status of ritual. Mimetic activities further transmitted meaning to objects that recalled associations even when removed from their application. Rituals and their materials led to the retelling and revitalising of concepts the community deemed significant.⁸³ Focusing on asceticism, Gavin Flood has shown that “cultural memory is a somatic memory encoded in ritual and in the body.” He demonstrates that by suspending the demands of self-will and re-enacting communal, physical behaviour, ascetics internalised and re-enforced ethical concepts.⁸⁴ This process can be identified in multiple contexts in fourteenth- to fifteenth-century Florence. An examination of a wide range of Florentine texts, images and traditions, from communal and domestic contexts, will demonstrate that sensate objects could mnemonically direct the mind to religious contemplation and embodiment.

7) *Conceptual Dualism*

Renaissance philosophy sought symmetry. The fifteenth-century texts exhibit a tendency to compartmentalise crucial ideas about religious, social and individual identity rhetorically into a balance of binary concepts (for instance soul/body, virtue/vice, masculine/feminine and public/private). This mode of thinking has been taken up in the historiographical treatment of the era. However, this mirroring potentially foregrounds an idealised division to the detriment of understanding the practice. For instance, historians have found it useful to separate the busy, ritualised urban life of the Florentine piazzas from the comfort and honour of the home; to distinguish between what Ronald Weissman called the “public body and private soul.”⁸⁵ Increased historiographical interest in gender has led to a conceptual separation of gendered ‘spheres’ associating the public, exterior with masculinity and the

⁸² Walter S. Melion, 2007. “Meditative Images and the Psychology of Soul.” Vol. 1, in *Image and Imagination: of the Religious Self in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*. Turnhout: Brepols, pp. 1-3.

⁸³ Jan Assmann, 1992. *La Memoria culturale, Scrittura, Ricordo e Identità Politica nelle Grandi Civiltà Antiche*. Munich: Biblioteca Einaudi. pp. XV-XVII.

⁸⁴ Gavin Flood, 2004. *The Ascetic Self: Subjectivity, Memory and Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, , pp. 212-214.

⁸⁵ Ronald F.E. Weissman, 1982. *Ritual Brotherhood in Renaissance Florence*. New York: Academic Press, p.32.

private, interior with femininity, thus merging hierarchical binaries.⁸⁶ There is certainly foundation for discussing the gendered activities of Florentine urban life in these terms; however, this division is frequently overstated.

As Bronwyn Davies points out, even in a twentieth-century context, binary arrangements tend to place the concepts in hierarchical opposition to their pair and this tendency is particularly significant when dealing with the opposition of male to female. Being raised to identify with one of these gendered positions influences the cultural and moral narratives one takes on as components of one's identity and the attitudes society encourages one to associate with.⁸⁷ The elite and the rising merchant classes of Renaissance Florence advocated a patriarchal system (reflected in their narratives and practices) whereby men worked and actively engaged with members of their community while women's roles predominantly consisted of domestic tasks. Suspicion and concern for women's virtue and safety increased society's preference for women to remain indoors. As women spent a great deal of their time indoors, keeping busy with housework like spinning thread, surrounded by allegorically imbued domestic objects, a discussion of the embodied transitions of women's identities will necessarily focus on the home and the materials therein.

However, a counter-trend cautions against over-emphasising the spatial segregation of gendered spheres as such an approach undermines the importance of permeability and reflection between locations.⁸⁸ Communal and domestic spaces informed and recalled one another and so become less distinct when considering the ways in which people engaged with and carried memories and influence from one sphere to another. Patrician men were known to build less impressive homes in order to build in their ancestor's neighbourhood, demonstrating that the home was recognisable as symbols of men's familial identity.⁸⁹ Patrician men's social and domestic identities also blurred due to *palazzi* acting as semi-public business spaces. Imposingly constructed with high walls and stone seating at ground

⁸⁶ For instance; Margaret Franklin, 2006. *Boccaccio's Heroines, Power and Virtue in Renaissance Society*. Burlington: Ashgate, p.106.

⁸⁷ Davies, pp. 67-68.

⁸⁸ Most notably, see: Natalie Tomas, 1992. 'A Positive Novelty': *Women and Public Life in Renaissance Florence*. Victoria: Monash Publications in History 12, and: Carole Collier Frick, 2005. "Gendered Space in Renaissance Florence: Theorizing Public and Private in the 'Rag Trade'." *Fashion Theory* (Berg) 9 (2): 125-146., pp. 125-146.

⁸⁹ Brenda Preyer, 2000. "Florentine Palaces and Memories of the Past." In *Art, Memory and Family in Renaissance Florence*, edited by Giovanni Ciappelli and Patricia Lee Rubin, 176-194. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 177

level for people to wait, the *palazzi* of wealthy families like the Medici gave the impression that conducting business in one of the more public rooms with the powerful but hospitable proprietor was a privilege.⁹⁰ Florentine values regarding hospitality led to the advice that one should wait to ask a man for a favour until one is in his home and he is obliged to be indulgent.⁹¹ Domestic space, therefore, had behavioural and political significance for men's public lives.

Paolo da Certaldo recognised the different spaces in which women were observed and therefore the behaviour they should exhibit and the sentiment they should feel in those spaces: "The woman ought to be solicitous in the house, and honest outside, and devout in church, the woman ought to love her husband above all the other men of the world."⁹² Prescriptive texts, therefore, suggest that women's behaviour in public and private space should be reflective of, and instil, appropriate emotions and values. The themes for decoration of domestic objects often echoed communal traditions and the acquisition of the objects themselves usually related to key events in the object-owners' social lives conducted outside the domestic sphere. This provided a mnemonic key for domestic reflections on the experiences and expectations of the external world. The nature of internalisation, recollection and embodiment makes distinctions between external society and internal domesticity more ambiguous.

Thesis Structure

"Chapter One – The Sensate Body" demonstrates the impact of contemporary theories regarding the body's senses on Florentine practice. By examining significant arenas in which each of the senses came to the fore, this chapter 'fleshes out' the cultural body of the patrician woman. "Chapter Two – Florentine Religious Community" demonstrates that frescos, poems and festivals inspired and re-enacted visions of Heaven and Hell, while perpetuating an underlying narrative that Florentine people are members of an eternal religious community. Women played a part in this narrative, alternately being framed as

⁹⁰ Roger J. Crum, and John T. Paoletti. 2006. "'Full of People of Every Sort': The Domestic Interior." In *Renaissance Florence: A Social History*, edited by Roger J. Crum and John T. Paoletti, 273-391. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 273.

⁹¹ On obligations in Florentine communities see: Dale Kent, 2009. *Friendship, Love and Trust in Renaissance Florence*. London: Harvard University Press.

⁹² Certaldo, p.40 "*La donna dee essere sollicita in casa e onesta fuori e divota in chiesa; la donna dee amare lo suo marito sopra tutti gli altri uomini del mondo.*" [my translation].

angels or as vain souls in need of redemption. “Chapter Three – Wealth and Charity” examines elite Florentine perspectives on their responsibility to charitably clothe the poor. This imperative was perpetuated by religious exempla promoting the idea that dressing humbly and being charitable would be rewarded with spiritual adornment in heaven while negative events, like plague, were interpreted as divine punishments for vices including women’s vanity. “Chapter Four – Fashioning Beauty and Honesty” discusses the philosophical equation of beauty to honesty and virtue, an ideal that generated tension through resultant practices as people sought to elevate their beauty using arguably dishonest means. Both Chapters Three and Four discuss the role of hierarchical stratification in the negotiation of moral and sartorial vice and virtue.

“Chapter Five – Gendered Education” discusses early Renaissance perspectives on the value of educating elite girls as opposed to elite boys. Identity formation and embodiment remain at the heart of this chapter, as the advice and correspondence of humanists and Florentine laymen continually articulated relationships between gender, education, speech, social expectation and physical appearance. “Chapter Six – Marriage” examines the ways brides’ new identities as wives were negotiated according to their monetary and social value. Women’s identities were sartorially articulated through the efforts of their male guardians, and were memorialised through portraits, furniture and gift-giving. “Chapter Seven – Motherhood” demonstrates that although female virtue was continually related to chastity, wives’ virtue was additionally measured by their production of legitimate male offspring for their husbands. The chapter will discuss the ways allegorical decoration of domestic materials, in tandem with books of advice and even sermons, sought to assist women in mentally and physically carrying out their embodied duty to conceive sons. “Chapter Eight – Widowhood” demonstrates key ways in which the philosophical, mnemonic and sartorial thinking were employed to manage death. The chapter begins by examining letters of condolence that highlight the gendered values against which people reflected on the lives of the deceased and their assurance of heaven. It then turns to consider the gendered nature of funerary practices and the ongoing role of widows as embodied mnemonic signifiers of a man’s death.

One method for instilling cultural values and behaviours identified by fifteenth-century thinkers was the repetition of moral narratives in social and private settings. Narratives in

this context can mean stories, tropes or behavioural traditions expressed through literature, images or embodied performances. The narrative form teaches morals through example by providing memorable scenarios with which an audience can empathetically engage. Narratives are observed, learned and stored in the memory, forming the basis of our expectations about how people could or should feel or behave in a given context.⁹³ People in Renaissance Florence engaged with the meaning and applications of allegorical narratives in a range of public, domestic, religious and social contexts. In respect of this tradition, I have invented a character called Beatrice Anselmi (b.1410-d.1474) who is a fictional pastiche based in fact. Her story is told in vignettes at the introduction of each chapter. This story helps to illustrate, at a human level, the way that the religious, social and domestic discourses addressed in this thesis constituted a lived experience for Florentine women. Religious and secular men's debate concerning devotion, virtue, education, society, gender, health and status did not simply inform discrete areas of experience, as historical study so often presents them. Rather, they formed a continuum of meaning negotiated and carried through the memories of women as they fashioned their identities within the dynamic Florentine elite culture.

⁹³ See: Carol Rambo Ronai, 1992. "The Reflective Self Through Narrative." In *Investigating Subjectivity: Research on Lived Experience*, 102-124. London: Sage Publications; Susanna Scholz, 2000. *Body Narratives: Writing the Nation and Fashioning the Subject in Early Modern England*. London: Macmillan Press.; Catherine Richardson, 2004. "Havying Nothing Upon Hym Saving Onely His Shirte, Narrative and Material Culture in Early Modern England." In *Clothing Culture 1350-1650*, 209-221. Ashgate; Bronwyn Davies, 1992. "Women's Subjectivity and Feminist Stories." In *Investigating Subjectivity: Research on Lived Experience*, 53-78. London: Sage Publication; and Mary Carruthers, 1990. *The Book of Memory in Medieval Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Chapter One -The Sensate Body

Beatrice Anselmi was born in Florence in 1410. Her prominent patrician family lived in the quarter of Santa Maria Novella in the *gonfalone* of Leon Bianco. She had two older brothers and one sister. When she was a little girl Beatrice's mother told her the stories of the pictures painted around the *palazzo*. She especially liked to sit on the floor in front of the colourful *cassone* painting of the story of Griselda in her parents' bedroom. As she looked she told herself the story in her head. She imagined herself as Griselda dressed in a golden wedding gown, admired by everyone because she was so beautiful, virtuous and obedient. On the other side of her parents' room was a painting of the Crucifixion and the sight of it always made her flinch. She wanted to cry because Jesus' poor body looked like it was in such pain. As she grew up she learned how to do household tasks. She would habitually sit by the window to spin thread because from there she could listen to the church bells, and hear the people working, walking and talking in the street below. When she went out she spoke in a hushed voice, imagining other people sitting by their windows and judging her by her conversation. She didn't spend much time out in the streets but she liked to hear and see all the busy people in the *mercato* and she savoured the special feeling of stepping from the hot noisy street into the cool church with its sweet smell of incense.

Early-Renaissance physicians and philosophers understood the sensate body as a biological entity existing as a part of a divine system. This chapter examines philosophical and cultural influences that informed Renaissance expectations of the sensate body, and the female body in particular. Those expectations led to the manipulation of the senses as a means to instil and subsequently express a socially legible identity. The social body was an adorned, tangible body. One's utilisation of sensory cues (such as the use of perfume) contributed to the ways one's identity would be interpreted and the social interactions one would therefore have. Adding to the complexity of sensory semiotics, the same physical cues and sensations could elicit diverse responses depending on whether the experience was interpreted from a religious or a social perspective. Remaining conscious of their culturally delineated surroundings and personal objectives, the Florentine mercantile aristocracy manipulated their sensory experience to enhance aspects of their gendered, social and religious identities. Moral qualities could be absorbed, not simply learned, through materials seen, heard, placed onto, ingested or breathed into the body. Whether people were trying

to smell their way to health, eat their way to intelligence, hear their way to attention, see their way to empathy or feel their way to spirituality, the evocative senses were the porous body's key to interpersonal interaction, to personal and spiritual development and to health.

The body's senses were the means through which a person experienced and understood the world. Influential late-fifteenth century Florentine thinkers built on Plato's theory of Forms, (as theologians following Thomas Aquinas had done before them) to argue that the reason earthly things were beautiful was because they reminded the spirit of heaven. According to Florentine preachers, including Dominican Archbishop of Florence Antonino Pierozzi (1389-1459) and Savonarola, the senses were needed to provide contemplative material for the imagination to return to during religious mediation.¹ However, when one indulged in sensations for their own sake, without attempting to comprehend their divine core, the senses became a corrupting force. This knowledge perpetuated a simultaneous wariness of the flesh which, through lust, violence and pleasure tempted the spirit away from the divine. The solution to physical temptation was to transcend the sensations of the body through mental and physical discipline. Florentine confraternities developed communal practices centred on coupling intense mental focus and prayer with self-inflicted physical hardship. Such practices acknowledged that the body was the only thing one truly owned and so can genuinely sacrifice.² Christians who were inclined toward this second ascetic view detested the body for its materiality and its influence over the will, yet treated the body as the key to spiritual rapture.³ The sensate body, then, sat in a precarious position as the assistant or tempter of the immortal soul.⁴

The different senses each have a different relationship with the self as mind and as body. The sense of sight is traditionally considered the most influential sense in terms of

¹ See: Theresa Flanigan, 2014. "Art, Memory, and the Cultivation of Virtue: The Ethical Function of Images in Antoninus's *Opera a ben vivere*." *Gesta* (The University of Chicago Press on behalf of the International Center of Medieval Art) 53 (2): 175-195p. 188. Savonarola talked about using certain sensory objects as a 'hook' to deter oneself from dangerous sensations and toward religious contemplation in: Savonarola, (2006) Ruth and Micheas, Sermon XXVIII The Art of Dying Well, All Souls Day, Delivered 2 November 1496, pp. 44-46. This particular example is discussed further on page 164.

² For instance, for a discussion of the Assinboine philosophy of embodiment, prayer and power see: Raymond W. Gibbs Jr., 2006. *Embodiment and Cognitive Science*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 169.

³ Bynum, (1992), p. 182 Bynum argues that in medieval devotion was not concerned with rejecting the body, only in disciplining and so elevating oneself through it.

⁴ For a discussion of the meditative use of the senses, and particularly of imagery for cultivating the Christian soul see: Melion, Walter S. 2007. "Meditative Images and the Psychology of Soul" in *Image and Imagination; of the Religious Self in Late medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Vol. I, Brepols, Belgium.

understanding and relating to people, places and objects in the external world. Hearing is usually placed next in the hierarchy of the senses for its communicative value and, again, for its ability to inform listeners of their external, often unseen, environments. Humanists, poets and preachers utilised the sense of hearing to create meaningful mental images, further uniting the pedagogic value of these first two primary senses.⁵ Laura Marks argues that the last three senses, which require direct embodied interaction between the world and the physical self, lend themselves less to transcendental experience.⁶ Yet, the senses of smell, taste and touch were avenues through which Florentines constructed their personal, social and spiritual identities. Medical, religious and domestic practices and treatises recommended the use of incense and scented waters for their emotive, mnemonic and healing capacity. A sense of touch could be stimulated in empathetic anticipation through sight and it could, for example, be a means to experience luxury fabrics, to succumb to lustful encounters and then to redeem oneself through penitentially inflicted pain. Eating was the most effective way to internalise and incorporate matter (which was spiritually or socially imbued with desired qualities) from the external world into the self.

In the fourteenth and fifteenth century people had a more fluid interpretation of the locus and qualities of the five senses. For instance the 'senses of the mouth' included eating and speaking which developed associations of self-control countered by boasting, gluttony and even of sexuality. This promoted the idea that women should remain silent and eat sparingly as signs of their chastity. Marsilio Ficino offered an alternative interpretation of the senses using the imagined voice of Mercury, who dismissed the two pleasures of tasting and touching (given by Venus) and saying "five I give, pure, perpetual, and wholesome, of which the lowest is smelling; the higher in hearing; the more sublime, in seeing; the more eminent, in imagination; the higher and more divine in the reason." Ficino thereby offered a new moral hierarchy of seven senses. The higher the status of the sense the more it resided internally. The highest, 'reason', relied on intellect and words (a means of communication to which women had limited access), the next, 'imagination', required the mind to construct images from remembered things of the world (a concept that informed the way theologians

⁵ Jill Burke, 2004. *Changing Patrons, Social Identity and the Visual Arts in Renaissance Florence*. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press. p 172

⁶ Laura U. Marks, 2008. "Thinking Multisensory Culture." *Paragraph* 31 (2): 123-137.p. 128.

discussed the value of images for religious contemplation, as will be discussed later in the chapter), whereas the lowest, taste and touch involved direct contact with earthly material.

Recent historians express concerns about applying contemporary theories of the body to the historic subject, as bodies are understood and treated differently according to culture and one can only observe traces of the historic body through written and visual relics.⁷ It is certainly essential to remember the significant influence culture has in informing the ways people engaged with the adorned sensate body. Ideas and theories about cultural bodies in the twenty-first century cannot all be attributed uncritically to fourteenth-century people. However, I would not wish to dismiss the possibility that more could be understood about the historic body as more is discovered about the human body. It can be fruitful to examine evidence of how humans from earlier times visually expressed or wrote about their sensory experience in light of more recent neurological research. From an early-Renaissance perspective, the senses' ability to inform the mind of the environment around the body, and the mind's ability to collate that information with memories to achieve recognition and meaning, supported the belief that sensory and intellectual engagement with external stimulus allowed people to discern divine *truth*.⁸ Twenty-first-century neurologists and sociologists are currently discussing the way the body's senses are engaged in the perception of the *real*. They argue, as did their fifteenth-century counterparts, that our senses combined with memories, emotion and cultural experiences significantly affect the manner in which we perceive and interpret our surroundings, including the people around us.⁹ The way historic peoples experienced and understood their bodies was informed by their contextual life-experience, and yet, they share a great deal with their twenty-first century descendants on a biological level. There are also points at which observable physical, neurological, emotional and philosophical understandings of self in Western societies reflect those of their cultural ancestors.

⁷ For a discussion concerning the historiography of the Renaissance body see: Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, 2006. *Early Modern Europe, 1450-1789*. Cambridge: Cambridge History of Europe, Cambridge University Press, pp.47-51. Also for a brief discussion of social meanings and makings of the body see: Strocchia, (1992), pp 30-31.

⁸ Connections between sensation and truth will be discussed in more detail in this chapter, in particular from page 42

⁹ Peter Corrigan, 1998. *The Dressed Society: Clothing the Body and Some Meanings of the World*. London: Sage Publications. p.2.

Many of the observations and connections that Renaissance thinkers made between the senses, health, community and selfhood can be confirmed as valuable and effective by setting them against twenty-first century understandings of the mind and body. This is evident when considering the messages that elite women received through their sensory experiences and the direct lessons and narratives that interpreted the influence of women's sensory experience on male observers. Cognitive theorist Mads Jessen notes that:

“distribution of cultural concepts over a broad range of media has several advantages [...] Both visual, auditory, and tactile inputs are affecting the overall internalization of the concepts [...] increasing the number of different experiences conforming to the overall model should provide a commonality of conceptual understanding within society [...] presenting concepts through materiality creates an enduring experiential unit. Concepts become more stable over longer periods of time – perhaps spanning several generations – which maintain the understanding of the concept [...] there seems to exist an underlying system of spatial generators in which the simulation of mundane experiences can create the social distribution of a common concept, such as authority ranking.”¹⁰

Concepts regarding the susceptibility of the female body to sin, and enticing men to sin, and therefore the importance of wilfully controlling the body, are evident and perpetuated through a range of media from elite philosophical treatises to popular *novelle*, religious paintings and the daily ordering of social interactions.

The self, as internal monologue, is in continual conversation with the sensations of the body. The mind interprets external physical events (for example, environmental), as well as internal ailments, through the lens of culturally engrained meaning and memory.¹¹ The cultural meanings and expected emotional responses to various sensory experiences are different in the twenty-first century context than in the fifteenth century. However, remaining mindful of what we share both culturally and neurologically with historical peoples allows us better to identify with, and so shed light on, the cultures which make up the foundations of contemporary societies.

In this chapter I will discuss Renaissance understandings of the body and the pursuit of truth through the senses. I will then discuss significant utilisations of and ideas concerning each of

¹⁰ Jessen, pp. 153-154.

¹¹ Virginia L. Olesen, 1992. “Extraordinary Events and Mundane Ailments: The Contextual Dialectics of the Embodied Self.” In *Investigating Subjectivity: Research on Lived Experience*, 205-220. London: Sage Publications p.215.

the senses (seeing, smelling, hearing, tasting and touching). As I do so I will note the cumulative impact these had on Florentine women's physical and emotional experience.

The Renaissance Body

Combining Christian ideas with ancient philosophy and contemporary observations, humanists, physicians and theologians of the fifteenth century treated the body as a malleable site for engaging with spiritual and social concerns.¹² Universities in Florence, Bologna and Padua coupled medicine with philosophy according to the understanding that the mind and body were inextricably linked and so, for instance, ethical flaws may be corrected by treating the body.¹³ Physicians accepted an array of methods for healing, including the use of medicines developed from ancient knowledge, contemporary observation of the body, and the use of religious incantations and spiritual talismans.¹⁴ They identified the role of senses in allowing the body to experience, remember, express and so understand the universe and itself within it. With this identification engrained in their perception of the world, people utilised the mnemonic potential of the senses, creating bodily adornments, imagery, perfumes, and music, to construct physically and emotionally pleasurable and painful experiences.

Following ancient Greek authors, notably Aristotle, Hippocrates and Galen, fifteenth-century physicians believed that the human body was held in balance between hot, cold, wet and dry qualities that influenced behaviour in life and determined a baby's sex in the womb.¹⁵ Male bodies were hot and dry whereas female bodies were cold and wet. This understanding of sex influenced the corresponding approach to gender, assuming that hot

¹² Robert Zwinenbergh, 2009. "Leonardo and Female Interiority." In *The Body Within: Art Medicine and Visualization*, edited by Renee van de Vall and Robert Zwinenbergh, 15-30. Leiden: Brill, pp. 15-18.

¹³ Skenazi, p.25. Also see: Bynum (1992), p. 234.

¹⁴ Katherine Park, 1998. "Medicine and Magic: The Healing Arts." In *Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy*, edited by Judith C. Brown and Robert C. Davis, 129-149. London: Longman, pp. 130 – 138.

¹⁵ For a discussion of the influence of Greek Medical treatises on early Renaissance understandings of the body and the importance of philosophy in its care see: Nancy G Siraisi, 1990. *Medieval & Early Renaissance Medicine: An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. For Siraisi's outline of Galen's account of the womb see pp. 91-95, For her outline of the humoral system see p. 97, for her discussion of the complexion (and the effects of heat and cold on character, and the typical deliniation between the sexes and age) see pp. 101- 104, for her reference to the one-sex model see p. 107. Galen remained an irrefutable source of anatomical knowledge until the anatomist Andreas Vesalius (1514- 1564) proved the inaccuracies in Galen's theories with reference to evidence from dissections. See Marco Catani, and Stefano Sandrone. 2015. *Brain Renaissance from Vesalius to Modern Neuroscience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.4 &16-18.

dry males were innately active and cold wet females innately passive.¹⁶ Heat and dryness were further associated with fire and air which justified connecting masculinity with elevation, intellectualism and rationality. Cold and wetness were associated with earth and water with connotations for femininity of carnality and emotion. The four key stages of life (like the seasons of the year) were also accounted for within this system: in youth (spring) a person was hot, moist and impulsive, on reaching maturity (summer) the body became hot and dry, in old age (autumn) one became cold, damp and melancholic and in senility (winter) the body was cold, dry and phlegmatic.¹⁷ Innate characteristics and attitudes were therefore expected in certain people in accordance with their age and sex. Weakness and deficiency were intrinsic conditions of femininity and old age.

To a Renaissance mind, drawing on a Galenic model, health, personality and complexion resulted from the balance of the four main bodily humours: blood, yellow bile, black bile and phlegm. According to this system all the bodily fluids were converted from one of the humours. Each humour corresponded to a temperament which can broadly be defined as: blood to optimism, yellow bile to anger, black bile to pessimism and phlegm to serenity. According to this system the balance of one's humours directly influenced one's character. Throughout their lives, people of the Renaissance sought to improve their mental and physical health by balancing their humours.

In his discussion of medicine, astrology and philosophy in *Three Books on Life* Marsilio Ficino interpreted the knowledge of the ancients alongside the knowledge of contemporary philosophers and apothecaries. He begins this work by discussing the emotional and intellectual effects of variously balanced humours.¹⁸ The attributes of the humours stemmed from celestial powers that imparted health, emotional and intellectual qualities to all earthly matter. Ficino suggested that the body and emotional temperament could be altered by "laying claim" to "celestial things" through contact with materials or behaviour

¹⁶ Wiesner-Hanks, p49.

¹⁷ Skenazi, p.17.

¹⁸ Marsilio Ficino, 2002, *Three Books on Life*. Translated by Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clark. Arizona: Tempre, pp. 117-119. This is a bilingual edition, in all cases when I have quoted this text I have used the translation but have read it against the Latin.

“acquired by art.”¹⁹ He therefore reasoned that healing could be achieved through eating, smelling, touching, hearing or looking at certain materials, saying, for instance:

If you want your body and spirit to receive power from some member of the cosmos, say from the Sun, seek the [...] Solar among metals and gems, still more among plants, and more yet among animals, especially human beings [...] These must both be brought to bear externally and, so far as possible, taken internally.²⁰

Physical and emotional health was, therefore, a matter of complete embodiment through deliberately manipulating one’s sensory environment, diet, appearance, and even one’s society to balance the humours and their associated qualities. Gems had strong celestial and talismanic associations and Ficino argued that their qualities could be gleaned by ingesting them or “even if they touch the flesh, and, warmed thereby, put forth their power, they introduce celestial force into the spirits by which the spirits preserve themselves from plague and poison.”²¹ Tangible materials whether minerals, flora or fauna were categorised within a planetary compendium and could be employed in multiple forms as remedies for human conditions.

Ficino recommended that one improve one’s receptive senses by eating myrobalan fruits that derive properties from Jupiter, Saturn and Mercury that “preserve youth, sharpen the senses, and benefit the intelligence and memory.”²² The relationship between the senses, memory and morality was central to philosophical debate and to religious practices. Savonarola, in a 1494 sermon in Florence, argued:

Where there are senses, there is a mixture of four elements, and because everything composed of contraries is corruptible, therefore, it was necessary that he have a mortal body with its senses to learn.²³

Savonarola thereby acknowledged that the body was changeable and exposed to temptation but that those very qualities could be harnessed for moral benefit.

¹⁹ Ficino, (2002) p.299.

²⁰ Ficino (2002), pp. 247-249.

²¹ Ficino, (2002), p. 301.

²² Ficino (2002), p.301.

²³ Girolamo Savonarola, 2006. *Selected Writings of Girolamo Savonarola, Religion and Politics 1490-1498*. Edited by Donald Beebe, Maria Pastore Passaro and Anne Borelli. Translated by Anne Borelli and Maria Pastore Passaro. New Haven: Yale University Press. “Aggeus, Sermon XIII, Third Sunday of Advent, 12 December 1494,” p.151.

Senses and the pursuit of Truth

Thomas Aquinas, whose writing influenced the theology of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Florence, asserted that sensory perception represented the primary means for the soul to observe, build up mnemonic associations with and understand the world.²⁴ In his *Summa Theologica* (1265-1274), Aquinas argued that Divine intent tied human nature to the corporeal and material and therefore “lest it be too hard for man to be drawn away entirely from bodily actions” God presented virtuous works and sacraments as a tangible avenue to spiritual attainment.²⁵ While Aquinas valued the senses for their role in comprehending truth, he realised that:

Truth is not in them in such a way as that the senses know truth, but in so far as they apprehend sensible things truly [...] hence it happens that falsity exists in the senses through their apprehending or judging things to be otherwise than they really are.²⁶

Aquinas reasoned that intelligence and discernment had to be coupled with sensory messages because “natural things depend on the divine intellect, as artificial things on the human.” Aquinas wrote of the necessity of the sensate body for the operation of the intellectual soul, “on account of the sensitive power, which requires an organ of an even temperament”²⁷ Comprehending truth was inseparable from the senses but the senses were unreliable without the mind.

However, even the mind, which received messages from the senses, could be a vehicle for both deception and temptation. Expressing distrust in the senses, Florentine chancellor and Humanist Coluccio Salutati (1331-1406) advised that:

The more beautiful things are to the eye, the sweeter to the taste and the softer to the touch; lust for them the less not only in your words but also in your feelings and in deed.

²⁴ Hayden Ramsay, 1997. *Beyond Virtue, Integrity and Morality*. London: Macmillan Press, p.137, For more on Florentine Preachers’ use of Aquinas see Peter Howard, 2008. “Preaching Magnificence in Renaissance Florence.” *Renaissance Quarterly* 61 (32): 325-369.

²⁵ Thomas Aquinas. 1952. *The Summa Theologica of Saint Thomas Aquinas*. Translated by of the English Dominican Province Fathers and Daniel J. Sullivan. Vols. 1-2. Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, *First Part*, Q. 79 Art. 6 & 7, vol. II, *Third Part*, Q. 61, Art. 1, p. 855.

²⁶ Aquinas, vol. I, *First Part*, Q. 17, Art 2, p. 102.

²⁷ Aquinas, vol. I, *First Part*, Q. 76. Art. 5, p. 395.

Salutati offered this advice as a preface to his argument for distrusting and taming the mind as much as the body:

If remembering things absent or confronted with enticements, our mind reaches outside itself [...] whether it is comprehended by the senses, represented by the memory, constructed by the sharpness of the intellect, or created by the desire of feelings, it is a property of the mind always to think something.²⁸

Salutati expanded his definition of material temptations from the inherent dangers of the external objects of desire, to the internal memory which desires them.

By contrast, in his third Advent sermon of 1494, Savonarola (who criticised vain temptations and the pursuit of beauty for its own sake) discussed the importance of senses as a God-given mechanism for comprehending the divine, saying:

The soul of man belongs among spiritual creatures, yet his intellect has an infinite capacity, nonetheless, because he had so little natural light he should not have been able to attain intellectual knowledge of things if God had not given him the body with all its active feelings so that he might learn [...] through the senses of which the soul could acquire knowledge²⁹

This debate extended beyond theological circles. Leonardo Da Vinci (1452-1519) expressed similar ideas, speaking as a humanist. He argued that “the senses are of the earth, the reason stands apart from them in contemplation,”³⁰ and yet the senses were necessary to inform contemplation as:

Objects send their images to the five senses by which they are transferred to the organ of perception (*impressiva*) and from the common sense; and from thence being judged they are transmitted to the memory, in which according to their potency they are retained more or less distinctly.³¹

Leonardo’s discussion of the common sense indicates his affinity with Aristotelian thought. Significant secular and religious figures, therefore, shared the belief that information from the senses was retained in the memory, from which position they informed people’s physical, intellectual and spiritual decisions.

²⁸Coluccio Salutati, 1978. “Letter to Peregrino Zambecari, Florence, April, 1398.” In *The Earthly Republic*, edited by Benjamin G. Kohl, Elizabeth B. Welles and Ronald G. Witt, translated by Ronald G. Witt. Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press. *Letter to Peregrino Zambecari, Florence, April, 1398*, p. 108.

²⁹ Savonarola, *Aggeus Sermon XIII, Third Sunday of Advent, 12 December 1494*, (2006), p.151.

³⁰ Leonardo da Vinci, 2003. *The Notebooks of Leonardo Da Vinci*. Edited by Edward MacCurdy. Connecticut: Konecky & Konecky. *Tr. 60 a*, p.67.

³¹ Leonardo da Vinci, p.200.

Preachers utilised biblical associations with each of the senses in setting out methods for domestic devotions. They encouraged the devotee to look upon and contemplate a holy image of Christ of the saints, to listen for the voice of God, to be physically humble, they evoked the sense of smell in addressing the divine (which fed into a rhetoric of describing saint's corpses as sweet-smelling) and they compared the sweetness of the divine (evident in the Host) to the bitterness of sin.³² Renaissance preachers utilised the power of the senses to strengthen mnemonic associations between the material world and morality.

Philosophers questioned the extent to which the memory was corporeal, intellectual or spiritual. However, drawing on Aristotelian thought they recognised that the experience and memory of sensation was essential for spiritual and intellectual cognition. Like Aristotle, they situated the phenomenon of memory as operating from the third ventricle of the brain.³³ In his book *The Fabrica of the Human Brain*, Andreas Vesalius (1514-1564) wrote about what he had been taught about the brain at university, when "one of the most knowledgeable academics" at "the most prestigious of the colleges" read directly from Aristotle's *De Anima*. This is representative of the beliefs held by physicians in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries:

It was written that the brain had been provided with three ventricles [...] the first, or anterior, which was said to face the forehead, was named the ventricle of 'common sense' because these men thought that the five sensory nerves depart to their organs from here, and that odors, colours, flavours, sounds, and tactile qualities are conducted by these nerves to the ventricle [...] to be the transmission of the precepts of the five senses to the second ventricle [...] allowing the second ventricle to imagine, reason, and think about the object of perception. [...] The third ventricle, which was consecrated to memory, received from the second one everything it needed consigned to memory [...] so that when the latter [the second ventricle] begins to reason about something previously entrusted to the cavity of memory, the former delegates and passes whatever this is to the second ventricle.³⁴

³² Elizabeth Bailey, 2009. "Raising the Mind to God: The Sensual Journey of Giovanni Morelli (1371-1444) via Devotional Images." *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies*, 84 (4) 984-1008, pp 995-1003.

³³ For Thomas Aquinas' discussion of memory and its relationship with the body intellect and soul see: Aquinas, Vol. I, pp. 419-421; also, for a historiographical discussion of the memory, the senses and the brain see: Francois Quiviger, 2010. *The Sensory World of Italian Renaissance Art*. London: Reaktion Books, p.17-18.

³⁴ Vesalius' *The Fabrica of the Human Brain* is translated in its entirety with comments in: Catani, Marco, and Stefano Sandrone. 2015. *Brain Renaissance from Vesalius to Modern Neuroscience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. The above quote appears on pages 47-48.

According to pre-sixteenth-century knowledge, then, the brain operated on a ventricular system (sometimes with additional ventricles dedicated to such things as sight) that mediated sensation and memory through reason.³⁵ This connection was consistent with Cicero's argument in his *De Oratore* that memory was best aided through sensory engagement and that the most effective of the senses was sight. He encouraged his readers to strengthen their understanding of moral concepts by localising them within a memory of a physical space or form.³⁶ Influential religious figures in Florence including Archbishop Antonino and Savonarola likewise discussed the idea that sensory input was interpreted and retained through the four internal senses; the common sense, imaginative, estimative and memorative.³⁷ Theologians, physicians and humanists of the fifteenth-century, then, argued that the senses could be deliberately utilised to inspire emotion, contemplation and religious devotion.³⁸

Courtesy books, which outlined socially expected etiquette, advised people to manipulate their sensory experiences in relation to their own bodies to train themselves to behave appropriately and think ethically. For instance, having first advised that women dress humbly within the conventions established for their social station, Franco-Italian author Christine de Pizan demonstrated that a woman's appearance, behaviour and use of perfume communicated her adherence to cultural values, her vanity or her altruism.³⁹ Christine argued that:

Sobriety also should be evident in all the lady's senses, as well as in her actions and costume. Her glance will be slow, deliberate and without vagueness. Sobriety will protect her from too great curiosity about sweet scents, to which many ladies give great attention, spending large quantities of money on perfume. Likewise, it will tell her that she should not seek out or indulge the body in such delights, when she would do better to give the money to the poor.⁴⁰

³⁵ Catani and Sandrone, pp. 189-190.

³⁶ Cicero. *De Oratore*. Translated by E.W. Sutton. London: William Heinemann LTD, 1967, pp. 468-471.

³⁷ Flanigan, pp. 187-188. Rubin, Patricia Lee. 2000. "Art and the Imagery of Memory." In *Art, Memory and Family in Renaissance Florence*, edited by Giovanni Ciappelli and Patricia Lee Rubin, 67 - 85. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.67

³⁸ Richard G. Newhauser, 2010. "Forward & The Senses in Medieval and Renaissance Intellectual History, and Peter of Limoges, Optics and the Science of the Senses." *The Senses and Society - Pleasure and Danger in Perception: The Five Senses in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Berg) 5 , no.1 (March 2010): 5-9 & 28-44., pp. 6-7

³⁹ Christine de Pizan's works provide a valuable female interpretation of values which were predominantly expressed by men, as noted in the introduction, on page 11.

⁴⁰ Pizan (1989), p. 92.

By suggesting that the money one would like to spend on self-indulgence should be given away in charity, Christine established an ethical dimension to restricting sensory pleasure. The meanings attributed to the senses were culturally constructed and learned. One could, therefore, construct one's identity in relation to cultural values through engagement with sensory stimulus. The senses were not only the keys to understanding the external but for expressing the internal.

Image and Imitation: Seeing and Feeling

Humanists ranked sight as the most influential of the senses. Awareness that people demonstrate embodied, imitative behaviour when engaging with visual material is evident in many Renaissance texts, products and practices discussed in this thesis. Poetry and courtesy books emphasise the power of the human gaze in seduction, communication and memory. Literature frequently referred to 'darts' of seduction fired from women's eyes when they met those of a man. Petrarca wrote of his muse Laura's eyes in this manner:

I was caught (and I put up no fight),
my lady, for your lovely eyes had bound me [...]
Love found me all disarmed and saw the way
was clear to reach my heart down through the eyes,
which have become the halls and doors of tears.⁴¹

Having made eye contact with her, Petrarca continued to write of Laura's eyes and beauty, often noting that he saw them now within himself, in his memory, even after she had died. Eye-contact could initiate love, it exposed the mind to images that would inform the imagination, but it could also be a weapon. Allegorical texts and images recounted instances from Greek legends including Narcissus and Medusa when misplaced sight had disastrous consequences.⁴² Literature and sermons treated eye contact as tantamount to sexual

⁴¹ Petrarch. 1996. *The Canzoniere or Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta*. Translated by Mark Musa. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. Canzone 3, pp 4-5, See Frick (1989), p. 20 for a brief discussion of Petrarca's references to the communication between his and Laura's eyes in over twenty sonnets.

⁴² Rosalind Brown-Grant, 1999. *Christine de Pizan and the Moral Defence of Women: Reading Beyond Gender*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 66-67, Walker, Julia M., *Medusa's Mirrors*, University of Delaware Press, Newark, 1998.

selection and frequently instructed women to restrict their gaze to avoid being the source or victim of temptation.⁴³

Sermons and religious treatises advised women to modestly avoid looking around or making eye-contact when attending church (one of the few public events that elite women could acceptably attend and therefore an important social gathering for many⁴⁴). In 1454 Archbishop Antonino wrote in his *Opera a ben Vivere* that, after tidying the house, his female reader:

Can go to church, and pay attention to controlling your gaze, keep it mortified that you will not scandalise your soul, [...] Go with your eyes low, so that you take care to see nothing but the ground where you have to put your feet.⁴⁵

Similarly, Savonarola's 1491 advice book for widows *Libro della vita Viduale*, noted that

In Churches and other public places you can attract scandal to yourself and to your kin, for I assure you that a great deal can be known from her eyes about the virtue of a lady [...] the widow ought always to look down and lower her eyes to the ground [...] especially when she is in the view of men.⁴⁶

It is worth noting that Savonarola placed the woman "in view of men" while she averted her gaze, perhaps allowing that it was inevitable that the woman should be seen but unseeing. Suspicion of the female gaze, coupled with admiration for the virtue of female beauty, is likely to have also informed the artistic tradition of painting women in profile.⁴⁷

However, the sight of certain things, viewed with the correct attitude could be as educational and virtuous as eye-contact could be misleading and corrupt. In the late fifteenth-century, Ficino argued that the beauty perceived with the eyes or the ears was beautiful because it reminded the soul of an innately internalised celestial truth (prior even to intellectual discernment):

⁴³ Adrian W.B. Randolph 1997. "Regarding Women in Sacred Space." In *Picturing Women in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, edited by Geraldine A. Johnson and Sara F. Matthews Grieco, 17-41. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 39, and: Frick, (1989) 8-31.

⁴⁴ The social experience of Church, and the opposition this received is discussed further in "Chapter Four – Fashioning Beauty and Honesty."

⁴⁵ Antoninus, p. 164 "E fatto questo, andate alla chiesa, e abbiate buona cura al vostro vedere, di tenerlo si mortificato, che non abbi a scandalizzare l'anima vostra; [...] Andate cogli occhi si bassi, che altro che la terra dove avete a porre li piedi non vi curate di vedere." Also see: Randolph (1997), p. 39.

⁴⁶ Savonarola's *Libro della vita viduale* (1491) as quoted in Alison Levy, 2003. "Framing Widows: Mourning, Gender and Portraiture in Early Modern Europe." In *Widowhood and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 211-231. Hampshire: Ashgate, pp. 220-221.

⁴⁷ Profile portraits are discussed in more detail in "Chapter Six – Marriage"

When the soul has received through the physical senses those images which are within material objects, we remember what we knew before when we existed outside the prison of the body. The soul is fired by this memory [...] Regarding the memory of the true and divine beauty by the appearance of beauty that the eyes perceive, we desire the former with a secret and unutterable ardour of mind.⁴⁸

The importance of imagery to memory and knowledge was consistent across society despite evident tensions which otherwise occurred between philosophical, religious and lay beliefs and practices.

Although fewer women would have access to such philosophical writings as that of Ficino, the association between sight and spiritual understanding did inform the manner in which religious paintings were composed and utilised and thus informed the devotional practices expected of women. Paintings gave ideas a tangible form with which viewers could identify. They directed the viewer's thoughts while supplying the viewer with images that could then reside in their memory to fuel imagination. The Church promoted the use of images as Bibles for the illiterate (a great proportion of whom were women), as aids to memory, and for their ability to emotively inspire devotion.⁴⁹ Artists composed their works as clear narratives including clues to interpret, and body-language to imitate.⁵⁰ The creation of images was an essential method to understanding and embodying religious sensibilities.

Wide-spread depictions of the Crucifixion in churches, friars' cells and wealthy homes demonstrate artists' recognition of the importance of inspiring viewers' contemplation and empathy with confronting signs of pain and enticing mnemonic riddles, to maintain the emotive impact of the subject matter. Fra Angelico painted a number of scenes, including a series of frescos in his fellow-friars' cells in San Marco. Vasari discussed Fra Angelico's works in his *Lives of the Artists* (1549-1568), which acted to aggrandise the concept of the autonomous artist and to trace the evolution of artistic innovation to the Italian states (particularly Tuscany).⁵¹ Vasari's vivid and poetic history that wrote of the pursuit of the

⁴⁸ Ficino, (1975) *Letter 6, Lex et Iustitia*, Vol. II, p. 44.

⁴⁹ For a discussion of religious disagreement about the use of images (potential idols) in religious settings and the ultimate assent to use them to educate see: Evelyn Welch, 1997. *Art in Renaissance Italy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.136-138.

⁵⁰ Michael Baxandall, 1988. *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy*. 2nd edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 41.

⁵¹ Kempers, pp.1-4.

artist as the pursuit of virtue and salvation, idealised Fra Angelico's practice as combining artistic skill (utilising the recent achievements in accurately depicting perspective) and religious ritual, stating that:⁵²

He never painted a crucifix without tears running down his cheeks, and the goodness of his sincere and noble nature inspired by the Christian religion can be recognised in the faces and poses of his figures.⁵³

Vasari is known to have embellished on his biographies, making such anecdotes unreliable, however, the significant point here is the suggestion that ideally there was a link between the emotion felt by artists and their ability to express those emotions in their paintings, and thereby to generate emotive responses from their audience.⁵⁴

Leon Battista Alberti's *On Painting* advised that artists use the represented figures' posture and facial expressions to convey their emotional states in order to 'move' their audience to empathy, saying:

A 'historia' will move spectators when the men painted in the picture outwardly demonstrate their own feelings as clearly as possible. Nature provides [...] that we mourn with the mourners, laugh with those who laugh, and grieve with the grief-stricken. Yet these feelings are known from movements of the body. [...] The painter, therefore, must know all about the movements of the body, which I believe he must take from Nature with great skill.⁵⁵

Humans do automatically imitate facial expressions and this subtle mirroring can alter the observer/imitator's emotional state while also, potentially, generating a sense of social cohesion or belonging. This effect may also carry across into the ways we respond to decorative objects, as extended forms of expressive behaviour.⁵⁶ Elite artistic commentators and practitioners from the fourteenth and into the fifteenth century pursued greater knowledge of the movements and composition of the body in order to create an art that represented human expressions naturally enough to emotionally and physically move its viewers. Leonardo Da Vinci addressed the idea that understanding the movement of the

⁵² For more on the poetic and religious nature of Vasari's writing see: Paul Barolsky. 1987. *Walter Pater's Renaissance*. Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University, pp.113-126, and in particular pp. 114-116.

⁵³ Giorgio Vasari, 1998. *The Lives of the Artists*. Translated by Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.177.

⁵⁴ Barolsky (1987, p. 117) likewise discusses Vasari's tendency toward 'biographical criticism' that reads the artist's character and life experiences into their work.

⁵⁵ Alberti, (1972) pp. 80-81.

⁵⁶ Østergaard, pp. 31-32 & 34-35.

body was the key to understanding the emotion (and so the soul) of the subject.⁵⁷ Francesco Barbaro (who corresponded with several influential Florentine scholars) wrote that through the 'speechless poetry' of paintings "all the motions of the person arise." He recognised that as one viewed and understood the movement of bodies in paintings, one's own body and emotions imitated what they observed.⁵⁸

Twenty-first century media works on a similar premise. Marks argues that films attempt to inspire affective responses by appealing to viewers' imitative senses. The audience may be guided to feel hungry and salivate during a cooking program or feel frightened and flinch in shock during a horror film, but at the same time each member of the audience will experience the stimulus in a unique way as each person's reaction will be informed by their own intellectual and emotional assessment of the stimulus and their own set of associative memories.⁵⁹ When considering reception theories, this contemporary artistic format (while not being directly equivalent) has useful parallels with the ways that painted images worked in the Renaissance. A film is temporal and works to direct viewers' focus to share in particular emotional experiences in sequence, whereas a painting allowed multiple viewers to identify with different figures in diverse sequences, requiring further mnemonic and emotional investment in the image. Fifteenth-century viewers did not only respond to the emotions they recognised in posture of the figures, but they identified the main narrative depicted, they identified the figures (which could include a mix of biblical characters, saints and even Florentine patrons and their social circle), and by recognising the identities of the figures they could be reminded of various other narratives and of the virtues attributed to specific figures. This medium, therefore, relied far more heavily on the audience to recognise the various clues in the image and to animate the various narratives in their minds. Nevertheless, the idea that observing other people's experiences can influence the emotional and physical states of the observer has continued to be utilised in evolving art forms for public consumption. Intellectuals of each era discuss the issue in light of contemporary advancements in the fields of science and psychology.

⁵⁷ Zwijnenberg, p.15 & 18.

⁵⁸ Randolph (1997), p. 39.

⁵⁹ Marks, p.134, also see Scheer, p. 210.

Observers' store of sensory and socio-cultural memory informed their ability to attribute meaning to and empathise with observed actions. These practices accord with recent findings in the field of neuroscience that observing people's behaviour can generate correlating somatosensory responses in the viewer. Studies argue that the human ability to recognise, imitate and empathise with the actions and correlating emotions of others is derived from a combination of cognitive systems, cultural expectations and personal experiences. In the 1990s the mirror neuron system was discovered, by which the motor regions of our brains are activated and connected with memory, allowing us to anticipate the movement and functional intentions of the actions we observe other people carry out. Almost immediately following their discovery, neuropsychologists have considered the implications of this system for understanding our ability to empathise with other people by reflexively identifying with the emotions certain actions portray.⁶⁰ The sight of other people's tactile experiences activates regions of the brain that prepare the body for movement (the premotor cortex), relate the body to its spatial environment (the posterior parietal cortex) and engage the somatosensory system, indicating that humans automatically relate to the physical experiences of others by preparing to experience it themselves.⁶¹ This is true of observing the sight of the emotion of the face, or the relationship between the body and external objects (for instance, distinguishing between the anticipated sensation of touching velvet as opposed to fire). These actions and expressions generate a somatosensory response while being connected with a range of emotional states.⁶² Without the scientific explanation of the twenty-first century, Renaissance artists produced visual products with an awareness that one empathetically understood and interpreted other people's emotional and physical states by relating observations to remembered experiences.

⁶⁰ For more on mirror neurons see: Giacomo Rizzolatti and Corrado Sinigaglia. 2006. *Mirrors in the Brain - How Our Minds Share Actions and Emotions*. Translated by Frances Anderson. Oxford: Oxford University Press. For a discussion of developments from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century in the field of psychology responding to similar observations of the psychosomatic responses viewers have to paintings see: Susan Lanzoni, 2009. "Practicing Psychology in the Art Gallery: Vernon Lee's Aesthetics of Empathy." *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* (Wiley Interscience) 45 (4): 330-354, and see: Østergaard, pp. 25-37.

⁶¹ Bastiaansen, J.A.C.J., M. Thioux, and C. Keyers. 2009. "Evidence for mirror systems in emotions." *Philosophical Transactions B*, p. 2391-2392.

⁶² Bastiaansen et al. p. 2394-2396.



Figure 1: Lorenzo Monaco, *Pietà with the Symbols of the Passion (Or Man of Sorrows)*, Tempera on board, 268 x 170 cm, Galleria dell' Accademia, Inv. 1890 n. 467. Florence, 1404.

Paintings utilised memory in a number of ways. Depictions of Jesus' dead body often drew their viewers in to deeper contemplation through symbols related to the narrative and significance of Jesus' passion. Lorenzo Monaco's 1404 large-scale *Pietà with the Symbols of the Passion* (Figure 1) created for Santa Maria degli Angeli, depicts Jesus' pale body, propped up in its tomb, being mourned by the Virgin Mary and St. John the Evangelist. A Pelican is painted at the pinnacle of the arched painting, medieval mythology associated pelicans with the passion of Christ, alleging that the

birds pierced their own flesh to nourish their young with their blood.⁶³ The pelican pierces its breast while sitting on the top of the cross, directly above Jesus whose own breast is pierced and bleeding. Jesus' halo is decorated with grapes and He is propped up in a coffin carved

⁶³ T.H. White, 1984. *The Book of Beasts: Being a Translation from a Latin Bestiary of the Twelfth Century*. New York: Dover Publications. pp.132-133.

with grape vines. The Holy Grail is depicted on the ground directly beneath Jesus. The theme of blood, sacramental wine and nourishment therefore trickled down the centre of the image. Marvin Eisenberg notes that the gilt representation of the grail would shine out when lit by candles while the Eucharist was celebrated, and that the biblical narrative recalled by symbols surrounding Christ would be reinforced by the words said and sung in laude and meditations.⁶⁴ The visual program thereby contributed to a broader devotional experience. The symbols of Christ's passion are placed on the ground and the space around and above Him, some are incorporated into the composition while others float over a flat golden backdrop. The ungrounded nature of these symbols encouraged the viewer to make sense of them by thinking about how they related to Jesus' experience. This accords with Alberti's advice on effective compositions, to: "leave more for the mind to imagine than is seen by the eye."⁶⁵ The familiarity of the narrative meant that the artist could afford to break the image down into its essential, emotive components, and leave the viewer, while focusing primarily on Jesus' visceral, lifeless body, to imagine the way surrounding objects and actions contributed to His pitiful, yet prophesied, state.

Illustrations in devotional books aimed to provoke religious contemplation and encouraged the user to connect figures seen with the physical eye to morally coded images in the mind's eye. These books' primary purpose was to aid memory and contemplation rather than communicate new knowledge. They frequently combined or even supplemented words with easily decoded images, like those which appear in Monaco's *Pietà*. Similarly, preachers rhetorically painted word pictures full of symbols for the audience to interpret. As noted by Jill Burke, in a sermon of 1496, Savonarola constructed a mental image, populated by multiple symbols which he deliberately stopped short of interpreting, saying that the conclusion was clear. He credited his large and varied congregation with being capable of contemplating and understanding it on their own.⁶⁶ This exemplifies the prevalence of the practice of using visual and mental images as a means of engaging with religious narratives.

⁶⁴ Marvin Eisenberg, 1989. Lorenzo Monaco. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press. p. 15, also see pp. 99-100.

⁶⁵ Alberti, (1972), p. 81.

⁶⁶ Burke, p. 171. Burke quotes the relevant passage in a footnote as *Prediche Italiane*, 3 no. 2, 449 "Io non ti voglio esporre altimenti questa figura, perche la conclusione e chiara, ma quanto alla particolarita, quello che significa quella croce rossa, quella vesta, quella spada, quelle maschere e le altre cose particolari, esaminate da voi: lascio a te questa esposizione" p. 252.

As a more personalised form of mnemonic contemplation, Christians overlayed lived experience with religious connotations, by imagining biblical narratives, particularly the passion of Christ, occurring in a familiar setting. The *Giardino de Oratione* (c.1454), a book on religious devotion attributed to Franciscan author Niccolò da Osimo, encouraged readers to revive their emotional connection with biblical stories through contemplation directed by associative memories.⁶⁷ This is a mode of imaginative contemplation recommended in a number of spiritual guidebooks including the Franciscan work *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, and Dominican Archbishop Antoninus' *Opera a ben Vivere*, also written in 1454, for Dianora and Lucrezia Tornabuoni.⁶⁸ Elite, literate women were socially constrained to live indoors and so contemplation, remembrance and imagination may have provided a much-needed avenue to engage with their external community. The *Giardino de Oratione* appealed to the reader's senses referring to devotion as a 'beautiful and fragrant garden' full of delicious fruits for the soul. It encouraged the reader to meditate on "all the acts of the passion" by first "fabricating in the mind" locations for the narrative to pass through, for which "your local memories will be easiest to recall," and then to "form in the mind some people: each to represent those principal characters from the passion." Once the scene was mentally set, Niccolò advised his readers, when:

Alone and solitary, distancing every other exterior thought, you should commence to think of the beginning of the passion [...] and if you should feel particular devotion at any point stop yourself: and don't pass further as long as this sweetness and devotion lasts.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ For a discussion of this text see Norberto Massi, 1991. "Lorenzo Lotto's "Nativity" and "Christ Taking Leave of His Mother": Pendant Devotional Paintings." In *Artibus et Historiae*, 12 (23), 103-119, pp. 112 & 118.

⁶⁸ Flanigan, p.178.

⁶⁹ Niccolò da Osimo, "*Entrati noi siamo in questo bello & odorifero giardino nelqual tanti fructi delectevoli trovano delliquali nella oratione lanima si possa pascere & ingrassare: e tra li altri saporiti fructi che lanima ritrova e il meditare la vita di Christo jesu: laquale meditatione presta allanima desiderosa ineffabile dolcezia: come disopra habiamo dicto.[...] quale citafe tu trovi li lochi principali nelquali forono exercitati tutti li acti dela passione: come e uno palacio nel quale sia el cenaculo dove Christo fece la cena con li discipuli. Anchora la casa fe anna e la casa de Caytas dove sia il loco dove fu menato la nocte Miser Jesu. E la stantia dove fu menato inanti da Cayfas: e lui deriso e beffato. Anche il pretorio de pilato dove li parlava con li iudei: & in esso la stantia dove su legato Misser lesu alla colonna. Anche el loco del monte de calvario: dove esso fu posto in croce: e altri simili lochi liquali tu fabrichi nella mente. E per questa memoria locale ti siano piu facilmente presentate: tutte quelle cose che forono nella passione. Anchora e dibisogno che ti formi nele mente alcuna persone: lequale tute representino quella persone che principalmente intervanero de essa passion: comee la persona de Misser Jesu: del nostra madonna: sancto Pietro: Sancto Ioanna evangelista: Sancta Maria Magdalena, Anna Cayfas, Pilato: Juda, : e altri simili: liquali tutti formarai nella mente. Così adunque havendo formate tutte queste cose nela mente: si che quivi sia posta tutta la fantasia, e entrarai nel cubiculo tuo e sola e solitaria disca - siando ogni altro pensiero exteriore. Incominciarai a persare il principio de essa passione. Incominciando come esso Misser Jesu vene in Jerusalem sopra lasino. E morosame-te tu transcorrendo ogni acto pensarai faciando dimora sopra*

This mnemonic device superimposes the imaginer's experience with one of the most important stories of the Christian faith. It encouraged meditators to focus on their emotions and so develop experiences and memories of personal grief for Jesus' suffering. Setting the passion in a familiar city full of familiar faces increased the likelihood that flashes of the passion would recur in the meditators' minds as they moved through the city or talked to people they had cast in their imaginative sequence, theoretically influencing the way they viewed their community.

Giovanni Dominici believed that imagery instilled in the memory from childhood was most effective in developing ongoing devotional practice.⁷⁰ In the *Regola*, Dominici advised his readers that as their children "open their eyes" they should be presented with religious images to treat figuratively as mirrors. He recommended the kinds of images that he believed young boys and girls could best identify with and most usefully learn from:

Have depictions in your home of saintly children or young virgins, in which your son, even in swaddling, can delight in, being similar and so similarly enraptured with acts and signs gratifying to childhood. [...] So [your child] mirrors the holy Baptist, dressed in camel skin, a little boy entering the desert, play-catching birds, sucking the leaves of honeydew, and sleeping on the earth. It would not harm if he saw paintings of Jesus and the Baptist; [...] Thus you would want to nurture small girls in the appearance of the eleven thousand Virgins, as they speak, pray and fight [...] and other figures which will supply them, with milk, their love of virginity, desire of Christ, hatred of sins, contempt of vanity, to cheer sad companions and begin to contemplate, to consider the saints.[...] But the revealed Scriptures are primarily more perfect for them, in which is found first every truth uncreated and created what the mind is capable of.⁷¹

ogni acto e passo: e se tu sentirai alcuna divotione in alcuno passo ivi ti ferma: e non passare piu oltra fino che dura quella dolcezia e divotione la quale come sia facta la sola prova e experientia te il po insegnare e lassando quella divotione precedi piu oltra meditando." [my translations].

⁷⁰ Debby (2001), p. 114.

⁷¹ Dominici, pp. 131-132 Full quote: "*La prima si è d'avere dipinture in casa di santi fanciulli o vergine giovanette, nelle quali il tuo figliuolo, ancor nelle fascie, si diletta come simile e dal simile rapito, con atti e segni grati alla infanzia. E come dico di pinture, così dico di sculture. Bene sta la Vergine Maria col fanciullo in braccio, e l'uccellino o la melagrana in pugno. Sarà buona figura Jesu che poppa, lesu che dorme in grembo della Madre; lesu le sta cortese innanzi, lesu profila ed essa Madre tal profilo cuce. Così si specchi nel Battista santo, vestito di pelle di cammello, fanciullino che entra nel deserto, scherza cogli uccelli, succhia le foglie melate, dorme in sulla terra. Non nocerebbe se vedessi dipinti lesu e il Battista, lesu e il Vangelista piccinini insieme congiunti; gl'innocenti uccisi, acciò gli venisse paura d'arme ed armati. Così si vorrebbero nutrire le piccole fanciulle nell'aspetto dell'undici mila vergini, discorrenti, oranti, combattenti. Piacemi veggano Agnesa col grasso agnello. Cecilia di rose incoronata, Elisabet di rose piena, Caterina in sulla ruota, coll'altre figure le quali col latte d'ieno loro amor di virginità, desiderio di Cristo, odio de' peccati, dispregio di vanità, fuggimento di triste compagne e cominciamento di contemplare, per considerazione de' Santi, il sommo Santo sanctorum. Però che debbi sapere sono permesse e ordinate le dipinture degli Angeli e Santi, per utilità mentale de' più bassi. Le*

Little boys should therefore learn from seeing and identifying with Jesus and other male figures from the Bible and girls should learn how to think, feel and behave by contemplating images of female saints.

Fifteenth-century debate concerning the influence of childhood sensory experience on adult religiosity, as exemplified in Dominici's advice, is paralleled by findings of twenty-first-century sociologists Ole Riis and Linda Woodhead in their study *A Sociology of Religious Emotion* which investigates the role of sensory memory in shaping emotional and embodied meaning-making. Riis and Woodhead's study provides an explanation of what cognitively, emotionally and physically was happening to produce the engrained mnemonic religious learning discussed by Dominici. They divide religious experiences of sensory stimulus, including material objects, places, songs and scents, into those that stem from objectification or from subjectification. In objectification, the designated stimulus is perceived, understood and, probably, elicits a socially informed physical response. Examples of socially cultivated physical responses include people adopting slow dignified movements when entering a religious space or relaxing their posture when walking around a market-place.⁷² Subjectification means that the material stimulus not only sets a mode for behaviour but elicits an emotional response, for instance, when images of suffering inspire pity and tears in their viewers. Riis and Woodhead argue that the most emotive religious responses are those which rekindle a connection with that stimulus to which familiarity was established in the person's formative years.⁷³ The alteration of behaviour and emotion according to culturally understood sensory engagement is evident in the advice of fifteenth-century texts related to embodied learning.⁷⁴ Riis and Woodhead's work therefore provides an analytical language and empirical data for explaining and analysing how childhood experiences and social expectations shaped the religious behaviour that Dominici and others observed.

creature son libri de'mezzani, le quali contemplate e intellette guidano nella notizia del sommo Bene. Ma le Scritture reuelate son principalmente per li più perfetti, nelle quali si truova d' ogni verità increata e creata quanto la mente è capace, tutto saporoso cibo per la vita presente. Nel primo specchio fa specchiare i tuoi figliuoli, come aprono gli occhi; nel secondo come sanno parlare, e nel terzo come son disposti alla scrittura." [my translation]. This passage is also discussed in Klapsich-Zuber (1985) p. 115, and Frick (1989), p. 22-23.

⁷² Bourdieu, noted the same phenomenon, that people adapted their comportment according to social space, see: Bourdieu, p.110.

⁷³ Ole Riis, and Linda Woodhead. 2010. *A Sociology of Religious Emotion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.99.

⁷⁴ Fourteenth and fifteenth century texts related to embodied learning are discussed in "Chapter Five - Gendered Education," in particular from page 202

For Renaissance thinkers sight had spiritual significance as the most powerful and immediate sense that linked worldly beauty to the eternal. On the opposite end of the spectrum, sight had interpersonal and gendered significance as the sense by which sexual attraction was established. Philosophers and artists understood the value of manipulating the sense of sight to inspire physical and emotional responses in the viewer. The power of sight to inspire empathy was based on observations of the body and human behaviour which have come to be confirmed as neurologically innate responses to the sight of embodied emotion. Just as sight related to empathy, memory, self-awareness and behaviour, so too did scent.

Scent and Character

Olfactory cues are a significant yet frequently overlooked means of establishing associations between emotion, memory and identity. Studies have focused on sight and discourse coupled with little or no reference to smell, taste and touch, which are more frequently associated with the visceral rather than the social aspects of humanity.⁷⁵ However, the way people manage body odour tells its own story about social identity.⁷⁶ Clothes pick up the scents of one's surroundings, but more than this one displays good manners, virtue and health by smelling pleasant whereas allowing bad smells from any orifice of one's body to reach the nose of another may be taken to indicate ill breeding, vice or sickness. Although the language used to express this ideology has shifted since the fourteenth century, the prevalence of deodorants, perfumes, breath-mints, air fresheners, incense and detergents indicate a continued concern with masking human odours. In Western societies body odour affects social acceptability. Smells related to good hygiene, herbs, flowers, spices or fruits are usually considered alluring, whereas smells emitted from the body, such as sweat, dried blood, or waste conjure associations of sickness or squalor.

In accordance with Renaissance philosophy, which sought to correlate sensory knowledge with truth, people interpreted evil smells as manifestations of evil, and pleasant scents as virtuous. Preachers, including Giovanni Dominici and Bernardino of Siena (1380-1444), used visceral allusions to stench, rottenness and vomit to describe the lingering temptations of

⁷⁵ This is evident in Ficino's analogy of Mercury and Venus, discussed previously.

⁷⁶ Martin J Corbett, 2006. "Scents of Identity: Organisation Studies and the Cultural Conundrum of the Nose." *Culture and Organization* 12 (3): 221-232, pp. 221-223.

the sinful soul.⁷⁷ Inhaling evil smells became a metaphor for the inescapability of sin, but was also understood to spread disease.⁷⁸ Inhaling incorporates external vapours into one's body. Ficino argued:

It is as important as possible what sort of air we breathe, what sort of odors we inhale; for the spirit in us also becomes like them. [...] people who wish to lengthen their life in the body, should especially cultivate the spirit: augment it with nutriment which augment blood [...] feed it daily with sweet odors.⁷⁹

This was easier said (by a scholar in the employ of the Medici) than done (by the majority of lower- and middle-class workers). As a city which specialised in textiles production, Renaissance Florence was saturated with unattractive scents from the animal smells of manure and festering flesh resulting from tanning leather to the rotten vegetal smells involved in dyeing fabric. It is, therefore, not surprising that perfume and scented objects became essential for health for middle- and upper-class households in the textiles city. The use of perfumes, oils and scented waters was popular among elite Florentine women who purchased and shared recipes for cosmetics and medical remedies.⁸⁰ The Observant nuns of Le Murate made perfume as part of their industry.⁸¹ In medicinal terms, Ficino recommended inhaling sweet aromas to assist the liver and spicy smells to strengthen the heart.⁸² In social terms, perfumes extended the parameters of the self beyond the body in a way that had a sensory effect on others.⁸³ This opposed the idealised virtue of modesty through self-containment. Inhaling external aromas and managing one's own body odour, therefore, depended on status and affected the impression people would have of an individual's health, morality and social acceptability.

However, moralisers distrusted the role of the senses in the daily lives of the lay society, where they were experienced without the pursuit of intellectual transcendence or embodied

⁷⁷ Debby (2001), pp. 44 -45.

⁷⁸ Karen Raber, 2010. "The Common Body: Renaissance Popular Beliefs." In *A Cultural History of the Human Body in the Renaissance*, edited by Linda Kalof and William Bynum, 99-124. London: Bloomsbury, p.110.

⁷⁹ Ficino, (2002), p. 225.

⁸⁰ For a discussion of Florentine cosmetics, perfumes and plague remedies see: Valentina Fornaciai, 2007. *'Toilette', Perfumes and Make-up at the Medici Court*. Livorno: Firenze MVSEI, Sillabe. Also see: Klaus Bergdolt, Wellbeing: A cultural History of Healthy Living. Translated by Jane Dewhurst. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008. pp. 171-172.

⁸¹ Sharon T. Strocchia, 2009. *Nuns and Nunneries in Renaissance Florence*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

⁸² Ficino, (2002), p. 223.

⁸³ Susanna Scholz, 2000. *Body Narratives: Writing the Nation and Fashioning the Subject in Early Modern England*. London: Macmillan Press, pp. 23-24 and: Corrigan, p. 5.

devotion. They recognised that people succumbed to the pleasure of olfactory sensation and manipulated it, by luxuriously and dishonestly perfuming their bodies to make themselves more desirable, and thereby led others into temptation.⁸⁴ In Boccaccio's *Decameron* a deceptive woman seduces a Florentine merchant, Salabaetto, with an extensive sensory illusion of wealth and sensuality. The lady washed Salabaetto, with her own hands with "soap of musk and cloves." Servants entered and wrapped him in "the whitest delicate sheets which had such a great smell of roses" and they produced rose, orange and jasmine perfumes in silver bottles, so that "Salabaetto seemed to be in heaven." The seduction continued in the women's home where she served a tasty dinner amidst a display of precious garments so that he "firmly believed" in the "beauty and artificial pleasantness" of the woman.⁸⁵ The laying on of sensory stimulus, the smell of perfumes, the touch of skin, soap, and delicate sheets, the sight of sartorial riches trigger associations of wealth and comfort in Salabaetto's mind and so contribute to his being deceived. Once the woman had set him at his ease and undressed him, she orchestrated it so that he fell through the toilet into an outdoor cesspit – the truth revealed as he stood naked, drenched in stinking filth. The story, therefore, pivots on two potent olfactory allusions, in the first, Salabaetto was deceived while being bathed, naked, in floral perfumes, in the second, the truth of his situation was marked by his naked body immersed in excrement. This plays on the belief that truth could be understood through the senses. It also expresses the moral that those who indulge in seductive pleasures for their own sake, not for divine inspiration or for procreation, will ultimately be reprimanded and faced with the true manifestation of their own vice.

Research indicates that olfactory experiences are neurologically linked directly to memory, and that smelling familiar scents affects brainwave patterns in the same manner as an alteration in emotional states.⁸⁶ Olfactory cues travel from the nose to the parts of the brain associated with memory and emotion (the amygdala and hippocampus) and only then to the cortex that allows the mind to understand the scent and its meanings. Marks explains that

⁸⁴ Richard G Newhauser, 2010. "Peter of Limoges, Optics, and the Science of the Senses" in *The Senses & Society - Pleasure and Danger in Perception: The Five Senses in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, Vol.5, Issue 1, March 2010, Berg pp.29 & 39.

⁸⁵ Giovanni Boccaccio, 1822. *Il Decameron*. Edited by Ginguéné Pierre Louis. 1-4 vols. Firenze: Leonardo Ciardetti.. vol. 3, Day 8 Story 10, my translations and summary from pp. 252-256.

⁸⁶ Ann Marie Fiore, 1993. "Multisensory Integration of Visual, Tactile, and Olfactory Aesthetic Cues of Appearance." *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* (Sage Publications) 11 (45).

scents, experienced unexpectedly or involuntarily, can disrupt the person experiencing it from externally observable events in the moment by eliciting strong emotional responses derived from, sometimes unidentifiable, mnemonic associations.⁸⁷ Marks further argues that the unpleasantness of various bodily and urban smells has made a taboo of commenting on scent in public. This makes the emotions and behaviour scent elicits (such as trying to mask, or indulge in scents) all the more personal.⁸⁸ This finding confirms, albeit in different terms, the mnemonic and emotional importance Renaissance thinkers attributed to olfactory experience.

Urban Sounds and Gendered Silence

The urban soundscape of Renaissance Florence echoed and enforced significant communal values. Three key elements of the socially constructed soundscape were speech (predominantly masculine voices and used to communicate and convince), music (utilised to enhance people's emotional engagement with devotion) and bells. Bells were the loudest and most pervasive sounds to be heard in Renaissance Florence. With distinct and identifiable tones and patterns, they set the civic and religious rhythms by which the city kept pace and progressed through their daily lives. As the recent research conducted by Niall Atkinson has demonstrated, civic bells informed Florentine citizens' well-trained ears of political events (from announcing meetings to confirming the executions of those who had dared to act against religious or civil laws). Conversely, as was the case during the Ciompi revolt of 1378, they could be employed to create a chaotic and deafening din (a distressing sensorial weapon) to call people to action and drown out the words of one's enemy.⁸⁹ During the War of Eight Saints 1376-78 a papal interdict silenced the bells while preventing the dying from confessing and the Eucharist from being exposed, so that the bells' eerie silence underwrote the people's blocked passage to heaven.⁹⁰ In times of peace, bells set out the daily activities of a church, which alerted people to the presence of the Eucharist and called them to prayer. This is not to say that they were always adhered to in accordance with their intention. In a 1425 sermon, Bernardino of Siena insisted to his listeners that the bells

⁸⁷ Marks, pp. 126 & 134, also see Corbett, pp. 229-30.

⁸⁸ Marks, p.127.

⁸⁹ Niall Atkinson, 2013. "The Republic of Sound: Listening to Florence at the Threshold of the Renaissance." / *Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 16 (1): 57-84., p. 59 & 82.

⁹⁰ John T Paoletti, and Gary M. Radke, 2011. *Art in Renaissance Italy*, fourth edition, London:Laurance King Publishing, p.163.

of Santa Croce were not an entertainment but a call to devotion which they too often ignored.⁹¹ However, the art employed by the bell ringers extended the function of conveying information to that of creating an experience. The bell ringers worked to create complex and musical sounds to remind people of the beauty of their faith. As the bells structured daily life, designating time for work, time for socialising, time for devotion and time for rest, the sounds of the bells initiated a daily pattern of human sounds of feet and voices.⁹² In Florence, then, bells were a daily reminder to the people, including elite women who were likely to be indoors, of their civic and religious surroundings and responsibilities.

Florentine people used music to emotively and mnemonically enhance sensorial personal and communal devotional practices. Ficino explained the emotive influence of music saying that:

Song is a most powerful imitator of things. It imitates the intentions and passions of the soul as well as words; it represents also people's gestures, motions, and actions as well as their characters and imitates all these and acts them out so forcibly that it immediately provokes both the singer and the audience to imitate and act out the same things. [...] this too is air, hot or warm, still breathing and somehow living [...] which is full of spirit and meaning.⁹³

Music, which was composed and performed by people with certain communicative intentions, had a direct effect on the psychosomatic experience of humanity. The sung mass and offices were intended to help both listener and singer to engage emotionally with and remember the words. From the mid-fifteenth century composers began to write music with the deliberate aim of inducing specific emotions through the theorisation and introduction of musical modality, and by matching the sense of the text with the tensions created by the melodic progression of the music as discord is created and resolved. The ability to derive meanings and emotions from music relies on both innate cognitive processes (as early as four months of age humans develop a dislike for dissonance) and on exposure and education.⁹⁴ Perhaps conscious of the need to bring one's learned behaviour to the music in

⁹¹ Debby (2001), p.55.

⁹² Kate Colleran, 2009. "Scampanata at the Widows' Windows: A Case Study of Sound and Ritual Insult in Cinquecento Florence." *Urban History* 36 (3): 359-378.p. 367.

⁹³ Ficino, (2002), p.359.

⁹⁴ For an excellent discussion of contemporary theories of the neurological and cultural evolution of musical emotions see: Leonid Perlovsky, 2010. "Musical Emotions: Functions, Origins, Evolution." *ScienceDirect, Physics of Life Reviews* (Elsevier) 7: 2-27. For his discussion of the cultural/philosophical development of music in the Renaissance see p. 4, for an overview of studies (their findings and theories) relating to the innate connection

order to gain the most spiritual value from the experience, Archbishop Antonino advised his female readers in how to engage with music sung in church, saying “place yourself in some honest place, be attentive to what is said and regard those songs not as earthly, but heavenly, not of men, but of angels”⁹⁵ He thereby encouraged his readers to separate themselves from others, to create introspective conditions under which they could actively use their imaginations to generate a more emotive experience when listening to music.

From the mid-thirteenth century, lay groups called *Laudesi* confraternities gathered on feast days and on Saturdays to sing praises. These male communities sang more frequently in Italian than Latin and they followed a musical tradition of improvising around a well-known melody.⁹⁶ From the early fifteenth-century, monophonic laude went out of fashion as demand increased for complex polyphonic music.⁹⁷ Rather than focusing on memorable lyrics, these pieces developed stylistic ornaments intended to match the intention of the lyrics with the emotional experience that music could create. In a sermon on 23 March 1495, Savonarola preached against polyphonic musical arrangements, arguing that:

If you should sense that these exterior prayers might take away from or impede interior worship, they ought to be removed [...] polyphonic music is sooner injurious in church than useful, because there one must contemplate and pray to God with the mind and with the intellect, and figural music does nothing but charm the ear and the senses.⁹⁸

Savonarola believed that polyphonic music contained too many simultaneous lines of music for the listener to detect, let alone contemplate, the words.

Between bells ringing and people singing, the sounds of work and conversation resonated through the narrow streets and through, predominantly glassless, windows. Kate Colleran

between sounds and emotion see from p. 6. Also see: Sirke Nieminen, Eva Istók, Elvira Brattico, and Mari Tervaniemi. 2012. “The Development of the Aesthetic Experience of Music: Preference, Emotions, and Beauty.” *Musicae Scientiae* (Sage) 16 (3): 372-391, pp. 372-376.

⁹⁵ Santo Antonino (Antonino (Antoninus) Pierozzi). 1838. *Opera A Ben Vivere*. Edited by Francesco Palermo. Digitalized by Google, from Oxford University for Internet Archive. Firenze. Accessed 2015. <https://archive.org/details/operaabenvivere00antogooq>.

⁹⁶ Patrick Macey, 1992. “The Lauda and the Cult of Savonarola.” *Renaissance Quarterly* 45 (3): 439-483.p. 441. Also see: Wilson, p. 160.

⁹⁷ Macey. P. 441.

⁹⁸ Macey, p. 442, Macey included the Italian in a footnote, which reads: “*E quando tu sentissi che queste orazioni esteriori ti togliessino o impedis-sino lo interiore, si debbano resecare e lasciarle, e stare saldo nella elevazione della mente e nel culto interiore. E pero si dice che li cantif iguratis ono pitup reston ocivi nella chiesa, che utili, perche quivi si debbe orare e contemplare Dio colla mente e coll'intelletto, e e'canti figurati non fanno altro che dilettae il senso e l'orecchio*”

argues that Florentine people were aware that their voices carried (and gossip could therefore spread rapidly), and that this impacted the ways people interacted in public. It would be reasonable to assume that in an urban context where one could sit in one's home and clearly hear private conversations taking place on the street below, one's sense of privacy in conversation would be coupled with judicious censorship.⁹⁹ Recognition of this auditory condition of urban living provides significant context for appreciating the censorship Renaissance literature and practice continually direct towards women's speech.¹⁰⁰

Indeed, Barbaro advised husbands that "if wives should at some time become suspicious, let them stay away from slanderous women, stop their ears, and suppress their mutterings, so that (as the proverb has it) fire is not added to fire."¹⁰¹ Women's opportunities to hear, become corrupted by and partake in gossip should be limited.¹⁰² Like his contemporaries, Barbaro connected a woman's silence with the concealment of her body beneath her clothes.¹⁰³ Drawing on an example from Plutarch, Barbaro concluded that "It is proper, however, that not only arms but indeed also the speech of women never be made public; for speech of a noble woman can be no less dangerous than the nakedness of her limbs."¹⁰⁴ Moralisers discouraged gossip and profane speech by using allusions that linked the tongue's involvement in speech and sexual acts, casting uncircumspect women as 'whores of the tongue.'¹⁰⁵ Speech could also harm silent women; enemies, like spurned lovers, could ruin the reputation of a lady and by extension her household through vocally scorning them outside their homes or spreading gossip amongst their neighbours.¹⁰⁶ Insults typically used

⁹⁹ Colleran, p.360.

¹⁰⁰ Restrictions placed on women's speech are discussed in more detail in "Chapter Five – Gendered Education", in particular see the discussion beginning on page 223.

¹⁰¹ Barbaro p.194.

¹⁰² Frick, (1989), pp. 18-19.

¹⁰³ Ann Rosalind Jones, 1999. "Surprising Fame: Renaissance Gender Ideologies and Women's Lyric." In *Feminism and Renaissance Studies*, edited by Lorna Hutson. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp.319-323.

¹⁰⁴ Barbaro, p. 205.

¹⁰⁵ Elizabeth Hallam, 2004. "Speaking to Reveal: The Body and Acts of 'Exposure' in Early Modern Popular Discourse." In *Clothing Culture, 1350-1650*, edited by Catherine Richardson, 239-262. Cornwall: Ashgate.p.245. For a discussion of the 'sins of the tongue' (such as loquacity, lying, swearing, boasting and whispering) as articulated and condemned by medieval moralists see: Mark D. Johnston, "The Treatment of Speech in Medieval Ethical and Courtesy Literature." *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 4, no. 1 (Winter 1986), p. 26, further, on 'sins of the tongue' as a direct discouragement of women's speech even in a religious context see: Claire M Waters, 2004. *Angels and Earthly Creatures: Preaching, Performance and Gender in the Later Middle Ages*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, p. 156.

¹⁰⁶ Colleran, p. 375 – 376.

sexually degrading terms in relation to women, as women's sexual reputation constituted their primary source of honour, and their honour reflected on their families.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, the use of speech and silence had strongly gendered social implications relating to the dignity of the speaker's body, kin and identity.

Nicholas Terpstra has recently demonstrated that Florentine legislation had further attempted to establish spatial boundaries to avoid mixing the sounds and sights of the sacred and sexual by delineating certain streets and spaces in which prostitution could be acceptably practiced.¹⁰⁸ The legislation of 1355 which only allowed prostitutes within in the city walls on Mondays proved unsuccessful, and was altered in 1377 to disallow them from working within certain distances from religious institutions, allowing them to wear any clothes they liked (probably in a bid to establish an association between luxury and sin) and insisting that prostitutes wear a bell on their heads to make them distinguishable from other women and so that their movements could be monitored.¹⁰⁹ In 1403 the newly established *Ufficio dell'Onestà* approved the city's first brothel near Mercato Vecchio. In 1415 they allowed for two more, but all in areas of dense civic traffic. A 1454 law set a mandatory distance of 300 braccia between prostitutes and religious houses.¹¹⁰ This delineated sections of the city according to carnality opposed to spirituality.

Throughout the city, the sounding of bells structured the rhythm of the day. *Laudesi* singers coupled speech with music and, in so doing, enhanced devotional memory. Among learned men, beautifully constructed rhetorical speech was the pinnacle of intellectual achievement. Yet, ill-expressed or unwelcome speech, especially by women, could ruin a person's reputation and could be interpreted as equivalent to sexuality or gluttony. Sound, in the form of a bell, was further utilised to identify prostitution and so aurally signify organised sexuality.

¹⁰⁷ Strocchia, (1998), pp. 54-55.

¹⁰⁸ Nicholas Terpstra, 2015. "Sex and the Sacred: Negotiating Spatial and Sensory Boundaries in Renaissance Florence." *Radical History Review* (Duke University Press) (121): 71 – 90, pp. 73-74. Terpstra is principle researcher on a project creating an online resource called DECIMA (Digitally Encoded Census Information and Mapping Archive) which can be used to develop a more complete idea of the changing sensory environment in Renaissance Florence. DECIMA Team, Nicholas Terpstra (Principle Researcher). 2014. Digitally Encoded Census Information Mapping Archive. Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRCC). Accessed 09 10, 2015. <http://decima.chass.utoronto.ca/>.

¹⁰⁹ Terpstra, p. 75, and see Rainey pp. 230-231

¹¹⁰ Terpstra, p.76 also see King (1991) pp. 77-78, and see Sharon T. Strocchia, 2009. *Nuns and Nunneries in Renaissance Florence*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 172-173.

Food for Physical, Mental and Spiritual Health

Florentine cuisine acted as a tangible expression of people's moral and social identities. Physicians believed that edible materials were imbued with qualities derived from the cosmos that could act to treat physical or emotional conditions which stemmed from a misbalance of those qualities. Although the humoral explanation has been discarded in the twenty-first century, food is proven to influence health, appearance and emotional wellbeing. The rhetoric connecting food to these qualities also continues to be manipulated in non-scientific popular culture to alter people's routines.¹¹¹ In an attempt to find symmetry between the material and the metaphysical that could guide or justify human behaviour, physicians and philosophers sought symbolic explanations for disparities in the community's diet. Thus, the elite attempted to overlay broader socio-economic inequalities with arguments for divinely appointed hierarchies and for foods that imparted the qualities most suited to the activities and ambitions of certain social groups. Although we do not exhibit such pronounced elitist philosophies as did our fourteenth-century counterparts, such ideas do function within twenty-first century societies, and certain foods, such as caviar, act as potent symbols of identity, communicating expense, luxury, elitism, power and social status.¹¹² Further, our media encourage us to believe that changes in our diet can dramatically improve our appearance and so affect the ways that we are perceived by others.¹¹³ This belief echoes the humoral and observational knowledge of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In the Renaissance, what one should eat, or should abstain from, communicated one's moral choices and social condition to the community and influenced one's personal physical, mental and spiritual health. One's ethical and cultural identity still

¹¹¹ Joan Fitzpatrick, 2010. "Introduction." In *Renaissance Food from Rabelais to Shakespeare: Culinary Readings and Culinary Histories*, edited by Joan Fitzpatrick, 1-10. Farnham: Ashgate, p.1, and see: Mabel Gracia-Arnaiz, 2010. "Fat Bodies and Thin Bodies. Cultural, Biomedical and Market Discourses on Obesity." *Appetite* 55 (2): 219-225.

¹¹² For instance, consider how 'caviar' is used in place of 'beans' to convey status in this chapter title: Laurel Guymier, 2004. "Spilling the Caviar: Telling Privileged Class Tales." In *Women and Social Class International Feminist Perspectives*, by Pat Mahony, 225-233. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, EBSCO Host. Accessed May 2, 2015. <http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.uws.edu.au/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=4&sid=ae6cbfd8-fbb9-472f-b1bc-737e3d189261%40sessionmgr4001&hid=4112>.

¹¹³ Pierfrancesco Morganti, 2009. "Part II: Beauty from the Inside and the Outside: Natural Products Work in Multiple Ways." In *Nutritional Cosmetics: Beauty from Within*, by Aaron Tabor and Robert M. Blair, 95-111. Oxford: William Andrew Applied Science Publishers., and see: Navin Geria, 2011. "The Beauty-Food Connection: From Broccoli to Coffee Berry to Euphoria Fruit - and Everything Between - the Link Between Beauty and Diet is Strong and Growing Stronger." *Nutraceuticals World* 14 (7): 26-34.

influences what one eats or chooses not to eat.¹¹⁴ Therefore, despite our vastly different cultural lives and scientific knowledge, it is possible to sympathise with early-Renaissance perceptions of the role of food in constructing a physically and mentally healthy person and its function as a marker of identity.

From a mid-fourteenth- to late-fifteenth-century perspective the humours could be balanced through the qualities contained in the ingredients of a meal and their preparation. Food, like the human body, consisted of a combination of hot, cold, wet and dry qualities. Food's origin influenced its inherent health benefits. Citing the thirteenth-century physician and philosopher Arnald of Villanova, Ficino recommended "that you should select animals, green vegetables, fruits, field-produce, and wines from regions that are high and fragrant [...] and the cultivated land grows rich not with dung-pits but with a natural moisture."¹¹⁵ Food preparation further allowed the cook to balance the qualities of the ingredients which would, in turn, balance the qualities in the consumer.¹¹⁶

Men and women's eating habits differed because, according to Renaissance knowledge, women were predominantly cold and wet and so would benefit from eating baked or roasted foods (prepared in hot and dry conditions) whereas men were naturally hot and dry and so should eat boiled food to prevent them from drying up or overheating.¹¹⁷ Ideally then, what one ate should reflect one's personal constitution. The qualities of particular animals, in terms of their nature and their diet also informed early Renaissance advice regarding what to eat to achieve optimum psychological and physical results.¹¹⁸ Masculine qualities of heat and dryness were associated with intelligence and spirituality. The wealthy elite therefore preferred to eat birds, believing such fragile animals that soared through the hot dry air could refine human thought.¹¹⁹ Doctors also recommended that women who had recently given birth should eat poultry because, though expensive, it was easy to digest and

¹¹⁴ For instance see: James M. Cronin, Mary B. McCarthy, and Alan M. Collins. 2014. "Covert Distinction: How Hipsters Practice Food-Based Resistance Strategies in the Production of Identity." *Consumption Markets and Culture* 17 (1): 2-28., and see: Kelly Donati, 2005. "The Pleasure of Diversity in Slow Food's Ethics of Taste." *Food, Culture and Society* 8 (2): 227 -242.

¹¹⁵ Ficino, (2002), p. 185.

¹¹⁶ Bendiner, pp. 9-11

¹¹⁷ C. M. Wollgar, 2010. "Food and the Middle Ages." *Journal of Medieval History* 36 (1): 1-19. pp. 12 & 15.

¹¹⁸ Ficino, (2002), pp. 183, also see Wollgar, p. 16.

¹¹⁹ Wiesner-Hanks, p.50.

would give them strength.¹²⁰ The ideal source and preparation of one's food depended on one's biological sex and social status. This placed biological health concerns at the mercy of wealth and cultural values concerning gender and hierarchy.

Florentine statesman Francesco Guicciardini (1483-1540) noted in his *Ricordi* that taste in food changed according to fashion:

If you look closely, you will see that from age to age not only is there a change in men's ways of speaking and their vocabulary, the clothes they wear, their manner of building, culture and similar things, but, what is more, even their tastes, so that one food that has been an expensive luxury in one age is often not so in the other.¹²¹

Food trends within a society reflect the economic divisions within the community as well as religious, political and social philosophies. The manner in which one physically ate was also subject to fashion. While it had been usual to eat with one's hands (and thereby be mindful of the cleanliness and politeness of what one touched at the dinner table) forks became fashionable in Italy from the 1430s, approximately three centuries before they became popular in the rest of Europe.¹²²

Specific eating practices also played a part in the cultural and religious rituals which bound the community in shared practice. For instance those in the community who could afford to engage in the culinary traditions of Carnevale indulged in excess and delicacies including fatty and tender meats, in preparation for the abstinence of Lent. On the last Thursday of Carnevale, known as in Florence as *Berlingaccio*, people ate duck for dinner, they abstained from meat on Friday and Saturday in honour of the Crucifixion and the Marian fast, on Sunday they ate veal and birds, on Monday they ate capretto, on *Carnasciale* (Shrove Tuesday) they ate venison, lasagne and parapelle. On Ash Wednesday the feasting ended

¹²⁰ Musacchio, (1999), p. 40.

¹²¹ Francesco Guicciardini, 1981. *Ricordi Diari Memorie*. Pordenone: Editori Riuniti spa di Edizioni Studio Tesi. "Se voi osservate bene, vedrete che di eta in eta non solo si mutano e modi del parlare degli uomini e e vocaboli, gli abiti del vestire, gli ordini dello edificare, della cultura e cosi simili, ma, quello che e piu, e gusti ancora, in modo che uno cibo che e stato in prezzo in una eta e spesso stimato manco nell'altra." p. 192 [my translation], also quoted in translation in Pina Palma, 2013. *Savoring Power, Consuming the Times: The Metaphors of Food in Medieval and Renaissance Italian Literature*. Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press p. 1.

¹²² Paoletti & Radke, p. 185.

and no one would eat meat or animal products for the next forty days, until Easter.¹²³ Food and its associations contributed to the communal enactment of religious identity.

Eating food engages the sense of taste but also those of touch, smell and sight. The sight and smell of food causes the mouth to salivate and the body to prepare to eat. To the Medieval mind, taste was one component of the 'senses of the mouth' which included speech. This connection created a neat dualism by which moral qualities enter the mouth through the food one ate and exit the mouth in the form of speech.¹²⁴ However, the almost-involuntary desire for food, combined with its conflation of taste and touch led to a counter association between gluttony and lust. Ficino advised his readers to "shun deceitful Venus in her blandishments of touching and tasting" warning that "the greater delight experienced in touching and tasting, the graver damage frequently befalls."¹²⁵ The association of food and sex was common in Christian rhetoric from as early as the fourth century, owing to interpretations of Adam giving in to temptation and eating the forbidden fruit offered by Eve as a metaphor for a sexual awakening.¹²⁶ Just as the Christian tradition called for abstinence from eating meat during Lent (a practice for which people prepared through ritualised excess) so too did they indulge in and then abstain from sexual activity.¹²⁷ It is likely that Boccaccio was responding to this cultural association between food and sex when he described a meal as a component of the seduction of Salabaetto.¹²⁸ Dominici preached that excessive eating made the humours dense, increasing sensuality and clouding the memory and so limiting the glutton's ability to think and conduct themselves virtuously.¹²⁹ Moral literature associated culinary abstinence with a transcendence beyond the gluttonous desires of the flesh and yet social practices and rituals indicate that the personal and social appeal of full bellies, and meals as a component of social interaction, proved more influential than theology or philosophy in shaping behaviour.¹³⁰

¹²³ William F. Prizer, 2004. "Reading Carnival: The Creation of a Florentine Carnival Song." *Early Music History* 23: 185-252, pp. 203-204.

¹²⁴ Wollgar, p.8

¹²⁵ Ficino, (2002), pp. 211-213.

¹²⁶ Palma, p. 35. And see: Kenneth Bendiner, 2004. *Food in Painting: From the Renaissance to the Present*. Chicago: Reaktion Books, p. 12.

¹²⁷ Prizer, (2004), p. 204.

¹²⁸ Boccaccio, (1822) "Day 8 Story 10" pp. 252-256.

¹²⁹ Debby (2001), p. 114 discussing Dominici's sermon recorded in MS Ricc. 1301, Predica 22, lines 71-74.

¹³⁰ Palma, p.17.

The rhetoric of self-denial was a continual theme in expressions of female virtue. While men ate more food, reflecting their need for strength to support their families out in the world, women ate less in order to accommodate both their husbands' and families' needs and so demonstrate their nurturing characters.¹³¹ For women who had dedicated themselves to a virginal, religious life, self-denial took on even more serious dimensions. St Catherine of Siena's relationship with eating, for instance, was one of humility and intense self-control. While visiting and caring for the sick, St Catherine sucked the pus from their wounds, not to clean them but to mortify her own body.¹³² She reduced her food intake, ultimately only accepting the Eucharist during mass until, in 1380, she starved to death. By sustaining her body solely on the bread, which for her was Christ's body, she challenged the boundaries of the self and increased her reliance on God.¹³³ Placing restrictions on one's food could publicly reflect one's religious ideas and adherence cultural values.

Despite the virtuous implications of self-denial as a penitential act, its application within lay society was not always met with approval. This was demonstrated when Venetian humanist Gregorio Correr noted in a 1443 letter to the aspiring nun Cecilia Gonzaga (whose cultural class aligned her with Florentine patrician culture) that if she were to try to starve herself penitentially, her family would "not permit it" and out of concern for her wellbeing they would present her with even greater temptations, because:

In fasting the visage pales, the skin wrinkles, the body shrivels [...] but if, for some reason, you seem a little pale, without delay [...] a soft bed will be made for you, and you will be laid upon it, the doctors [...] turn to your father 'this maiden of yours,' they say, 'fasts too much' [...] Meanwhile, you will be hounded with a storehouse of delicacies.¹³⁴

Women's beauty was a primary medium by which society assessed their virtue and value. Correr warned that a woman's choice to fast would diminish her beauty, concern her family and result in further temptations. Although fasting visibly caused the body physical distress, other methods of penitence were devised which relied on concealing signs of pain.

¹³¹ Wollgar, p.12.

¹³² Bynum, p. 184, and Siraisi, pp. 46 &.121.

¹³³ Lester, pp. 190 & 203.

¹³⁴ Gregorio Correr, "Letter to the Virgin Cecilia on Fleeing this Worldly Life, 1443" viewed in: Margaret L. King Albert Rabil Jr. (ed. trans.) 1992. *Her Immaculate Hand*. Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies. p 97.

Asceticism: Self Control Through Touch

For many fourteenth- and fifteenth-century thinkers, the essence of humanity resided not in the senses (experienced by all living creatures) but in rationality, sometimes achieved 'through' but ideally 'over' the sensate body.¹³⁵ One method for conquering the senses' influence over the will was through self-sacrifice. This included mortification of the flesh, rejection of luxuries and the performance of menial, dangerous or repugnant tasks in the name of humility and of imitating the suffering of Christ.¹³⁶ Asceticism created a spiritual object of the body by pursuing the complex ambition of eradicating the will through an act of will.¹³⁷ Ascetics, most commonly individual female mystics or confraternal groups of men, ritualistically engaged in self-effacing behaviour, manipulating the physical to achieve the metaphysical.

Performing penitential acts, which could involve saying prayers, giving alms, wearing penitential garments or flagellation, were important religious practices in Florence. The purpose of penance was to inflict physical punishment on one's body to express repentance of one's sins or to aid the soul of a deceased person believed to be languishing in purgatory. While Christians treated active intercession for the souls of the departed as a duty, theologians debated whether anyone's soul could be aided by the actions of another, living person.¹³⁸ The 1438 council of Ferrara-Florence added prayerful, charitable and penitential intercession for the souls of the deceased to doctrine.¹³⁹ This added another dimension to the fifteenth-century association between spirituality and sensation in that the physical experience of pain could metaphysically benefit both oneself and the souls of loved ones who had left the living but remained in the eternal community.

While masculine communities called *Disciplinati* gathered regularly to reaffirm their faith, acknowledge, and make amends for their sins through ritual ascetic practices, female

¹³⁵ H.W. Janson, 1952. *Apes and Ape Lore in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*. London: The Warburg Institute, University of London, p. 240.

¹³⁶ For a discussion of the historiography of late medieval religiously motivated self-sacrifice see: Caroline Walker Bynum, 1992. "The Mysticism and Asceticism of Medieval Women: Some Comments on the Typologies of Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch" (pp.53-78) in *Fragmentation and Redemption Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion*, New York: Zone Books, also see p. 184 of the same book; for a discussion of asceticism's role in the formation of the religious self, see: Flood, (2004).

¹³⁷ Flood, pp.212-213.

¹³⁸ For Aquinas' discussion of the value of works of intercession for the dead see: Aquinas, vol. II, *supplement to the third part*, Q. 71, Art. 1-3 pp. 901-904 and art. 6 pp.908-909.

¹³⁹ Welch (1997), p. 147.

penitents and ascetics usually acted alone.¹⁴⁰ Female ascetics' social identities were engrained in their biological difference from men. As discussed, the ugly effects of such practices as flagellation and starvation led to disapproval of women pursuing extreme penitential devotion. A popular alternative method of physical penitence was to secretly wear a coarse hair shirt. The key to the garment's spiritual function was to inflict continual discomfort on wearers, who would thereby be reminded of their sin and mortality, and of Jesus' suffering. The hair shirt was a symbol of revulsion for earthly pleasures and wearing it was ideally accompanied by charitable actions such as care for the sick and poor.¹⁴¹

While some penitential garments were simply abrasive and acted as a physical reminder of morality, others caused permanent mutilation. These garments incorporated brutal ornaments of metal or bone. Savonarola wore a coarse belt interwoven with fish bones that would have scratched, cut and bruised his skin as he moved.¹⁴² The wife and charitable mystic St. Francesca Romana (1384-1440) wore a hair-shirt and a belt made of horsehair or of iron which crippled her so badly that her confessor instructed her to desist for the sake of her health.¹⁴³ Especially painful garments could take on an additional protective significance for female penitents. Third-order Dominican, Colomba da Rieti (1468-1501) tore and scarred her hips and breasts so severely with chains and barbed belts that it repelled and converted three men who attempted to rape her.¹⁴⁴ In this instance the harsh means of penance was vindicated as a means of conversion and, ironically, physical and psychological protection.

The church directed people to wear penitential garments in secret to disassociate the devotional experience from self-righteous pride. The most influential and popular collection of hagiographies in Europe, Jacobus de Varagine's *Golden Legend* (1275), includes many exempla relating to rejecting material wealth and performing (ascetic and charitable) works in secret.¹⁴⁵ For instance, St Bernard's (1090-1153) virtue is expressed by noting that he:

¹⁴⁰ Weissman, p.50

¹⁴¹ Siraisi, p.44.

¹⁴² Savonarola's belt is preserved and displayed at the monastery of San Marco, Florence.

¹⁴³ Cordelia Warr, *Dressing for Heaven: Religious Clothing in Italy 1215-1545*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010, p. 174.

¹⁴⁴ Margaret L. King, 1991. *Women of the Renaissance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p.122.

¹⁴⁵ Tinagli, p. 156, For an examination of the *Golden Legend's* changing impact in Europe lasting as a 'cultural institution' or 'medieval best-seller' from the thirteenth into the late fifteenth century, declining in readership and respect at the turn of the century and re-emerging as a symbol of medieval faith during the Romantic era

Had no pleasure in clothing; he said that [...] outrageous clothing was folly, a man but glorifying himself [...] He wore many years the hair, and as long as he might hide it and wear it. And when he saw that it was known he took him to common vesture.¹⁴⁶

Following hagiographies' lead, fourteenth- and fifteenth-century stories likewise praised women who upheld their families' honour by wearing what was socially expected of them while secretly wearing a hair-shirt underneath. Florentine families' expectation that their daughters would dress as they instructed and marry whom they chose allowed women little recourse to dictate their own behaviour and appearance. Hair-shirts allowed women to maintain their externally legible social identities while developing their religious identity through private visceral devotion. Dale Kent demonstrates this with the late thirteenth-century Florentine example of the lawyer Iacopone De Todi who became an ascetic when his wife died and he discovered for the first time that she had worn a hair-shirt.¹⁴⁷ Similarly, St. Francesca Romana, consented to her family's desire that she marry but she wore a hair-shirt to her marriage bed as a token of her religious vocation.¹⁴⁸ This indicates that brides who would have preferred a religious vocation could take mental comfort in physical discomfort. The meanings of pleasurable and painful touch were therefore also subject to social classification. For Renaissance women, this meant that pain could be a tool for asserting personal control over the self which, as a female body, was culturally understood to be sexualised and pleasure-seeking.

see: Sherry L. Reames, 1985. *The Legenda Aurea: A Reexamination of Its Paradoxical History*. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press.

¹⁴⁶ All references to the *Legenda Aurea* use William Caxton's 1483 translation, checked against Voragine's Latin. The Latin is included in footnotes where relevant. The Spelling of Voragine's name differs according to the two texts making it easier to distinguish between the references. Jacobus de Voragine, 1973. *The Golden Legend*. Edited by F.S. Ellis. I-VII vols. New York: AMS Press. "The Life of St. Bernard," Vol. V, p.18. And: Voragine, Jacobus de. 1850. *Legenda Aurea: Vulgo Historia Lombardica Dicta Ad Optimorum Librorum Fidem*. Edited by Johann Georg Theodor Grässe. Lipsiae: Librariae Arnoldianae. p. 531 "In vestibus ei semper paupertas placuit, sordes nunquam, nimirum animi fore iudices aiebat aut negligentis aut inaniter apud se gloriantis aut foris humanam gloriam affectantis. Proverbium illud in ore ejus frequenter, semper in corde erat: qui hoc facit, quod nemo, mirantur omnes. Unde et cilicium pluribus annis portavit, quamdiu occultum esse potuit, sed ubi hoc cognitum esse sensit, continuo illud abiciens ad communia se convertit," also see: Voragine, "The Life of St. Clare", Vol. VI, p.162.

¹⁴⁷ Dale Kent, 2001. "Women in Renaissance Florence." In *Virtue and Beauty: Leonardo's Ginevra de' Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women*. Princeton: National Gallery of Art Washington, Princeton University Press. p. 37.

¹⁴⁸ Siraisi, p.44. This solution for rejecting the sensory luxuries of wedding attire marriage also features in the *Golden Legend*, see: Voragine, "The life of St. Cecilia," vol.6, p. 247.

Conclusion

Sensory input is not objectively understood and experienced. Cultural context and mnemonic associations contribute to how people understand and emotionally respond to their private and social experiences.¹⁴⁹ As a culture searching for connections between the material world and divine will, theologians from the thirteenth century onwards took a particular interest in framing the sensate body as a necessary and malleable component of a spiritually unified whole.¹⁵⁰ They drew on ancient knowledge and contemporary observation to understand how to heal the body and to further appreciate the senses' relationship to health, thought, emotion, gender and identity. This elite rhetorical foundation for treating and interpreting the moral values of the body informed the ways that sensory experiences were constructed and interpreted in society. The combination of philosophical meaning and cultural practice filtered down into social expectations of women. As women negotiated the meaning of gendered cultural values in their daily practice they became living representatives of the rhetoric of embodied morality.

The sensory world that fourteenth and fifteenth century patrician women inhabited taught them what society expected of them. Women were encouraged to internalise moral lessons through their senses. They had to be selective in their gaze (in order to view and build up a mnemonic store of devotional images while avoiding eye contact), listen to sermons, the sounds of bells and religious music but not listen to or partake in idle gossip, fast during lent and then see and ingest the transubstantiated flesh of the Lord. The society's combination of theological and social values to which women were expected to adhere included to be modest, obedient, virtuous and beautiful, and to signal these qualities by making minimal eye-contact, speaking softly and infrequently, smelling good but not overly perfumed, delicately eating food selected and prepared to enhance their health and virtue, and to dress modestly but with grace and beauty. The juxtaposition of theological requirements of modesty and the opulence required of their social status reveals inherent inner conflict in the foundations for fashioning female identities. The hairshirt, used by a few particularly

¹⁴⁹ For a relevant sample from twenty-first-century research into the difficulties involved in understanding other cultures' coded sensory, particularly visual and sartorial, experience when one's own perspective is coloured by a lifetime of cultural conditioning, see: Anette Lynch, Susan O. Michelman, and Jane E. Hegland. 1998. "Cross-Cultural and Intra-Societal Application of DeLong's Framework for Visual Analysis." *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* (Sage Publications) 16, no. 145.

¹⁵⁰ Bynum, pp. 222-223.

pious wives can be seen as the ultimate expression of this conflict for elite women. The senses provided means for women to express and experience their adherence to social values. Yet, by denying women a strong oral/auditory presence and by restricting women's eye-contact, the society reduced the more explicit avenues through which women could communicate their character and virtue. While women's varying adherence to these restrictions in themselves became points of judgment, the restrictions placed particular attention on the ways women utilised their adornment and comportment. This increased the importance for women to be ever conscious of the different ways in which their appearance and actions may be read. Women were also particularly susceptible to accusations of vanity. The inherent tensions in the rhetoric of embodied morality when put into practice will be examined throughout the following chapters. By engaging with the cultural dialogue drawn from a comparison of religious, popular and humanist perspectives, this chapter has identified the idealising rhetoric that informed the utilisation and interpretation of the senses as a means of generating emotions, cementing memories, and maintaining health. While this chapter has considered the internalisation of sensory input, the following chapter considers the externalisation of spiritual identities in the religious community.

Chapter Two - Florentine Religious Community

Beatrice was thrilled the first year she was allowed to attend the festival of San Giovanni with her family. When she was younger she used to spend the day with her head out the window (even though she knew she shouldn't) so that she could listen to the distant music, the crowds and the horse races and could watch all the beautifully dressed people making their way to the festivities. This year she and her sister spent a whole month planning their outfits in eager anticipation. When she first caught sight of the piazza del Duomo it took her breath away, it looked just like the paintings of heaven she had seen at church and the beautifully dressed women suddenly didn't seem like women at all but like angels. She thought of the rows of angels and saints painted in the chapel of Thomas Aquinas, Santa Maria Novella.* She would always remember the first time she saw that frescoed chapel. It was three years ago, she was nine years old, she walked up the steps and suddenly felt so small, surrounded by the overwhelming vision of heaven and hell. When she cricked her neck all the way up she had felt a strange fear at the sight of Jesus looking down at her with his hand tilting toward hell. She had been fascinated by the strange monsters and naked people on the wall to her right but when she realised that that was where she would go if she made God angry by being vain, greedy or cruel the image seemed even more frightening and the monsters had occupied her nightmares ever since.

**The chapel Beatrice knew as dedicated to Thomas Aquinas is now known as the Capella Strozzi di Montova.*

This chapter examines parallels in the visual rhetoric found within literature, paintings, sermons, politics, clothing and festivals that represented Florence as the New Jerusalem, an eternal beautiful and virtuous community. Florentine frescos of heaven, hell and the militant church situate the city as the blessed stage on which the people perform their piety and seal their eternal fate. Festivals, and in particular, the San Giovanni festival, brought those heavenly images and allegories to life. Men were able to engage with the festival as citizens, process beneath their guild or confraternity's *gonfalone*, display their merchandise and take part in games and theatrical performances. Women's role was as observers, while dressing in their finest Florentine textiles positioned them as living extensions of city's proud display of its beauty, wealth and nobility.¹ Contemporary accounts of the proceedings indicate a

¹ Heidi L. Chretien, 1994. *The Festival of San Giovanni: Imagery and Political Power in Renaissance Florence*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing. p. 33, and Weissman, p 84. The role of women's appearance as symbols of

tendency to view the overall impact of the Feast of San Giovanni as being a vision of paradise, in which the women resembled angels. The representation of the community as being peaceful, united and orderly is in keeping with contemporary practice amongst Florentine chroniclers.² The collective imagination of what heaven on earth would look like, as expressed in these accounts, indicates shared experiences and stores of cultural imagery. Contemporary paintings and literary images worked with ritual experience to establish and perpetuate such imaginings.³ While the rhetoric of Florence resembling paradise had wide appeal, the magnificent materials dedicated to actualising that vision challenged the parallel call for humility. This is particularly evident in references to female attire. Conflicting values created a difficult setting for assessing the role of women's appearance and behaviour during religious festivals. On the one hand, women were praised by secular religious observers for their angelic beauty which contributed to the city as a vision of heaven. On the other hand, women's extravagant public appearance attracted accusations of vanity and corruption. Public magnificence could not eradicate personal humility. Heavenly ideals relating to the observed bodies and imagined souls of the Florentine community were conceptualised in public words, images and experiences and those ideologies were, therefore, internalised and carried with the listeners, viewers or participants into their domestic and contemplative lives.

Florence as the New Jerusalem

The idea that life was a step toward judgement and eternity was reinforced daily in Florence. Marsilio Ficino wrote a letter to Cherubino Quarquagli in which he encouraged his contemporaries to superimpose heavenly standards upon their self-perception and lived experience, saying that one "should realise that he is indeed a citizen of Heaven, but an inhabitant in earth. He should therefore strive to think, say and do nothing which does not become a citizen of the kingdom of Heaven."⁴ Reflecting and perpetuating the idea that Christians should keep their minds on death and judgment, heavenly imagery was

masculine power, nobility and identity more is discussed in the following chapters, particularly "Chapter Six – Marriage."

² Strocchia, (1992), p. 6.

³ Theresa Flanigan, p. 189, has also recently argued that the repetition of certain religious imagery in both visual and oral forms was a deliberate strategy for shepherding Christians' public memory toward appropriate images on which to muse and from which to draw specified emotional and intellectual responses.

⁴ Ficino, (1975), Vol. II, *Letter 53*, p. 67.

conspicuously incorporated into Florentine architecture, the city's soundscape and its art. The city was audibly characterised by the sound of church bells announcing the tangible presence of Jesus, transubstantiated from the mundane substance of bread. The Christian community of Florence maintained a sense of continuity and shared cultural memories, articulated by artistic products and further experienced through taking part in religious rituals. Festivals and theatrical performances temporarily transformed the living landscape into a vision of Heaven or the New Jerusalem. From the mid-fifteenth century, religious paintings, particularly those relating to the Last Judgment or heaven, made idealised visual references to the Florentine landscape, its architecture, saints and to prominent Florentine people past and present.⁵ Continual reimagining of Florence as a stepping-off point between earth and heaven elevated Florentine self-perception and encouraged the people of Florence to behave in a devout and Christian manner throughout their daily lives.

Patronising tangible expressions of the city's religious and political aspirations through works of art and architecture was important to the rising merchant classes and the flourishing humanist spirit of the city. In turn, preachers, particularly Dominicans, evocatively cited the architecture and the appearance of the Florentine population to inspire a collective idealised sense of the city's aesthetic magnificence.⁶ Peter Howard has shown that Dominican Archbishop of Florence Antonino preached that lavish charity through magnificent public works was a virtue in the wealthy. Charity is now extended beyond a focus on the individual toward the needs of the city as a whole. Antonino indicated that when people willingly spent their money on such public buildings as hospitals and churches, then the virtue of the populace was externalised and the city was made to more closely resemble heaven.⁷ In his *Summa Theologica*, Antonino argued for the public nature of magnificence and suggested that personal extravagance, written on the body, was a vice unless it was merely a formality of rank or occasion.⁸ Contemporary Franciscan Bernardino of Siena, and Dominicans Giovanni Caroli (1429-1503) and Savonarola, opposed the idea of magnificence as virtue regardless of its application in public works or in personal appearance. They interpreted the

⁵ For more on the role of idealised Florentine landscape as paradise in painting see: Paul Barolsky, 1996. "Savonarola and the Beauty of Florence." *Notes in the History of Art* (Ars Brevis Foundation) 15 (2): 11-14.

⁶ Howard, (2012), pp. 20-21.

⁷ Howard (2012), pp. 107-110.

⁸ Antoninus, *Summa Theologica*, IV:III:VI quoted in Latin and translation as Appendix 2 in Howard (2012), pp. 117-121.

luxury of the Florentine elite as self-gratifying vanity attempting to mask itself with a veneer of piety by being directed to public works.⁹

The biblical city of Jerusalem was used as a means of both criticising and praising the politics and social cohesion of Florence. Giovanni Dominici allegorically warned Florentines against their current politics with reference to the old Jerusalem, saying, “As Jerusalem was destroyed because of its internal divisions and corrupt leaders, so God will punish Florence and send war upon it.”¹⁰ Ritual behaviour, sartorial traditions and strategies for memory creation at festivals sought to reflect the city’s collective imagination of the New Jerusalem, which the Bible indicated would follow the Apocalypse. This image was derived from a biblical prophecy that instructs; “put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city [...] Ye shall be redeemed.”¹¹ St John the Evangelist echoed this prophecy in his vision of Revelation, saying he “saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of Heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. [...] there shall be no more death.”¹² Florentine religious and social reformers favoured this allusion for its connotations of effective and permanent reprieve, connecting their own adorned city with a new spiritual city rescued from plague, war or a corrupt government by the will of God.¹³ Dante echoed these biblical texts in his *Paradiso*, describing a blended vision of Florence and heaven in his prophecy of Emperor Henry VII, as a New Augustus, overturning papal power in the city.¹⁴ The potent cultural conceit of Florence as paradise opened the way to embedding significant political and civic messages into ostensibly religious settings. On a communal level, politically powerful, and even opposing figures from the Medici to Savonarola influenced the nature of the religious celebrations as manifestations of their vision of paradise. Savonarola alluded to Florence as a New Jerusalem in 1494 when Charles VII of France had invaded, leading to the

⁹ Howard (2012), pp. 210-212. Burke (pp. 167-168) argues that Savonarola’s opposition to material magnificence as a sign of devotion developed over time, indicating that in his 1495 *De Simplicitate Christianae Vitae* he allows that spending money on chapels could have devotional relevance, but that by 1496 he continually used his sermons to criticise the practice.

¹⁰ Dominici MS Ricc. 1301 Predica 6 lines 55-57 as translated in Debby, p.67. The full sermon is printed in an appendix in Debby pp 239-246 The translation is not direct, but carries the meaning from “*Isaya piange la distruzione di Gerusalem: Ys.primo capitolo, et che dicie: 'Maravigliati tu Giudea che Gerusalem sia distrutta, che Idio ti mandi adosso le guerre, le pestilenze?' O riguarda come sono fatti i principi tuoi, co loro che sono posti al governo degli altri, poni mente come sono fedeli della repubblica!*” pp 240-241

¹¹ Isaiah 52:1-3.

¹² Revelation 21:2-4.

¹³ See: Girolamo Savonarola, 1965. *Prediche Sopra Aggeo: con il Trattato circa il reggimento e governo della citta di Firenze/a cura di Luigi Firpo*, Roma: Belardetti, 1965 see especially numbers 10, 13, and 23.

¹⁴ Alighieri, Dante, *Paradiso Canto XXX:135-141*.

exile of the Medici and allowing him to instigate religious reform.¹⁵ Even when framed in a different manner, religious gatherings drew on the imagery of the New Jerusalem, which was substantially manifest through the clothing worn by women for the occasion.

Florence in Dante's Paradiso

Florentine poets, painters, preachers and philosophers created works for diverse audiences, while engaging with the notion of Florence as a city striving to create a vision of paradise on earth. Dante Alighieri's *Commedia* (1308-21) influenced the way Florentines saw their city, their social relationships and their religious stance. The three-part epic poem recounts Dante's imagined journey from Florence through hell, purgatory and heaven. The poem identifies figures from antiquity, the Bible and Florentine history at each point of the journey. In doing so, it proudly portrayed Florence as a community whose relationships and practices would be remembered for all eternity.

In *Paradiso* Dante wrote of meeting his own ancestor Cacciaguida degli Elisei (c. 1091-1148) in the celestial semblance of "living topaz, that joyous precious gem."¹⁶ Cacciaguida's words expressed nostalgia and displayed the civic and familial pride that continued to shape Florentine identities. Dante created a sense of the city's longevity and ancestral continuity in Cacciaguida's statement "O my leaf, in whom I delight and anticipate, I am your root."¹⁷

¹⁵Jon Arrizabalaga, John Henderson, and Roger French. 1997. *The Great Pox, The French Disease in Renaissance Europe*. New Haven, London: Yale University Press. p.41.

¹⁶ In the next chapter I will discuss the symbolism of gems as celestial rewards good works.

¹⁷ This and the following quotations from Dante's *Paradiso* are my translation from: Dante Alighieri, 1997-2012. *Divina Commedia*. ELF Divine Comedy Research Edition. http://www.divinecomedy.org/divine_comedy.html, *Paradiso* XV:85-148.

Ben supplico io a te, vivo topazio / che questa gioia preziosa ingemmi, / perché mi facci del tuo nome sazio».
//«O fronda mia in che io compiacemmi / pur aspettando, io fui la tua radice»: / cotal principio, rispondendo,
femmi. //Poscia mi disse: «Quel da cui si dice / tua cognazione e che cent'anni e più / girato ha 'l monte in la
prima cornice, // mio figlio fu e tuo bisavol fue: / ben si conven che la lunga fatica / tu li raccorci con l'opere
tue.// Fiorenza dentro da la cerchia antica, / ond'ella toglie ancora e terza e nona, / si stava in pace, sobria e
pudica. // Non avea catenella, non corona, non gonne contigiate, non cintura / che fosse a veder più che la
persona. //Non faceva, nascendo, ancor paura / la figlia al padre, che 'l tempo e la dote / non fuggien quinci e
quindi la misura. //Non avea case di famiglia vòte; / non v'era giunto ancor Sardanapalo / a mostrar ciò che 'n
camera si puote.// Non era vinto ancora Montemalo / dal vostro Uccellatoio, che, com'è vinto / nel montar sù,
così sarà nel calo. // Bellincion Berti vid'io andar cinto / di cuoio e d'osso, e venir da lo specchio / la donna sua
sanza 'l viso dipinto; // e vidi quel d'i Nerli e quel del Vecchio / esser contenti a la pelle scoperta, e le sue donne
al fuso e al penneccchio. // Oh fortunate! ciascuna era certa / de la sua sepultura, e ancor nulla / era per Francia
nel letto diserta. // L'una vegghiava a studio de la culla, / e, consolando, usava l'idioma / che prima i padri e le
madri trastulla; // l'altra, traendo a la rocca la chioma, / favoleggiava con la sua famiglia / d'i Troiani, di
Fiesole e di Roma. // Saria tenuta allor tal meraviglia / una Cianghella, un Lapo Salterello, / qual or saria
Cincinnato e Corniglia. // A così riposato, a così bello / viver di cittadini, a così fida / cittadinanza, a così dolce
ostello, Maria mi diè, chiamata in alte grida; / e ne l'antico vostro Batisteo / insieme fui cristiano e Cacciaguida.

Using his ancestor's voice Dante described Florence as an ancient city of continuing religious (auditory) tradition, saying "Florence, within the ancient circle wall, where she still hears the tierce and nones, was quiet, temperate and chaste."

Dante then contrasted the virtue of ancient Florence with the vanity of his contemporary city manifest in the adornment and comportment of the city's women. Dante's imagined ancestor noted that in the past "no golden chains had she, nor crowns, unending skirts, nor belts that caught the eye more than the person." This allegorical representation of Florence through the apparently increasingly corrupt symbol of female attire resonated with the way men talked about and depicted adorned Florentine women into the fifteenth century. Referring to the dowry system, which Dante evidently believed to have negative effects on family relations, Cacciaguida reflected, "being born, a daughter did not incite fear in a father, for the age and dowry were not too great this side or that, but fitting." Cacciaguida referenced the former dress and behaviour of significant patrician families, shaming Dante's contemporaries into temperance: "I saw Bellincion Berti adorned in leather and bone, and his wife depart from the mirror without a painted face; and I saw the Nerlo and Vecchio families content with bare skin and their wives with spindle and flax."

A few stanzas later, Dante referenced the San Giovanni Baptistery, the centre of Florentine spiritual identity in which people received their name and religion, with his ancestor's words "in your ancient Baptistery, I at once became Christian and Cacciaguida." During baptism babies officially received their names and were initiated into the Christian community. All Florentine citizens were baptised in the San Giovanni Baptistery opposite the Duomo. John the Baptist was the city's patron saint and so the Baptistery was the focal point of the city's collective spiritual and social identity. A sumptuary law of 1355 only allowed for a maximum of three godparents.¹⁸ Nevertheless, baptism provided a valued opportunity to strengthen social relationships through spiritual bonds. Therefore, Florentine fathers of the ascending merchant class, into the fifteenth century, (including Buonaccorso Pitti, and Gregorio Dati)

//Moronto fu mio frate ed Eliseo; / mia donna venne a me di val di Pado, / e quindi il soprannome tuo si feo. // Poi seguitai lo 'mperador Currado; / ed el mi cinse de la sua milizia, / tanto per bene ovrar li venni in grado. // Dietro li andai incontro a la nequizia / di quella legge il cui popolo usurpa, / per colpa d'i pastor, vostra giustizia. // Quivi fu' io da quella gente turpa / disviluppato dal mondo fallace, / lo cui amor molt'anime deturpa; // e venni dal martiro a questa pace» [my translation].

¹⁸ Rainey, p.155.

selected upwards of thirty godparents for their children.¹⁹ Selecting godparents to share the responsibility of raising and supporting one's child in the Christian faith meant formalising friendships, and the loyalty and reciprocity which friendship implied.²⁰ Reciprocity began immediately as godparents brought gifts for the mother and child and, in turn, the father held a baptismal feast, during which the new spiritual family would break bread and solidify their relationship.²¹ Dominici argued that this culturally unifying practice had become corrupted by vanity and instructed parents "do not try to seek such pomp in the event of baptism, with much golden velvet, banners, trains, embroidered cloaks, crowd of relatives, multitudes of friends full of sins." Instead, he recommended inviting "devout men and women, in humble garments covered" and expressed thanks in God's justice, which "in baptism forgives original sin in the baby even if the father and mother seek vanity, honours, and new relatives [god-parents] or other evils."²² Dominici demonstrated his view that sumptuous attire was the primary indicator of secular corruption of the holy event. Three key sites for identity creation - religion, society and family - were invested in the Baptismal rite.²³ All Florentines, like Cacciaguida, could trace their Christian and Florentine identities back to the San Giovanni Baptistery.

Recalling his own death in the second crusade, Cacciaguida said that he left the "deceitful world, the love of which corrupts many souls, and came, from martyrdom, to this peace."²⁴ Dante's poem expressed and reinforced the importance of Florence's heritage, in the context of Christian eternity, as well as the importance of individual appearance as an externalisation of vice or virtue. This canto encapsulates the ongoing character, concerns and tensions relating to Florentine religious and civil identity.

¹⁹Haas, Louis. 1995. "Il Mio Buono compare: Choosing Godparents and the Uses of Baptismal Kinship in Renaissance Florence." *Journal of Social History* 29, no. 2 (winter 1995): 341-356., pp.343-344.

²⁰ Weissman, p. 29.

²¹Bossy, p 15 and Mussacchio, (1999), pp. 49-50.

²² Dominici, p. 139-140 "*Se sarete così fatti non cercherete pompe nel battesimo; e tanti velluti dorati, [139] sciugatoi, pezze divise, mantellucci dorati, turba di partenti, moltitudine di compari di peccati pieni, saranno abbandonati; e mandereteli d'umili vestimenti coperti, d'uomini o donne divote accompagni; pigliando si fatti compari, uno o più, che abbin fede per se e per altri. Io dubito assai molti piccolini sono battezzati, i quali solo ricevono il saramento e non la grazia del sacramento; come dicono i Dottori d'un grande si va a battezzare senza contrizione di peccati e fuor della divozion della fede. Deh pensa in quali meriti Dio iustissimo, nel battesimo, perfona il peccato originale a quel piccinino, se il padre e la madre cercano vanita-de onori, e alto nuovo parentado o altro male...*" [my translation].

²³ For more on Florentine baptism see: Haas, pp. 341-356.

²⁴ Dante Alighieri, 1997-2012. *Divina Commedia*. ELF Divine Comedy Research Edition. http://www.divinecomedy.org/divine_comedy.html, *Paradiso* XV:85-148. (see full excerpt in footnote above).

The Last Judgement

Dante's *Commedia*, and particularly the *Inferno* with its nine circles of hell each containing tortures specific to particular sins, influenced the majority of subsequent representations of the Last Judgement.²⁵ Last Judgement imagery depicted the fearful event in which Jesus would judge and assign resurrected humanity to either heaven or hell. The subject gave artists the opportunity to depict recognisable people from Florence, or stereotypical figures, whose behaviour would earn them either salvation or damnation. Written and visual representations of the Last Judgement allowed their creators to pass judgment on their community, and to reinforce social expectations of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour.²⁶ Iris Grötecke's study of fourteenth- and early fifteenth- century Italian Last Judgement frescos revealed that male figures usually outnumbered females in both heaven and hell. In hell, men were usually depicted receiving punishments for political offences, for pride and heresy, both men and women were depicted being punished for avarice, wrath and gluttony, but women were represented being punished for sexual misdemeanours including adultery, prostitution, vanity and infanticide.²⁷ While the typically masculine sins related to men's thoughts and dealings with society, female sins were predominantly rooted in the sexualised body.²⁸ The division in political and social roles between men and women, and the visibility and interest paid to women in the community in general, were thereby echoed in depictions of this poignant theme. In depictions of the Last Judgment, chaotic, crooked, tortured, naked bodies of the damned, on Jesus' left, appealed to viewers' visceral empathy and reminded them of human shame and fragility. The damned are contrasted with stately figures in elegant garments, on Jesus' right, which remind the viewer of all they had been told about spiritual rewards. The garments of the elect, frequently fashioned of pastel fabrics embellished with gold that drape to produce vertical lines which make the figures seem grounded, are demonstrative of an association between the beauty of ornate

²⁵ For further reflection on Dante's influence on the iconography of hell see: Joachim Poeschke. 2005. *Italian Frescoes, The Age of Giotto 1280-1400*, New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, pp. 325 & 339-341, Lorenzo Lorenzi, 2006, *Devils in Art: Florence, from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance*. 2. Translated by Mark Roberts, Perugia: Centro Di. pp. 38-48, On Vasari's endorsement of the association between Dante and paintings of the Last Judgment see: Barolsky (1987), p. 117.

²⁶ Iris Grötecke. 1988. "Representing the Last Judgment: Social Hierarchy, Gender and Sin" *The Medieval History Journal*, 1(2): 233-260, p.233.

²⁷ Grötecke, p. 252.

²⁸ Grötecke, p. 255.

textiles and the beauty of heaven. Such imagery, as will be demonstrated, helps to contextualise the manner in which women dressed for feast days or weddings.

Between 1350 and 1357, Nardo di Cione frescoed a vision of the *Last Judgment* in the Capella Strozzi di Mantova in the far left transept in the church of Santa Maria Novella (Figure 2). This representation of the end of the world pointedly reminded viewers of their private guilt and its effect on their souls. All three walls of the chapel are used for this fresco, in a triptych style, surrounding the viewers with the overwhelming message. The central wall depicts Jesus, high above the heads of the viewers, who must look up to see Him as though they are standing before a judge awaiting their own sentence. Angels and saints are seated on a cloud between Jesus and the people. Jesus is depicted in the act of dividing the resurrected into the elect, on his right, and the damned, on his left. The great distance between the clothed (and thereby sovereign and divine) Jesus above and mankind below, recalls the intimidating statement “Fear Him who [...] has power to cast into hell.”²⁹

The conceptualisation of judgement, and therefore an afterlife, shifted according to the perceived dynamics between God and humanity. In this genre, Jesus usually sits in the seat of judgment holding a sword in one hand, to symbolise justice. In the other hand, He holds a globe, symbolising His role as creator and sovereign. Alternatively, He might gesture toward the exposed wound in His side as a reminder of His sacrifice and so a symbol of both His mercy and authority as judge.³⁰ The way the symbols of justice, sovereignty and mercy were visually tempered altered according to the artist’s or patron’s interpretation of God’s attitude toward His creation. It is notable that in this fresco Jesus directs His attention to the damned and draws very little attention to His side wound which is closely wrapped in garments. This choice communicated Jesus’ authority and judgment rather than leniency. The limited expectation of compassion from Christ in this painting can be contextualised by the city’s recent devastation by the outbreak of the Black Death in 1348.³¹

²⁹ Luke 12: 4-5. Jesus is depicted naked in many of the most significant moments of his life including his birth, baptism, passion and resurrection. For Renaissance viewers this emphasised His humanity, making it easier for them to identify with Him, and to believe that He empathised with their suffering. It is therefore, worth noting the austerity communicated by Jesus dressed for judgement.

³⁰ Louise Marshall, 1994. “Manipulating the Sacred Image and Plague in Renaissance Italy.” *Renaissance Quarterly* 47 (3), p.516.

³¹ For a discussion of the paintings in Capella Strozzi as a visual response to the plague, see: Millard Meiss, 1951. *Painting in Florence and Siena after the Black Death: The Arts, Religion, and Society in the Mid-Fourteenth*



Figure 2: Nardo Di Cione, *Giudizio Universale, Inferno, Purgatorio e Paradiso*, Fresco, Cappella Strozzi Mantova, Santa Maria Novella, 1351-1357

Century. New Jersey: Princeton University Press. pp. 94-104, The link between this painting and the Black Death is also made in: Lorenzi, pp.38 & 68, also on the effects of plague on Italian painting see: Franco Mormando, 2005. "Response to the Plague in Early Modern Italy: What the Primary Sources, Printed and Painted Reveal." In *Hope and Healing, Painting in Italy in a Time of Plague 1500-1800*. Chicago: Clark University Collage of the Holy Cross. Worchester Art Museum, University of Chicago Press.

Meiss argued that the particularly symbolic or conceptual aesthetic of the painting, which disregarded the recent move toward natural representation initiated by Giotto, was a deliberate emotive response to the plague. He noted that “Whereas the painter of the early trecento brought the sacred figures down to the earth, both figuratively and literally, those of the third quarter of the century projected them upwards again.”³² He thus argued that the plague had reasserted the awesome power God and that the hierarchical, symbolic and unearthly mode of painting significantly and intentionally expressed the holy fear experienced by plague survivors. This theory has been challenged by art historians, including E. H. Gombrich who argued that it was reductive to read all visual features as intentional choices that acted as emotional responses to current events. He maintained that the brief Florentine reversion to an earlier iconographic style can be contextualised by considering artistic trends in the broader artistic community, notably the Germanic states that rejected realism prior to the plague and whose stylistic preference may have influenced Florence to slow its push toward naturalism.³³ Art historian Louise Marshall builds on Meiss’ premise with her argument that following the plague the already existing visual language of the hierarchical heaven presided over by an alternately merciful or angry Christ was “energetically mobilized and refashioned to meet the new situation.”³⁴ Taking on-board Gombrich’s suggestions of additional influences on the stylistic shift, the devastating impact of the Black Death (which gave Christians pause to consider their mortality and, more frighteningly, the subsequent and eternal fate of their resurrected body) only two years before the commencement of the fresco must have also influenced the choice of theme and the choices made in relation to Jesus’ physical attitude. However, the plague is unlikely to have been the sole factor in this choice of theme. Representations of the Last Judgment with particular emphasis on heaven and hell increased in popularity in Tuscany from the 1330s, perhaps owing to the popularity of Dante’s *Commedia*.³⁵

The wall on Jesus’ left depicts the torments of hell, as a dark, tangled collection of caves filled with monsters, fire and helpless, eternally suffering human figures. It draws heavily on Dante’s *Inferno* in its iconography, including its division of hell into compartments with

³² Meiss, p. 41.

³³ E. H. Gombrich, 1953. “Reviewed Work: Painting in Florence and Siena after the Black Death by Millard Meiss,” in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 11 (4): 414-416.

³⁴ Marshall, p. 529.

³⁵ Poeschke, p. 339.

punishments designed for specific sins. According to the genre, the miniature damned are naked, aside from occasional figures in headgear symbolic of their former identities as, for instance, priests or kings. The identification of kings indicates that even the powerful will face judgment. Petrarca similarly wrote that in hell kings would “lie naked, wretched, beggars” without their earthy “gems, sceptres, crowns” by which “they are deceived.”³⁶ Crowns, in this context, change from a symbol of power to being a symbol of vanity. The inverted nature of the ornament increases the shame of the damned soul’s position. By contrast, on the wall to Jesus’ right Nardo painted the elect, who are large, dressed characters, with individual faces framed by haloes, who stand in orderly tiers gazing at Christ.

Nardo depicted those who had been judged, but not yet removed to hell or welcomed to heaven, on the main wall. There is a prominent and orderly line of haloed saints at the top of the elect who are countered by an equivalent line of dark-haired Jews and Muslims in the top tier of the damned. Below this orderly upper-line the damned and elect are represented in tiers of descending importance and decreasing scale, from members of the clergy (cardinals and bishops), kings, elite men, ordinary men and finally, closest to the viewer, a single row of women from diverse, identifiable but unsegregated ranks (including nuns, old married women wearing veils and young unmarried noblewomen with braids).³⁷ The majority of theologians agreed that the most significant physical signs of identity, including one’s gender and the scars one acquired through devout actions, were an integral part of personhood and would therefore characterise the resurrected body.³⁸ This provided additional justification for representing recognisable people or character-types amongst the resurrected in Last Judgement paintings.

The elect and the damned are dressed in much the same fashions as one another. Physical attitude, more than clothing, differentiates the elect from the damned. The elect greet one another and hold hands whereas the damned stand in attitudes of bereavement, weep and wail, clasping their hands to their faces or flaying them in the air, gazing upward in appeal or hanging their heads in shame. One pitiful figure clambers out of his grave, reaching toward Jesus’ right but a demon is already dragging him back by his hair toward hell (Figure 6). The

³⁶ Petrarch in Eco *On Ugliness*, pp.64.

³⁷ Grötecke, pp. 240 -249.

³⁸ Bynum (1992), p. 230

message presented here is dark because it indicates that the damned had expected to reach heaven. It shows that even holding a religious office and fashioning themselves as upstanding members of the community through their appearance was not capable of deceiving God.³⁹ This chapel is intended to shock and force its viewers to consider which side of the distant Jesus they wished to be on.

The Militant and Triumphant Church

The Guidalotti family commissioned Andrea di Bonaiuto to depict an encouraging aspirational view of the road to eternity (beginning in Florence and occupied by Florentine people) in the Santa Maria Novella chapter house following a bequest by the merchant and plague widower Buonamico di Lapo Guidalotti who had also helped to finance the building of the chapel.⁴⁰ The chapter house (later known as the Spanish Chapel) was daily used as a capitular meeting place; it was where honoured guests were received and where novices joined the order.⁴¹ The c.1365-1368 fresco represents the Militant and Triumphant Church (Figure 3). The fresco highlights the prominent place of Florentine people in both churches.⁴² There is debate over the work's title. Vasari referred to it as *Order of St. Dominic* in 1568, Biliotti called it *The Militant and Triumphant Church* in 1586, in 1951 Meiss retitled the work *Via Veritatis* 'the way to truth' and in 1976 Romano referred to it as *Corpus Mysticum*.⁴³ I will use the title *Militant and Triumphant Church* because it draws an important distinction between the trials and need of good works in life and the hopes for achieving access to paradise, and the ways it was imagined. The term Militant Church refers to the physical community of Christians on earth, still confronted by temptations, while the Triumphant Church refers to the eternal, unchanging church in heaven. This image depicts the spiritual hierarchy from highest heaven to lowest earth without descending into hell. The fresco is set in the New Earth of Florence's future, as indicated by the inclusion of a completed Santa

³⁹ Tension between wearing socially approved adornment, expressing one's real intentions and thoughts through adornment, and considering the possibility of divine reward or punishment due to either one's adornment or masked intention is discussed further in "Chapter Three –Wealth and Charity."

⁴⁰ Meiss, p. 79.

⁴¹ Julian Gardiner, 1979. "Andrea di Bonaiuto and the Chapterhouse Frescoes in Santa Maria Novella," in *Art History*, 2 (2): 107-138, pp. 111 & 120.

⁴² Debby, Nirit Ben-Aryeh. 2012. "Art and Sermons: Dominicans and the Jews in Florence's Santa Maria Novella." *Church History and Religious Culture* (Brill) 92: 171-200, p. 174, also see Meiss, p. 102, and Kempers, 189.

⁴³ Poeschke, p. 363. Also see: Joseph Polzer, 1995. "Andrea di Bonaiuto's Via Veritatis and Dominican Thought in Late Medieval Italy." *The Art Bulletin* (Collage Art Association) 77 (2): 262-289, p. 266.

Maria del Fiore (Florence's cathedral, dedicated to the New Jerusalem) which was in mid-construction when the fresco was completed.⁴⁴ The chapel is located at the entrance of the monastery's cemetery, making its message of salvation particularly pertinent.



Figure 3: Andrea di Bonaiuto, *The Militant and Triumphant Church (or Via Veritatis)*, Fresco, Spanish Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, Florence, 1365-1368

The sartorial message presented in *The Militant and Triumphant Church* contrasts vanity with humility and related dignified servitude with celestial glory. The heavenly hierarchy can be read from the top of the fresco down. At the pinnacle, suspended in a radiant *mandorla*, Jesus is enthroned, with the symbols of the Evangelists at his feet, flanked on either side by angels. In the Bible an angel is described as having a countenance “like lightning, and his

⁴⁴ Barolsky (1996), p.13.

raiment white as snow.”⁴⁵ In fourteenth- and fifteenth-century paintings, however, angels appealed to contemporary ideals of beauty enhancing the imagined splendour of heaven through their beautiful, colourful attire. Angels maintained uniformity and spatial balance within a painting. In many cases, including Andrea’s fresco, angels’ wings matched their robes, showing that their garments were as much a part of them as their wings.⁴⁶ Their robes were usually hitched over a belt, in the manner of a fourteenth-century servant. A law of 1318 disallowed servants’ skirts to touch the ground, which freed movement and avoided textile waste.⁴⁷ The sartorial allusion to angels as the servants of God is consistent with the contemporary tendency to envision heaven as a perfect hierarchical society, a belief that lent authority to the hierarchical structure of the Florentine state. Andrea painted angels in active attitudes elsewhere in the Spanish chapel, with hitched robes and billowing skirts to denote movement. However, those depicted in the *Triumphant Church* stand gazing at Christ wearing robes flowing to the ground, perhaps indicating the completion of their work. Andrea’s angels are balanced on either side of Jesus, in orderly tiers dressed in equally distributed colours. Closest to Christ, on either side are a pair of angels in green garments, followed by a pair in white, gold, and finally, red. Each pair wears different embellishments such as caps, crowns, belts and sashes. As they appear in pairs they do not express competitiveness, but unity and unaffected beauty.

A collection of saints is depicted on the upper left of the fresco, just below the celestial assembly. Having entered through the gates of heaven they turn to gaze at Jesus. This image was reminiscent of Dante’s *Paradiso* which was interwoven with an idealisation of Florence, “this safe and joyous realm, crowded with ancient people and new, all face with love to one point.”⁴⁸ Their robes are simple and unfitted, reminiscent of the clothing of the early Middle Ages. Paired figures enter the gates of heaven wearing pastel, subtly fitted garments called *guarnelli*, with low neck and waist lines and slight variation in gold embroidery. Warr identifies these simple outfits as belonging to an iconographical tradition of depicting the

⁴⁵ Matthew 28:2-4.

⁴⁶ For instance: the archangel St. Michael’s wings match the red of his tunic and red of his shoes in Lorenzo di Niccolò Gerini’s (1376-1440) *St Michael and St Catherine*, (tempera and gold on panel, Bargello); Vendure di Moro’s 1420-1430, *Madonna in Torno col Bambino e Quattro Angeli*, (tempra e oro su tavola, Bargello) features four angels: two with pink garments and wings and two with green garments and wings.

⁴⁷ Kovesi, p.88.

⁴⁸ Dante, *Paradiso* Canto XXXI:25-27 “Questo sicuro e gaudioso regno, / frequente in gente antica e in novella, / viso e amore avea tutto ad un segno.” [my translation].

once-naked souls of purgatory new-clothed in the pure and humble attire of the elect (although those in purgatory in this particular fresco cycle are clothed).⁴⁹ They kneel to receive a rose garland as they reach heaven's gate.⁵⁰ The pairs enter heaven holding hands but looking in different directions. Therefore, although they dress and move the same way they experience their entry as individuals. All female figures in heaven have blond hair while the colour of men's hair varies. Blond hair was considered beautiful and indicative of virtue, and therefore bleaching was a common practice among elite women of the fourteenth century. Yet social conventions were not always compatible with religious rhetoric; for instance, Dominici lamented the practice of "keeping the hair blond" for the love of the world.⁵¹ Through the collage of archaic and contemporary fashions in heaven, Andrea's fresco appeals to both nostalgic ideas of ancient humility and to contemporary aesthetics.

The layers below, depicting the *Militant Church* include an assortment of historic contemporary and allegorical figures. The Militant Church is gathered in front of the cathedral with the most significant personages sitting on an elevated platform. They face the viewer while the virtuous public kneel or stand, mostly side-on, at their feet. The Pope sits in the centre, to his left are a cardinal and bishop, below whom the clergy are gathered, and to the Pope's right are an emperor, king and duke at whose feet the virtuous laity reside.⁵² Such a collection of secular and religious powers has no historic basis in Florence.⁵³ That these religious and secular rulers share a platform, and are seated on either side of the centralised Pope communicates an ideal of secular and religious unity under the ultimate authority of the church.⁵⁴ Nuns and married women are identifiable by opaque veils, and young unmarried women have their hair arranged in plaits wrapped around their heads.⁵⁵ True to contemporary etiquette, the women dress appropriately for the outdoors wearing *mantelli*.⁵⁶ The justification for this sartorial practice was that the *mantello* concealed the

⁴⁹ Warr, (2010), p. 216.

⁵⁰ From the thirteenth century Latin Christianity associated roses with Mary and with Heaven, a connection also made by Dante (Paradiso, XII:19). From Greco-Roman antiquity they were also associated with temporal beauty, and so the fleeting nature of mortal life.

⁵¹ Dominici, p. 45.

⁵² Polzer, p. 268. Also, see Debby (2012), pp. 182- 183, Paoletti & Radke, p.161, and Poeschke p. 363 for a discussion of the scholarly debate around the possibility that these figures are portraits, including the convincing argument that the Pope is Urban V and the Emperor is Charles IV who had been reconciled in 1367.

⁵³ Gardner, p. 123.

⁵⁴ Poeschke, p. 363.

⁵⁵ Newton, pp. 86-87.

⁵⁶ Rainey, p. 252-253.

figure and the veil covered the (potentially sexually attractive) hair and so encouraged the woman to be modest. The fresco is consistent with contemporary ideals in that it equates the modest clothing worn on earth to sartorial rewards in heaven. The appearance of identifiable saints, biblical, historic or contemporary, in religious images (including this one) encouraged viewers to recall each figure's significance, and to reflect on the eternal community, of which they could consider themselves members.

The centre right of the fresco is dedicated to those in need of absolution. The most prominent feature of this section is four noble figures, two male (possibly a knight and a judge) and two female, seated in a garden of earthly delights, framed by bushes. They are reminiscent of the vice-ridden figures at the centre-right of Buffalmacco's *Triumph of Death* (Figure 5) fresco, also on the outer wall of a cemetery. Buffalmacco's seated figures are richly-attired, oblivious to the suffering surrounding them, unconscious of a chaotic battle between angels and demons for small naked souls above them, and inattentive to the winged personification of death swooping down to kill them. A richly attired woman, seated with a lapdog on her knee was specifically identified for her vanity by the pointed glance of an angel and a scroll.⁵⁷ Three of the four figures in Andrea's *Militant Church* are likewise richly attired, in pale colours, making the fourth, a woman dressed in a crimson velvet dress with long fur-lined tippets, whose hair remains visible beneath a transparent veil, patting a lapdog on her knee, the most striking.⁵⁸ Seated with the woman in the crimson gown is a lady playing a fiddle and wearing a pale dress with a golden collar, gold bands above her elbows and a floral garland. A woman in a similar dress is depicted in a fresco of the *Harrowing of Hell* on a wall to the left. The presence of the same woman, or a woman of similar means or attitude, to the one in the *Militant Church* suggests that there is redemption in sight for her, following a period burning off sins in purgatory. Above these four are little naked figures sitting in and eating the fruit from trees in the garden. Beneath the four nobles are a group of young people dancing against a dark backdrop. Polzer interprets the dancers as children

⁵⁷ Poeschke, p.324. According to an appendix by Poeschke the (now illegible) scroll once read "*Schermo di salvare di ricchezza / Di nobilita [...] ancor di prodessa / Val neente a' colpi di costei; / Ed ancor non si truova contra llei, / O lector, neuno argomento. / Or non avere lo 'ntelletto spento / Di stare sempre si apparecchiato / Che non ti giunga nel mortal peccato.*" P. 440.

⁵⁸ Dogs are symbolic of nobility, fidelity, envy and lust, see: Roberta Gilchirst, 1996. "Medieval Bodies in the Material World: Gender, Stigma and the Body." In *Framing Medieval Bodies*, 43-61. Manchester: Manchester University Press. p. 57. Paoletti and Radke (p.155) read the lapdog in the Pisan fresco of the *Triumph of Death* (which the iconography of the *Militant and Triumphant Church* deliberately echoes) as a reference to female genitalia, complemented by a man beside her stroking a hawk which can be read as a phallic symbol.

playing, and argues that the garden including cypresses and pomegranates is symbolic of eternal life and the Virgin.⁵⁹ The small figures each wear a unique dress with gold embroidery or complex cuts of fabric to make fitted garments with horizontal bands of alternating colours, tippets, dagges and slits (unusual attire for children). They hold hands to lead one another around. Although there are no images of death or punishment in the painting, this section's reference to Buffalmacco's fresco led Vasari, and later Meiss, to interpret this three-tiered scene as the garden of earthly delights.⁶⁰ The reference to the *Triumph of Death*, the fact that this section is in the militant church, that it is on Jesus' left (where the damned are placed during judgement) just above a representation of heretics, Jews and Muslims who refuse to acknowledge the words of the Dominican preachers, and the complex tailoring evident in the dancers' appearance, lend credence to Meiss' assessment. However, the presence of one of the seated figures in purgatory, and the entrance into heaven of white-clad figures of the same scale as the dancers do suggest a redemptive message was intended.

The most prominent figure depicted on the earth is St Dominic himself, who directs the people around him (and, by extension, those viewing the fresco) to the gates of Heaven. Beside this figure, a seated Dominican blesses an old man who has humbly removed his cap. Once absolved the man can follow the welcoming and directing hands of St Dominic toward the gates of heaven.⁶¹ This may offer another clue to understanding the four seated figures, as they are depicted on the same plane and scale as the absolved man. This may indicate, as Polzer argues, that the three tiers on the centre-right are representative of humanity's weakness, ability to both succumb to temptation but equally to be absolved.⁶²

The fresco features a number of references in praise of Dominican friars' works. The bottom right of the fresco is occupied by preachers, including St Peter Martyr and St Thomas, converting heretics, Jews, and Muslims (identifiable by their beards, turbans and wide-brimmed hats).⁶³ Gardner notes that converting heretics was one of St. Dominic's primary concerns in establishing the order that the presence of this scene supports his argument

⁵⁹ Polzer, pp. 269-271. Also see Poeschke, p. 363 for an account of Polzer's interpretation and that of Dieck which read the figures as inner views that prevent man from doing penance.

⁶⁰ Meiss, pp. 97-98.

⁶¹ Polzer, p. 269.

⁶² Polzer, p.283.

⁶³ Debby, (2012) p. 178 – 179, also on the depiction of hats and turbans in hell see: Warr, (2010), pp. 212-215.

that the iconography of the fresco cycle was inspired by the *Corpus Domini* as well as having iconographic ties with Last Judgment paintings in its rendering of the central judging Christ, and the division of the pious to His right and heretics on his left.⁶⁴ Along the bottom of the fresco Andrea painted black and white 'Dogs of the Lord' or '*Domini canes*' as a pun on the black and white clad '*Dominicans*'.⁶⁵ The combination of these solemn and whimsical allusions to the Dominicans visually fortified the significance of the order in the salvation of the whole social spectrum of Florence.

The *Santa Maria Novella* frescoes used the meanings legible in adorned bodies in specific settings to visually link the city, the saints and the current society in an eternal community. In the above discussion, I have identified ways in which the fresco reflected experiences and attitudes within the society, including the association between blond hair and virtue which acted alongside the values of modesty, evidenced by the blond-haired elect contrasted with the veiled hair of the pious, while the unrestrained blond hair of the vain echoed the cultural practice of bleaching hair.⁶⁶ Diverse community members depicted in the paintings of the *Militant and Triumphant Church* and *Last Judgment* can be identified according to their sex, social and religious status through sartorial cues. This supported the idea that the earthly hierarchy was a reflection of a divine system, and so, essential to accept and maintain rather than vainly aspiring to better one's condition through sartorial display. The fresco reflected the society's concerns about vanity and its hopes for absolution. In doing this it also constructed an inspirational vision of the beauty of heaven. The following section will demonstrate that the visual language of embodied morality was not only carried from society into paintings but also from idealised frescoes into lived experiences. Just as the images reflected the society at the time of their creation, they influenced the embodied visual references and ideals of the living society, as will be demonstrated in the following discussion of the Festival of San Giovanni Battista.

⁶⁴ Gardner, pp. 120-122.

⁶⁵ Paoletti & Radke, p. 161.

⁶⁶ Chapter Four will further discuss the problems of vanity on earth being associated with aspirational representations of the divine.

The Festival of San Giovanni Battista

In the same way that architecture, frescos and literature enabled Florentines to consider their social and personal roles, festivals provided an occasion to enact those roles. The Feast of Florence's patron saint San Giovanni Battista, held on June 24th (but frequently beginning on the 22nd to spread out religious and secular festivities), was one of the most important festivals on the city's religious and secular calendar.⁶⁷ Aside from its religious significance, the date marked the anniversary the city's liberation from the Goths in 401A.D.⁶⁸ The celebration centred around the baptistery which, as noted, was where Florentine people received their names and were welcomed into their religious family. The baptistery was also believed to have been an ancient Roman temple to Mars the god of war (and hence bolstered the city's pretensions concerning its ancient heritage and defensibility) and its maintenance was the responsibility of the powerful Wool Merchant's Guild (which reflected the central role of mercantile communities in the character and organization of the city).⁶⁹ Florentine society used the festival to display an image of wealth and stability to local and foreign eyes, and to subtly foreground political intentions. From 1438, Cosimo 'il Vecchio' de' Medici had engaged in unofficial ducal behaviour by funding the San Giovanni Choir (initially allowing the *Arte de Calimala* to take the credit) to sing polyphonic praises on Sundays and during festivals. Piero and then Lorenzo de' Medici had continued this practice, becoming ever bolder in their approach. Lorenzo invited foreign dignitaries and musicians to hear and contribute to the choir and wrote his own music for the choristers.⁷⁰ In 1451, when Florence was on the brink of war with Naples, the city invited the King of Naples' choir to sing at the festival in order to diplomatically flatter and materially impress their rivals.⁷¹ The festival therefore, played an important diplomatic and secular role in the city. I argue that there was also strong underlying rhetoric of socio-religious self-fashioning that took place through this annual event, evident through the manner in which sartorial materials were employed, scenes performed, and the decoration of the city-centre aligned with heavenly imagery. In many ways, this embodied event was reminiscent of the imagery used in *The*

⁶⁷ Daniela Delcorno Branca, 2003. "Un Camaldolese alla festa di San Giovanni: La Processione del Battista descritta da Agostino di Porto" in *Lettere Italiane*, 55: 3- 25, p.4.

⁶⁸ Trexler (1980), p.77.

⁶⁹ Paoletti & Radke, pp.80-81.

⁷⁰ Frank A. D'Accone, 1961. "The Singers of San Giovanni in Florence During the 15th Century." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 14 (3): 307-358, p. 326, and see: Macey p.441.

⁷¹ D'Accone, p.318.

Militant and Triumphant Church, and in *Last Judgement* frescoes, and so helped to establish an ever-present mnemonic connection between the city and the supernatural.⁷²

The festival was an expansive social and sensory event. The sounds generated by the festival, from musical instruments to marching feet, processing from one religious landmark to another, were perceptible even to those who did not attend.⁷³ The city was adorned on ground level with glittering wares and the Piazza del Duomo was canopied above with blue silk printed with golden fleurs-de-lis, reminiscent of contemporary paintings of the heavens. Taking place during midsummer meant that sunlight would be tinted as it shone through the silk canopies and glistened on the mercantile exhibition beneath. In his *Istoria di Firenze* (c.1409-11), Gregorio Dati described the preparation for the festive program, when, “early in the morning, all the guilds make a display of all their fine wares, ornaments and jewels outside their shops; they displayed enough cloth of gold, and of silk, to adorn ten realms!”⁷⁴ The scene was populated with fancifully arrayed people who, in taking part in the festive activity, embedded the celestial appearance of their city into their sensory, spatial and experiential memories.⁷⁵

The adornment of both the city and its inhabitants physically recalled the dazzling imagery of the peaceful, idealistically-beautiful city which was typical for artistic depictions of heaven. In c.1452-54, Abbot Augustino di Porto was a spectator of the San Giovanni procession, which he described in a letter to sister Battista al Santa Maria. He wrote with wonder that:

The streets, square, windows roofs and walls were crowded and you could see so much nobility of dress and ornaments and especially of the women, which made me think of the way to heaven and its happiness and I thought how much better ornaments of the blessed souls will be.⁷⁶

⁷² For a discussion of Florentine festivals and communal rituals providing an opportunity to re-write the city, see Weissman, p. 41.

⁷³ Colleran, p. 368.

⁷⁴ Goro Dati. 1735. *Istoria di Firenze di Goro Dati, dall'anno MCCCCLXXX all'anno MCCCCV*. Firenze: Giuseppe Manni con licenza de'superiori. p.85 “Giunti al dí della vigilia di San Giovanni, la mattina di buon' ora tutte l'Arti fanno la mostra fuori alle pareti delle loro botteghe di tutte le ricche cose, ornamenti, e gioie; quanti drappi d'oro, e di seta si mostrano, ch'adornerebbono dieci Reami!” [my translation].

⁷⁵ Trexler (1980), p. 249.

⁷⁶ Augustino di Porto, Oxford, Bodleian Library ms. Ita f.3 cc. 286v 290r, transcribed in full in: Branca, Daniela Delcorno, 2003. “Un Camaldolese alla festa di San Giovanni: La Processione del Battista descritta da Agostimo di Porto” in *Lettere Italiane*, 55: 3- 25, p. 9 (287v-288r in the original): “Ma tutti gli luoghi dove aveva a ppassare [sic] la processione erano presi e erano piene le vie, piazza, finestre e tetti e mura e vedevasi tanta

An anonymous poem describing the feast of San Giovanni c. 1407/8 expresses admiration for the ornaments and textiles worn and displayed throughout the city “so that I did not believe there were so many in the world.” The poet associated this textile vision with divine gifts “even though I saw it, I do not believe it, / that such grace could have rained down from God.” The poet then described seeing “thousands of royal queens / in their proud robes / O divine might!” and he confessed he “thought I was in paradise” and that these exquisitely dressed women with their “angelic manners, / sweet and lovely, / they seemed rather a thousand paradises.”⁷⁷ Just as the poem argued that the extravagance of the textiles on display could not be believed, fifty years later Abbot Augustino di Porto said of the same festival “if I had not seen it I would not have imagined such incredible things.” He concluded that all the wonders seen that day “grand people and rich adornments. All these things can be drawn to the spiritual sense.”⁷⁸ Abbot Augustino, therefore, stressed that the significance of the festive display was not the celebration of material possessions but the ability of that material to educate by recalling visions of heavenly splendour. The religious imagery in festivals cultivated spiritual fervour, even as the city placed its secular agenda upon the holy days, ultimately recalling the city as one which could receive redemption from death and sin.

Florentine people used the festival as a setting in which to publicly convey messages and enhance rituals that informed secular identity in terms of interpersonal relationships, economy and politics. Dati recorded the demonstrations of joy expressed through singing, dancing and jousting on the feast day noting, in particular, that any Florentine who had to “organise a wedding banquet or some other celebration postpones it until then to honour the [San Giovanni] feast day”⁷⁹ Wedding feasts, marking the final, most public and most extravagant of a series of marriage ceremonies often had a profound sensory effect on the city:

nobilita di vestire e d'ornati e maxime di donne, che mi fece via ad pensare del paradiso e della sua letitia e pensava che [c.287v] molto meglio saranno ornate l'anime beate.” [my translation].

⁷⁷ Cesare Guasti, 1908. “Poem Describing the Feast of San Giovanni copied 9 Feb 1407/8.” In *Le Feste di San Giovanni Batista in Firenze*.

⁷⁸ Porto, p.11 (290r in the original) “*Di tutte queste cose io n'ebbi molta consolation e se non l'avesse veduto non l'arei immaginato che palano cose incredibili. Grande moltitudine diroti quante e belle, e paramenti. Grande popolo e molto ornato. Tutte queste cose si possono trarre al senso spirituale.*” [my translation].

⁷⁹ Dati, “chiunque ha a fare conviti di nozze, o altra Festa s'indugia a quel tempo per fare onore alla Festa” [my translation] pp. 84-85.

Men and women return home to dine, and as I said, the whole city has these weddings, grand banquets with many pipers, musicians, and songs and dances, celebration and delight, and ornamentation that it appears the earth is heaven.⁸⁰



Figure 4: Florentine Art and Giovanni Toscani, *Historiated chest with the Palio of St John (with fragment)*, Tempera and Gilded Wood, inv. 161MA, from Spedale of Santa Maria Nuova, Bargello, Florence, before 1429

The spectacular festival commenced with a religious procession on the 23rd with religious companies, children, representatives of hospitals and members of the religious orders wore and displayed symbols of their communities, carried banners and relics through the streets.⁸¹ The religious procession was complimented (albeit somewhat begrudgingly from the perspective of religious leaders) by more secular celebratory expressions including poems performed on raised floats, a horse race and subsequent private celebrations including weddings. The decorative scheme on a *cassone*, or wedding chest, painted in 1429 (Figure 4) exemplifies this practice while referencing the key (secular) attractions of the festival. The predominant action represented is preparation for the horse race, located beside the San Giovanni Baptistery beneath the blue silken canopy imprinted with fleurs-de-lis. Additionally, on the left of the scene a small crowd watches a performance on a float. In a more central position, a group of beautifully-dressed young women watch the horses, one woman and one racer in particular acknowledge each other. It seems likely that these figures represent an embedded nuptial narrative to commemorate the marriage that the domestic

⁸⁰ Dati, *"Fatte queste cose, e offerte, uomini, e donne tornano a casa a desinare, e come ho detto, per tutta la Città si fa quel dì nozze, e gran conviti con tanti pifferi, suoni, e canti, e balli, feste, e letizia, e ornamento, che pare, che quella Terra sia il Paradiso."* [my translation] p88. For further discussion of wedding feasts see: Deborah L. Krohn, 2008. "Rites of Passage: Art Objects to Celebrate Betrothal, Marriage, and the Family." In *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*, by The Metropolitan Museum of Art New York, 60-67. New Haven: Yale University Press. 61.

⁸¹ Branca p.4 and p. 9 (from Augustino di Porto's own account).

object was created for. The *cassone* would act to maintain domestic recollections of both the marriage and of the festival. This festive matrimonial tradition connected the public with the personal and the spiritual with the secular, making Florence more tangibly reflect the spiritual city, (the New Jerusalem, itself adorned as a bride).

Sumptuary laws that restricted ostentatious attire in the city were practically (although not officially) waived for the festival.⁸² The eager sartorial anticipation of the festivities is indicated by Dati's account: "when spring time arrives [...] every Florentine begins to think about making the Feast of San Giovanni beautiful" they plan both "garments and adornments."⁸³ In a similar vein Boccaccio's *Fiammetta* begins with the heroine recounting her excitement to dress for a festival, hoping to outdo other women, to look like a goddess and thus proudly attract the admiration of her community. Boccaccio wrote of his heroine Fiammetta's anticipation of being seen, nymph-like, at a religious festival:

That day was solemn almost to the whole world, and for that solicitude I dressed myself in cloth of gleaming gold and adorned myself entirely with a masterly hand, similar to the goddesses seen by Paris in the Valley of Ida. [...] while I admired myself, not unlike a peacock does his feathers, imagining the great pleasure others would have, as I had, to see me.⁸⁴

Despite Fiammetta attending a Christian festival, Boccaccio ironically used classical references, also calling her Proserpina and Eurydice.

The focus on women's heavenly beauty and adornment in the festive context conflicted with the idealised modest behaviour expected from virtuous women. In an everyday context, it was immodest for women to parade their beauty in public or act in a manner that could attract men's lust. Therefore, women's attitude toward their festive appearance was not only the subject of scrutiny in fictional literature, but was evident amongst the community. There were those who opposed their wives' presence at festivals. Morelli's *Ricordi* spoke of the moral danger posed by extravagant feasts and weddings in an argument condemning

⁸² Trexler (1980), pp.76-77, and Rainey, p.537.

⁸³ Dati, "*Quando ne viene il tempo della Primavera, che tutto il Mondo rallegra, ogni Fiorentino comincia a pensare di fare bella Festa di San Giovanni, che é poi a mezza a State, e di vestimenti, e d'adornamenti*" [my translation] p.84.

⁸⁴ Boccaccio, (1994), p. 28 "*Quello giorno era solennissimo quasi a tutto il mondo; per che io con sollecitudine i drappi di molto oro rilucenti vestitimi, e con maestra mano di me ornata ciascuna parte, simile alle dee vedute da Paris nella valle d'Ida tenendomi, per andare alla somma festa m'apparecchiai. A mentre che io tutta mi mirava, non altramenti che il paone le sie penne, imaginando di cosi piacere ad altrui come io a me piaceva, ...*" [my translation].

women's idleness for its ability to lead to immorality, boldness and vanity. He stated that "today all kinds of dishonest acts take place there, and there is a great deal of chit-chat, so much so that one cannot get away. No woman is so good that in these circumstances she does not become spoilt."⁸⁵ From Morelli's perspective, then, the relaxed atmosphere of the festival, which allowed women to dress up and gossip in public view damaged their morals and their reputation.

Boccaccio's fifth story from the seventh day in his *Decameron* takes a swipe at jealous husbands who prevented their wives from attending festivals because of the beautiful attire women wore, and the attention they received on such days:

Women are locked up all week to attend to the needs of family and household, desiring, as each does, to enjoy the next festival day [...] In which the jealous do not allow them to do anything, even in those days when all the other women are enjoying themselves, to make their wives more pious they keep them tightly locked up, so the women's experience is more miserable and more painful.⁸⁶

This suggests that women's evident enthusiasm for festive attire caused some husbands anxiety. Women at home would watch the attendees traipse by below their windows, and as noted the windows of Florentine homes were thin and the streets were narrow so that all the sounds of the festival would be tantalisingly, or tauntingly, audible in the rooms of those women left behind.⁸⁷

Nevertheless, the civil relaxation of sumptuary legislation achieved its intention to maximise the visual impact of the city's wealth and power. Poor people might only own the clothing

⁸⁵ Morelli as quoted in: Rogers and Tignali, p. 117. This same concern for the fragility of young women's reputations at feasts is evident in early Renaissance texts across Europe. For instance, Geoffroy IV de la Tour Landry, voiced the same concern in France, noting that women were invited to feasts, became vain by hearing their beauty praised, and in socializing permanently wounded their reputations. Landry warned his daughters not to "be ouer desirous to goo to suche feestes" because "many good ladyes and gentyle women gete moche blame and noyse withoute cause." (Geoffrey IV de la Tour Landry, 1971. *The Knight of the Tower*. Translated by William Caxton. London: Oxford University Press. pp 44-45). Similarly, Christine de Pizan (1989, p. 202) noted that "at social gatherings [...] more people will have their eyes on them [unmarried noble girls] than upon other women."

⁸⁶ Boccaccio (1822), Vol.3 Day 7 Story 5, pp. 82-83 "*Esse stanno tutta la settimana rinchiuse et attendono alle bisgone familiari e domestiche, desiderando, come ciascun fa, d'aver poi il dì delle feste alcuna consolazione, alcuna quiete, e di potere alcun diporto pigliare, si come prendono i lavoratori de' campi, gli artefici delle città et i reggitori delle corti, come fe' Iffio che il dì settimo da tute le cue fatiche si riposò, e come vogliono le leggi sante e le civili, le quali allo onor di Dio et al ben commune di ciascun riguardando, hano l di delle fatiche distinti de quegli del riposo. Alla qual cosa fare niente i gelosi consentono, anzi quegli di che a tutte l'aktre son lieti, fanno ad esse, più serrate e più rinchiuse tenendole, esser più miseri e più dolenti*" [my translation].

⁸⁷ Colleran, p.360. Also see the discussion in the chapter The Sensate Body from page 60.

they stood in and perhaps one additional outfit, but even in poverty, they would wear their one outfit until it disintegrated while reserving their second outfit for use during festivals.⁸⁸ A practice also developed whereby wealthy people would leave a bequest in their wills to dress a specified number of poor people in new clothes on festival days, which further enhanced the community's sense of their own generosity, piety and prosperity.⁸⁹ People adorned themselves in the attire that made them feel most important, pious or angelic on festive days. The decoration of the city and its people therefore tapped into a particular genre of religious self-representation.

Despite the heavenly imagery associated with the celebrations, preachers (like husbands) feared that the attention paid to external beauty could be a confusing and corrupting force for women. Archbishop Antonino, who praised the magnificence Florentine men bestowed on their heavenly city, was nevertheless among those who discouraged such ambiguous social piety in women.⁹⁰ In *Opera a ben Vivere* he forbid the sisters Dianora and Lucrezia Tornabuoni to attend festivals "except if you believed that it [not attending] would cause scandal, or dishonour your husband, in this case I leave it with your discretion, and charge it upon your conscience."⁹¹ He advised them to not *want* to go saying he was "not content for you to sit in the windows to see who goes," and to instead redirect their minds to obedience, remembering that "the pleasures and joys of life eternal [...] and the pleasures of this world, with all its joy, nevertheless are opposites and enemies of each other."⁹² Despite giving his blessing for attendance if it were motivated by charity, in which case "God will give such grace, that you will return home with spiritual gain," he warned that "if you go there for sensuality, allow that God will return you with the loss of your soul."⁹³ To avoid the extreme dangers of earthly temptation he recommended meditative exercises saying:

⁸⁸ Muzzarelli, pp. 75 & 78-79.

⁸⁹ Dati lists "e le veste de'Servidori" p. 85, among the preparatory events for the day. Also see Newton p. 72 who discusses a bequest made by Niccoló Acciaiuoli (1310-1365) to clothe 12 paupers on feast days.

⁹⁰ For a discussion of Antonino's preaching of the magnificent materialization of Florentine virtue see: Howard, (2008), p. 357.

⁹¹ Antonino, p. 177 "*eccetto che se voi credessi n'avesse a uscire scandalo, o disonore del vostro marito, in questo caso lo lascio nella vostra discrezione, e sopra l'incarico della vostra coscienza*" [my translation] Also see the beginning of the quote below, beginning "Ma se credete"

⁹² Antonino, p. 179. "*non mi contento che stiate alle finestre, a vedere chi passa, e meno che potete vi fate ad esse; [...] Je i piaceri e gaudii di vita eterna, fuggite tutti i delecti e piaceri di questo mondo, con ogni suo gaudio, però che sono contrarii e nimici l'uno dell'altro*" [my translation]

⁹³ Antonino, p. 177 "*Iddio vi darà tanta grazia, che ne ritornerete a casa con guadagno spirituale. Ma se v'anderete per sensualità, permetterà Dio che ne tornerete con danno dell'anima vostra*" [my translation]

When you see those vain people, the sounds, or dancing or other vanities, do your best to bear everything with spiritual intelligence. Deem yourself to be in heaven, and to hear the sounds of the angels, and the dances and songs deem to be the choirs of the holy Virgin, and those who dance are dancing before the throne of the immaculate lamb, going with celebration and joy and songs to offer up their crowns before God, as St. John says in Revelation.⁹⁴

For Archbishop Antonino then, the woman experiencing the festivities was responsible for imaginatively reframing the experience in spiritual terms. This means of constructing emotions (not *wanting* to attend and generating a liminal spiritual experience from the tangible world) exemplifies the concept of “emotional practices” that Monique Scheer defined as “things people do in order to have emotions.”⁹⁵ By mentioning the Apocalypse, as described by St John, Archbishop Antonino referred his readers to a store of already familiar supernatural imagery expressed in text and paint right across the city, and so appealed to an existing mnemonic template with which to overlay the secular vanities of the festival as a basis for emotional practice.



Figure 5: Buonamico Buffalmacco (attrib.), *Triumph of Death*, fresco, Camposanto Monumentale, Pisa, c.1350-1355

During the San Giovanni festival costumed performers from lay companies, raised above the crowds in decorated *carri* (wagons), sang choreographed festive songs and presented religious tableaux, to entertain, and evoke emotions. Abbot Augustino described a scene of

⁹⁴ Antonino, p. 178 “*Ma se credete che, per non volere andare, avesse a uscire scandalo, o indegnazione verso lo sposo vostro con voi, o altro notabile scandalo, andatevi. E quando vedete quelle vanità, di suoni, o di balli, o d'altre vanità, ingegnatevi di recare ogni cosa a spirituale intelligenza. Reputatevi di essere in Paradiso, e di udire i suoni delli angeli, e quei balli e canti reputate siano quelli cori delle sante Vergini, le quali ballino e danzano dinanzi al trono dell'Agnello immacolato, andando con festa e gaudio e canti ad offerire le loro corone dinanzi a Dio, come dice San Giovanni nella Apocalisse.*” [my translation]

⁹⁵ Scheer, p.194.

the Annunciation that was so devout that it brought tears to his eyes.⁹⁶ It is significant that Antonino engaged emotionally with the performances, and observed people's reactions as consisting of tears, laughter and other physical manifestations of emotion. Using emotive imagery, focused on the body, these tableaux educated and reminded the audience of their mortality and the vanity of their fine possessions in a normal secular context.⁹⁷ Following his account of the crowd at the San Giovanni procession, Abbot Augustino di Porto, described the enactment of the *memento mori* of three living meeting three dead as follows:

After came three kings on horses, very ornate, with great company, and with queens richly adorned in new fashions, and after them came an edifice on which there were three dead kings [...] and those dead spoke to the living and converted them and it was a beautiful thing.⁹⁸

The three living meeting the three dead was frequently depicted in this era. In about 1426 Masaccio painted the *Trinity* in Santa Maria Novella, including a skeleton (representative of Adam, or 'everyman' who is subject to sin and death) above which is painted ominous words that translate as "I once was what you are and what I am you also will be."⁹⁹ The image of the living and the three dead was depicted at the bottom left corner of the *Triumph of Death* fresco in Pisa (Figure 5), in which a wealthy hunting party made up of aristocratic men, women and their attendants are shocked out of all their pride and vanity (as confirmed by an accompanying scroll) by the sight of three bodies in varying stages of decay.¹⁰⁰ The inclusion of finely attired queens might, likewise, have recalled the right side of the *Triumph of Death* (noted earlier)) who are unheeding of their imminent deaths. The theme, of the dead calling the living to penitence at the very time that they indulged in splendid celebration continued and developed throughout the Renaissance, as evidenced by the song *Dolor, Pianto e Penitentia* (Sorrow Crying and Penance), that became a regular and striking

⁹⁶ Porto, p. 10 (289r of the original) "*Questa cosa fu tanto devote che extorse lagrime da gli occhi e fece me lagrimare.*"

⁹⁷ Branca, p.3

⁹⁸ Porto, p. 11 (original 289v-290r) "*Drieto venne tre re a cavallo molto ornate con gran gente, e con le reine molto ornate e avevano nuove forgie, e drieto loro venne uno edifitio che v'erano su tre re mor ti e uno romito che stave in una cella; e que' morti parlarono ad vivi e convertironsi e fu cosa bella*" [my translation].

⁹⁹ "*Io fu' gia quell vhe voi sete, quell ch'io son voi ancor sarete*" Masaccio, *Trinità*, c. 1425-1427, 317x667cm, fresco, Santa Maria Novella. See: Angelo Tartuferi, 2003. *Masaccio*, Livorno: Sillabe, p. 61.

¹⁰⁰ See: Poeschke, pp. 322-323. In an appendix, Poeschke includes the text from the scroll which is no longer visible but was recorded in 1899 as "*Se nostra mente fia ben accorta / Tenendo fiso qui la vista afitta, / La vanagloria vi sara sconfitta / La superbia, come vedete, morta. / V'accorgerete ancor di questa sorta / Se osservate la legge che v'e scritta.*" p. 440.

feature of Florentine Carnivale festivals into the sixteenth century.¹⁰¹ Images of the dead interacting with the living were relatively common in fifteenth-century visual rhetoric. They reminded people of the equality of corpses, unburdened by possessions and social status, all awaiting resurrection and judgment.¹⁰² The three royally-attired women, in Augustino's account, play a passive role which must have mirrored the women who watched the play. The female characters on stage and their female audience merely observe the action dressed in their beautiful garments. The moral expressed in the story emphasised that although dressing in an angelic fashion for the festival could win women praise, if they were to dress in this fashion in their daily lives they would be in danger of damnation.



Figure 6: Di Cione, Nardo, *Last Judgement* (detail of a resurrected man being dragged from his grave to hell by a demon), Fresco, Santa Maria Novella, Florence, 1350s

The scene of the three living and the three dead followed a scene from the *Last Judgement* being enacted as part of the Procession. Augustino described Christ elevated above tombs from which bodies arose to the sound of a trumpet. He recalled it as "something to weep for, although it made the brigade laugh because there were some who did not want to enter hell and there was a great battle."¹⁰³ These macabre and quasi-comedic images were likewise used in Florentine pictorial representations of the *Last Judgement*. It is, therefore, possible that

the theatrical performance Abbot Augustino recounted was inspired by Nardo di Cione's dramatic scene of a man being dragged to hell by his hair, located nearby (Figure 6). The repetition of these devices in different media from painting to theatre and sermons would

¹⁰¹ William F. Prizer, 2004. "Reading Carnival: The Creation of a Florentine Carnival Song." *Early Music History* 23: 185-252. Prizer makes a case for the artistic attributions of the song as: Lorenzo Strozzi (patron) Castellano Castellani (poet), Bartolomeo degli Organi (composer) and Piero di Cosimo (carro and costume designer and producer).

¹⁰² John Bossy, 1985. *Christianity in the West 1400-1700*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 31

¹⁰³ Porto, p. 10 (289v of the original) "*Cristo levo via le porti e que' demoni fuggivano; e trasse fuore Adamo e Eva e molti barbassori antichi e con molti angeli andava al Paradiso. Et queste cose si fece con tanto ordine che pareva cosa stupenda. Di poi venne un altro edifitio del Giudicio e stave Cristo in aria e di sotto erano molti sepolcri. Di subito che sono la tromba di ttutti [sic] uscironno fuore molta gente e cosi facea tutte quelle parole e attic he si scivavano, e fu cosa da piangiere [sic], ben che facesse ridare la brigata perche v'erano alcuni che non volevano intrare in Inferno e quivi fu grande battaglia.*" [my translation].

work to develop a store of visual, linguistic and spatial associations, linking theological concepts to powerful mental imagery.

The celebration of baptism and eternal life sat very closely with reminders of death and judgment. The image of the three living meeting the three dead, and of the last judgment, related to advice put forward by preachers, that one limit harmful ostentation by contemplating death and judgement. Savonarola's 1496 sermon on the *Art of Dying Well* argued that, "if lustful thoughts come into your imagination, all of a sudden you are afire with evil" and so to counteract the effects of such mental images one should "make yourself a forceful image of death." He directed this instruction particularly to Florentine women, saying "if the fancy takes you to preen yourselves and to strive for fine display, put on these spectacles of death, and so not want to go with your finery into eternal damnation."¹⁰⁴ He recommended the use of physical representations of death in the home so that people were daily reminded of how their actions would weigh against them when they die.¹⁰⁵ Savonarola suggested that sensory experiences, such as seeing dead friends buried, or holding a piece of bone could be used as a "hook" to "remember death because the imagination comes from sensory perception, which is moved by sensible objects."¹⁰⁶ Preachers promoted strategies for utilising sensory, emotive objects to direct moral reflection and self-examination. Taking this into account, it is evident that a diverse range of visual, temporal and auditory genres united in encouraging women to counter social pressures to attend parties and dress beautifully with a broader spiritual imperative to live modestly, die well, and to live an eternal life with the elect community in celestial beauty.

A century earlier, Paolo da Certaldo likewise lamented upon vain, spiritually destructive behaviour that people "commit sins every Sunday, Easter and other solemn festivals." Addressing many of the practices which occurred at the festival of San Giovanni Battista, he recommended:

Always when you want to make a grand festival in honour of a saint,¹⁰⁷ do not have jousts or games, nor banquets or worldly things; but give alms and prayers

¹⁰⁴ Savonarola, (2006), *Ruth and Micheas, Sermon XXVIII The Art of Dying Well*, All Souls Day, Delivered 2 November 1496, pp. 44-46.

¹⁰⁵ Welch (1997), pp. 138-9.

¹⁰⁶ Savonarola, (2006) pp. 44-46.

¹⁰⁷ Certaldo distinguishes both male and female saints "onore d'uno santo o santa".

and think of our sins: these are the festivals acceptable to God and his blessed Saints.¹⁰⁸

Da Certaldo's call for a more devout tone to religious celebrations was briefly achieved in Florence, under Savonarola's guidance. From 1494 to 1498 Savonarola gained a strong albeit brief religio-political footing in Florence by condemning the misuse of religious occasions for vain civic ends and arguing that plagues and other communal misfortunes stemmed from such sacrilegious behaviour. Savonarola reacted against the secularisation of religious occasions, including the rise of polyphonic music.¹⁰⁹ In the few years of Savonarola's austere influence, and the loss of the political motivations of Medicean magnificence, the tone and appearance of the San Giovanni festival was subdued. Savonarola promoted humble charity and devotion during the festival rather than what he viewed as the vain material display of self-congratulation.¹¹⁰ He effected a change in the celebration of religious festivals, including the San Giovanni, Carnevale and Palm Sunday, so that while his influence was at its height (1496-1498) his followers exchanged extravagant costumes, feasts and secularised carnival songs for processions conducted in white robes to the sound of monophonic hymns.¹¹¹ In 1496, Savonarola held a bonfire of vanities during Carnevale and, following the Palm Sunday celebration he congratulated the people for their devout conduct saying:

Yesterday, Florence, your children were gathered to make garlands of olive branches in order to have them today for the feast, and they were lined up chorus by chorus, and made garlands and sang laude, so that it looked like a paradise.¹¹²

The rhetoric of Florence as paradise and its people as angelic therefore continued to be attached to religious activities, images and clothing.¹¹³ It remained central to the city's

¹⁰⁸ Certaldo, pp. 52-53 "*Maggiore e il peccato che commetti la domesnica e l'altre paque e feste solenni che quello che commetti gli altri di lavoratoi: e pero sempre quando vuoi fare una grande festa a onore d'uno santo o santa, no la fare di giostre ne giuoco ne conviti ne d'altre cose mondane; falla di limosine e d'orazioni e di guardarti de' peccati: queste sono le feste accettevoli a Dio e a' Santi suoi benedetti.*" [my translation].

¹⁰⁹ D'Accone, p. 198.

¹¹⁰ Chretien, pp. 60-61.

¹¹¹ Macey, p. 442, and Prizer (2002), pp. 206 – 208.

¹¹² Macey, p. 445, I have used Macey's translation but have changed the word 'fanciulli' from her translation to the English 'children' Macey included the original Italian in a footnote which reads: "*Dimmi: chi governa li fanciulli in questa opera se non Cristo? ieri, Firenze, che li tuoi fanciulli erano insieme a far grillande d'ulivo per averle oggi alla festa ed erano distesi a coro per coro e facevano grillande e cantavano laude, che pareva un paradiso.*"

¹¹³ This reimagining of the appearance and experience of heaven had precedents and was not unique to Savonarola. The thirteenth century Franciscan text *Sacrum commercium sancti Francisci dum domina Paupertate*, envisioned heaven as a place without distinctions of wealth or poverty, selfhood or emotion. For

identity on both a communal and interpersonal scale, even as the politically acceptable means for interpreting that rhetoric shifted.

The shared rhetoric of text, paintings, sermons and embodied cultural traditions carried ethical values over generations. This was achieved through repetition that physically situated and artistically constructed behaviours. The repeated performance of scriptural text further incorporated the implied applications of Christian virtue into the memory, leading it to be internalised and integrated into the self. External experiences, including viewing frescoes or watching familiar Christian narratives and motifs performed in the streets could be enhanced through personal introspection. For instance, Niccolò da Osimo encouraged people to mentally picture Christ's Passion occurring in their own city and to cast familiar people as biblical characters in order to personalise the narrative and influence the way they would later see and think about their city. Similarly, Savonarola's sermons on Ezekiel engaged with Socrates, saying that the intellect perfected the imperfections of tangible objects and so by contemplating physical beauty one understood the tangible as a reflection of the divine. He advised, like Archbishop Antonino before him, that his listeners reconstruct the beauty of Florence in their imagination, and thereby perfect it and elevate their souls through spiritual contemplation. The idealisation of the familiar through the imaginary forged new religious associations with the tangible. This reciprocal process between experience, memory and imagination would influence people's future relationship to familiar spaces, people and moral stories.

Conclusion

The rhetoric of Florence as the New Jerusalem, evident in frescos, sermons, festivals and devotional texts, provides a significant framework through which to consider the role of female embodied morality in the performative and imaginative lives of the religious community. Just as the previous chapter noted the limited audibility of women in the city, representations of heaven and hell limited women's visibility. In visual landscapes crowded with men, women were depicted as the modest few (veiled with downcast eyes or admiring Christ along with their saintly sisters), or as seditious blonde temptresses (wearing revealing

more on this text and this vision of heaven and the ways it responded to debates in the order see: Thomas Frank, 2008. "Exploring the Boundaries of Law in the Middle Ages: Franciscan Debates on Poverty, Property, and Inheritance) in *Law and Literature*, 20 (2): 243-260, pp. 255-256.

dressess and flaunting their society's rules, only to be tossed into the vast caves of hell). These dualistic representations perpetuated a dominant rhetoric with implications for the society's hegemonic moral expectations of women's adornment and comportment. Sermons verbally extended this rhetoric of unease concerning the female adorned body by reminding women of the punishments set aside in hell for vain and adulterous women and thereby reinforcing the importance of sartorial modesty, especially when visible to men. However, women's beautiful appearance was essential to the pride of the mercantile city. During festivals, women's adorned bodies became the manifestation of the city's wealth and power. At these times, women were encouraged to sartorially imitate the angels of heaven rather than the pious of the earth, and thereby breathe life into the collective imagination of heaven while feeding the communal pride of their male kin. Although the sight of the women served this function of reinforcing public literacy of social compliance, they did not escape the negative counter-interpretation of their public appearance. Devotional texts discouraged women from attending public events when possible but if obliged to go, the texts advised women to disassociate themselves from the secular excitement of the event and instead to view their surroundings through the lens of the sacred, familiar to them through such images as frescoes depicting the joys of heaven. The mnemonic overlapping of familiar religious narratives with the city presented Florence as an eternal community, and served to construct an ever-present lens through which Christian women could monitor their spiritual identity as projected by their adornment and comportment. The following chapter will continue to consider the implications of communal spiritual imagery and values, and the ongoing balance between hopes of heaven and fears of hell that underscored the cultural foundations for the behaviour and sartorial identities of women.

Chapter Three - Wealth and Charity

Beatrice would always remember the excitement, mingled with fear, that she felt on the day in 1424 when her mother took her to hear the famous preacher Bernardino of Siena. The sermon worked the congregation into a frenzy as the Franciscan friar condemned the city's vices, including women's vain clothing, and it ended with a large bonfire in the piazza. Beatrice's mother tried to get her away from the crowd but she caught a glimpse of ashamed women throwing their headdresses into the flames. Days later she could smell the smoke on her clothes. She had heard preachers condemning women's vanity before. They said that if you cared too much about your appearance now you would be punished by God for eternity, but if you were charitable and humble you would be rewarded with beautiful clothes in heaven. When she first heard this as a child she tried to take off her necklace straight away so that she could give it to the first poor person she saw but her mother stopped her and explained that a poor person wouldn't be able to wear or sell the necklace and her things belonged to her father so she should never give anything away without permission.

Values related to responsibly in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Florence were mediated through the familiar rhetorical language and images of adornment. These values responded to the combined influence of Christian morality, economic growth, communal hardship, humanist philosophy and hierarchy. Charity was a fundamental Christian practice that moral educators sought to engrain in the Christian community from childhood via hagiographies read, sermons heard, and paintings viewed. These sources promoted the idea that God would reward people for wearing humble attire in life with spiritual garments in heaven, embellished with precious ornaments representing each act of charity. The hope for heavenly rewards for charity was intensified by the argument that vanity and selfishness could result in punishments both in the afterlife and on earth. Earthly punishments ranged from humiliation to plagues. On occasion, sermons intended to inspire repentance for vanity were reinforced through the enactment of bonfires on vanities. The flames, like those in purgatory or hell, consumed women's clothing, fake hair and ornaments, non-devotional books, gambling materials, and paintings that expressed selfishness and ostentation. Despite appeals to act charitably in the face of plagues, the wide variety of human responses to the event suggests alternative values by which people defined themselves. One response

to plague was to elevate concern for one's children above that of moral imperatives to stay in the city as the plague raged on. Another response amongst poorer community members was to attempt to take advantage of the situation to improve their lives and material resources, leading to accusations of vanity and loose morals in women. The concept of social and sartorial stability continued to infiltrate and cause tension within moral narratives promoting charity and humility. The church promoted the spiritual ideal of charity while the government simultaneously established sumptuary laws that formalised the social hierarchy and limited the kinds of clothes that could be offered to the poor in charity. Treatises from both religious and secular standpoints articulate counter-arguments about the use of material wealth in the household, considering the impact fine clothing would have on children who should grow up to be both charitable Christians and astute merchants.¹ This chapter identifies the range of avenues through which social and moral values concerning wealth, charity and vanity were debated and imparted for the Florentine community to observe, negotiate and imitate. It argues that sartorial identities (particularly of women) were a central rhetorical allusion, and site of negotiation, in the tensions between religious and secular values.

Perceptions of the poor

The historiographical treatment of the Renaissance argues that the era marks a developing sense of individuality and the breakdown of a hierarchical communal identity. However, evidence suggests that members of the Christian community continued to define themselves within a hierarchically stratified and sartorially demarcated society. This society frequent updated sumptuary laws that formalised hierarchical distinctions. Moral educators, including priests, encouraged people to dress even more humbly than the law dictated. People could only choose to dress humbly if they were aware that their station entitled them to more. Charity often involved dressing the poor, but sumptuary laws meant that the poor could only be dressed in attire befitting their station. For instance from 1472 farmers and their wives were prohibited from wearing silk (aside from minimal silk ribbons for women) meaning that even if they could afford or were offered silk their status had to be sartorially demonstrated

¹ Ideals of economy expressed in prescriptive text, like Alberti's *Book of the Family* and Barabaro's *On Wifely Duties*, presented particular challenges to the sartorial identities of women who had to be both humble and beautiful. This conflict is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

through its absence.² Almsgiving required an awareness of the needs of the poor and a sense of responsibility toward others. It meant assessing the appropriateness of a charitable gift for its intended recipient. It is therefore pertinent to briefly examine fourteenth- and fifteenth-century perceptions of and interactions with the poor.

In a particularly idealistic statement, Giovanni Dominici argued that people, accustomed from childhood to live a certain way, would be content with their means, even developing fashions within their social station that had relative value to the more precious equivalents in wealthier circles. He said that:

The peasant woman lusteth not for a crown of pearls, which she may well see on the head of a countess, and in her station seems as well adorned with a necklace of fish eyes or oyster shells, which are called mother of pearl, as the lady is with real pearls and fine rubies.³

Dominici's edifying example is easily disproved in practice by reference to Luca Landucci's grisly account of a young woman tried and executed in April 1465 for having murdered the young daughter of a goldsmith to steal her pearl necklace.⁴ Also an amendment to sumptuary legislation in October 1472 insisted that women stop wearing mother of pearl ornaments to imitate, prohibited, real pearls.⁵ Nevertheless, according to Dominici's optimistic observations "tradition itself converts nature, being of a community makes people remain content."⁶

Alberti's *Books of the Family* (c.1432) recognised people's covetousness, but also acknowledged the power of communal solidarity saying that people experienced comfort from those who resembled themselves (an argument that also explained distrust between classes). He argued that:

Every difference of life, of customs, habits, age, and occupation, troubles the relationships of men. Such difference impedes the process described by Empedocles, by which love allows the spirits of two persons to run together and

² Muzzarelli, p. 264, see pages 261 – 268 for Muzzarelli's account of the clothing of poor labourers in Europe from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries.

³ Dominici, p. 137 "*Non appetisce contadina corona di perle, bene la vegga in testa alla contessa; e nel suo grado le pare essere ornata con un frenello d'occhi di perce, o osso d'ostrica che si chiama madre perla, come la gentil donna delle perle vere e balasci fini.*" [my translation].

⁴ Luca Landucci, 1883. *Diario Fiorentino dal 1450 al 1516*. Firenze: G.C. Sansoni. p. 4

⁵ Archivio di Stato di Firenze. 1472 October. *Provvisioni Registri 163*. "Clarification about Pearls", 117r – 118r, Archivio di Stato di Firenze.

⁶ Dominici, p.137 "*Usanza in se converte natura; e comunità de'suoi fa rimaner contenta*" [my translation].

unite, like water and milk. Any resemblance, I would say, greatly attracts men and invites them to love.⁷

Alberti's statement suggests that economic and cultural similarity engendered social cohesion. Archbishop Antonino recognised that economic division was an innate characteristic of societies, but he discouraged personal extravagance by the wealthy, promoted the just and prompt payment of wages, and a more equitable distribution of wealth in the city in order to maintain familial and political stability.⁸ However, rather than accepting them for their similarity, sumptuary legislation and elite women condemned people of lower social stature who wore fashions that imitated their own. This reflects the "trickle down" effect outlined by fashion theorists including Simmel, "naturally, the lower strata look and strive towards the upper."⁹ Dominici's argument expresses, as fact, his idealised aspirations for simplicity, suggesting that people only desire things they have access to and are exposed to as children. There are other factors that contribute to the adaptation of style and observations of the clothing people of diverse social standing wore. Secular texts and legal records do indicate an upper-class resistance to an evident desire among the lower classes to dress themselves, and so elevate their self-worth, through fashionable attire.

While the wealthy might demonstrate their worth through charity or voluntary poverty, the destitute were unable to claim their poverty as an ennobling characteristic. As fourth-century, St. Ambrose had taught, holiness ennobled the destitute, and so the poor had to prove their virtue by their stoic acceptance of their struggle, praying for those who offered them charity, and by exhibiting polite and pious behaviour.¹⁰

Responding to resentments and more serious consequences of divisions of wealth in society, Bernardino of Siena preached of the wealthy's responsibilities to the poor. Although a large portion of the city's wealth and influence was generated through its successful textiles trade, (the Arte della Lana even having responsibility for the care of the city's baptistery, as noted in the previous chapter) the essential skills for the early preparation of wool; carding, dyeing

⁷ Alberti, (1969), p.275.

⁸ Glen Alexandrin Steven S Poulatis, 2001. "Social Economist: St Antonino, Bishop of Florence, 1384-1459." *International Journal of Social Economics* (MCB University) 28 (5/6/7): 561-576, pp. 567-568.

⁹ Simmel, p. 190.

¹⁰ Bynum, p. 34, and see: Rosita Levi Piestzky, 1978. *Il Costume e la Moda nella Societa Italiana*. Torino: Einaudi Editore.p. 19-20.

and spinning, received very little compensation and hence the people who performed these roles, including women, were some of the poorest members of the community.¹¹ This circumstance made Bernardino's metaphors all the more poignant as he related the external clothing of the rich to the internal flesh of the poor. He spoke of wringing wedding gowns of blood, and of "purple dyed in the blood of the poor."¹² Bernardino encouraged his congregation to consider the insult and pain the sight of elite women's trains, dragged in the mud, would cause for the ragged, freezing poor, many of whom worked for the Florentine textiles industry to produce the fine materials they would never possess.¹³ He reminded the wealthy that their clothes were made through the sweat and blood of the most vulnerable members of their own community, including widows and orphans. Orphans were raised in foundling hospitals that trained them in servitude or basic textiles-related skills.¹⁴ Bernardino's accusatory language was not a new feature of Christian rhetoric. Archbishop of Constantinople John Chrysostom (347-407) spoke of women's acquisition of sumptuous garments as "squeezing the bellies of the poor."¹⁵ The graphic rhetoric was used to induce feelings of guilt and moral obligation in the elite. The textiles -working poor were not in distant sweatshops but were present and visible in the Florentine community and according to religious belief being charitable towards them would benefit the soul of the elite giver.

When hagiographers discuss the clothing of saints and martyrs they usually contrast their humble dress with the sumptuous garments they encountered others wearing. Saints responded differently to the contrast depending on the situation and their (or the hagiographer's) temperament. In most cases, wealth repulses a saint. This either leads them to turn indignantly from the wealthy to address the needs of the humble, or to take pity on the misguided rich and to steer them toward righteousness. The Florentine panel painting of *St. Ives Administering Justice* (1405-1410), by an unknown artist, is an instance of the

¹¹ Paoletti & Radke, p. 83.

¹² Paul Thureau-Dangin, 1906. *The Life of Bernardino of Siena*. Translated by Baroness G. Von Hufal. London: Philip Lee Warner.pp. 158 & 210-211.

¹³ Thureau-Dangin, p. 158. Shaming techniques used by preachers to discourage the vain are discussed further in Chapter Four. For another discussion of the sartorial gap between rich and poor and the moral response of preachers in opposition to these realities see Muzzarelli, pp.315-324.

¹⁴ Rogers, pp.109 – 110.

¹⁵ Kristi Upson-Saia, 2011. *Early Christian Dress, Gender, Virtue and Authority*. New York: Routledge, p.45.

former.¹⁶ It depicts the thirteenth-century ecclesiastic judge and Franciscan tertiary, St Ives turning away from rich flatterers to address the legal concerns of the poor. The rich stand on St. Ives' left and the poor stand on his right. The key identifiers between the two groups are clothing and demographic. The figures on St. Ives' right are predominantly nuns and widows whereas those on his left are predominantly men. There are children depicted at the forefront of both. The contrast between the two sets of children is profound. Literate rich children approach St. Ives with books in their hands, they wear fashionable wing-like loose silk sleeves in diverse colours with embroidered hems. The rich have different colours visible through the pleating of their tunics indicating both excess of fabric and that the material was what was called *cangiante* (meaning it was woven with different colours in warp and weft), as was the fashion.¹⁷ The poor children's clothes are in tatters with ragged edges. Each of the children wears a slightly different style, possibly indicative of what was available from the second-hand dealer or through charity rather than what is fashionable. Many of the sleeves droop at the elbow and are secured at the wrist, reminiscent of an early fourteenth-century fashion that would look dated 1405.¹⁸ The poor children either have bare feet or hose with holes at the toes. The father of one of these children holds his son's wrist with one hand and humbly holds his hat to his chest as he addresses St. Ives. The father's attitude of humility, is accentuated by its contrast with the rich who leave their headgear on, evidencing their sense of self-worth.¹⁹ One wealthy man demonstrates his disrespect by turning his back to the saint to address a friend. The figure of St. Ives provides an exemplar for Christian behaviour, reminiscent of Jesus in His seat of judgement, that those in power should turn their backs on the ungrateful privileged, to support the humble. The painting depicts the 'worthy poor,' those from respectable families who had fallen on hard times.

¹⁶ Maestro di Sant'Ivo, *Saint Ives Administering Justice*, Tempera on wood panel, 1405-1410 from the Communit  Offices in Palazzo di parte Guelfa in Florence inv. 1890, n. 4664, Accademia, Firenze [image unavailable].

¹⁷ Peter Thornton, 1991. *The Italian Renaissance Interior 1400-1600*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson pp. 69-70.

¹⁸ Stella Mary Newton, 1980. *Fashion in the Age of the Black Prince*. Suffolk: The Boydell Press.p.3

¹⁹ See: Trexler (1980), pg.102, for further discussion of the social behavior, including removing hats when addressing people of a higher social station, which religious images and Preachers including Bernardino of Siena taught as secular models for engagement with spiritual figures; Jennifer Woodward, 1997. *The Theatre of Death: The Ritual Management of Royal Funerals in Renaissance England 1570-1625*. Suffolk: The Boydell Press, p.20-21, for a discussion of the Renaissance use of headgear to demarcate status during a funeral procession; and: Alison Lurie, 1981. *The Language of Clothes*. New York: Random House. p. 8, for a discussion of the continued prominence of headgear in the expression of identity in contemporary western society.

Fear of the poor, as potential thieves or as counterfeiters who devalued the sartorial grandeur of the rich through imitations of wealthy fashions, bred resentments among the rich and justified sumptuary laws. Moral educators of the early Renaissance countered fear by promoting the concept of the worthy poor. They attempted to remind the wealthy of their own role in the plight of the poor, to be sensitive to the impression their own extravagance would have on the impoverished, and of their Christian responsibility to be charitable. While some attempted to idealise the simple needs of the poor, secular sources demonstrate the desire among the poor for self-improvement and security. Poor parents dressed their children according to what was given to them as charity or they could afford from the second-hand clothing dealers.²⁰ However, on the other end of the spectrum, wealthy parents had more freedom to balance considerations of economy and morality in their selection of their children's attire.

Domestic Wealth

Wealthy parents had the luxury of making choices about the sartorial impressions of their offspring's formative years. However, this ability was constrained by sumptuary laws. For instance, the sumptuary restrictions established on 20 July 1356 insisted that children under the age of seven must not be dressed in clothing exceeding five gold florins in value, and that the penalty for doing so would be 25 florins for each offending item, which would also be confiscated, causing additional economic loss.²¹ In dressing their children, Florentine parents had to negotiate legal restrictions with social expectations related to economy, status and morality.

Influential writers identified luxurious attire as a moral strain in the household. They indicate a shared belief that children's sensory engagement with material culture played a vital pedagogical role in their ability to harness their self-will and develop their understanding of the material and spiritual world. In the *Regola* Dominici recommended that parents instil

²⁰ For more on second-hand clothes dealers (who sold domestically made products and the clothing of the dead) and the ways they contributed to the cycle of wealth, particularly among the poor see: Frick, pp. 36-37 and John Henderson, 2006. *The Renaissance Hospital, Healing the Body and Soul*. New Haven: Yale University Press. pp.268-269.

²¹ Archivio di Stato di Firenze. 1356. *Capitoli Registri 12*. "*Ordinamenta super ordinamentis mulierum* under the subheading *De Vestimentis Puerorum*, "...septem annis infra facere vel fieri facere tunicam vel aliquod indumentum sive' mantellum, que vel quod valorem excedat v. florenorum auri sub pena librarum XXV fp'. pro quolibet et qualibet vice, qua contra factum fuerit auferenda".

generosity and humility in their children by dressing them modestly and encouraging them to compare themselves with “examples of the saints which they can understand.”²² Dominici expressed admiration for early Christians who differentiated themselves from others with attire, “because not only the tongue and heart ought to confess the perfect Catholic faith, but with all signs.”²³ Dominici’s texts and sermons shared the society’s practice of reading internal values through external display.

Dominici’s prime audience was the literate and privileged members of the Christian community. Sermons and books offering devotional guidance suggest that religious leaders were concerned that elite members of society had complacently accepted the idea that sumptuous indicators of their status were consistent with, not in opposition to, their religious identities. By simultaneously considering the advice offered by religious figures and that being increasingly proffered by educated laymen, an unstable dialogue emerges regarding the measure for virtue.

When discussing children’s religious education, Dominici defined the role of dress in fostering a Christian identity. He recognised that clothing played a role in self-perception. He expressed concern that the mercantile aristocracy were raising their children to be too heavily influenced by material social concerns. Attention to personal adornment was problematic in that material objects were frequently treated as though they carried sacred significance. Dominici provided this advice for raising sons:

Plant in him customs, or true affections, when you start to teach him to use and guide his own will. If you start to use or enjoy beautiful golden cloth, garments, printed shoes, short *giubbottini* [waist-coats], tight soled socks, blonde combed hair, greedy games, empty words, false deceit, love of revenge, and the like miserable beginnings, you have placed the worm of sin in his food. [...] Give him, from the beginning, moderate nature, to nurture your son to the end.²⁴

²² Dominici, p.137 “*Convienti prudentemente lusingargli, e con esempi di Santi quanto son capaci, e altre buone parole, contentargli*” [my translation].

²³ Dominici, p. 136 “*Come si legge nelle antiche istorie, eera determinato vestire quel de’Cristiani dagli alti popoli; perché non solo colla lingua e cuore si debbe confessare la perfetta fede cattolica, ma con tutti i segni; siccome ancora fanno l’altre nazioni.*” [my translation].

²⁴ Dominici, p.141, “*Piantasi ne’costumi, o vero negli affetti, quando si comincia a ’nsegnarli l’uso o movimento della propria volontà. Se il cominci adusare o dilettersi negli dorati panni, incincischiati vestimenti, stampate scarpette, corti giubbettini, tirate e solate calze, biondi e pettanti capelli, avari giuochi [i varii giuochi] vane parole, falsi inganni, amor di vendette, e simili cominciamenti tristi, tu hai posto il vermine del peccato in sul cibo suo. [...] Tu darai lo inizio, la natura il mezzo, e esso figliuolo nutrito conchiuderà il fine.*” [my translation]. (*giubbottini* literally translates as small jackets). At the same time Dominici was writing this treatise in Florence,

In relation to daughters, Dominici expressed the culturally engrained opinion that females were of a “more imperfect nature” making it more important to dress young girls in “honest colours [...] without too many mutations” rather than letting them “needlessly delight, as in the orient, in gold, precious stones, [...] and other vanities.”²⁵ Dominici supported this advice, appealing to his contemporary readers, by referring to the authoritative sartorial practices of the early Christians. Clothing worked within society to secure and communicate social identities. For members of the early, persecuted, Christian faith, to dress in a manner that indicated a voluntary social segregation was a bold visual statement of religious conviction.²⁶ However, the religious climate, aesthetic and sartorial practices in fifteenth-century Florence differed greatly from those of early Christianity. Dominici recognised that dressing in similar garments to the early Christians would not communicate an equivalent meaning to the sartorially literate eyes of his community. He therefore recommended that parents encourage their children to be humble and community-minded rather than self-importantly defining them with jewels and embroideries that “distract the minds of children from the True God.”²⁷

Despite the popular trope which associated luxury with vanity and divine punishment, laws and social practices promoted a sartorially stratified social hierarchy. This generated a counter-rhetoric in which luxurious adornments, in certain contexts, became symbols of social virtue. When the Florentine government required funds they found they could capitalise on their society’s display culture by introducing sumptuary laws, such as those set in Florence in December 1364, that allowed women to purchase the right to wear forbidden adornments, including sleeves worth more than six florins, or adorning themselves in precious materials including gold and silver.²⁸ Therefore, the government took advantage of

Christine De Pizan wrote her *The Body Politic* which engages with the same fear that children who were materially over-indulged would grow into unrestrained sinful adults. See: Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the Body Politic*. Edited by Kate Langdon Forhan. Translated by Kate Langdon Forhan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. pp. 59-60.

²⁵ Dominici, pp. 136-137 “*Peró tutto quello gli può superfluamente dilettere, come ariento, oro, pietre preziose, ricamature [ricami], intagli, stampe e altri travisati lascia stare; colori onesti, tagli debiti, non con troppe mutazioni, vestiri loro: e cosí questo osserva nelle femine come ne’ maschi, o tanto piú quanto quella piú imperfetta natura n’è piú vaga.*” [my translation].

²⁶ For more on the sartorial practices of early Christianity see: Upson-Saia, Kristi. *Early Christian Dress, Gender, Virtue and Authority*. New York: Routledge, 2011.

²⁷ Dominici, pp.136-137 “*Pure attendi, seguitando la piú onesta usanza della patria, i vestimenti non tolgano la mente de’ faciulli da Dio vero.*” [my translation].

²⁸ Archivio di Stato di Firenze.1364 December 21. *Provvisioni Registri* 52. f.79r-80v.

the rising merchant class whose fortune had increased and who subsequently wished to signify their change in wealth on their bodies. As the wealth of the merchant class rose, concerns about the impact of overindulgence on the morality of the younger generations became particularly pertinent.

In *Books of the Family* Alberti articulated his justification for the values children could learn by growing up in a wealthy household, saying:

The body must not be formed in idleness and indulgence; our only use for wealth must be to make us free. It is perhaps, a kind of slavery to be forced to plead and beg from other men in order to satisfy our necessity. That is why we do not scorn riches, but learn to govern ourselves and to subdue our desires while we live free and happy in the midst of affluence and abundance.²⁹

Typically for his era, Alberti recognised the danger of luxury garments as a distraction or temptation, which should not be allowed too great an influence over the development of body or mind. However, even amid times of political stability and pockets of prosperity, Florence experienced recurrent plague and war, rendering people familiar with the sight of sickness and poverty. Alberti's justification of wealth in the household attempted to shift the focus from a question of charity and social responsibility to self-sufficiency and economy. Alberti notes that begging from others was humiliating and set poor habits and desires in one's children, but becoming indebted had broader social implications. Morelli advised his children, in his diary, that to keep one's friends one should not become financially indebted to them.³⁰ Alberti argued that children should learn to appreciate and maintain good fortune but not become overindulgent in the process.

Dominici likewise spoke of indebtedness as a loss of freedom. However, unlike Alberti, he discussed indebtedness as a moral failing derived from being dissatisfied with one's own means and wanting to deceive oneself and others. Dominici wanted people to be content with their poverty:

“Oh how praiseworthy rather to live on your bread and water, and dress in your poor clothes than to indebt yourself at the expense of others [...] in the first case the conscience remains clear, and the man free and his own lord, in the latter

²⁹ Alberti, (1969), p. 148.

³⁰ Morelli, p. 278.

the conscience feels remorse, [...] he deceives and sells his freedom, one of the most valuable things man possesses in this life and in the future.”³¹

Nevertheless, Dominici spoke directly against prudence as a justification for hoarding wealth:

Do you not feel free to give alms as you desire, fearing to impoverish yourself? Oppose this fear saying: I could become rich, I may soon die, I can be robbed, burned, kicked [...]: better that the poor have alms than the thief or fire [...] So prudently oppose the possibility by the possible, the good by bad, the secure by doubt, the love of God by love of vanity.³²

Dominici intended for this moral philosophy of contentment and charity in adult society to be perpetuated through the careful construction of the younger generation’s experiences. He encouraged even wealthy parents to accustom their children to humble attire but acknowledging the process of observational and comparative learning. He noted that children raised according to his advice might be unsatisfied with their humble appearance “recognising they are not dressed as their equals.” He recommended that parents make their children content with humble attire by encouraging them to imitate saints instead of their peers.³³ The relevance of Dominici’s pedagogic advice is attested to in the rhetorical nature of popular female hagiographies which are often accompanied by references to material, metaphoric and celestial garments.³⁴ Similar to Jesus’ use of parables to communicate complex moral arguments, hagiographies used an accessible narrative tradition to address moral pitfalls particular to the contemporary Christian community.

³¹ Dominici, pp. 174-175 “*Oh quanto e laudabile viver piu tosto del suo pane ed acqua, e del suo vestire di taccolino, e alle sue spese dormire in una capanna in sulla paglia, che alle spese d’altri, indebitando se, usar cibi al corpo dilettesi, vestimenti fini, e case impalazzate! Nel caso primo sta la coscienza netta, e l’uomo libero e signor di se: nel secondo rimorde la coscienza, perche divora quel d’altri, e ancora inganna e vende sua liberta, una delle piu care cose possegga l’uomo nella presente vita e nella future.*” [my translation].

³² Dominici, p. 171-172 “*Non se’libro fare la desiderata limosina, temendo tu d’impoverire? Opponi a questo timore: io posso arricchire; io posso tosto morire; io posso essere rubato, arso, cacciato e fatto ribello: meglio e questa limosina abbia il povero che il ladro, fuoco, o ver furioso popolo. Di’: io posso impoverire, aro bisogno di limosina, fia fatto a me come io faro ad altri: daro, accio sia dato a me, se giungo a tal partito. Per paura di mare o di martiro stai di sovvenire la fede? Opponi e di’: uno scarpione mi puo uccidere nel letto; un tegolo ammazzarmi andando per la via; un poco di veleno preso per errore, un furioso, mi puo repente dare morte: cosi possono essere queste come quella. Ho a morire: qui muoio miseramente, senza frutto; la, s’l’mioio, morro sicuro della salute mia. O cosi prudentemente opponi il forse al forse, il bene al male, il sicuro al dubbio, l’amor di Dio all’ amor vano; e goderai nel ben fare, cosi seguitando avversita come prosperita*”. [my translation].

³³ Dominici, p.137 “*Agevolmente interverrà gli udirai sopra ciò piagnere e ritrosire, ramaricandosi non son vestiti come lor pari e saranno da vicini, noti e compagni a questo ammessi [e da compagni ammessi]. Conviene prudentemente lusingargli, e con esempi di Santi quanto son capaci, e altre buone parole, contentargli.*” [my translation].

³⁴ Warr, (2010) from p. 133.

Late-Medieval and early-Renaissance people frequently, and instinctively, came to understand and interpret their experiences by relating them to their mnemonic framework constructed in great part by moral narrative examples.³⁵ Dominici's instruction to read about the saints to cultivate virtuous behaviour closely associates lived experience with written and visual stimulus. Hagiographies provided memorable narrative examples that encouraged virtue and clarified religious precepts. There was evidently conflict in the idealisation of how clothing could shape the economic and social morality of children. Dominici recommended dressing children in clothes of less than their means and to couple this with hagiographic lessons to instil humility. Popular hagiographic figures expressed their humility by rejecting wealth and by giving alms. A common trope was that the saints' humble dress and acts of charity were divinely rewarded with spiritual garments.³⁶ Therefore, having considered the influence of household economics on sartorial experience, and thereby, the formation of cultural values, the following sections of the chapter will consider the influence of the ideas of rejecting wealth, performing charity, hoping for divine reward and fearing divine punishment.

Rejecting Wealth

Re-enacting the moral teachings of the gospel was a means for Florentines to attest to their faith. Three of the four gospels recount Jesus' instruction to a rich young man to "sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me," warning that "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven."³⁷ Despite the man not rising to the challenge, Jesus' instruction and promise of reward echoed throughout Christianity. For instance, in his fifteenth-century sermon on the spiritual state, charismatic Franciscan preacher Bernardino of Siena encouraged his young male listeners to trade their fine garments and patrimony for spiritual garments.³⁸

³⁵ For more on late medieval people's use of memory see: Mary Carruthers, 1990. *The Book of Memory in Medieval Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

³⁶ Warr (2010) pp. 146-148

³⁷ Matthew 19:21&24, Mark 10: 21&25, Luke 18:22 25.

³⁸ Bernardino, da Siena. *Le Prediche Volgare*. Edited by Cannarozzi Padre Ciro. Vols. 1-5. Firenze: Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, *LX Dello Stato Spirituale, 4 Aprile mercoledì (Lent of 1425)*, vol. III, pp.306-307

St. Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) called for a complete rejection of property, claiming that Jesus lived in poverty (an idea that never sat well with the papacy). This challenged the way people viewed the poor and the idea that the social hierarchy mirrored a divine hierarchy.³⁹ To encourage members of the order in their conviction, the Rule of St. Francis stated “heaven has made you poor in possessions, has exalted you in virtues.”⁴⁰ Franciscans, including Bernardino of Siena, gave stirring sermons on the psychological and spiritual dangers of material possessions and modelled their ideals for their community by their collective poverty. A solution to the difficulty of claiming absolute poverty while being accommodated, eating and wearing clothes was offered by Pope Gregory IX in 1230, who established that the Church owned the property and the Franciscans simply used it; however this distinction between ownership and use attracted continual debate and accusations of hypocrisy.⁴¹ Franciscans relied on the charity of the laity, of which they received a great deal. They further believed that beauty, evident in grand architecture, rich frescoes, and ornate reliquaries, was a fitting reflection of the divinity for which the pious hoped. The construction of the large Franciscan Basilica of Santa Croce, consecrated by Pope Eugene IV in 1442, was supported by subsidies from the Florentine communal government, indicating the significance of religious affiliations to the community’s collective identity.⁴² The church’s decoration could be commissioned, funded and largely designed by wealthy Florentine families, thus further entwining the order with the community. The attention the church received from the wealthy mercantile class is testament to the influence of the Franciscan community in Florence even when that attention was expressed in the form of financial support and commissions for expensive devotional materials that stood at odds with the ideal of poverty.⁴³

³⁹ The idealization of earthly society striving to mirror an interpretation of the divine is discussed in the chapter *Florentine Religious Community* starting on page 151. For a discussion of the pressure St Francis’ claims placed on the church, Francis’ followers and those who resisted his insistence on poverty see: Leahey, p.11; Lee Palmer Wandel, 2003. “The Poverty of Christ.” In *The Reformation of Charity: The Secular and the Religious in Early Modern Poor Relief*. Boston: Brill Academic Publishers.pp.18-20, and: Reames, p. 147; and Frank, 243-260.

⁴⁰ *The Rule of Saint Francis*, p. 471.

⁴¹ Frank, pp. 247 & 249-251.

⁴² Paoletti & Radke, p.83; also see Richard Trexler, 1989. *Naked Before the Father: The Renunciation of Francis of Assisi*. New York: Peter Lang, p.66.

⁴³ Kempers, pp. 22 & 189. For a discussion of the influences on the artistic program of Santa Croce (of the splinter of the True Cross and of St. Francis’ own intense devotion to Jesus suffering) and on the manner in which the Franciscan Friars and their wealthy patrons used the artworks see: Nancy M. Thompson, 2004 “The Franciscans and the True Cross: The Decoration of the Cappella Maggiore of Santa Croce in Florence” *Gesta*, The University of Chicago Press and the International Centre of Medieval Art, Vol. 43 (1) pp. 61-79.

St. Francis renounced his parental inheritance by stripping naked before the Bishop of Assisi.⁴⁴ Following St. Francis' example, men made public displays of their convictions, but women, whose reputations were more fragile, were encouraged instead to secretly wear hair-shirts as a private means of rejecting wealth.⁴⁵ Caroline Bynum has argued that women had less need to mark their spiritual conversion through a publicly-enacted physical transition. She suggested that women experienced a continuity of self as they seamlessly modelled themselves on their mothers, whereas men were raised by women and were forced to dramatically revert from admiring and emulating their mothers to admiring and emulating their fathers.⁴⁶ While young girls did learn how to be wives through observation and imitation, Bynum's argument overemphasises the continuity of the female sartorial self, as women's lives were continually marked by changes in attire that accompanied changes in their social and marital status.⁴⁷ A woman's sartorial identity was not her own, but was an expression of her father's and then her husband's wealth. Her dignified comportment reflected on her family's honour. Perhaps the more transitory nature of women's sartorial identities would have lessened the pious impact of rejecting their family's possessions and would have caused shame instead of admiration, for both families, by publicly and physically expressing personal convictions over family obligations.

⁴⁴ For further discussion of nudity and spirituality in paintings of Francis' Renunciation see: Paci, p.41; and for an extensive discussion of the historical development of St. Francis' Renunciation in literature and in visual iconography see: Trexler (1989).

⁴⁵ This was demonstrated in the earlier discussion of asceticism on page 37.

⁴⁶ Bynum, p.43.

⁴⁷ The role of observation and imitation in the embodied education of women will be discussed at greater length in this thesis, in particular from page 175.

For fifteenth-century women, projecting a modest appearance was essential. This was especially the case for female writers who had to counter the suspicion directed against them for their immodest and unconventional aspirations of pursuing a literary education. A 1453 letter from Ludovico Foscarini to Isotta Nogarola (two influential humanist writers)

demonstrates this through his pointed praise of her “voluntary poverty.”

Ludovico expressed his Epicurean philosophy that, as Nogarola rejected her family’s “golden robes” for a simple dress “neither dirty nor ornate” she became closer to God and “since you need little and are content with little, you are leading your life without anxiety, richer than a queen.”⁴⁸ While Ludovico interpreted a rejection of wealth as doing away with the troublesome temptations of the world and thereby achieving contentment on earth, others treated rejecting wealth as asceticism by

which one achieved joy in heaven, not on earth.



Figure 7: Filippino Lippi, *Saint Mary Magdalene, St John the Baptist*, paintings on wood, from the church of San Procolo in Florence Galleria dell' Accademia, c.1496 - 1498

⁴⁸ Foscarini as quoted in: King and Rabil, p. 118.

The concept of expressing devotion through simplicity, despite having access to the ornate, also came to be reflected in art. In 1496 Francesco Valori, a follower of Savonarola, commissioned Filippino Lippi to paint a triptych for his family chapel in San Procolo. The central panel depicted the crucified Christ, skulls scattered at his feet and mourned by a kneeling Virgin Mary and Francis of Assisi. The side panels depict St John the Baptist, and St. Mary Magdalene (Figure 7). The triptych has since been dismantled but the side panels remain together. Art historians have interpreted the work through the ambiguous terminology of the ‘Savonarolan style,’ arguing alternately that the central panel minimises the impression of Christ’s pain to encourage contemplation, and that the outer panels appeal to the viewers’ emotions precisely through their depiction of human suffering.⁴⁹ By the late fifteenth century, simplicity was emerging as a new standard of beauty in religious painting.⁵⁰ Lippi’s painting, therefore, reflected Savonarola’s view that Florentine vanity required repentance and a significant move toward spiritual and material cleansing. The painting depicted the biblical saints unshod and dressed in the rags of poverty. The Magdalene’s ground-length hair is wrapped like a shroud over her slumped shoulders and her torso is swaddled in a dirty piece of white fabric roughly tied about her with sashes. St. John’s roughly cut garment of inwardly facing fur is tied at the waist with a grey sash with a hint of gold embellishment, over which he wears a martyr-red cloak. However, they each hold a golden object: the Magdalene holds the cup of oil from which she anointed Jesus, and the Baptist holds a cross. The golden objects indicate that the saints’ material poverty is supplemented by spiritual wealth. Precious objects are only depicted so far as they show appropriate respect to the sacred.

For Florentine viewers, the choice of St. John the Baptist, the city’s patron, would contextualise the image as a commentary of their city. As Savonarola was particularly concerned by the vain frippery of women, the Magdalene was a useful choice for the third panel, as a familiar symbol for feminine vanity transformed through Christ into devout repentance. The central image would, ideally, act as a reminder of Jesus’ sacrifice, death, and of Francis’ mode of imitating Christ by rejecting wealth and privilege. For women,

⁴⁹ Burke, Jill. 2004. *Changing Patrons, Social Identity and the Visual Arts in Renaissance Florence*. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press. P.155 See the chapter “Painted Prayers, Savonarola and the Audience of Images” pp. 155- 187 for Burke’s discussion of Savonarola’s influence on Florentine Religious art.

⁵⁰ Burke, p.174

rejecting wealth was problematic because their appearance did not only speak of their identities but was also their families' honour. Voluntary poverty from a female standpoint then, meant wearing modest, clean clothing (conceived as an extension of their moral state) and by exemplifying the truth of that outward appearance by conducting acts of charity.

Charitable Acts

From early hagiographies to fifteenth-century sermons the concept of rejecting wealth was completed through acts of charity. When people contemplated their deaths, they thought about aiding their souls through charity, and this made the virtuous poor (who would pray for the souls of their benefactors) the objects' of the elite's hopes for heaven.⁵¹ For example, on the death of her youngest son Matteo (1459), Alessandra Strozzi wrote to her eldest son Filippo to ask to put Matteo's estate to a charitable use "for the satisfaction of his soul," writing:

There is a sister of your servant that you had here, who is married, and cannot go to her husband, because of her great poverty. Other times I have recommended her to you, and I received no answer. Now this being the case, you may want to help (it will cost in all fifteen florins) and not want to miss [the opportunity].⁵²

This example indicates that in the Florentine urban environment, poverty was a familiar condition, visible to the wealthy elite. The continual calls for charity made by preachers were not unheeded. However, it did sometimes take a personal tragedy to spur people to act on charitable inclinations. There were also those who lived in an extravagant manner and used posthumous bequests, often of clothing for the poor, to safeguard their souls and their memory for the future.⁵³ Therefore, various motivations, from genuine concern to self-interest, are evident in charitable behaviour in Renaissance Florence. However, the intention of this section of the chapter is not to discuss the range of charitable acts performed in but

⁵¹ Kathleen Ashley, 2004. "Material and Symbolic Gift-Giving: Clothes in English and French Wills." In *Medieval Fabrications: Dress, Textiles, Clothwork and Other Cultural Imaginings*, edited by E. Jane Burns, 137 - 146. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, p. 146

⁵² Alessandra Strozzi, 1877. *Lettere di Una Gentildonna Fiorentina*. Edited by Guasti Cesare. Firenze: G. C. Sansoni. "Lettere Diciassettesima, Alessandrato Filippo degli Strozzi in Napoli, 6 September, 1459", p.182, "e per soddisfacimento dell'anima sua ... che ci e una sorella del tuo ragazzo che avesti di qua, che e maritata, e none puo andare a marito, che e una gran poverta la sua. Per alire te l'ho raccomandata, e mai n'ebbi risposta. Ora esendo questo caso, si vuole aiutarla: che sono in tutto fiorini quindici: e non voler mancare" [my translation].

⁵³ Newton, p. 72.

to outline the foundational religious messages of eternal rewards that acted to encourage people to dress humbly and to clothe, dower and feed the poor.

Charity is the most fundamental of the biblical virtues and was integral to the creation of a Christian identity. Jesus taught that those who clothe the naked would be welcomed into the kingdom of Heaven as though they had clothed Him.⁵⁴ This statement reverberated strongly in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century morality, with many religious paintings alluding to Jesus as a beggar receiving the charity of saints. Marsilio Ficino wrote that charity was the most 'God-like' virtue because others benefited from it. He did not view charity as selfless, but as a means of upward mobility within the spiritual hierarchy. Ficino stated that "a man of small stature can do nothing better than ascend the heights with humanity. A great man can do nothing better than descend to the lowest places with magnanimity."⁵⁵ Similarly, the rule of St Benedict, which laid the foundation for important Florentine orders argued that: "we descend by self-exaltation and ascend by humility, and the ladder this set up is our life in the world, which the Lord raises up to heaven if our heart is humbled."⁵⁶ Acts of charity, then, were not solely altruistic but demonstrated the givers' transcendence above their own sense of property, which would improve their chances of reaching heaven.

In a 1375 letter, Catherine of Siena encouraged Florentine Frate Bartolomeo Dominici to be "drowned in the fire of God's blazing charity" which she conceptualised as a garment. She advised Frate Dominici to be "stripped of your unfit clothing and completely covered, clothed in the fire of the Holy Spirit, that garment is so strong and tough that nothing weakens its fibre."⁵⁷ Catherine described the 'garment' of charity as a protection for both the soul and the (dangerously sexual) body, saying:

The heart clothed in it never grows effeminate, but is strong enough to tolerate the worst pounding thrusts the world, the devil, and its own have to offer. Those thrusts never penetrate, because the garment of charity repels them.⁵⁸

In a similar letter to Raimondo da Capua Catherine wrote that she longed to see him clothed in "the wedding garments that covers all our sin and nakedness" and which "gets stronger

⁵⁴ See: Isaiah 58:7-8, Matthew 25:36-40, and 1 Corinthians 13:13.

⁵⁵ Ficino, (1975), Vol 1, *Letter to Lorenzo il Magnifico*, 12 April 1474, p.116.

⁵⁶ Saint Benedict, p. 174.

⁵⁷ The idea of being stripped from earthly attire, synonymous with sin, to be new clothed in holy robes is consistent with the language used in relation to Baptism in the previous chapter.

⁵⁸ Catherine of Siena, *Letter 29, To Frate Bartolomeo Dominici*, In *Florence*, 1375, pp 102-103.

rather than weaker with each blow of temptation.” She said that blows to one’s body received for faith, “will be precious stones and pearls set onto this garments of blazing charity.”⁵⁹ Charity therefore protected the body and soul. These letters demonstrate a culturally engrained rhetoric that utilised clothing metaphors to conceptualise spiritual strength.

Giving away the clothes from one’s own back was a common hagiographic trope.⁶⁰ As clothing was so closely tied to the body and to identity, theologians argued that when someone gave their clothing to another person, some degree of their spiritual essence remained embedded in the gift and so influenced the sensory and spiritual identity of the receiver as well as accumulating spiritual rewards for the giver.⁶¹ The trope marked a key moment of spiritual transition in the life of St. Martin of Tours (316-397), whose story became a significant subject in Christian iconography into the Renaissance. According to Varagine’s rendition of the tale St. Martin, newly converted:

Met a poor man all naked, to whom no man gave any alms. Then Martin drew out his sword and carved his mantle therewith in two pieces in the middle, and gave that one half to the poor man, for he had nothing else to give him, and he clad himself in the other.⁶²

⁵⁹ Catherine of Siena, *Letter 70, To Frate Raimondo da Capua, in Avignon, 1376*, p. 219. It is also worth noting Catherine’s reference to Revelation 21:2-4 by discussing charity as the wedding garment of the New Jerusalem.

⁶⁰ See Warr (2010), p.141 for a discussion of Friar Tommaso da Celano’s hagiography of St Francis where the saint is said to have given the cloak he was wearing to beggars in four separate instances.

⁶¹ Cordelia Warr, 2004. “Clothing, Charity and Visionary Experience in Fifteenth Century Siena.” *Art History* (Blackwell Publishing) 27 (2): 195-196. (2004) p. 188.

⁶² Varagine, “The Life of S. Martin,” Vol. VI, pp.142-3, and Vorgaine, pp. 741-742 “*Quodam hyemali tempore per portam Ambianensium transiens pauperem quendam nudum obvium habuit. Qui cum a nullo elemosinam accepisset, Martinus hunc sibi servatum intelligens arrepto ense chlamydem, quae sibi supererat, dividit et partem pauperi tribuens reliquam partem rursus induit. Sequenti igitur nocte Christum chlamydis suae, qua pauperem texerat, parte vestitum vidit ipsumque ad circumstantes angelos sic loquentem audivit: Martinus adhuc catechumenus hac me veste contextit.*”



Figure 8: Lorenzo di Bicci, *Enthroned Saint Martin between 2 angels*, predella Sta Martins alms, Tempera on Wood Panel, from the Corporation of Guilds, later the Florence Chamber of Commerce, inv. dep. 174 inv. 1890, n 462, Accademia, 1380-1385.

Lorenzo di Bicci illustrated this story on the *predella* of his altarpiece *Enthroned Saint Martin Between Two Angels* (1380-85, Figure 8). The man's poverty is accentuated by the outline of his ribs through his bare chest. St. Martin interacts with the beggar while sitting on a horse, indicative of his privilege. The men look each other in the eyes and are connected by St. Martin's fur-lined and gold-trimmed cloak which is draped, as yet uncut, over both their shoulders. The warm red of the outer cloak is the colour traditionally associated with charity. That night the beggar appeared to Martin as Jesus "clothed with that part that he had given to the poor man" and commended Martin for his charity.⁶³ St. Martin's influence in Florence increased when in 1442 Antoninus, as Prior of San Marco, established the (still active) Buonomini di San Martino. The Buonomini were a small Dominican confraternity who provided charity (using anonymous donations) for the shamefaced poor (the *poveri vergognosi*) who were too respectable to beg.⁶⁴ One of the primary charitable acts was to

⁶³ Varagine, "The Life of S. Martin," vol VI, p.143.

⁶⁴ Hughes-Johnson, p. 5. Also see: Nicholas Terpstra, 1996. "Confraternities and Mendicant Orders: The Dynamics of Lay and Clerical Brotherhood in Renaissance Bologna." *The Catholic Historical Review* 82 (1): 1-22., p.12.

provide dowries for impoverished girls which allowed destitute orphans to marry honourably, and thus to support the population of the city.⁶⁵

The intention of written and painted narratives was to inspire self-reflection, imitation and charity. Yet, images such as St. Martin's presented particular difficulties for fourteenth- and fifteenth-century women as their material ownership was mediated through the patriarch of their family and giving away the clothing from their backs exposed them to social ridicule. St. Catherine of Siena's passion for charity was admired by her contemporaries but her example was nevertheless unconventional and attracted reprimand. In one instance, having given her cloak away, St. Catherine was criticised for walking through the streets without one. She responded to this saying: "I would rather be found without a coat than without love."⁶⁶ In a second instance, St. Catherine offered a beggar a layer of her clothing but, seeing that he was unsatisfied, she gave him more clothing belonging to her father and to a servant from her household. Giovanni Dominici would condemn such behaviour, arguing that "God does not like the sacrifice of robbery, nor that you steal from the household, to give to strangers."⁶⁷ Nevertheless, echoing Matthew 25:31-46 and mirroring the story of St Martin, St. Catherine's beggar was Jesus who returned to her in a vision, holding the (now miraculously jewel-encrusted) clothing she had given Him. He praised her "unstinting generosity" that shielded Him from the "cold and from the shame of going in rags" and He rewarded her with a celestial garment "invisible to other eyes" as a "sign and pledge of the garment of glory" she would receive in heaven.⁶⁸ The jewels on the garment were representative of good works. Metaphor blurred with spiritual belief, in the highly image-driven religious context, leading to a belief that one's actions altered the spiritual garment one would wear on judgement day, either appearing beggarly and full of tears representing one's sins, or glistening in precious stones representing one's pious actions.⁶⁹ Hagiographies

⁶⁵ Musacchio (2002), p. 19, and see: Hughes-Johnson, pp. 3-31

⁶⁶ Philine Helas, 2007. "The Clothing of Poverty and Sanctity in Legends, and their Representations in Trecento and Quattrocento Italy." In *Weaving, Veiling and Dressing, Textiles and their Metaphors in the Late Middle Ages*, 245-299. Turnhout: Brepols. p.271.

⁶⁷ Dominici, p. 123 "*Non piace a Dio sacrificio di rapina; né che tu rubi i domestici per dare agli strani*" [my translation].

⁶⁸ Quoted in: Warr (2004), p. 187. Giovanni Di Paolo depicted this event in 1460 among a series of predella paintings of the life of St. Catherine of Siena for an altarpiece for the hospital church in Siena: Giovanni di Paolo, St. Catherine of Siena and the Beggar, Tempera and Gold on Wood, Cleveland Museum of Art, c. 1447-1465.

⁶⁹ Laura F. Hodges, 2005. *Chaucer and Clothing*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer. p.181.

thus described female saints posthumously performing miracles in ethereal bejewelled garments.⁷⁰ Hagiographies indicate that spiritual attire was sometimes bestowed on living saints as encouragement or protection. In one of St. Catherine's visions, the Virgin Mary dressed her in a jewel-encrusted garment drawn from Jesus' stigmata with the reassurance that "the garments which come from the side of my son excel all others in elegance and beauty."⁷¹ This trope in text and image provided spiritual reassurance for Christian women, suggesting that charity and moderation on earth would be rewarded in kind.⁷²

Despite the idealisation of charity, wealthy women of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were limited in their ability to be charitable with 'their own' possessions as sumptuary laws restricted certain adornments for people of particular social positions. These laws attempted to visualise and stabilise the social hierarchy and reduce unproductive economic excess while making a case against soul-endangering vanity. Varagine's account of the life of thirteenth-century princess St. Elizabeth provided an example of the pitfalls of ill-considered charity while it traced the saint's spiritual life through the textiles she wore, gave away and made. Wishing to imitate Christ, she exchanged her condition from 'sovereign glory' to 'sovereign poverty' by wearing "poor vestments" and a veil, but "though she did abstinence, yet she was liberal with the poor." St. Elizabeth had to learn the social limits of charity:

She gave on a time to a poor woman a right good vesture, and when this poor woman saw that she had so noble a gift, she had so great joy that she fell down as dead, and when the blessed Elizabeth saw that, she was sorry that she had given her so noble a gift.⁷³

St. Elizabeth found her solution to overly fine charity through the feminine task of spinning wool and making cloth to be distributed by the church. St. Elizabeth "gave good ensample [sic] unto others" by being active in her spinning and passive in benefactions, relying on the church's better judgement for distribution.⁷⁴ In 1424 Bernardino of Siena preached in favour of this solution saying that "it is more pleasing to God that you should sew a shift yourself

⁷⁰ Warr, (2010), p.67.

⁷¹ Quoted in Warr (2010), p.164.

⁷² Warr, (2010), p.163-4.

⁷³ Varagine, "The Life of S. Elizabeth" Vol. VI, pp. 218, and Varagine, p. 757 "*Accidit autem, ut cuidam pauperulae quoddam satis bonum tribueret vestimentum, illa autem videns donum tam magnificum, tam ingenti gaudio est perfuse, ut ad terram cadens mortua crederetur. Quod beata Elizabeth videns doluit, se sibi tanta dedisse, timens, ne sibi fieret causa mortis, sed tamen pro ea oravit et ipsa sanata surrexit.*"

⁷⁴ Varagine, "The Life of S. Elizabeth" Vol. VI, pp 219.

and give it to a poor man, than that you should give him the money for two shifts.”⁷⁵ Similarly, bequests in the Renaissance, made by the rich to the poor, often address this concern asking that their clothes be sold and textiles of a lesser value purchased for distribution. Conversely, Boccaccio’s *Decameron* condemned the “hypocritical charity of friars, who give to the poor, that which they should give the pigs or throw away.”⁷⁶ Just as there was social awareness that one should not give too fine gifts to the needy, there was also a known danger of going too far in the other direction. These examples demonstrate the conscious associations people in both religious and secular contexts drew between the charitable-giver’s means, the degree of their generosity and the social worth of the recipient.

In another sermon Bernardino encouraged his listeners to be mindful of their intentions, and remember Jesus’ instruction to “let your alms be in secret.”⁷⁷ Bernardino compelled his listeners to remember that mankind was not infallible and even monks might not live up to their own or society’s expectations but it was nevertheless their private intention that concerned God.⁷⁸ Savonarola made a similar point saying that, “although you may be able to perform good exterior works, if you do not have charity and this law of Christ in your heart, you can accomplish nothing, and you will end up in the house of the devil.”⁷⁹

Although hagiographers’ intention of suggesting moral interpretations to their writing is clear, the relatively minimal record of the female voice makes it difficult to assess women’s reception and resulting application of hagiographic values.⁸⁰ However, there is evidence that people reflected on the identities of members in their own community in hagiographic terms. Florentine Poet, Ugolino Verino (1438-15) wrote a hexameter praising a thousand years’ worth of saintly or exemplary Florentines, in keeping with a popular trope of Florence as an eternal Christian community. Villana de’ Botti of the Strada family (1332-1361) was among the more contemporary figures acknowledged in Verino’s poem. While ancient

⁷⁵ St. Bernardino, 1424 Lenten sermon as quoted in: Warr, (2010), p. 189.

⁷⁶ Boccaccio, (1822) Vol. 1, Day 1 Story 7 p. 92, “... *ipocrita carita de’ frati, che quello danno a’ poveri, che converrebbe loro dare al porco o gittar via...*” [my translation].

⁷⁷ Bernardino da Siena, (1425), p.338.

⁷⁸ Bernardino da Siena, *XXXIX Della Ipocresia* (1425, 14 marzo), vol. IV, pp 332-333, For more discussion of the idea of intention outweighing action see: Leahey, p. 114.

⁷⁹ Savonarola, (2006), p324.

⁸⁰ Catherine Sanok, 2007. *Her Life Historical: Exemplarity and Female Saints' Lives in Late Medieval England*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.p.3.

female saints were more likely to die as martyrs for refusing to marry a pagan husband, contemporary female saints were praised for conducting charity, maintaining modesty and resisting temptation. Dangers that concerned religious women of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were those of excess carnality and luxury, which would seduce their minds and bodies away from devotion. This was briefly the case for Villana, whose family denied her religious vocation and arranged for her to marry young. As a wife she indulged in extravagant clothing until she saw her own form replaced by a demon in her mirror. This prompted her to return to her initial course, don a penitential hair shirt and give “all she possessed” away in charity.⁸¹ Verino stated that Villana was “Famous for the unique piety, she gave the poor all she possessed out of love for Christ, in order to become rich in heaven,” thereby repeating the oft-made promise that acts of charity would be divinely rewarded.⁸²

Belief in divine reward was reinforced through tangible material, sensory signs and rituals. The display of saints’ relics emphasised the continued relevance of those whose stories inspired socially responsible behaviour. The Florentine religious calendar was embellished with days dedicated to saints, including the last Sunday of January on which the relics of Villana De’ Botti were displayed and communally venerated at *Santa Maria Novella*.⁸³ The combination of religious belief with social ritual helped to create a stronger sense of a communal religious identity.

Christians believed that contact relics, including the body and clothes of a saint, retained the spiritual good and the posthumous attention of the saint so that they could act as mediator between earth and heaven. Female saints were frequently said to struggle with the hindrance of their flesh; however, once they died that very flesh was valued as sacred. This suggests that the saint’s soul remained invested with her flesh. The bodily resurrection promised in the Bible may account for this transcendental position. According to another hagiographic trope, the spirituality of saints resulted in the incorruptibility of their dead

⁸¹ Stuard, p.121 and Ugolino Verino 2000. *Images of Quattrocento Florence: Selected Writings in Literature, History and Art*. New Haven, London: Yale University Press. pp 29-31.

⁸² Verino, as quoted in: Baldassarri and Saiber, New Haven & London, 2000, pp. 242-243.

⁸³ Verino, Ugolino. 2000. “A History of Florentine Piety.” In *Documents in Religion: Images of Quattrocento Florence: Selected Writings in Literature, History and Art*, edited by Stefano Ugo Baldassarri and Arielle Saiber, 241-245. New Haven: Yale University Press.. pp. 244-245.

bodies. The *Golden Legend* is full of examples of saints' pristine, sweet-smelling corpses.⁸⁴ Such stories provided rhetoric that assisted Christians in comprehending and articulating their experiences.⁸⁵ This is evidenced by a 1447 letter by Francesco Barbaro who wrote of his niece's corpse as miraculously healing itself "and in the place of fetor such a sweet fragrance followed."⁸⁶ Hagiographies impacted the ways people praised the virtue of the deceased and inspired humility and virtue in the living.

While hagiographers commemorated saints through a discourse of virtuous life and death, artists created decorative reliquaries as tangible manifestations of imagined heavenly ornamentation. Reliquaries incorporated contact relics (such as bone, blood, hair or clothing) belonging to a saint into devotional sculptures. For fourteenth-century Christians these objects were signs of the saints' genuine presence and thereby opened lines of communication between those on earth and those in heaven.⁸⁷ Massimo Leone discusses this trend in religious devotion as being reflective of (what he views as) human nature's desire for transcendence, evident in the fetishizing of objects that direct the viewer to imagine and desire immaterial knowledge beyond the material prompt. He argues that while reliquaries combined spiritually precious and economically valuable materials, they powerfully directed and controlled the imaginations (and thereby the emotions and freedom) of devotees.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ This tradition is further discussed in: Catherine Saucier, 2010. "The Sweet Sound of Sanctity: Sensing St. Lambert." *The Senses and Society - Pleasure and Danger in Perception: The Five Senses in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Berg) 5 (1): 12-27. pp.10-27. For an example, see: Varagine, "The Life of S. Thomas Aquinas," Vol. VII, p. 160.

⁸⁵ See Carruthers 180-182 for a discussion on how remembered narratives assisted people in articulating their own experiences.

⁸⁶ Francesco Barbaro as translated in: King and Rabil, pp. 108- 111. Barbaro's letter is discussed in greater length in this thesis on page 306.

⁸⁷ Eliot W. Rowlands, 1979. "Sienese painted reliquaries of the Trecento: Their format and meaning." *Konsthistorisk tidskrift/Journal of Art History*, 48 (3): 126.

⁸⁸ Massimo Leone, 2014. "Wrapping Transcendence: The Semiotics of Reliquaries" *Signs and Society* Vol.2 (S1): pp. S50-S51.

Reliquaries were often shaped to echo the part of the body the relic may have come from, or placed into an arm-shaped reliquary that could be used to gesture and to touch devotees.⁸⁹

However, other relics were incorporated into near-life-sized busts that returned the viewer's gaze, potentially increasing the sense of the saint's presence and communion. These



Figure 9: Unknown Sienese sculptor Reliquary bust of one of the thousand virgins of Cologne, Carved polychrome and gilded wood, glass paste, Branachi Chapel Santa Maria Novella, end of the fourteenth cent.

reliquary busts were portable, allowing them to be carried during processions. They were beautifully decorated to echo the spiritual value of the relic and the faces were idealised, usually with blond hair denoting virtue.⁹⁰ For instance, an unknown Sienese sculptor of the late-fourteenth century created a reliquary bust of one of the *Thousand Virgins of Cologne* (Figure 9) by incorporating the relic into an elaborate golden neckline along with jewels made from glass paste. This evokes the rhetorical practice

of referring to saintly works as jewels or ornaments on heavenly clothing. The decoration of relics echoed the idea of spiritual ornamentation as a divine reward for humility

and charity. This offered people the perspective that if they sacrificed their own pride and self-interest while living they would in fact be amassing wealth in heaven. The words of hagiographies and the sight of adorned relics provided exempla for people seeking to exchange material wealth for spiritual wealth. The popularity of visual and written accounts of saints in Florence indicates the importance of devotional imagination, memory and imitation for personal moral development and the promotion of charity.

⁸⁹ Caroline Walker Bynum & Paula Gerson. 1997. "Body-Part Reliquaries and Body Parts in the Middle Ages." *Gesta* (The University of Chicago Press on behalf of the International Center of Medieval Art) 36 (1): 3-7, pp. 5-6.

⁹⁰ Catherine King, 1995. "Effigies: Human and Divine" in *Siena, Florence and Padua: Art, Society and Religion 1280-1400*, Volume II: Case Studies, edited by Diana Norman, 105-128, New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. 120-122.

Vanity and Punishment

Christians believed that although giving charity would reap spiritual reward, amassing earthly wealth led to plagues and punishment. Preachers and merchant writers interpreted personal and communal disasters as divine warnings against sodomy, gambling and displays of excessive vanity.⁹¹ During plagues preachers encouraged their congregations to band together in charity, staging penitential processions and changing their dress as embodied signs of repentance. Many preachers had first-hand experience caring for those dying of the plague. This limited their trust in the physicians' arts and enhanced their argument that plague could best be managed through virtuous (charitable) rather than physical (medicinal) means.⁹² Communal tragedies provided fertile ground to revive Florentine people's moral conscience. Yet many people responded by fleeing the city or by trying to turn the situation to their material advantage. The threat of impending death brought people's core values to the fore. Consequently, evidence of a diverse cultural discourse emerges relating to the conflicting concerns for the self and for the community, for the preservation of the body and of the soul.

The need for charity increased during plagues which affected all aspects of the Florentine religious and secular experience. Between 1348 and 1498 there were twenty-two years of exceptionally high mortality mostly due to epidemics.⁹³ Religious and secular measures for managing plague often overlapped. In 1453 the Florentine government provided alms to the Dominican order as though it were a payment to God by which the city's sins might be forgiven. This was also an investment as Dominicans could use the alms to support the community as it recovered. Communal attention was more likely to be given to the poor in the early stages of an epidemic, representing a moral pledge to God.⁹⁴

Not only were people dying, but they were postponing weddings, the lifeblood of the society. Alessandra Strozzi wrote in 1464 that "this plague is a great annoyance for girls

⁹¹ Debby, (2001), p. 148. This response was not limited to Tuscany, in France, Landry identified similarities between vain contemporary fashions with the corruption which incited God to destroy humanity with a flood in the time of Noah (Landry, p.73).

⁹² Debby (2001), p. 101 and see p. 132, referring to Dominici MS Ricc. 1301, Predica 13, lines 240-42: Dominici MS Ricc 1301, Predica 47, 156v

⁹³ Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, p. 79.

⁹⁴ Hunt, 294.

because there are so few marriages occurring.”⁹⁵ Plagues affected women’s marital status in a number of ways, as girls lost their dowries with their fathers and wives became desolate widows. Confraternities, including the *Company of Orsanmichele*, turned their attention to assisting widowed and orphaned plague survivors. Such companies, and their hospices, paid particular attention to housing, training and providing small dowries for impoverished girls, to protect the girls’ virtue and ensure the respectability of the following generations of the city.⁹⁶ Twenty percent of Florentine girls who married in the years immediately following the Black Death had their dowries subsidised by the charitable *Company of Orsanmichele*.⁹⁷ The hospice of *Orbatello*, founded in 1372 and initially funded by Messer Niccolò di Jacopo degli Alberti, housed approximately two hundred impoverished but respectable women in 1376.⁹⁸ Charity was therefore essential to protect women’s virtue following plagues.

Plague visited the city in 1423 and 1424, reigniting the intensity of people’s mortal fear. In 1424 Bernardino of Siena ended a stirring sermon by marching his enthused congregation out of Santa Croce and across the Piazza where he set fire to gambling paraphernalia, and encouraged people to add their own vain fripperies, including women’s headdresses. A participant wrote about what fire meant to those who witnessed it saying “you have never seen a more beautiful fire, and the flames spread in the air and confused the demon enemy of God, bringing glory, honour and praise to the reverence of our master Jesus.”⁹⁹ Bernardino’s action poignantly pitted Christian values against those of the Florentine elite because it destroyed the sartorial props that had been culturally endowed with connotations of virtue and status.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, the event demonstrates that Florentines could be remarkably receptive to the emotive sermons issuing spiritual warnings.

⁹⁵ Strozzi, “Lettera Trentunesima, to Filippo degli Strozzi in Napoli, 21 April, 1464” p. 295 *Questa moria dá loro gran noia, alle fanciulle, ché pochi parentadi ci si fa. Veggo che voi di costá n'avete anche sospetto, e di già ve n'è morti alcuni: she n'ho dispiacere assai, piú essendo costá che qua, e co piú sospetto ne staró.*” [my translation].

⁹⁶ Colleran, pp. 363-366

⁹⁷ Henderson, p. 35.

⁹⁸ Henderson, p. 35., and: Colleran, p. 363

⁹⁹ Debby, p. 54, quoting an anonymous report sourced from Bernardino’s *Prediche Volgari* published in 1934, Vol II, pp. 87-88. The original Italian reads: “...frate Bernarduno lasciasse la predica e venne di chiesa in sulla piazza con molti frati, e fece ardere el capannuccio che v'era da quattro cento tavolieri da giuocare, parecchie zane di dadi, piu di quattromila paia di naibi vecchi e nuovi di grandissima quantita, e imposti legati spenzoloni intorno intorno con multi capelli e balzi di donne e altre cose, con molta stipa da pie, che mai vedesti el piu bel fuoco, che andava infino all'aria la fiamma in confusione del dimonio nimico di Fio, e gloria e onore e lalde e reverenza del mostro Signor Gesu Cristo altissimo Iddio”

¹⁰⁰ Frick, (1989), pp. 20-21.

Savonarola likewise utilised the established rhetoric whereby vanity caused divine punishment, and built on the past success of bonfires of vanities. He gained influence when he called for repentance from vanity after the French invasion of 1494 and the plague of 1495. In 1496, he expressed a clear equation between rejecting vain attire and performing charitable acts by having ostentatious adornments confiscated and sold to acquire funds for charity.¹⁰¹ In 1497 he arranged a large bonfire of vanities for the cathartic combustion of superfluous ornamentation. He appealed to young men, once the trouble-makers of the city, to be the saviours of their community by pressuring their neighbours to give up their luxurious lifestyles, and to collect clothing, cosmetics, mirrors, paintings and books, to be burned in Piazza Signoria.¹⁰² On 7 February 1497 Girolamo Benivieni gave a commentary on this event saying that Savonarola's young followers:

Wherever they might find women or girls dressed immodestly and without their proper decorum on the public streets or in churches, they would admonish them in the same way, that is, with all humility, gentleness, and reverence, on God's behalf and exhort them to lay aside such vanities for the public good of the city and of their private souls. They would also search their own homes and the homes of our other citizens and encourage anyone found to have vain or lascivious things or things scarcely suitable to a Christian profession to strip themselves of such vanities and curses provoking God's wrath.¹⁰³

Although this account approves the actions, it paints an intimidating image of women being targeted and shamed in the streets, in church, and even in their homes. Rather than being caught up in the fervour of the immediate event, as Bernardino's crowd, Savonarola's tactic relied on sustained city-wide reform. People, stirred by either humiliation or religious fear, threw their once prized possessions into the fire. These events are evidence of moral tipping points during which changing social circumstances and fear of imminent death increased religious fear, which temporarily outweighed people's concerns for economic security and sartorially evident social success.

¹⁰¹ Warr, (2010), p. 164.

¹⁰² Guido Ruggiero, 2014. "Reform: Spiritual Enthusiasm, Discipline and a Church Militant" in *A Social and Cultural History of the Rinascimento*, 489-530, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.490.

¹⁰³ Girolamo Savonarola, 2006. *Selected Writings of Girolamo Savonarola, Religion and Politics 1490-1498*. Edited by Donald Beebe, Maria Pastore Passaro and Anne Borelli. Translated by Anne Borelli and Maria Pastore Passaro. New Haven: Yale University Press. "Bonfire of Vanities I: 7 February 1497, Girolamo Benivieni, 'Da che tu ci hai Signore,'" p. 246.

Social anxiety relating to the dangers of women's vanity became manifest in the identification of personal disasters as prophecies of communal disaster. According to one trope women's imaginations were capable of influencing the shape of their unborn children, meaning that by imagining the vain and unnatural silhouettes created by contemporary fashions they could give birth to unnaturally shaped, monstrous, children.¹⁰⁴ Abnormal births reminded people of their own potential to be both inwardly and outwardly corrupted.¹⁰⁵ Diarist, Luca Landucci described three simultaneous cases of abnormal births which, due to their proximity, he interpreted as prophetic rather than as individual punishments:

On the 12th of April 1489, there was in Venice, a monstrous birth of this quality; there was a long crack from the mouth to the nose, one eye was by the nose and one was behind the ear; the face was entirely split,¹⁰⁶ as if it had been stabbed. [...] During these days another was born in Padua, on Good Friday, who had two hands on each arm and two heads. It lived two to three days. One of those heads died first, was cut off, and the other only lived a little while longer. And in addition a woman over sixty years old had three babies at once. [...] it was true. These signs mean great tribulation to the cities where they befall.¹⁰⁷

On reading this text from a twenty-first-century perspective, certain medical conditions, such as a cleft palate, come to mind. Nevertheless, in the fifteenth-century afflictions of this kind were interpreted as consequences of women's vanity and indecent imaginations or as prophetic of communal punishment.

Penitential rituals, designed to ward off divine vengeance, moved seamlessly between sacred and secular spaces. During tense situations, when people's hope and faith could potentially decline, the Church spilled out into the streets in processions brandishing

¹⁰⁴ Monstrous births are discussed at greater length from page 296.

¹⁰⁵ Margrit Shildrick, 2002. *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self*. London: Sage Publications. p. 17.

¹⁰⁶ The verb *fettare*, meaning *to slice* is used a few times in this passage but in forms *fesso* and *fessa* which are adjectives meaning stupid, foolish or idiotic. He also uses *fussi* which may also be the plural of *fussa/o* meaning melted. It is possible, then, that this is a play on words to suggest not only the physical deformity but the way the face was seen by the viewers.

¹⁰⁷ Landucci, p.57 "*E a di 12 d'aprile 1489, ci fu come a Vinegia era nato uno mostrano di questa qualita: la bocca festa per lungo del naso, e un occhio dal naso e uno dirietro all'orecchio; e fesso tutto 'l viso, come se gli fussi stato dato una coltellata. E dinanzi alla testa aveva un corno e subito mori. Dicono che le parti da basso essere di strana maniera. Aveva coda d'animale. E in questi di ne naque un altro a Padova, el venerdi santo, ch'aveva a ogni braccio due mani, e due teste. E visse 2 in 3 giorni. Una di quelle teste mori prima, e taliatola, l'altra visse poco. E in oltre una donna di 60 anni a fatto tre figliuoli a un corpo. Queste cose strano sono state qui a Vinegia in pochi di. Questa lettera fu scritta spunto come ell' e qui e fu mandata nel banco di Tanai de' Nerli. E di quivi la copiai, e fu vero. Questi segni sinigicano grande tribulazione alle citta dove vengono.*" [my translation].

miracle-working relics and banners. The *Crucifix of Bianchi* Company formed in 1399 in response to European epidemics, wars and rebellions. Members staged a nine-day demonstration in Florence, to incline the city to penitence. The company's statute book recorded that participants:

Began to dress in humble white linen robes that reached their feet, robes that were closed and hid one's face and head, leaving open a finger of light for one's eyes. They marched in a great processional throng, fasting, whipping themselves, and singing hymns, following the standard of our Lord Jesus Christ [...] And in our city, more devoutly and less disorderly than elsewhere, such solemnity was celebrated with many prayers and pious acts of charity. Every sort of man and women [...] dressed like the others.¹⁰⁸

Following its success in 1399, the *Bianchi* continued to be active in the city's processions.¹⁰⁹ By creating a liminal space, joining a crowd, obscuring their vision, dressing identically, performing penitence and charity, the city appealed to God for deliverance.

Authoritative voices identified the plague as an opportunity to care for one's community. However, these voices cried out against a frightened and sometimes resistant populace. When plagues struck, many people fled rather than remaining to assist the dying. Literature immediately following the Black Death of 1348 reflects this, as the premise of Boccaccio's *Decameron* has the protagonists leave the plague-infested city, to escape its ghosts and to deal with their trauma by enjoying the countryside and making each other laugh by telling outrageous tales.¹¹⁰

The highest plague-related fatalities typically occurred in the heat of July, causing anxiety about the arrival of summer and leading those who could afford it to develop escape strategies.¹¹¹ In November 1448 Alessandra Strozzi wrote to her son Filippo, saying that the plague had returned and those who had country villas had already left. She reported "they say there won't be too many deaths this winter but a lot of people will die in the spring."¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Capitoli, 537, *Statuti della compagnia del Crocefisso di Santa Maria Maddalena dei Bianchi*, prologue, as translated and quoted by Weissman, p. 51.

¹⁰⁹ Weissman, p. 84.

¹¹⁰ Boccaccio, (1822), Intro, p. 29 "il che in quelle che ne guarirono, fu forse di minore onesta nel tempo che succedette, cagione." [my translation]

¹¹¹ Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, p. 80.

¹¹² This translation is from: Heather Gregory (trans.) 1997. *Selected Letters of Alessandra Strozzi, Bilingual Edition*. Berkley: University of California Press. pp. 36-39. The Italian, from a letter written on the 8 November 1448, reads "e quasi per tutto il contado ne muore quand' uno e quand' un altro [...] Istimasi che questo verno non farà il fracasso"

She acknowledged Filippo's concern for his youngest brother Matteo; however, she could not afford to move her family away from the city and was reluctant to send Matteo away on his own. Again, on 22 March 1463 she wrote that plague had returned "a little, in the manual labourers." Social class influenced the ways people planned and protected their bodies. Plague amid the poor made the nobility think about leaving but did not cause panic, as Alessandra stated:

They are not without caution: but for now the citizens are staying. I strongly think that when Easter is done, those who own a Villa in a good situation, will stay there [...]. Marco bought another farm in Mugello [...] so if there is plague, but it was healthy there, perhaps I would stay there.¹¹³

Alessandra's letter does not respond to the plague as a divine punishment. Instead it suggests that she, and her society, felt no moral conflict about protecting themselves and their families by leaving the city when plague arrived.

Despite the seeming normality of this practice, Coluccio Salutati condemned the wealthy who fled and ignored their responsibility to their community.¹¹⁴ In the early summer of 1497 Landucci wrote about the local death-toll, rumours and responses to plague. On 2 July he recorded that "25 people died, of fever and disease in only one day in Santa Maria Nuova", on 3 July "there are more houses discovered with disease, so that everyone's thought was to escape" and, indeed on 9 July:

Plague was discovered in San Marco and many of the brothers left and went to the villas of their fathers and relatives and friends. Brother Girolamo [Savonarola] remained in San Marco with some of the friars. During these days in Florence there were about 34 homes suffering from disease and fever.¹¹⁵

When faced with the prospect of a painful death, all but the staunchest of San Marco's friars chose to escape the city. Plagues brought ideals and practice into sharp contrast.

¹¹³ Strozzi, "Lettera Veniottesima, A Filippo degli Strozzi, A dì 22 di marzo 1463", pp.274-275 "*La moria ci è pure un poco ritocca, ma in gente manuali [...] E non ci si sta senza sospetto: per ancora e cittadini ci si stanno. Credo bene che fatto pasqua, chi arà villa che vi sia buona istanza, vi s'andrà a stare [...]. Marco ha comperato un podere in Mugello presso al suo, [...]che sendoci moria, e là fussi sano, forse vi s'assetterebbe*" [my translation]

¹¹⁴ George W McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation in Italian Humanism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991, p. 81.

¹¹⁵ Landucci, pp. 154, "*E a di 2 detto, ci moriva sasai di fibre e di morbo e morinne solo in un di, a Santa Maria Nuova, 25 el di. E a di 3 detto, ci si scopri piu case di morbo, in modo che ogniuno faceva pensiero di fuggire. E in questo tempo valeva un paio di pollastre lire 3, e un paio di capponi 7 o 8 lire; tanti c'era l'infermi. [...] E a di 9 di Luglio 1497, si scopri morbo in San Marco, e uscissene di molti frati e andavano alle ville di'loro padri e loro parenti e amici. E frate Girolamo rimase in San Marco con alquanti frati. E in questi di c'era in Firenze circa 34 case di morbo e anche di fibre.*" [my translation].

Further social commentary suggested that the immoral choices made in extreme circumstances had ongoing consequences for social standards of morality in the future. The *Decameron* indicates that moral laxity resulted from plague; attractive noble women, desperate for assistance, unashamedly displayed wounds on any part of their bodies to men. Boccaccio contended that of those women, “the ones who were cured, were perhaps less honest [read: chaste] in the future.”¹¹⁶ Boccaccio did not consider the threat of imminent death to be reason for women to relax their controlled and modest comportment, even indicating that such a lapse would permanently taint their virtue.

More brazenly, some people took advantage of their survival by living indulgently and even pillaging the homes of the dead. Following the Black Death, Matteo Villani (d.1363) wrote of what he perceived as the degradation of Florentine ethics, which resulted from “having seen the extermination of their neighbours and all the nations of the world.” He noted “that men being few, and abundant due to the legacy and inheritance of worldly goods” indulged in an “indecent and dishonest life as they had not done before” With fewer mouths to feed, people indulged in “sins of the throat, banquets, taverns and delights with dainty food,” they played and gambled, were unrestrained and lustful “finding clothes in strange shapes and disused and dishonest ways.” This lax morality and the irreverent treatment of the sartorially stratified social hierarchy caused especial concern given that the plague was interpreted by many as a punishment for that behaviour. Villani complained that the *popolo minuto* “did not wish to work on their trades,” arranged unsuitable marriages and dressed their “children and vile females in all the beautiful and expensive robes of honourable dead women.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Boccaccio, (1822), *Intro*, p. 9.

¹¹⁷ Matteo Villani, 1834. *Cronica di Matteo e Filippo Villani, con le vite d'uomini illustri fiorentini di Filippo e la cronica di Dino Compagni*. Milano: N. Bettoni e comp. <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp> .p. 3 “Come gli uomini furono peggiori che prima. Slimossi per quelli pochi diseret che rimasono in vita molte cose, che per la corruzione del peccato tutte fallirono agli avvisi degli uomini, seguendo nel contradio maravigliosamente. Credeltesi che gli uomini, i quali Iddio per grazia avea riserbati in vita, avendo veduto lo sterminio dei loro prossimi, e di tutte le nazioni del mondo, udito il simigliante, che di venissono di migliore condizione, umili, virtudiosi e cattolici, guardassonsi dall' iniquità e dai peccati, e fbssono pieni d'amore e di carità l'uno contra l'altro. Ma di presente restata la mortalità apparve il contradio; che gli uomini trovandosi pochi, e abbondanti per l'eredità e successioni dei beni terreni, dimenticando le cose passate come state non fossero, si dierono alla più sconcia e disonesta vita che prima non aveano usata. Perocché vacauo in ozio, usavano dissolutamente il peccato della gola, i conviti, taverne e delizie con delicate vivande, e' giuochi, scorrendo senza freno alla lussuria, trovando nei vestimenti stram; e disumate fogge e disoneste maniere, mutando nuove forme a tutti gli arredi. E il minuto popolo, uomini e femmine, per la soperehia abbondanza 'he si trovarono delle cose, non voleano tavoriare agli usati mestieri; - le più care e delicate vivande voleano per loro vita, e allibito si maritavano, Vestendo le fanti e le vili femmine tutte le belle e care robe delle orrevoli donne morte. E senza alcuno rilegno quasi tutta la nostra città scorse alla disonesta vita; e così, e peggio, l'altre città e provincie del mondo. E

Meiss has noted that although a moment of superfluity immediately followed the devastation of the plague, it did not last. What did last, however, was a psychological shift in the survivors who either developed a self-indulgent disregard for social regulations or a feverish attachment to the rituals and regulations of the Church, hoping to remain in God's favour to protect their lives and souls.¹¹⁸ Samuel Cohn Jr., likewise argues that the second wave of plague, in 1363 had a larger impact on the fear and thereby the piety Florentine people expressed through their charitable bequests to religious causes.¹¹⁹

Moralisers represented the plague as a punishment for vanity, and an opportunity for the society to save their souls through charity. However, in practice, when faced with imminent death, people's behaviour exhibited a wider range of values and concerns. On a broad communal level, confraternities conducted processions seeking divine reprieve. Church leaders followed stirring sermons against vanity (particularly targeting women's adornment) with bonfires to excite their congregations into repentance. Plagues interrupted the society's routines as people stopped working and arranging marriages. Confraternities and hospitals cared for the sick, dowered poor girls, housed widows and provided charitable outlets for the wealthy. This charitable enterprise was a moral and economic investment to prevent the survivors turning to uncivil lifestyles. Despite moralisers insisting that people loyally remain in their city, evidence indicates that many who could leave preferred to do so. Florentine people's degrees of adherence to an often conflicting range of religious, social and familial values were amplified in the range of actions they took when they faced the threat of death.

Conclusion

The written visual and spoken rhetoric of adornment reveals tension between personal wealth and charity toward the poor. Christians anticipated that the manner in which they balanced these values through a display of wealth and generosity in clothing the poor would be reflected in the way God would judge them. This moral rhetoric of adornment, with its implications for both social and eternal judgment, informed the ways that the social

secondo le novelle che sentire potemmo, niuna parte fu, in cui vivente in continentis si riserbasse, campati dal divino furore, stimando la mano di Dio essere stanca. Ma secondo il profeta Isaia, non è abbreviato il furore d'Iddio, né la sua mano stanca, ma molto si compiace nella sua misericordia, e però lavora sostenendo, per ritrarre i peccatori a conversione e penitenza, e punisce temperatamente" [my translation].

¹¹⁸ Meiss, p. 67.

¹¹⁹ Samuel K. Cohn Jr., 1996. "Last Wills: Family, Women, and the Black Death in Central Italy." In *Women in the Streets*, 39 - 56. Baltimore: the Johns Hopkins University Press, pp.39-40.

community read adorned bodies. Despite contradictions and debate, evident in the range of texts discussed, the society held both religious and social definitions of virtue that influenced their management of material wealth, particularly insofar as it was manifest in women's adornment. Significantly, despite the church establishing charity as the greatest virtue, when bestowing wearable charity people had to remain conscious of the social hierarchy and act within its bounds. The idea that social values of sartorially legible status acted as a justifiable restriction in the way people practiced the Christian value of charity, reveals the degree of sensibility with which the Florentine elite read adorned bodies within their community. From the time they were children, and through ongoing observation and practice, elite Florentine women learned and internalised modes for recognising, interpreting, maintaining, and (where appropriate) embodying hierarchical distinctions. Religious values acted to rein in excessive sartorial displays of hierarchical superiority and uncharitable behaviour through the rhetoric of moral embodiment. Religious imagery provided allegorical assistance for Christians to contemplate divine rewards for charitable acts and modest attire. By contrast, abnormal births and epidemics were cited as evidence of divine punishment played out within and upon the body because of immoral bodily actions including adultery, sodomy and the vanity evidenced by luxurious adornment. People sought to make amends for angering God through charity, processions, and bonfires of vanities. As indicated in the previous chapter, even in times of peace and abundance, permanently displayed apocalyptic images evoked people's fears of imminent judgment and encouraged viewers with a promise of heaven. While this chapter focused on religious imperatives of virtuous charity and the socioeconomic imperatives of sartorially evident hierarchy and wealth, the following chapter will focus on the philosophical and social importance of beauty in tension with religious and social concerns about virtue, hierarchy, artificiality and hypocrisy in women's adornment and comportment.

Chapter Four - Fashioning Beauty and Honesty

From the time Beatrice was fourteen her mother encouraged her to dress up beautifully to accompany her to church. Her most precious dress was her yellow *cioppa* which she wore with her bleached hair braided and held in place with a hairnet of beaded gold thread. Beatrice had already learned to move with decorum by observing and imitating her mother. She admired the beauty of saints and angels painted in church and the women depicted on the furniture and objects throughout her home. When her parents had guests, she noticed the compliments beautiful people received. Learning from these examples she had already begun cultivating elegant and controlled beauty in herself. While preparing her for church, Beatrice's mother talked to her about the importance of demonstrating her grace, beauty and virtue to attract the attention of a prospective husband. Although she had always trusted her mother's advice and had seen people behaving this way before, the memory of Bernardino's fire, and of the devotional book she read that insisted on humility, made her feel uneasy about dressing to impress in the church. On one such occasion, when she was sixteen she was humiliated when the priest likened the train of a dress, just like the one she was wearing that day, to a serpent's tail. She felt self-conscious for the rest of the mass and as she walked home she felt like she was dragging demons along behind her, clinging to her once-beautiful skirts.

According to Christian and philosophical beliefs of the early Renaissance physical beauty was a reflection of honesty and virtue whereas ugliness revealed vice.¹ This connection, supported by religious rhetoric, was utilised in secular rhetoric to emphasise the importance of female beauty as an expression of social virtue and wealth, fundamental criteria for securing an advantageous marriage. Yet preachers, moral philosophers and certain diarists also argued that women's attempts to adhere to society's pressure to be beautiful demonstrated dishonesty and vanity. Individuals had to construct corporal identities, using potentially dishonest means, to embody the cultural ideals of honesty. The concept of

¹ Joanne Snow-Smith, 1998. "Michelangelo's Christian Neoplatonic Aesthetic of Beauty in the Early Oeuvre: the *Nuditas Virtualis* Image." In *Concepts of Beauty in Renaissance Art*, edited by Francis Ames-Lewis and Mary Rogers, 147 - 178. Aldershot: Ashgate. And: Liana De Girolami Cheney, 1998. "Vasari's Interpretation of Female Beauty." In *Concepts of Beauty in Renaissance Art*, edited by Francis Ames-Lewis and Mary Rogers, 179-190. Aldershot: Ashgate, p.184, and: David Alan Brown, 2001. "Introduction." In *Virtue and Beauty: Leonardo's Ginevra de' Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women*, 11-24. Princeton: National Gallery of Art Washington, Princeton University Press. p. 13.

onestà was bound up with virtue and chastity. When articulated through tangible means, honesty denoted a unity of character and physical features with the accurate performance of culturally constructed expectations of one's status and occupation. Honesty was thereby judged according to one's adherence to cultural expectations rather than adherence to one's internal sense of self. Preachers, including Bernardino of Siena, challenged this interpretation of honesty, arguing that regardless of society's judgements, God would judge according to the internal self. Literature likewise suggested that the truth of a person's attitude and motivations would become manifest and their deception punished. This tension was smoothed, in part, by the argument that by constructing the self with the dress and behaviour conventional for one's status, one would instil the core values of those expectations, meaning that one could fashion a new truth. This reassertion of the link between appearance and truth emphasised the importance of fashioning one's appearance to both internalise and project beauty and virtue.

Tensions between secular and religious ideals and interpretations of women's beauty as virtue are most clearly articulated in the rhetoric and practice of church attendance. The church constituted one of the few public spaces in which elite Florentine women could socialise. Women therefore used the setting to publicly flaunt the beauty of their daughters, enhanced by associations of religious virtue, in order to improve their marriage prospects. Preachers spoke against this secular practice in the sacred space. One means of doing so was to taint the women's beautiful adornments with demonic allusions, suggesting that their monstrous imagery was the true spiritual core of women's socially fashioned façade. The values that women learned from an early age regarding how they should manage their appearance, pulled in two contradictory directions that they had to navigate for the benefit of both their lives and their souls.

The ideas presented in this chapter were primarily propagated by elite educated men from religious, philosophical and political spheres of influence. The male-dominated cultural debate had practical implications, primarily for women's lived experience, because it influenced the social expectations and judgments made of women's appearance.² This chapter will unpack some of the aesthetic and social theories that influenced the way Renaissance people read the adorned bodies of their peers. It will demonstrate people's

²Barthes, p.4.

engagement and struggle with the contradictions between cultivating etiquette and interpreting appearance as honesty.

Natural and Cultivated Beauty as an Honest Expression of Virtue and Status

On an idealistic level, Florentine society sought to read beauty as an expression of honest virtue. As problematic as it is to equate beauty to virtue and as alien as some historians claim it to be, fashioning one's appearance with the expectation that it will give a certain impression to viewers about one's identity does have parallels in western cultural practices into the twenty-first century.³ The paradoxical system that demands the 'honest' representation of culturally constructed ideals is evidenced in Bourdieu's argument that people read the sign-wearing and meaning-producing body as a tangible expression of a person's natural moral identity (even when that nature is one of cultivation).⁴ The legibility of appearance relies on cultural expectations and associations, and on an awareness that appearance inspires emotional reactions in others. Giacomo Rizzolatti and Corrado Sinigaglia's *Mirrors in the Brain* notes that when we meet new people their appearance and conduct provokes feelings that "supply our brain with an important instrument for navigating the sea of sensory information and automatically triggering the most appropriate responses to ensure our survival and wellbeing."⁵ Further research found that cosmetics affect viewers' automatic judgments of the user's attractiveness, trustworthiness, intelligence and likability.⁶ In the fifteenth-century, women sculpted their bodies through their use of a combination of tight- and loose-fitting elements of attire.⁷ In the twenty-first century it has become more common to sculpt the body directly through cosmetic surgery for a range of reasons including a desire to conform to cultural ideals of beauty, and to

³ Joseph Manca, 2001. "Moral Stance in Italian Renaissance Art: Image, Text and Meaning." *Artbus et Historiae* 22 (44): 51-76. Manca insisted, in his discussion of fifteenth-century moral aesthetics, that idea of beauty deriving from virtue seemed 'alien' and the concepts 'unrelated' to twentieth-century minds, p.53. For an examination of the way western societies foreground women's beauty as a signifier of their virtue, character and worth see: Cheryl Brown Travis, Kayce L. Maginnis, and Kristin M. Bardari. 2000. "Sexuality, Society, and Feminism." In *Psychology of Women*, pp. 237-272. Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association.

⁴ Bourdieu, pp. 191-193.

⁵ Rizzolatti & Sinigaglia, pp. 173-174.

⁶ N.L. Etcoff, S. Stock, L.E. Haley, S.A. Vickery, and D.M. House. 2011. "Cosmetics as a Feature of the Extended Human Phenotype: Modulation of the Perception of Biologically Important Facial Signals." Edited by Satoru Suzuki. *PLoS ONE* 6 (10). <http://www.plosone.org/article/info:doi/10.1371/journal.pone.0025656>.

⁷ The use of attire to sculpt the body into desirable silhouettes will be discussed further in this chapter, for more on this topic see: Calamandrei E. Poliadori, *Le Veste delle Donne Fiorentine nel Quattrocento*. Rome: Multigraphica Editrice, 1973. pp. 6-7.

change the way one is seen and, consequently, treated.⁸ The conditions of cosmetic enhancement have evolved between the fourteenth- and twenty-first centuries, yet Western societies have continued to use cosmetics to draw viewers' attention to the features of the body that are biologically or culturally associated with particular values. Appearance is able to generate a significant response due to an underlying expectation that peoples' appearance communicates their true identities.

The philosophy that human beauty and nobility were a 'Mirror of the Soul' reflecting truth and virtue was partially generated by theologians. Prior to the Renaissance, Thomas Aquinas taught that what people recognise as beautiful is the harmonious relationship of proportion, integrity and clarity, and in humans these qualities had to exist in union with mind, body and emotion.⁹ For Aquinas, beauty could not exist without goodness, and physical beauty increased as a result of spiritual virtue and charity. In this instance, charity was the translation of a rational and emotional state into physical behaviour. This, Aquinas argued, made it rare to find evil in beautiful people.¹⁰ In a sermon on 31 March 1425, Bernardino of Siena advised his congregation that "honesty makes one beautiful and dishonesty makes one ugly, and the woman who paints her face can never be honest."¹¹ Similarly, Savonarola opposed cosmetics but adhered to this basic principle concerning natural beauty stating that "you can tell the barbarians from those who believe by their ugly and angelic faces respectively." Dominici engaged with the link between beauty and virtue in a different way, suggesting the impact that the rhetoric of beauty and virtue was having on women. His *Regola* told the story of a girl who, due to her disappointment that the beauty of her soul was not evident in her appearance, began to neglect her body and became ill. Doctors could not understand her illness but a spiritual man, aware of the intrinsic link between body and mind, encouraged the girl to be patient with her body, suggesting that her internal beauty

⁸ For a discussion of contemporary theories on cosmetic surgery see the chapter "Cosmetic Surgery and the Eclipse of Identity" in Llewellyn Negrin, 2008. *Appearance and Identity: Fashioning the Body in Postmodernity*. New York: Palgrave, pp. 75-96.

⁹ Kevin E. O'Reilly, 2007. *Aesthetic Perception: A Thomistic Perspective*. Dublin: Four Courts Press.

¹⁰ Ramsay, 1997, pp. 134-138, Also see Pietro Bembo quoted in: Jane Bridgeman, "'Condecentu et netti...' Beauty, Dress and Gender in Italian Renaissance Art." In *Concepts of Beauty in Renaissance Art*, edited by Francis Ames-Lewis and Mary Rogers, 44-51. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998, p.48.

¹¹ Bernardino of Siena (*Le Prediche Volgare*, Vol. III), from the sermon "LVI Come Debba Vivere La Donna in Questo Mondo E massimamente le Vergini - sab. 31th Marzo" p. 227: "la onestà la fa bella e la disonestà la fa laida. mai può essere onesta la donna che si dipigne il volto." [my translation]

would finally be manifest in her eternal resurrected body.¹² This alternative interpretation indicates that beauty would be a divine reward for virtue at the resurrection rather than something women should expect in life. Trusting living appearances was complicated by the fact that adornment required human action initiated by human will which could oppose divine will. The need for human agency to select attire and cosmetics to adorn the body and to enact various behaviours presented a difficult interpretive task for those seeking to discern truth from the tangible. Christian leaders predominantly accepted that there was a link between beauty and virtue but their interpretation and discussion of the link and its interaction with human agency varied. The problem of agency did, however, contribute to a consistent argument made in religious circles that the only legitimate means of cultivating beauty was through cultivating virtue, not artifice.

From the 1440s, Marsilio Ficino interpreted, studied and disseminated the works of Plato, whose theory of forms served to validate and reinforce the existent association Florentine Christians made between beauty and divine truth. For instance, in a 1457 letter addressed to the poet Peregrino Agli, Ficino wrote that “we do indeed perceive the reflection of divine beauty with our eyes and mark the resonance of divine harmony with our ears - those bodily senses which Plato considers the most perceptive of all.” The letter went on to warn that “it was the mark of a dull mind” to enjoy beauty for its own sake without seeking “anything beyond what his eyes can see.”¹³ In a later letter to the diplomat Giovanni Cavalcanti, Ficino noted that in the case of observing human beauty, man:

Thus called to the sublime through vision, plunges himself into the mire through touch. Although he could become God instead of man by contemplating the divine through human beauty, from man he returns to beast preferring the physical shadow of form to true spiritual beauty.¹⁴

Although the recipients of Ficino’s texts were more elite than those of his religious predecessors, discussed earlier, both sought to impress on their audiences the imperative to understand the divinity of beauty without being corrupted by the carnal desires that beauty could elicit.

¹² See Debby (2001), p.100.

¹³ Ficino, (1975 vol. 1) p. 44.

¹⁴ Ficino, (1975, vol. 1), p. 85, this and the above quoted letter are from a collection of letters first compiled and printed by Ficino himself in 1495. No specific date is provided for this letter but the first book of letters in which this is found are all dated between 1457 and 1476.

Secular literature encouraged readers to learn and cultivate signs of honesty and beauty, suggesting that the meanings constructed through practice could form a true identity. A performative approach to dress and behaviour had the potential to seem deceptive but it represented an increasingly accepted way of conforming to society.¹⁵ Secular literature encouraged pleasing comportment and appropriate speech above the display of private motives. As Francesco Barbaro argued, even dumb animals demonstrate their emotions through their eyes and actions, but the thing that distinguished humans was the ability to control those signs. He argued that “demeanour, which is above all the most certain expression of personality and is found in no living creature except man, demonstrates signs of an honest, respectful, and abstemious character.” For this reason he argued that “Moderation in a wife is believed to consist especially in controlling her demeanour, behaviour, speech, dress, eating and love making.”¹⁶ The totality of the wife’s public and private adornment and comportment demonstrated her virtue and humanity. Barbaro compiled statements from ancient writers to support the idea that the body and its comportment was indicative of soul and mind.¹⁷ For him, the wife’s deliberately controlled comportment revealed her honesty.

The philosophical associations of beauty, control and virtue had implications for the ways women were judged. Men praised women’s beauty by associating external signs to internal qualities. For instance, Lorenzo il Magnifico de’ Medici wrote an account of Simonetta Cattaneo Vespucci (1453-1476), saying that in looking at Vespucci he could “hardly know what was of greater beauty in her: the body or her mind and intellect.” His ensuing description shows that his perception of her mind was derived from an examination of her body:

She is of beautiful and suitable grandeur,¹⁸ the colour of her flesh is white but not deathly pale [...], her appearance is grave and not haughty, sweet and pleasant, without thoughtlessness or cowardice; her eyes are lively and don’t roam, without any sign of arrogance or lightness. The whole body is well proportioned, which among others things showed dignity without anything rough or inept, [...] in going and in dancing [...] and in effect all her movements,

¹⁵ Martin, pp.35-36.

¹⁶ Barbaro, p. 202.

¹⁷ Shelley MacLaren, 2007. “Shaping the Self in the Image of Virtue: Francesco da Baberino’s *I Documenti D’Amore*.” In *Image and Imagination of the Religious Self in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*. Turnhout: Brepols. p. 88.

¹⁸ The Italian word *grandezza* has connotations of size, nobility or quality.

are elegant and attractive.[...] in dress and behaviour she is very clean and well ornamented, fleeing from all the fashions that noble and gentle women agree lower gravity and dignity. Her speech is really sweet, full of acute and good sentences.¹⁹

Writers expressed a belief that beauty derived from the unity of character, status, attire and etiquette.²⁰ Lorenzo demonstrated this unity by identifying the virtues associated with Vespucci's skin tone, bearing, eyes, movement, voice and adornment. He emphasised her positive features by acknowledging the potential negative connotations one might find when surveying these attributes in others (for instance her eyes being lively and steady rather than arrogant and roaming). Vespucci's beauty is enhanced through her cultivation of appropriate body-language and dress.

¹⁹ Lorenzo de' (il Magnifico) Medici, 1913. *Opere*. Edited by Attilio Simoni. Vol. 1. Bari. "*Comento del magnifico Lorenzo de' Medici sopra alcuni de' suoi sonetti*, pp. 36-37 "*Era la sua bellezza, come abbiamo detto, mirabile: di bella e conveniente grandezza; il colore delle carni bianco e non ismorto, vivo e non acceso; l'aspetto suo grave e non superbo, dolce e piacevole, senza alcun segno o d'alterigia o di levita. Tutto il corpo si bene proporzionato, che tra l'altre mostrava dignita sana alcuna cosa rozza o inetta; e non dimeno, nell' andare e nel ballare e nelle cose che e lecito alle donne adoperare il corpo, ed in effetto in tutti li suoi moti, era elegante ed avvenente. Le mani sopra ttte le altre, che mai facessi natura, bellissime, come diremo sopra alcuni sonetti, alli quali le sue mani hanno dato materia; nell'abito e portamenti suoi molto pulita e bene a proposito ornata, fuggendo pero tutte quelle fogge che a nobile e gentile donne non si convengono, e servando [36] la gravita e dignita. Il parlare dolcissimo veramente, pieno d'acute e buone sentenzie, come faremo intendere nel processo, perche alcune parole e sottili inquisizioni sue hanno fatto argomento a certi delli miei sonetti. Parole e sottili inquisizioni sue hanno fatto argone si poteva nelle sue parole o desiderare o levare; li motti e facezie sue erano argute e salsa, senza offensione pero d'alcuno dolcemente mordere*" [my translation], also see Tignali, p 67.

²⁰ For an argument for Renaissance identification of beauty in etiquette over personality see: Bridgeman, pp. 44-51, also on the importance of unity expressed in courtesy literature see: Johnston, p. 24.



Figure 10: Masolino da Panicale *The Temptation of Adam and Eve*, Brancacci Chapel, Church of Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence, Fresco, mid-fifteenth century

As Lorenzo's reference to Vespucci's skin-tone indicates, beauty and virtue were read in the comportment, shape, and complexion of the body's surface. This is clearly exemplified in representations of Adam and Eve which provided artists with the opportunity to engage with a range of moral, social and aesthetic meanings of the essential, unclothed, body. As a subject, Adam and Eve's bodies prior to the Fall (uncorrupted and created in God's image) allowed the artist to represent nudity as innocent and beautiful. Nevertheless the attributes that denoted beauty to the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century eye depend on cultural conventions. Engrained ideas of the ideal gendered (weightlessly elegant) body can be read in Masolino da Panicale's mid-fifteenth century *The Temptation of Adam and Eve* in the Brancacci Chapel in the Church of Santa Maria del Carmine (Figure 10).²¹ In this fresco, depicting a time prior to society and labour, Eve's body is pale and rounded, suggestive of a domestically sheltered and well fed body, whereas Adam's body is tanned and muscular

²¹ Perri Lee Roberts. 1993. *Masolino da Panicale*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p.75.

suggestive of a body that already ‘worked by the sweat of his brow’ outdoors. In fifteenth-century Florence, women were deemed to be most beautiful and virtuous when they had pale skin, blond hair and a healthy young body. Pale skin implied a domestic lifestyle, out of the sun and out of sight of corrupting influences. Such a lifestyle was unachievable for lower-class women, whose work took them outdoors. Blond hair was likewise associated with divine virtue and wealthy women acquired this sign of virtue by bleaching their hair in the sun, while maintaining their pale complexion with a wide-brimmed open-topped hat called a *Solana*.²² Alessandra Strozzi’s letters indicate that pale skin was a category for assessing the beauty and virtue of a potential bride.²³ Women’s complexion communicated their status, implied their virtue and influenced their social and familial lives.

The surface of the body, not only its tone but its scars, wrinkles and its carriage, acted as signs of life experiences, emotions and individuality.²⁴ Christine de Pizan warned women that poor humour and ungracious personality may become evident in one’s appearance and have negative physical, social and spiritual consequences:

If you could only see how unattractive your face is when you are agitated, you would be horrified! [...] Avoid such anger, for behaviour of this sort is displeasing to God. Your body is the worse for it; and, it makes you less liked.²⁵

The way one habitually behaved gradually developed decipherable evidence of one’s character and activities on the body’s surface which was likely to affect how one was viewed and treated by others.

In one example, imperfections were written on the body by the female task of spinning thread which was a part of daily life in Renaissance Florence. Spinners developed a kinetic memory that allowed them to work quickly with precision. They pulled flaxen fibres from the distaff and spun until the whole thread had run through their carefully trained, saliva-

²² Thornton, p. 244. Two instances of fair skin and blond hair being associated with virtue are: in Giovanni Morelli’s *Ricordi* (1393-1421) where he described his sister’s beauty by saying she was blond and had the corresponding virtues (pp.178-180), and Christine de Pizan who also argued that “Nothing, after all is more beautiful headdress for a woman than fine blond hair” in Pizan, (1989), p. 176. Yet social conventions were not always compatible with religious rhetoric, for instance, in his *On the Education of Children*, Giovanni Dominici lamented the practice of “keeping the hair blond” for the love of the world (p. 45).

²³ Gregory, Heather, trans. 1997. *Selected Letters of Alessandra Strozzi*, Bilingual Edition. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 143 & 155.

²⁴ Valentine Groebner, 2007. *Who Are You? Identification, Deception and Surveillance in Early Modern Europe*. New York: Zone Books, pp. 97-98.

²⁵ Pizan, (1989), pp.204-5.

moistened fingers.²⁶ This caused callused fingers and swollen lips.²⁷ When women's bodies became deformed from spinning it may have added support to the idea that noble women (who did less spinning) should be less deformed and more beautiful. It is ironic then, that noble-women's beauty was associated with virtue while poor women's ugliness, derived from hard work and low income, was associated with vice.

Florentine terminology for social division, *popolo grasso* (fat people) and *popolo minuto* (little people), expressed the way status and wealth shaped the bodies of society members.²⁸ Fatness and its covering became a symbol of self-centeredness and moral corruption in late fourteenth-century literature. Christine de Pizan wrote that:

The body, made too fat by indulgence, kills both its own virtue and its own soul. Pride, of course, delights in such rich nourishment, making you covet not only superabundant food but also clothes, jewels, and ornaments, until you scarcely think of anything else - neither what they cost nor where they come from.²⁹

Therefore one's eating habits (informed by one's moral attitude toward wealth and gluttony) shaped the body and perpetuated moral weaknesses including vanity. Boccaccio used his *Decameron* to satirise the hypocritical fatness of friars whose vocation insisted on self-denial and charity. He wrote that numerous scandalously corrupt friars were "not ashamed to appear fat, flushed in the face, or wearing soft raiment." He attacked not only their outer bodies but what they absorbed into the skin, ate or drank, accusing them of filling their cells with "ointments, boxes full of various sweets [...] perfumes, and oils, and flagons overflowing with evil [...] valuable wines" He further suggested that the health of their internal bodies reflected their unholy behaviour, saying:

They are not ashamed that others know they are gouty, flattering themselves that others do not know and that much fasting, a coarse diet and diminutive sober living, makes people lean, thin and most healthy.³⁰

²⁶ Jones & Stallybrass, p. 105.

²⁷ Jones & Stallybrass, p. 106.

²⁸ To read more on how this social division manifested itself in Florentine social and economic politics see: Weissman, pp. 5-10.

²⁹ Pizan, (1989), p.76.

³⁰ Boccaccio, (1822), vol.3, Day 7 Story 3, p. 70 "*essi non si vergognano d'apparir grassi, d'apparir coloriti nel viso, d'apparir morbidi ne' vestimenti et in tutte le cose loro; e non come colombi, ma come galli tronfi, colla cresta levata, pettoruti procedono: e, che è peggio (lchiamo stare d'aver le lor celle piene d'alberelli di lattovari e d'unguenti colmi, di scatole di cari confetti piene, di ampolle e di guastadette con acque lavorate e con oli, di bottacci di malvagia e di di Greco e d'altri vini preziosissimi traboccanti, in tanto che non celle di frai, ma botteghe di speziali o d'unguentari appaiono più tosto d'rignardanto) essi non si vergognano che altri sappia*

Boccaccio further implied that friars engaged in uncondoned sexual activity saying the customary cure for gout was chastity. Literature thereby warned that one's morals, attitude and hypocrisy would influence one's health and physical appearance, making internal truth external and legible.

As we have seen, ideally the surface, shape and comportment of the body expressed signs of character, control, virtue and status. Adornment worked alongside these physical signs to create a more comprehensive picture of identity. A revision of Florentine sumptuary legislation on April 27 1420, which sought to minimise expenditure and standardise hierarchical division, justified its aims by echoing contemporary Christian sentiment to do with adornment as a reflection of truth. It stated that "Chastity, the leading ornament of women's beauty" was being defiled by women's "unbridled luxury of clothing," which had a profound effect on virtue, because clothing "reveals the balance of the mind."³¹ This secular legal document appeals to the culturally engrained rhetoric that interpreted clothing choice as shaping moral character.³² However, revisions of sumptuary legislation in themselves are a testament to the problems inherent in reading external appearance, including adornment, as an expression of truth. Fashions changed and as they changed so too did the meanings and virtues associated with them.

Sartorial meaning making could develop organically or be deliberately imposed. Preachers and lawmakers were quick to overlay fashions with ethical, social and gendered implications. Without being attuned to the social implications of previous styles, clothing could have very little intrinsic communicative value. For instance, slashing garments became a stylised sartorial technique in the fifteenth century. It originated from people trying to use clothes they had outgrown or which they had acquired too small (for example, attire received as

loro esser gottosi, e credonsi che altri non conosca e sappia che I digiuni assai, le vivande grosse e poche et il viver sobriamente faccia gli uomini magri e sottili et il più sani; e se pure infermi ne fanno, non almeno di gotte gl'infermano, alle quali si suole per medicina dare la castità et ogni altra cosa a vita di modesto frate appartenente. E credonsi che altri non conosca, oltra la sottil vita le vigilie lunghe, l'orare et il disciplinaris, dover gli uomini pallidi et afflitti rendere; e che nè San Domenico, nè San Francesco, senza aver Quattro cappe per uno, non di tintillani nè d'altri panni gentili, ma di lana grossa fatti e di natural colore, a cacciare il freddo, e non ad apparere, si vestissero." [my translation].

³¹ Archivio di Stato di Firenze.1420. *Provvisioni Registri* 110.12r, "Pudicitie decorum precipuum mulieris ornamentum [...] Effrenato vestimentorum luxu deturpari [...] Mentis indicet qualitatem". The beginning of this except echoes 1 Peter 3-4 that advised wives to adorn themselves not with seductive hairstyles and gold apparel but with "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit."

³² It may be that the oratory tone of this preamble was adopted due to the practice of periodically reading sumptuary laws in the public spaces to keep people informed of the legal limits to their spending.

charity, or which soldiers took from the dead).³³ As a fashion derived from usurping another person's clothes/identity, it received criticism as dishonest and, once stylised, as vain. Andrea Denny-Brown demonstrates the implication, present to the minds of moralists, that slits in female garments, which revealed successive layers of fabric to men's eyes, invited connotations of female penetrability and lasciviousness.³⁴ Therefore, one feature of attire carried multiple levels of positive and negative meanings related to its history, application and interpretation. That sartorial feature was read alongside the rest of the wearer's garments and body-cues.

Alberti's *Books of the Family* acknowledged the cultural debate regarding the use of hierarchical signs of wealth and adornment as a means of expressing and interpreting beauty and virtue. The books advise that the household be well dressed according to their status.³⁵ Alberti's speaker, Ricciardo, noted that virtue was spiritually valuable but in a social world it was not enough to achieve admiration and respect; rather, virtue must be accompanied by wealth and good looks:

Virtue ought to be dressed in those seemly ornaments which it is hard to acquire without affluence and an abundance of the things which some men call transient and illusory and others describe as practical and useful supplements to virtue. [...] the first thing necessary is not so much either virtue or riches, but [...] the face, the eyes, the manner, and the presence of a man, giving him a certain grace and charm full of modesty. [...] you know if you are faced with two men of equal virtue, equally zealous, equal in every other aspect of fortune, noble and rich, you are likely to see one of them happy and well loved, while the other is held back and almost despised.³⁶

Alberti introduces the hierarchical restrictions of culturally recognised virtue by noting that the trappings of virtue rely on one's wealth. He further argued that people were treated differently according to their beauty. For philosophers, beauty could be cultivated through virtuous, devout acts, whereas for more practical and socially minded people like Alberti beauty could be achieved through physical alteration.

³³ Désirée Koslin, 2002. "Value-added Stuffs and Shifts in Meaning; An Overview and Case Study of Medieval Textile Paradigms." In *Encountering Medieval Textiles and Dress*, 233-250. New York: Palgrave MacMillan. p.243. Also see: Muzzarelli, p.76.

³⁴ Andrea Denny-Brown, 2004. "Rips and Slits: The Torn Garment and the Medieval Self." In *Clothing and Culture, 1350-1650*, edited by Catherine Richardson, 223-237. Cornwall: Ashgate.

³⁵ Patricia Rubin, 1996. "Domenico Ghirlandaio and the Meaning of History in Fifteenth Century Florence." In *Domenico Ghirlandaio 1449-1494, Atti del Convegno*, 97-108. Firenze: Centro Di, p. 102.

³⁶ Alberti, (1969), p. 250.

Literature outlining etiquette advised that a woman select her adornment according to her status and character and to enhance her natural beauties with enough subtlety so as not to be mocked for her effort.³⁷ For instance Barbaro advised that wives:

Care more to avoid censure than to win applause in their splendid style of dress. If they are of noble birth they should not wear mean and despicable clothes if their wealth permits otherwise. Attention must be given, we believe, to the condition of the matter, the place, the person and the time [...] we approve neither of someone who is too finely dressed nor someone who is too negligent in her attire [...] Excessive indulgence on clothes is a good sign of vanity. Moreover, experience and authorities have shown that such wives are more apt to turn from their own husbands to other lovers.³⁸

Barbaro insisted on clear sartorial delineation of social classes. He also suggested that women's dress was informed by their self-awareness and morality. He placed this in stark terms by stating that a viewer could infer that women in overly-fine attire were vain adulteresses. Given that women's social currency was in their chastity and fidelity, the circulation of this attitude through literature had damning implications for women's self-fashioning. Adding pressure to those attempting to strike a perfect balance of beauty, status, and modesty, if their efforts were too obvious they could, instead, appear awkward, dishonest or pretentious. If one did unintentionally express affectation it could be argued that it was a truer reflection of character than the message one intended to convey.

The act of dressing requires intentional action and embodiment of a particular aspect of one's identity. A change in attire altered the wearer's physical comportment while signalling social status and it altered the way in which people interacted with the wearer.³⁹ It follows, then, that this change in physicality and social acceptability could work physiologically on the subject to develop a new, true identity.

The transformative power of adornment was especially relevant for women because changes in costume accompanied major shifts in their familial identities as well as shifts in

³⁷ For instance see: Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* (1510-1528) p. 194, and Thomas More's sixteenth century *Utopia*. In *Utopia*, for instance the inhabitants "consider it lazy and negligent not to keep up natural beauty by grooming, but they consider seeking help from cosmetics a disgraceful affectation." See: Thomas More, *Utopia*. Translated by Clarence H. Miller. New Haven: Yale Nota Bene, 2001 pp. 100-101.

³⁸ Barbaro, pp. 206-207.

³⁹ See Warr, (2010), p.57, for a discussion of Pope Innocent III identifying and condemning the way in which people's treatment of others is influenced by the appearance of wealth and social significance.

immediate context.⁴⁰ Barbaro noted that the beauty of one's appearance depended on the appropriateness of one's dress to one's context ("the place the person and the time"). Alberti similarly demonstrates the importance of women's attire as an expression of contextualised identity. In *Book of the Family*, a man asks his wife if she would be respected for attending a festival proudly outfitted in an elegant dress, with her hair tied up in a handkerchief, carrying a sword and distaff, to which she replied "I'd be thought mad, poor me, if I dressed like that." The husband concluded:

It does not benefit a woman like you to carry around a sword, nor to do other manly things that men do. Nor is it always and in all places fitting for a woman to do everything that is proper for a woman.⁴¹

The way one dressed could be read as demonstrating the state of one's social- and self-awareness. One's identity was not static but shifted throughout one's life along with changes in context and personal maturity.

The unity of the body's shape and colouring, as well as attire, status, behaviour and speech came into play when assessing a person's honesty, virtue and beauty. A true identity could be created through the selection of contextual attire and etiquette. Even if one paid no heed to one's context or comportment, one's appearance would affect the way one's character and virtue would be interpreted by others. The pursuit of a single truth from an adorned body relied on one's familiarity with contemporary sartorial meanings and expectations. Therefore, despite the philosophical ideal that beauty was a consequence of virtue, in practical terms people remained conscious that sartorial meanings could change and legible truth must be read through the inconstant signs of fashion.

Maintaining Hierarchy: Economic Fears and Monstrous Allusions

Rather than only focusing on beauty as a positive state of the soul and natural privilege of the elite, moralists constructed monstrous allusions to shame women against the use of vain attire, warning that humiliation and chaos would result from poorly maintained economy and hierarchy. Courtesy books and sumptuary laws sought to restrict people's ability to

⁴⁰ The manner in which changes in women's identities were marked by a change in their attire will be the subject of further analysis in the second part of this thesis.

⁴¹ Leon Battista Alberti, 1969. *The Family in Renaissance Florence*. Translated by Renee Neu Watkins. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, p.224.

elevate themselves by dressing in more costly adornments than their social superiors, or to waste their own, and ultimately the city's, wealth in the process.

The idea of unity of virtue and status as beauty added weight to arguments for dressing within one's social station. When addressing the concerns of the elite, Christine de Pizan argued that fashions threatened individuality as "one follows the other, like sheep [...]" insisting that the fashionable must imitate one another."⁴² She told her readers of the irony that some people "pawn one gown in order to buy another," and so, through their attempt to "outshine their neighbours" they "relegate themselves to poverty."⁴³ However, Christine suggested that Italian fashions displayed greater moderation than the French because, although Italian women used more impressive ornaments they reused and refashioned them, making them more financially viable and less ostentatious.⁴⁴ Christine said it was ridiculous for a poor woman to dress above her station "when one knows it is not really her own and that she does not even possess the means for maintaining it."⁴⁵ This comment is reflective of the fact that people knew the social and economic status of those with whom they engaged (people lived, worked and purchased goods predominantly within their own neighbourhood⁴⁶) and that "poor judgement" on the dresser's part would diminish their credibility. She made much the same point about merchants' wives, adding that "it is ridiculous to feel no shame in selling one's merchandise [...] and yet to feel shame at wearing the corresponding costume, it has its own lustre for those who wear it appropriately." She reminded her readers that "those pretending to finery must be considered disguised" and such a state "is not good for either soul or body, but it can cause new taxes for their husbands."⁴⁷ She appealed to both moral and economic concerns to express the contemporary opinion that the unity of character, class, context, virtue and appearance ennobled and beautified the person.

⁴² Pizan, (1989), pp. 174-5.

⁴³ Pizan, (1989), p.175.

⁴⁴ Pizan, (1989), pp. 175- 176.

⁴⁵ Pizan, (1989), p.175.

⁴⁶ Weissman, p. 48, Elizabeth Currie, 2009. "Demand and the Clothing Trade in Florence from the Mid-Sixteenth to Early Seventeenth Centuries." *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 39 (3): 484-510.pp. 485 – 486.

⁴⁷ Pizan, (1989), pp. 195-196.

The protection of modest yet distinct gender and hierarchical representation was a key concern addressed in sumptuary law.⁴⁸ Fourteenth-century Florentine town criers regularly announced the terms of the city's sumptuary regulations, and parish priests were required to proclaim restrictions concerning weddings and funerals every two months. Priests also had to report any violations, and were asked to have the offenders excommunicated, establishing serious consequences for the over-sumptuous use of material culture.⁴⁹ A number of city-states threatened to have sumptuary offenders excommunicated but the tactic had to be discarded as too great a portion of the community risked separation from the church.⁵⁰ Law-makers felt strongly enough about the financial and social threat of material expenditure blurring hierarchical boundaries to threaten their people's eternal souls. Nevertheless, people who could afford to dress in a decadent and stylish manner felt strongly enough about their sartorial appearance to call the law-makers' bluff.

In the midst of economic hardship caused by war or plague, for instance in 1364 and again in 1373, the Florentine commune attempted to turn people's interest in personal aggrandisement to its advantage by introducing a voluntary tax for those who wished to wear banned adornments.⁵¹ In 1364, for the annual sum of 100 gold florins, women could wear forbidden ornaments of pearl and precious stones, providing the commune with money and allowing women (particularly of the mercantile aristocracy) to signal their wealth, both through the ornament and, through their ability to pay the tax.⁵² Such taxes added justification for the argument that indulging women's sartorial desires would lead men to financial ruin.⁵³

Clothing design also carried hierarchical meanings derived from their economic and embodied impact. Again, these fashions were driven by social approval and a sense of beauty while also becoming the focus of accusations of vanity. Rhetoric in religious and secular settings suggested that fashions intended to increase beauty by forcing wearers to alter their gestures and posture actually created silhouettes of deformity.

⁴⁸ Hunt, p.218, also see Muzzarelli, pp.272-275.

⁴⁹ Rainey, p.80.

⁵⁰ Kovesi, pp. 102-103.

⁵¹ Kovesi, p.47 and Rainey, pp. 209-211.

⁵² Archivio di Stato di Firenze, *Provvisioni Registri* 52 (1364 December 21), f. 79r.

⁵³ Hunt, p.218.

Physical transformation resulted from clothing design that moulded the body to be carried in ways appropriate to the wearer's status and typical physical demands. The physical demands adornment had to accommodate depended on the wearer's class and sex. Gender-specific dress became an increasing matter of interest from the fourteenth century as fashions diverged more rapidly than they had previously, changing the way people presented and observed the physical form.⁵⁴ One Florentine example of such fashion was the use of heavy, pleated over-garments which required ample fabric. As Carol Frick has shown, the wide silhouettes of heavy drapery worn by Florentine men communicated physical and economic dominance; while for women wide pleats hinted at pregnancy (an honourable estate) and long heavy skirts forced them to walk slowly, carefully and so to convey stately dignity.⁵⁵

Clothing design played on variations of stiff, tight-fitting elements coupled with high shoes forcing an upright posture and a careful gait for the nobility and loose attire which allowed a greater breadth of movement for labourers.⁵⁶ By the mid-fourteenth century, new styles overshadowed the role of basic garments such as the tunic or the modestly enveloping *mantello* (cloak), distinguishable in both gender and class only by fabric and minor embellishments.⁵⁷ People did continue to wear the *mantello* outdoors but for the poor this might mean a single unlined woollen cloak, while for the rich it could be made and lined with alternate fabrics of silk, wool, leather or fur, demonstrating wealth through the expense, weight and warmth of the outer garment.⁵⁸ The sartorial distinction between the sexes as well as classes occurred by means of a change in clothing production which used multiple cuts of fabric rather than large re-useable rectangles.⁵⁹ This fabrication resulted in greater wastage and expense and so a greater sense of luxury. A distinct fifteenth-century example of sartorial compartmentalisation was the fashion for detachable sleeves, which became a

⁵⁴ Muzzarelli, pp. 268-269.

⁵⁵ Frick (2002), p. 91.

⁵⁶ For a Renaissance comparison between appropriate and inappropriate attention to clothing and movement see: Castiglione, pp 46-48, For a discussion on the sociological value of restrictive clothing see Corrigan, p. 160, and for a discussion of movement dictated by fifteenth-century male attire in England see: Herbert Norris, *Medieval Costume and Fashion*. Mineola: Dover Publications, 1999. (p. 204), Also see: Pietszky, Rosita Levi. *Il Costume e la Moda nella Societa Italiana*. Torino: Einaudi Editore, 1978. (p. 166) on Boccaccio and Barbaro's guidance on how to walk when wearing a robe, see: Scholz, pp.15-38, on Galatio, Erasmus and Della Cassa's connection between comportment, clothing and facial expressions as tokens of gendered honesty or nobility.

⁵⁷ Stuard, p. 15.

⁵⁸ Muzzarelli, p. 316.

⁵⁹ Denny-Brown, p.226.

popular way for women to adapt and personalise their outfits after 1450.⁶⁰ Tailored clothing manipulated the figure into distinct silhouettes, most significantly drawing attention to men's legs (through the use of tight colourful stockings and increasingly short doublets) and women's waist and breasts.⁶¹



Figure 11 School of Pisanello, *A Young Woman Holding a Helmet*, Rotterdam, Museum of Boymans-van-Beuningen, inv. I.5 26 verso, early-fifteenth century.

The sculpted silhouette of elite women's dress of mid-fifteenth century Florence attracted the criticism of moralisers on a number of scores. To begin with, at festive occasions the fashion was to wear a large headdress, sometimes called a *balzo*, constructed over a frame of woven sticks and decorated with high quality textiles, gems, feathers and other ornaments.⁶² As well as the more cosmetic function of creating the illusion of height, hats and headdresses drew attention toward the head, the primary locus of authority, character and gendered identity, visually signifying the authority of the mind over the body.⁶³ The size and accompanying weight of these accessories altered the way people carried themselves to maintain balance. *Sketch of a Young Woman Holding*

a Helmet (Figure 11), from the school of Pisanello, effectively demonstrates the way in which a woman's posture was manipulated beneath her *balzo*. Even from her frontal pose one can see that her head is dipping to accommodate its weight. As Calamandrei Polidori's study of

⁶⁰ Carole Collier Frick, 2002. *Dressing Renaissance Florence: Families, Fortune and Fine Clothing*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press. p.99.

⁶¹ Stuard, p.15, and Muzzarelli, p. 268.

⁶² Herald, pp 58 & 210.

⁶³ Michael Camille, 1994. "The Image and the Self: Unwriting Late Medieval Bodies." In *Framing Medieval Bodies*, edited by Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin, 62-99. Manchester: Manchester University Press. p. 68. And Strocchia, p. 41.

fifteenth-century women's attire shows, the combination of a large headdress with light, heavy, tight and loose elements sculpted and covered but did not strictly conceal the fragile body beneath.⁶⁴ As with Pisanello's sketch, the figure's high waistline combined with a heavy train pulls her shoulders down and pushes her torso forward, directing secondary attention from the head to the belly, suggestive of pregnancy. Her gathered skirts pool at her feet making a fast walking pace impossible. She has to crook her elbows and gather the folds of her sleeves on her forearm in order to use her hands. The line of her neck and slightly sloping shoulders are extended by the drapery of her sleeves. The overall effect of drapery was deliberately reminiscent of birds' wings. Bernardino of Siena used this illusion against its wearers, reinterpreting sleeves as 'wings' that would be cut, or used to fly themselves into hell.⁶⁵



Figure 12: Andrea Orcagna, *Triumph of Death and Last Judgement and Hell* (fragment), Fresco cycle, from the right wall of Santa Croce, Florence, 1344-45

⁶⁴ Polidori, Calamandrei E. *Le Veste delle Donne Fiorentine nel Quattrocento*. Rome: Multigraphica Editrice, 1973, pp. 6-7.

⁶⁵ Pisetzky, p.18 and Warr, (2010), p. 215.

Both secular and religious moralisers discouraged sumptuous attire by drawing allusions between sartorial and bestial forms. There was a culturally engrained connection across Europe between the fashionable trains of women's dresses and serpentine tails. Trains were a feature of clothing frequently targeted by both sumptuary legislation and sermons. Bernardino of Siena denounced elite women for dragging expensive fabric through the mud in full view of the poor who had no choice but to dress in rags.⁶⁶ In his 1425-27 Lenten sermons, Bernardino described trains as the tails of serpents and a free ride for demons.⁶⁷ Savonarola described women's dress in a Flemish style (which included a train, a décolletage which emphasised the breasts, and double-peaked cone headdress) as looking like a cow complete with tail, udders and horns.⁶⁸ Andrea Orcagna's now-fragmented fresco of hell from the nave of *Santa Croce* includes a demonic temptress whose green dress explicitly extends from a train into a tail (Figure 12). This allusion also allowed for the reinforcement of associations between woman's vanity and the deceitful snake who led Adam and Eve to the fall of mankind.⁶⁹

In his *Codice Urbanate*, Leonardo da Vinci spoke about adornments as though they were malicious living creatures that usurped human identity and manipulated the struggling body as they evolved. He described how "the clothes began to creep higher and higher up the neck until they finally smothered the whole head" and once the collar had "peeled away" the "dress became so elongated that men had to bundle the excess textile into their arms to avoid trampling over the hems with their feet," feet which would eventually wear shoes so tight "that the toes bunched up one over the next and developed corns." Long-toed shoes would also alter the wearer's movement, enforcing a proud strut, as the toe had to be lifted

⁶⁶ Thureau-Dangin, p. 158.

⁶⁷ Kent, (2001), p. 30, and; Pietszky, pp. 17-18, and; Warr, p.164. This rhetoric was not exclusive to fifteenth century Italy. Thirteenth-century French Dominican preacher Étienne de Bourbon, tried to embarrass the vainly attired women in his congregation by asking them of the train/tail: "why aren't women ashamed to wear an appendage that nature had reserved for beasts?" (see Burns, p.52 for a discussion of Bourbon's sermons against monstrous attire)

⁶⁸ Kent, (2001), p.30 & Rainey, p. 554.

⁶⁹ The serpentine tail accumulated moral associations, stemming from Genesis. For instance a twelfth-century bestiary explained that the dragon was a deceptive demon whose strength lay not in its poison (as other serpents) but in its tail "because he beguiles those whom he draws to him by deceit." White, p.167.

and kicked forward at each step to avoid tripping.⁷⁰ Moralists publicly made associations between pointed shoes and devil's talons and to an erect penis that could lift ladies' skirts.⁷¹ Leonardo associated the embellishment of women's garments with slashes or 'dagges' to snakes and so to sin. He argued that dagged fringes appeared as "offensive weapons: in effect, everything I saw, right to the tips of the tongues of whoever wished to appear beautiful, was forked in sharp points."⁷² His terminology suggested that those who indulged too passionately in these fashions risked the alteration of their bodies and that even their speech (and thereby character) would begin to resemble their garments. The ugly mental images created by such spoken and visual allusions would tarnish the wearers' appreciation for the targeted fashions and inspire fear of the potential metaphysical reality of the allusions.

Hypocrisy and Divine Exposure

Sumptuary laws provided economic imperatives to avoid vain attire and maintain hierarchy. Preachers' monstrous allusions provided imaginative spiritual discouragement for vain, socially negligent, attire. In another line of rhetoric, utilised in particular in literary narratives, the very adornments people used to create a false impression would, through divine intervention, ironically expose their hypocrisy. As discussed in the previous chapter, large-scale disasters including plague were sometimes interpreted as a divine punishment for the community's collective vanity. However, punishments attributed to vanity also worked on a smaller, individual scale. Theologians and humanists including Francesco Barbaro argued that "in every instance truth always overcomes imitation."⁷³ The Gospel of Luke supported this belief referring to Jesus' warning "beware [...] hypocrisy. For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known."⁷⁴ While preachers usually interpreted this exposure in divine terms, suggesting that despite one's

⁷⁰ Norris, P.204. For an example of this same fashion for pointed shoes in England being linked to "devil's talons [rather] than apparel for men" see: "Eulogium Historiarum Sive Temporis" (excerpt). Translated in: Rosemary Horrox 1994. *The Black Death, Manchester Medieval Source Series*. Manchester: Manchester University Press Vol. 3, p.133.

⁷¹ Laughran and Vianello, pp. 259-260.

⁷² Jacqueline Herald, 1981. *Renaissance Dress in Italy 1400-1500*. Edited by Aileen Ribeiro. New Jersey: Bell and Haman, London and Humanities Press.p. 45-46.

⁷³ Barbaro, p.197.

⁷⁴ Luke 12:1-2.

external appearance God would judge the soul on internal truth, literature interpreted exposure in more immediate, and possibly more accessible, terms.

The moral failings of nuns were habitually represented in late-Medieval literature through a reference to vain or sloppy attire.⁷⁵ For example, Boccaccio's *Decameron* tells the story of a nun who was in such a rush to berate a novice discovered with a man in her cell that she accidentally put her own lover's underwear on her head instead of her veil, proving herself to be a hypocrite before her whole convent. In terms of sartorial literacy, items worn on the head were likely to be read as the most telling ornaments of identity, making the site of this nun's exposure all the more poignant.⁷⁶ While rhetorical, this story presents a conceivable scenario in which dishonesty is physically revealed. The abbess's reaction to being caught out, however, was unexpected, she:

Changed the sermon, and speaking in an entirely different fashion than she had started, concluded it was impossible to defend oneself from the desires of the flesh: and she said therefore that everyone should have a good time when she could, discreetly, like unto that day it had been done.⁷⁷

Boccaccio slyly argues that deception was a normal and expected part of life and that it was being caught in the lie which presented the real problem.

Boccaccio's stories are often resolved through attire ironically betraying its deceptive wearer. The *Decameron* indicates that Boccaccio and (given the popularity of his text) his Florentine readers shared a cynical view of the piety expressed through nuns' and monks' dress. In another story the narrator, Pampinea, recites a proverb: "He who is guilty but held to be righteous, can do no evil for no one believes it."⁷⁸ From this starting point the narrator expands on the inauthenticity of monks "with robes wide and long and with artificially pallid faces, and with voices humble and gentle to beg from others yet shrill and robust when

⁷⁵ Hodges, p. 47.

⁷⁶ Lurie, pp 7-8. The hierarchy of the body is outlined in this thesis on page 27.

⁷⁷ Boccaccio, (1822) Vol. 4 Day 9 Story 2, p. 19 "*Di che la badessa, avvedutasi del suo medesimo fallo, e vedendo che da tutte veduto era ne aveva ricoperta, muto sermone, et in tutta altra guise che fatto non avea cominucio a parlare, e conchiudendo venne, impossibile essere il potersi dagli stimuli della carne difendere: e perciò chetamente, come indino a quel di fatto s'era, disse che ciascuna si desse buon tempo quando potesse.*" [my translation]. Although the word 'desires' conveys the sense of the sentiment most efficiently in English, the literal translation would be 'stimuli' of the flesh, emphasising the power the sensate body has over the will.

⁷⁸ Boccaccio (1822), Vol. 2 Day 4 Story 2, p. 156 "*chi è reo e buono è tenuto, può fare il male e non è creduto.*" [my translation].

biting at their own defects in others.”⁷⁹ Pampinea reminded the reader of monk’s equally naked and flawed bodies beneath their habits, asserting; “if it was appropriate and was lawful I would reveal to the many simple people, what is concealed inside friars’ very wide habits.”⁸⁰

Following this prologue, Pampinea told the story of Brother Alberto, who heard the confession of a merchant’s wife named Lisetta. He asked her if she had a lover, which she denied while insisting that she could have plenty if she wanted to because her beauty would be exceptional even in heaven. Recognising that she was attractive and stupid, Alberto chastised her for her vanity while formulating a plan to take advantage of her conceit.⁸¹ He later convinced her that the angel Gabriel was in love with her and had punished him for criticising her. Alberto presented her with a plan that Gabriel would come to earth by possessing Alberto’s body (placing his soul in heaven) to allow the woman and angel to make love. The story then reasserted the dangers not only of female vanity but of gossip, saying Lisetta bragged about her seduction of the angel and the gossip this generated reached her in-laws who decided to surprise them and “see if the angel knew how to fly.”⁸² On being cornered Alberto leapt out the window into a canal and sought refuge in a neighbouring home (perhaps to avoid scandalising Florence too greatly, this story was set in Venice). The neighbour offered to help Alberto, telling him there was a costume festival taking place and he could dress him up to sneak him out. The man left to acquire props, but asked a friend to announcement that if anyone wanted to see the angel Gabriel they should go to the Piazza of San Marco. He dressed a miserable Brother Alberto as a madman by smearing him with honey, sticking feathers to his body, placing a chain around his neck and a mask over his face. When they reached the piazza the man tied Alberto to a podium and unmasked him at

⁷⁹ Boccaccio (1822), Vol. 2 Day 4 Story 2, p. 156 “...li quali co’ panni larghi e lunghi e co’visi artificailmente pallidi, e con le voci umili e mansuete nel domandar l’altrui, et altissime e rubeate in mordere, se per torre, et altri per lor donare...” [my translation].

⁸⁰ Boccaccio (1822), Vol. 2 Day 4 Story 2, p. 156- 157 “De’ quali, se quanto si convenisse fosse licito a me di mostrare, tosto dichiarerei a molti semplici quello che nelle lor cappe larghissime tengon nascoso.” [my translation] In a later story, Boccaccio invoked the friar’s naked body, having the story’s lecherous protagonist say “My lady, when I have this habit off, which I can take off easily, you will see a man, made like the others, and not a monk” Boccaccio, (1822) vol. 3, Day 7 Story 3, p. 71 “Madonna, qualora io avrò questa cappa fuor di dosso, che me la traggio molto agevolmente, io vi parrò uno uomo fatto come gli altri, e non frate.” [my translation].

⁸¹ Boccaccio (1822), Vol. 2 Day 4 Story 2, pp. 158-159.

⁸² Boccaccio (1822), Vol. 2, Day 4, Story 2, p. 165 “Ma tra gli altri a’quali questa cosa venne agli orecchi, furono i cognati di lei, li quali, senza alcuna cosa dirle, si posero in cuore di trovare questo Agnolo, e di sapere se egli sapesse volare; e più notti stettero in posta.”

which point a crowd of people recognised and took free reign to punish him. Dishonest actions exposed the character's false identity, and ironically, elements of his initial costume (the angelic feathers), were used to humiliate him. The story concludes "he that was held to be good, but striving to bad, [...], tried to become the Angel Gabriel, and was converted into a wild man, in the long run, as he deserved, he was reviled."⁸³ Thus, even the bawdy entertaining literature of the age suggested that the revelation of a deceitful identity was almost inevitable and would cause humiliation.

Despite sometimes being the target of accusations of hypocrisy, preachers warned laymen of its dangers. While literature presented social punishment as the outcome for hypocrisy, the church focused on divine punishment. Bernardino of Siena's 1427 *Sermon against Hypocrisy* suggested that hypocrisy was detrimental to the soul, even if society was pleased with one's behaviour. He argued that women who behave correctly, according to religious and social standards, must do so from their honest will to be good and not to be admired.⁸⁴ He spoke of the "hidden hypocrisy" of a woman, driven by desire to be accepted in society "clothed with long honest clothes," and "eat[ing] in the presence of others in the room like a little bird [...] outwardly seeming all honesty, temperate, just and humble." Bernardino argued that these practices could be performed despite the fact that "inside will be all the opposite, and all attached to the deeds of the world" and that "if it were not for shame of the world, [she] would be like a harlot."⁸⁵ One argument put forward in sermons, then, was that adornment and eating habits associated with modesty and piety could represent an internal state and might be read that way by one's community but when it came to divine judgement, inner intention outweighed external signs.

The importance of unity of intention with appearance is also addressed by Christine de Pizan but in reverse of Bernardino's concern:

⁸³ Boccaccio (1822), Vol. 2 Day 4 Story 2, p. 168 "*Così costui tenuto buono, e male adoperando, non essendo creduto, ardi di farsi l'Angelo Gabriello, e di questo in uom salvatico convertito, a lungo andare, come meritato avea, vituperato, senza pro pianse i peccati commessi.*" [my translation].

⁸⁴ Bernardino's sermon works on the same premise as the argument that hair shirts worn openly, rather than in secret, exhibited pride rather than a penitential spirit, see page 39.

⁸⁵ Bernardino da Siena, (14 March, 1425) XXXIX *Della Ipocresia*, p.333 [full quote]: "*Una donna co'panni lunghi onestamente vestita, e di dentro arà tanta vanità che, se non fusse per vergogna del mondo, andrebbe come una meretrice; alcuna parrà di fuori che non voglia della roba altrui e di dentro la disiderrà in copia; mangerà in presenza d'altri come un passerino e in camera come un Jupicino; parrà di fuori tutta onesta, temperata, giusta e umile, e tutta pura di fede, e di dentro sarà tutta il contrario, e tutta attaccata a'fatti del mondo; questa é la ipocresia occulta, ché mostri di fuori quello non ái di dentro.*" [my translation].

Even though a woman may be inspired only by good will and had neither a wicked act nor thought in her body, the world will never believe it if she is indiscreet about her clothes. [...] She should especially avoid styles that are too flashy, too costly, or too suggestive. Besides all this, a woman must have poise and restraint in her bearing and countenance.⁸⁶

This indicates that ill-chosen attire and poorly enacted movement would outweigh a woman's true identity in society's eyes, just as prudently-chosen but dishonest attire would be recognised as such in God's eyes. Women, being observed, had to be conscious of the relationship between adornment comportment, intention and fragility of her honour both socially and spiritually.

Beauty, Objects and Self Reflection

The ideas presented so far, discussed in literature, written into law and extolled from the pulpit, reached people in social settings but were also carried into the home in the form of allegorical objects intended to promote self-reflection. Elite women received additional psychological inducement to contemplate and cultivate their natural and virtuous beauty from the allegorical decoration of their domestic objects, including (but not limited to) mirrors and religious icons.

Mirrors functioned as a direct means for self-monitoring and carried diverse symbolic meanings about beauty, virtue, and vanity. From the fourteenth century, a European market opened for French mirrors and combs carved in ivory with illustrations of courtly love stories.⁸⁷ These encouraged women to judge themselves against restrained courtly values, as they mused on both the narrative and their own reflection. Mirrors were often included in a bride's trousseau or counter-dowry.⁸⁸ Mirrors showed the viewer as they were but also suggested what they should be.⁸⁹ For instance, a Sienese papier-mâché mirror frame represents a figure of idealised beauty, much larger and more prominent than the circular

⁸⁶ Pizan, (1989), p.190.

⁸⁷ Victoria and Albert collection, Mirror Case – A Lady Crowning her Lover, museum number 217-1867, Public Access Description, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O69982/a-lady-crowning-her-lover-mirror-case-unknown/>. For further discussion of the attribution of this work (believed to be by the school of Neroccio de' Landi due to the ways in which the face and hairstyle stylistically echoes the Magdalene as painted in an alterpiece painting of the *Madonna and Child with Saints Jerome and Mary Magdalen* by Neroccio (c.1490, currently held by the Metropolitan Museum in New York, accession number 61.43), see: Gertrude Coor, 1961. *Neroccio de' Landi 1447-1500*, New Jersey: Pinceton University Press, pp. 81-82, 97 & 170.

⁸⁸ Syson and Thornton, pp.51-52.

⁸⁹ Syson and Thornton, p. 51, and Frick (1989), pp. 19-20.

mirror attached at its base (Figure 13).⁹⁰ The object encouraged its viewers to aspire to the pale skin and disengaged loveliness of the sculpted face.



Figure 13: Neroccio de' Landi, Mirror Frame, Siena: Italy, Painted and Gilded Cartapesta (papier mâché), Victoria and Albert Museum, 45.7x40.6cm, museum number 850-1884, London, ca. 1475-1500 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Like female beauty itself, mirrors were symbols of both truth and vanity. Painters traditionally depicted Prudence as a woman holding a mirror directed to the world to reflect the truth, but depicted Venus as the personification of the vanity and lust directing a mirror toward herself.⁹¹ Laura Cereta railed against Christian women's use of mirrors, asking if women were baptised that they "might worship in shameless devotion the idols of our

⁹⁰ Syson & Thornton, p. 52.

⁹¹ Cheney, pp. 184-185.

mirrored faces?”⁹² As objects of potential idolatry, mirrors shared similar problems with reliquaries of saints that secured moral teachings in the memory, yet were rendered of valuable and beautiful materials that could divert people’s attention from spiritual contemplation to the material. As symbols of vanity and idolatry, moralists and priests discussed mirrors as portals to demonic temptation and played on their reflective quality through allegorical stories in which an ugly internal truth was reflected instead of the viewer’s face.⁹³

Other kinds of domestic objects encouraged self-reflection without the need for literal reflection. Alberti’s *Book of the Family*, constructed as a dialogue, brought the question of virtuous beauty versus vain cosmetic beauty directly into the domestic setting.⁹⁴ He did this by suggesting a wife fashion herself according to the example set by a sculpture of a saint in their home. Alberti noted that “everyone hates to see make-up on his wife, yet no one seems able to prevent it.” Giannozzo, the mature conservative voice in the dialogue, described how he used the sculpture to convince and remind his wife of the gravity of his concerns about cosmetics. Giannozzo recounts speaking to his wife about the harmful social consequences of make-up and luxurious dress which make women “look far from virtuous,” elicit disapproval from respectable people and provoke lustful men to “besiege and attack such a girl [...] until at last the unfortunate wretch falls into real disgrace.”⁹⁵ Having presented threatening consequences for dressing up and wearing makeup, Giannozzo argued that cosmetics were poisonous, ruining wearers’ skin and lessening their value. To prove this point he drew his wife’s attention to “a saint in the room, a very lovely statue of silver, whose head and hands alone were of purest ivory.” He said to his wife

Suppose you besmirched the face of this image in the morning with chalk and calcium and other ointments. [...] In the course of the day the wind would carry dust to it and make it dirty, but in the evening you would wash it, and then, the next day cover it again [...] Tell me, after many days of this, if you wanted to sell

⁹² Cereta, Laura, Letter to Augustinus Aemilius, *Curse against the Ornamentation of Women*, (c.1485-1488), in King & Rabil, p. 78-9.

⁹³ For instance see the hagiography of Villena Di Botti who was confronted by the image of a demon in her mirror which led her to repent and sinful vanity and dedicate herself to charity: Stuard, p.121 and Verino, Ugolino, in: Baldassarri & Saiber, pp. 29-31; Also see Landry’s warning (visually represented throughout the early modern period) that girls who spend too long brushing their hair and gazing in the mirror will see the devil’s bottom in place of their faces: Grössinger, p. 14.

⁹⁴ For an overview of the criticism women who use cosmetics have received throughout the history of Western history from ancient Greece to Postmodernism see Negrin, pp. 54 – 57.

⁹⁵ Alberti, (1969), p.213.

it, [...] how much money do you think you would get for it? More than if you had never begun painting it?" "much less" she replied.

Giannozzo conceptually superimposed his wife's beauty and worth onto the sacred object, with which she could continue to identify, by concluding "you will not be more beautiful with that stuff, only dirty, and in the long run you will ruin your skin."⁹⁶ Two years later (1436) Alberti published his work *On Painting*, in which he considered the way people engage with paintings and sculptures by mirroring the emotions and movements that they see represented in themselves.⁹⁷ It is, therefore, likely that Alberti already thought about, and wrote with an awareness of, the effect an allusion made between self and an object would have on a contemplative person.⁹⁸ The household object would theoretically continue to remind the wife of her husband's moral lesson concerning his expectations, her appearance and value.

Self-reflection and embodied practice in the home were important for women whose social interactions were limited. Paolo da Certaldo's advice for his elite readers indicated that the etiquette which betrayed one's status could be cultivated in a domestic setting through a combination of imagination and practice:

Always be mannerly, in your room where there is no one but you, as though you're in the hall among your family or outside among neighbours, yet those who are not well mannered to themselves cannot be perfectly mannered to others.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Alberti, (1969), p. 214.

⁹⁷ Alberti, (1972), p. 79.

⁹⁸ Although Alberti's text is not evidence of lived practice it does scenarios which are reflective of the philosophies of his era, of the significance his contemporaries read into female appearance and of the historiographically recognised objectives of identification and self-reflection evident in the allegorical decoration of Renaissance domestic objects. Historians frequently refer to Alberti's *Book of the Family* to demonstrate fifteenth century perspectives on the appropriate use of domestic objects, a small selection texts which discuss Alberti in this way includes: Caroline Campbell, 2009. *Love and Marriage in Renaissance Florence: The Courtauld Wedding Chests*. London: The Courtauld Gallery in association with Paul Holberton Publishing, p. 16, and: Werner L. Gundersheimer, 1980. "Bartolommeo Goggio: A Feminist in Renaissance Ferrara." *Renaissance Quarterly* 33 (2): 175-200., p. 177, and: Tinagli, p. 156, and: Baskins (1998), pg.1, and: Frick, (2002), pp.80, 88 & 131.

⁹⁹ Certaldo, p.33.

Da Certaldo indicated that continual commitment and practice, even in private, made it possible to engrain socially advisable customs and so fashion one's true state to adhere to the ideal.¹⁰⁰

Domestic objects and advice for elite Florentine women of the mid-fourteenth to the late-fifteenth century perpetuated and reinforced the importance of a beautiful appearance for expressing status and virtuous identity. Mirrors decorated with allegorical images were intended for women to adjust their appearance with a mind to emulate the beauty and virtue depicted. Secular and religious measures for virtue conflicted as household images were deliberately constructed to promote socially legible beauty and status whereas preachers and religious texts expressed distrust for materials which used, often pagan, iconography to encourage women to elevate external beauty over the spiritual.

Women's Appearance at Church

Although elite women's social exchanges were limited, the church was a relatively safe and acceptable environment for women to interact. The centrality of religious spaces to the Florentine communal experience led to an overlapping of religious and social practices. Evidence relating to women in this setting demonstrates direct conflict and negotiation between the rhetoric of beauty as virtue and as vice. Young women's comportment at church was judged by potential fathers- and mothers-in-law. In this way individuals effectively enhanced the impression of their social values (wealth and status) by piggy-backing them on the religious values (charity, modesty and devotion). Alessandra Strozzi told her son that she went to church for the express purpose of viewing a prospective bride for him.¹⁰¹ Nubile girls' awareness that their dress, speech, movement and gaze would be witnessed and judged imposed the need for studied enactment and restrictive self-surveillance.

¹⁰⁰ This sentiment continued to be relevant to elite Florentine ideals, as evidenced by Machiavelli's 1513 letter to Francesco Vettori that explains his practice of changing his attire when he gets home to both sartorially and psychologically mark his shift from his identity outside among peasants to his identity at home, alone, reverently reading ancient philosophy. Niccolò Machiavelli, *Lettera a Francesco Vettori* (1513). Edited by Mario Bonfantini. LiberLiber. 2003.

http://www.liberliber.it/mediateca/libri/m/machiavelli/lettera_a_francesco_vettori/pdf/letter_p.pdf.p.4,

¹⁰¹ For a discussion of this and other instances of the church being used in this way see: Randolph, (1997), pp. 35-36, also see: Kent, (2001), p. 36-37.

While preachers worked to make their sermons emotionally stirring, they had to compete with the fact that for elite women public sermons provided one of the few opportunities they had to dress up (publicly demonstrating their superior beauty, nobility and taste) and to socialise.¹⁰² A scribe recorded one of Bernardino of Siena's sermons in which he set out to praise women by saying that since woman (Eve) was made of bone she was precious and clean, but easily flustered, whereas man (Adam) was made of base, foul clay but was calmer as a result. During his sermon he was distracted by women chatting and he quickly adapted his allusion, chastising the women for their chatter that sounded like "rattling bones."¹⁰³ This record suggests the hustle and bustle of attending a sermon as a social rather than spiritual event for predominantly house-bound women. Recognising these additional social functions of church-attendance, Archbishop Antoninus advised Florentine women that it was better for them not to attend church if they had less-than-pious intentions in doing so.¹⁰⁴

For fifteenth-century priests the practice of using the church to advance the prospects of a marriageable daughter or son, led to an all-too-secular treatment of a devout experience. This contributed to the mixed messages unmarried girls received concerning piety, modesty, beauty, vanity and sex-appeal. Elite women's attire and behaviour at church was an important point of discussion in both sermons and secular literature. Three of the most influential men to preach in Florence, St. Bernardino, St. Antonino and Savonarola, criticised Florentine women for dressing their daughters like nymphs and parading them around the church like idols or prostitutes in full view of gawking men.¹⁰⁵ In a 1401 sermon at Santa Maria Novella, Dominici likewise shamed women for attending church to be admired, saying

I do not want you to think that I desire that the pretty girls should not come to the sermon because God does not wish them to go to hell, but they must come as one must come to church, modest and without make-up, [but if she wants] to dress up and adorn herself with cosmetics so everyone should see her, she must

¹⁰² Randolph (1997), p.20. For a contemporary Fraco-Italian female perspective on the shameful preening which occurred in church see Christine de Pizan (1989), pp. 176-179.

¹⁰³ Bernardino, of Siena. August 1996. "Two Sermons on Wives and Widows." *Internet Medieval Source Book*. Edited by Paul Halsall. Fordham University. <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/bernardino-2sermons.asp>. For further discussion of Bernardino's use of the Adam and Eve story throughout his works (which argues for the spiritual equality of husband and wife despite women's temporal inferiority) see: Mormando (1998), pp. 23-25.

¹⁰⁴ Kent, (2001), p. 36.

¹⁰⁵ Randolph (1997), p.35, and Debby (2007), p. 67.

be where she would not offend the Lord, meaning in the squares, at parties, at weddings¹⁰⁶

In his *Summa Theologica Moralis* (1477) Archbishop Antonino composed a list of vices specific to women, including their habit of dressing up to attend church.¹⁰⁷ Across the written discourse on female appearance in church one may note a shifting of blame: St. Bernardino blamed the mothers of the women, Antonino blamed the women themselves, and, in the early-sixteenth century Galeazzo Flavio Capella would blame men.¹⁰⁸

Moral educators encouraged their audience to comport themselves in a manner that would allow them to engage more attentively with the lesson. In a booklet on church behaviour, Augustinian writer Girolamo da Siena (1330-1420) articulated the importance of physical composure, silence, contemplation and memory for engaging with sermons, telling people to “stay alone, and devout and in perpetual silence [...] write down in the living tablets of your heart, those elements of doctrine which it seems to you that you need to remember most.”¹⁰⁹ This ideal of silent introspection is greatly at odds with evidence of the actual behaviour of church-goers.

Addressing women about the messages they communicated through the attire, St. Bernardino of Siena likened the mass, which honoured the memory of Jesus’ death, to the funeral of an earthly husband and argued that women should adapt their headdress accordingly:

How singular would it seem for a woman, on the death-day of her husband or of her father, to come to church, her head adorned with flowers! Yet it is far stranger still to behold a female ransomed by the blood of Christ, daughter and spouse of our Supreme Father, coming to Mass with her head not only a mass of flowers, but of gold and precious stones, of false hair and dye.

He then used graphic mental images to juxtapose women’s appearance with Jesus’ during His execution:

¹⁰⁶ Debby (2001), p. 53, translated by Debby from: Dominici, MS Ricc. 1301, *Predica 41*, lines 183-95.

¹⁰⁷ Debby (2007), p. 67.

¹⁰⁸ Galeazzo Flavio Capella’s *Della Eccellenza et Dignità delle Donne* (c.1525) defended women by arguing that men attended church in order to voyeuristically gaze at women, all the while accusing women of vain intentions, see Benson, p. 69. John Berger (*John. Ways of Seeing*. Great Brittan: Penguin, 1972.p.45) likewise points out that in the painting tradition, men depicted naked women for men’s viewing pleasure while entitling it ‘vanity’.

¹⁰⁹ Girolamo da Siena, as quoted in: Debby (2007), p. 67.

Think of that divine head [...] which, to expiate your vanity, was pierced and wounded to the vital parts of the brain by a massive crown of thorns [...] yours is arrayed in precious stones; while those locks are matted with blood, your tresses, or rather the false locks you wear, are done up with skill. His cheeks are marred by spittle, blood and wounds, yours are painted in various ways. His glorious eyes, [...] are broken by the most cruel of deaths, the while your eyes are aglow with voluptuousness and filth. That sacred head, [...], consents to such ignominy for your sake, while you carry yours so haughtily.¹¹⁰

It was a common rhetorical device to encourage women to look at an image of Christ and to imaginatively embellish the image, to emotively focus on Jesus' visceral experience of death in order to develop their empathetic appreciation of Christ's suffering for their sins.¹¹¹ While Bernardino framed the suffering of Christ as an act of humility and selflessness, he argued that women's attempts to appear beautiful were vain and selfish; while Christ's wounds became beautiful through the resurrection, women's tokens of beauty made them spiritually ugly. Recent studies have found that the use of metaphoric language to describe one's appearance communicated memorable messages which influence the way one thinks about oneself and how one relates to others.¹¹² It can therefore be supposed that Bernardino's technique of utilising an already powerfully-emotive image, laden with guilt and the grotesque, would have been effective in influencing the way women thought about their appearance. Nevertheless, given the ongoing repetition of such criticism it would seem that the effects of this shaming did not make enough of an impact to change Florentine women's behaviour and conflict between religious and social values continued to be played out in the church.

Boccaccio's Fiammetta, the Paradox of Praising Beauty and Condemning Deception

Boccaccio's novel *Fiammetta* imagined the experience and emotion of a girl born by "benign fortune" to a noble family, "nourished" in "high delights," who brought her secular understanding of her beauty and self-worth into the church, where she was confronted by a man of an evidently similar upbringing, which led to unrequited, adulterous love and misery. The novel criticises the contradictions in the society which educated and so predisposed

¹¹⁰ Thureau-Dangin, p. 159.

¹¹¹ Flanigan, p. 180.

¹¹² Jenn Anderson, Mary Bresnahan, and Briana DeAngelis. 2014. "The Impact of Personal Metaphors and Memorable Interpersonal Communication on Body Satisfaction." *Qualitative Health Research* (Sage) 24 (6): 727-737.

people to practice and fall victim to artful, embodied deception. Fiammetta learned “under a reverend mistress any noble customs which would be convenient for a young girl to exhibit.” As well as direct instructions she learned from experiences “even as a little girl, hearing many praise [my beauty], I gloried in it, and with focused art I increased it.” Without considering that this made her vulnerable to her admirers’ licentious intentions, she came to observe that “my beauty, miserable gift to those who would fain to live virtuously, most of my peers and other noble youths lit a fire of love.”¹¹³ Boccaccio thereby indicated that people developed their self-perception and learned how to comport themselves and interact socially through instruction, observation and by paying attention to how others responded to them.¹¹⁴ Boccaccio’s *Fiammetta* exemplifies the manner in which people composed themselves and judged others, while ultimately warning the reader of the dangers of taking appearance as truth. His use of a self-reflective female voice demonstrates a sympathy with the concept that people came to know themselves through consciously performing selfhood, being cognisant of the response they hope to elicit from observers as they choose how to behave within a given context.¹¹⁵

Fiammetta reflects on her deliberate enactment of modest comportment at a religious festival, saying: “accompanied by women, with slow step we came to the holy temple.” However, her intention was not united with her performed solemnity as she disregarded preachers’ insistence that women refrain from engaging with others in the church. She took note of who was present and how they responded to the sight of her. As noted in chapter one, theologians including Archbishop Antonino and Savonarola would write treatises that insisted when women attend church they should control their gaze, keeping their eyes lowered in order to protect themselves from being corrupted or causing a scandal by seeming to flirt by making eye-contact with men.¹¹⁶ Disregarding the, already engrained,

¹¹³ Boccaccio, (1994), Giovanni. 1994. “Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta.” In *Tutte le Opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, edited by Vittore Branca and Carlo Delcorno, 2-412. Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore.p.25, [my translation].

¹¹⁴ The importance of observation and imitation for education in etiquette is discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

¹¹⁵ See: Ellis & Bouchner, p. 98 for a discussion of the ways people develop an greater understanding of the self through performance, and see: Berger, (pp.40-41) for discussion of the manner in which western cultures since the Renaissance have raised women to continually survey themselves for the eyes of an exterior surveyor, with the expectation that the way they present themselves communicates the way they expect to be treated.

¹¹⁶ Antoninus, p. 164 “E fatto questo, andate alla chiesa, e abbiate buona cura al vostro vedere, di tenerlo si mortificato, che non abbi a scandlezzare l’anima vostra; [...] Andate cogli occhi si bassi, che altro che la terra dove avete a porre li piedi non vi curate di vedere.” Also see: Randolph (1997), p. 39. And Savonarola’s *Libro della vita viduale* (1491) as quoted in Levy, pp. 220-221.

arguments against eye-contact, having entered the temple Fiammetta sat in an elevated position reserved for the nobility, and:

According to my custom, my eyes immediately looked around, [...] Before celebrating the sacred office, it was heard in the temple, which, like other times was wont to happen, [...] that not only men's eyes turned to regard me, but even women, not otherwise than if Venus or Minerva, never again to be beheld by them, miraculously descended in the one spot where I was.¹¹⁷

As people gazed up at Fiammetta she looked down on them and "saw men and women the temple equally divided, and organized into diverse crowds."¹¹⁸ Bernardino of Siena, who often had to preach outdoors due to the large crowds who went to hear him, promoted the use of a portable curtain to separate men and women during sermons to encourage the congregation to listen to their words rather than ogle one another. Preachers reinforced the physical separation of men from women during the sermon by directing particular messages either to male or to female members of the congregation.¹¹⁹ However, paintings of Bernardino himself preaching, suggest that this low partition offered little impediment for seated nobles or standing men intent on viewing women.¹²⁰

Fiammetta acknowledged it was customary, after a sermon, for men in the church to crowd around to complement her beauty:

I, who, with my eyes turned in another direction, showed my interest was engaged elsewhere, kept my ears intently on those men [...] it seemed to me I was obligated by such flattery, to gaze at them with a more benign eye, and I realized not once, but many times, that some of them with vain hope boasted with their companions.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Boccaccio, (1994) p. 29 "*La vecchia usanza la mia nobilita m'aveano tra l'altre donne assai eccellente luogo servato; nel quale poi che assisa fui, servato il mio costume, gli occhi subitamente in giro volti, vidi il tempio d'uomini e di donne parimente ripieno, e in varie caterve diversamente operare. Ne prima, celbrandosi il sacro officio, nel tempio sentita fui, che, si come l'altre volte solea avvenire, cosi e quella avvenne, che non solamente gli uomini gli occhi torsono a riguardarmi, ma eziandio le donne, non altramenti che se Venere o Minerva, mai piu da loro non vedute fossero in quello loco, la dove io era, nuovamente discese.*" [my translation].

¹¹⁸ Boccaccio, (1994), p. 29 [my translation, see above].

¹¹⁹ Debby, Nirit Ben-Aryeh. 2007. *The Renaissance Pulpit, Art and Preaching in Tuscan, 1400-1550*. Turnhout: Brepols.p.67.

¹²⁰ Randolph (1997), pp.21 & 26. For a visual example see: Giovanni di Ser Giovanni Guidi (Lo Scheggia)'s mid-15th century *Bernardino of Siena Preaching*, tempera on panel 24.4x23.5 cm at Birmingham Museum of Art, <http://www.artsbma.org/pieces/saint-bernardino-of-siena-preaching/> in which Bernardino of Siena preaches outdoors to a segregated congregation which foregrounds seated, chatting women. And see: Mormando (1998), pp. 22 & 27.

¹²¹ Boccaccio, (1994), p. 29 "*Ma io che, con gli occhi in altra parte voltati, mostrava me da altra cura sospesa, tenendo gli orecchi a' ragionamenti di quelli, sentiva desiderata dolcezza, e quasi loro prearendomene essere*

Fiammetta's behaviour opposed the contemporary ideal that unity of intention with appearance was essential. Christine de Pizan insisted that, when rejecting a man's propositions, a woman's "looks must be in keeping with her words. Her glances and bodily signs must not give any encouragement."¹²² Fiammetta also broke with the advice of preachers on the introspective manner people should attend church. On "elevating my eyes with due gravity" Fiammetta noticed a man whom she admired for his appearance and comportment, essentially, for playing the game as well as herself:

I began to appreciate him and his manners. I say that, in my judgment, which was not yet occupied by love, he was of beautiful form, in his actions he was exceedingly pleasant and, *very honest* in his behaviour, and his youth was manifest in the soft stubble that even now occupied his cheeks.¹²³

Demonstrating the power of vision to imprint images on the memory, she continued: "already being in my mind the effigy of his figure remained" and, apparently troubled by the relationship between appearance and truth, she dwelt on his image trying to convince herself that she had understood him accurately. In hindsight she laments that he was well versed in the battle for love:

Knowing with what weapons to seize the longed-for prey, each time with greater humility and greatest pity he showed himself full of amorous desire. Alas! What deceit did he conceal beneath that pity! [...] all that was fictitious stopped on his face, and that I may not go on narrating his every action; every one was full of masterly deception [...] immediately and unexpectedly I found myself in love, I was taken in and still am.¹²⁴

There was evident tension between the danger of disguise and the reliance placed on the performative aspects of social interaction. This story exemplifies the social purpose of

obligatta, tale fiata con piu benigno occhio li rimirava; e non una volta m'accorsi, ma molte, che di cio alcuni vana speranza pigliando co' compagni vanamente sen gloriavano." [my translation].

¹²² Pizan, (1989), p.191.

¹²³ Boccaccio, (1994), p. 30 "...gli occhi, con debita gravita elevati [...] a me dirittissimamente un giovane opposto vidi; e, quello che ancora fatto non avea d'alcuno altro, da incessabile fato mossa, meco lui e i suoi modi cominciai ad estimare. Dico che, secondo il mio giudicio, il quale ancora non era da amore occupato, egli era di forma bellissimo, negli atti piacevolissimo e onestissimo nell'abito suo, e della sua giovanessa dava manifesto segnale crespa lanuggine, che pur mo' occupava le guance sue; ..." [my translation and my italics].

¹²⁴ Boccaccio,(1994), p. 31 "A cosi fatti sembianti esso, senza mutare luogo, cautissimo riguardava, e forse, si come esperto in piu battaglie amorose, conoscendo con quali armi si dovea la disiatata preda pigliare, ciascuna ora con umilta maggiore pietosissimo si dimostrava e pieno d'amoroso disio. Oime, quanto inganno sotto se quella pietà nasconde! La quale, secondo che gli effetti ora dimostrano, partitasi dal cuore, ove mai poi non ritorno, fittizia si fermo nel suo viso. E accio che io non vada ogni suo atto narrando, de' quai ciascuno era pieno di maestrevole inganno, o egli che l'operasse o i fati che 'l concedessono, in si fatta maniera ando, che io, oltre ad ogni potere raccontare, da subito e inoppinato amore mi trovai presa, e ancora sono" [my translation].

learning how to dress and comport oneself, to be admired by one's peers and to be sexually appealing. Philosophers and theologians who associated honesty and virtue with beauty added further pressure to these social objectives, even as they criticised vanity and deception.

Conclusion

Literary rhetoric indicated that natural beauty resulted from virtue, and practicing virtuous behaviour would increase beauty and create a new true identity. However, superficial illusions of beauty, wealth or piety enacted through adornment and cosmetics were economically and spiritually dangerous and could lead to social humiliation or divine punishment. As noted in the previous chapter, sermons and books of advice primarily presented those on the lower levels of the social hierarchy as pitiable potential recipients of charity. This chapter demonstrates that literary narratives, courtesy books, sermons, images and sumptuary laws likewise worked to shame women against wearing vain attire so as not to destabilise the social hierarchy or to waste the economic resources of the community. The city's women, like its poor, had their place in the hierarchy. As women found ways of embodying the moral rhetoric that praised beauty as a sign of virtue, they reinforced the implied message that the higher levels of society (who had access to a broader array of material and cosmetic resources) must therefore have a higher degree of virtue.

Literature and sermons idealised the beauty of the adorned body as a text from which truth could be read. Honest unity of adornment and comportment with status, character and intention was Renaissance society's benchmark for assessing beauty. Secular authors increasingly theorised the ideal enactment of etiquette in response to, and in aid of, increasing pressure to conform to socially acceptable standards of appearance. Allegorically decorated objects including mirrors brought the social and spiritual significance of beauty and etiquette into the domestic sphere with the intention that people should observe, learn and emulate good examples. However, moral pressure against hypocrisy made self-presentation all the more complex. Literature, sermons and paintings rhetorically warned women that any detectable effort to appear beautiful would actually appear ugly, even bestial, and would be exposed and mocked. Philosophical ideals, whether learned through reading or through visual and verbal rhetoric, contributed to the formative experiences and

memories that informed people's awareness of the cultural expectations they would face. The discussion in the thesis has so far focused on the ways women learned who society expected them to be, on a spiritual and social level, in sympathy with communal activities, public sermons and large-scale imagery. The next chapter will discuss the ways in which Florentine children, and girls in particular, received direct instruction in how to translate rhetorical ideals into embodied practice, by learning appropriate etiquette as well as practical skills they would be required to exhibit as evidence of their character and domestic competence in their adult lives.

Chapter Five - Gendered Education

Beatrice's father was frequently away from Florence overseeing the trade of luxury cloth. When she was eight her elder brother left Florence to begin a commercial apprenticeship in a bank in Rome. Her brother closest to her own age attended an independent elementary school where he learned to read and then continued his mercantile education at an abacus school. While the men in her family travelled and studied out in society, Beatrice remained at home and helped her mother with the domestic tasks. Over the years her mother taught her useful skills like how to spin thread and to sew simple *camice* for her brothers to wear. Her mother also taught her how to serve dishes and to dance so that she could behave appropriately at feasts and festivals. Beatrice hoped that her mother would have another baby so that she could learn to care for it like her sister had done with her before she got married. Her mother did have one more baby but he arrived very early, only survived a week, and her mother never became pregnant again. Under the tutelage of her mother, with support from her father and occasional help from her brother, Beatrice also learned to read. Her mother had a beautiful Book of Hours that she had received as a wedding present. She would read it aloud following the text with her finger to help Beatrice to recognise the words. There were not many books in the house and her father didn't really like her to read anything without asking his permission first. However, he did encourage her to read devotional books so that she would learn how to live virtuously and quietly. He also taught her how to write a little so that she would be able to write and receive letters when she was married.

Women implicitly learned what was expected of them and how to meet those expectations as a relatively informal daily process of observation and imitation. This chapter demonstrates the explicit consolidation of that observational practice in tandem with direct instruction regarding behaviour and domestic and literary skills. The gendered, hierarchical and religious values debated in Renaissance Florence played an important role in children's education. The structure of children's formative experiences depended on the cultural values deemed appropriate to their gender and prospects. Pedagogical practices were based on the rhetorical belief that distaffs and silence were to girls as quills and speech were to boys. Typically, upper-class boys learned to read, write and to use either an abacus for mercantile business or rhetoric, for public speaking. Girls learned basic textiles, housekeeping, serving skills and enough literacy to read letters from family members and

use devotional texts to learn to be modest and silent. Humanists articulated an ideological framework against which the lived practice of the elite was judged. The most highly educated of the European male elite, and a handful of female humanists, presented various arguments concerning the moral, social and biological justification for providing boys with a more comprehensive literary education than girls. Male humanists' discussion of female education usually inclined toward discussion of adornment and comportment. Female humanists responded to this in different ways, with a few defending their position whilst others criticised their fellow-women or deflected criticism by downplaying their own abilities, or, indeed by internalising and accepting their innate inferiority.¹ The humanist community was not tied to a single city but shared ideas across city-states and courts through public letters. Although the community of female humanists was small and disparate, its elite and exceptional position and their subversive interpretation of the abilities of their sex makes them an important community to engage with in any discussion of female literacy in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Italian states. Preachers likewise discussed education, promoting a less hierarchical perspective on the value of diverse trades, instead encouraging the broader populace to follow their own natures and abilities, to love learning and in doing so to love and express Christian virtue.² This chapter will examine the ways in which education differed according to the intended roles and identities of the recipients. In this way it will highlight the role of education in perpetuating gendered, hierarchical values and embodied behaviours. Florentine society in the Renaissance enjoyed a relatively high level of literacy which had begun to extend, albeit to a lesser degree, to women. This chapter examines the remarkably body-centric moralising rhetoric that accompanied the issue of female literacy. It concludes by discussing the ways that paintings of the Virgin Mary reinforced (for potentially illiterate female viewers) ideals otherwise expressed in humanist writing, that women should focus their attention on motherhood and spinning, limiting any reading they did to devotional texts.

¹ On this last point also see Bynum (1992), pp. 235-236.

² Debby (2001), pp. 112-113.

Learning Etiquette

Given the significance of beauty and etiquette in the adult social world, and the ways this significance was reinforced in the home, it is pertinent to examine the ways moral and practical lessons were taught and learned from childhood. Humanists, theologians and wealthy merchant authors offered advice for constructing experiences from which children could see, imitate and learn the behaviour appropriate to their social and domestic status. Writers, including Giovanni Dominici, advised parents to use their children's early development to engrain appropriate moral attitudes to manners of dress, speech and gesture and to think of "that age as being willing wax that takes the impression you make on it."³ Pedagogic practice utilised the Aristotelian argument that sensate experience contextualised and strengthened the memories necessary for intellectual growth.⁴ Writers recommended that children establish associative memories between morals learnt, social interaction, material culture and ritual.

Preachers warned their listeners of the dire consequences of providing a negative example or establishing inappropriately gendered patterns for their impressionable children. Dominici reminded his readers that "it should be that father, mother, nurse and all other inhabitants of the house dress in such a way to be an example."⁵ Further, Dominici preached that fathers who set a bad example and mothers who dressed their infant sons "in a study of vanity" using "dishonest vestments" so that they looked like little girls, ruined boys.⁶ This would lead their sons down the path to sodomy, a sin which not only destroyed their souls but which brought the judgement of God down upon the city in the form of disasters and plagues.⁷ It was, therefore, essential on both a personal and a communal level that parents demonstrate good behaviour and provide appropriate dress for their children to learn from.

³ Dominici, p.137 "*É tale età come disposta cera, e piglia quella impronta vi s'accosta*" [my translation], Christine de Pizan's 1404-1407 *The Book of the Body Politic* likewise affirmed that "things taught early in childhood are lost with difficulty," p.5.

⁴ Quiviger, p.17-18.

⁵ Dominici, p. 137 "*Ma conviene di tal vestire, padre, madre, balia e tutti altri abitatori della casa dieno esempi a via*" [my translation].

⁶ Dominici MS Eicc. 1301, Predica 47, 156v-148r quoted in Debby (2001) p. 151: "*Il maladetto peccato della sodomia tanto trascorso. E nota che lle femine piangono [...] Se tu pensi bene grande parte di questo peccato et miseria e proceduto da llozo. Pero che come la femina a il fanciullo maschio, tutto il suo studio non e altro in altro che in adornarlo, pulillo et non meno, ma piu in studio di vanita. Usano a maschi che alle famine: pettinagli, puligli, disonesti vestiri in forma che creschono [...] Non si cognosce il maschio dalla femina.*"

⁷ Debby (2001), p.148-151.

Seeing, remembering and imitating were important concepts for the education of children. Having been raised with a particular understanding of the moral and social norms, people reenact and enforce that behaviour within themselves and for their children. Imitation is an innate human behaviour which we begin to experiment with as early as forty-two minutes after birth.⁸ A newborn learns to distinguish happy from sad faces within two or three days of birth, at two or three months they match facial expressions with their mothers and through this practice they begin to develop rudimentary empathy and are capable of deliberately offering comfort.⁹ Neurological studies have found that the human mind possesses mirror mechanisms which help the body and mind to interpret and respond to the emotions and actions of others. Both experiencing something and the evocation of that experience in others activates the same parts of the brain (the anterior insula and the cingulate cortex) linking sensation and emotion automatically to the motor system and impulsively preparing people to imitate what they see.¹⁰ Therefore, pedagogical systems that rely on the concept of imitation are a continuation of the initial practice by which humans identify themselves with others and, from that recognition, begin learning how to direct their movements, and eventually how to behave and express themselves corporally.

Numerous texts indicate the importance of observational, embodied learning. For instance, Marsilio Ficino expressed his view in a letter to Amerigo Benci:

Imitation is a surer way to virtue than reading [...] so the illustrious deeds of living heroes rouse us more ardently to the pursuit of virtue and fashion us more perfectly for it than do the words of the ancient philosophers discussing moral conduct.¹¹

As a humanist philosopher, Ficino understood narrative, observation and practice as a more effective pedagogical tool than solely studying philosophy. One of the first Renaissance humanists, Petrarca, wrote a letter in c.1333 to Tommaso da Messina, in which he argued that speaking eloquently to one's pupils was important:

By means of erecting examples of our virtue before their eyes, so that delighted by the beauty of those examples, they would be seized by an impulse to imitate them! For naturally we are much more effectively and easily moved by the

⁸ For a study on the stages by which innate imitative skills develop in children see, Gibbs, pp. 231-232.

⁹ Rizzolatti, & Sinigaglia, p. 177.

¹⁰ Rizzolatti & Sinigaglia, pp. 178 -189, and: Bastiaansen, et.al. pp. 2391-2404.

¹¹ Ficino, (1975, Vol. 1) "Imitatio utilior est quam lectio" pp. 34-35.

stimulus of deeds than by that of words, and we can ascend more expeditiously along this path toward the heights of virtue.

Further, Petrarca argued that the most important key to achieving eloquence was not through studying texts but through emotional control:

Since our feelings are in disarray, both our conduct and our words will be so as well. By contrast, the well-ordered mind [...] even if it did not have the ornaments of the art of oratory to hand, it would still be able to draw out of itself the most magnificent and gravest words.¹²

Therefore in order to be politically and ideologically persuasive and to be a good example for others, one had to first master one's emotions. Parents and tutors provided examples and taught children how to dress and comport themselves in order to make such emotional control appear natural and virtuous. Both female and male children had opportunities to observe, replicate and so learn the social importance of self-presentation.¹³

For a Florentine girl, the ability to act as an elegant, virtuous hostess was an important skill to learn. Morelli included his sister's ability to gracefully serve at banquets among her chief virtues.¹⁴ Even noble families including the Medici prepared their daughters for public diplomatic events by teaching them to gracefully greet and entertain illustrious guests. For example, Teodoro da Montefeltro wrote of Pope Pius II's stop-over in Florence in 1460, during which Piero di Cosimo's daughters Bianca (14 years old) and Lucrezia (11 years old) entertained the party by performing music on the organ, singing fashionable French court songs and dancing, following which "Bianca thanked Monsignore on the part of the other ladies there and touched his hand."¹⁵ Similarly, Florentine biographer and bookseller, Vespasiano da Bisticci (1421-1498) recorded the admirable performance of Alessandra de' Bardi, who served the ambassadors of Holy Roman Emperor Sigmund in 1432. His account begins with the judgement that Alessandra's behaviour indicated "how carefully she had

¹² "Francis Petrarch, Letter to Tommaso Da Messina, Concerning the Study of Eloquence (dated either 1333 or 1350-51" in Wayne A Rebhorn, ed. 2000. *Renaissance Debates on Rhetoric*. Translated by Wayne A. Rhebhorn. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, pp. 15-16.

¹³ Texts written in close proximity to but outside the context of Renaissance Florence likewise stress the political importance of male attire and etiquette, for instance Landry's *The Book of the Knight of the Tower* (French, 1372) was one of a pair of books including a (now lost) instructive text for his sons. Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* (Italian, 1528) analysed both male and female etiquette but its primary focus was the definition of an ideal noble man.

¹⁴ Morelli, pp.177-180.

¹⁵ Teodo da Montefltro's letter to Marchesa Barbara of Brandenburg as quoted and discussed in Prizer (1991), pp. 3-6.

been brought up by her accomplished mother.” This emphasised that one’s public appearance and behaviour reflected on one’s family and community. Vespasiano continued by admiring the graceful way Alessandra served “a dish of sweetmeats to the ambassadors, with a napkin of fine linen on her shoulder” while “curtsying to the ground in a most natural way.” It is worth noting that he praised Alessandra’s *natural* performance of an embodied behaviour which he had already attributed to her mother’s example. Vespasiano proudly recounted the appearance of the Florentine women at the banquet and in doing so he revealed the unquestioned association between clothing and character. The women were:

Finely dressed, most beautiful and seemly in body and mind, splendidly ornamented with pearls and jewels [...] their dresses were not low cut at the neck as they are today, but cut high in a fair and modest fashion.

Vespasiano nostalgically reflected, “Florence had the most beautiful and chaste women in Italy and their fame had spread all over the world. Just think whether nowadays they are still like that.”¹⁶ Thus, he utilised the popular trope of the virtuous past, corrupted by present female fashions. Vespasiano’s account indicates the extent to which lived experiences were interpreted through the lens of contemporary philosophy. He viewed the unity of Alessandra’s well learned and performed comportment with her social status, character and adornment as being a sign of virtue, beauty and honesty.

Florentine parents provided their children with opportunities to practice imitating the behaviours they observed in adults, both at home and, at various auspicious moments, in public. Dominici idealistically advised parents to instil piety in their young sons by making:

A small altar or two in the house, [...] You can dress them [the children] up in surplices like acolytes, [...] bring them to the church sometimes and show them what the real priests do so they learn [...] and then making them preach, you and your family sit down while they stand above and speak, do not laugh, but commend, and reward them when they imitate the spiritual office.¹⁷

¹⁶ Bisticci as quoted in Rodgers, p.108.

¹⁷ Dominici, p. 146, Full quote: “*a farsi uno altarusso o due in casa, sotto titolo del Salvatore, del quale é la festa ogni domenica: abbivi tre o quattro dossaluzzi variari, ed egli, o piú, ne sieno sacrestani; mostrando loro come ogni festa debbano variatamente adornare quella cappelluzza. Alcuna volta saranno occupati in fare grillande di fiori o d'erbe, e incoronare Iesu, adornare la Vergine Maria dipinta, fare candeluzze, accendere e spegnere, incensare, tenere pulito, spazzare parare gli altari, comporre de'candelieri di fuscilli di cera, di terra; sievi la campanuzza, corrino a sonare tutte l'ore come sentono nelle chiese, possansi parare con le camice [colle camicie] come accoliti, cantinvi come sanno, parinsi a dir messa, e sieno menati alcuna volta allachiesa e loo mostrato quel che fanno e' veri sacerdoti acció imparino a contraffargli; e cosí veriatamente quento si può sieno*

This embodied imitative activity would, theoretically, encourage children to learn to use objects of devotion in the safe, nourishing environment of the home.¹⁸ Such an approach to teaching children to dress, speak and behave was likewise promoted and practised with more secular contexts in mind. Mary Rogers has shown that even girls being trained for the less reputable future of being a courtesan learned by “playacting at everything” according to their mothers’ example and instruction, and they continued to learn how to adapt their appearance, speech and comportment through various kinds of social interaction.¹⁹ In 1454, at the age of five, Lorenzo de’ Medici displayed his grown-up behaviour by greeting the Duke of Anjou to Florence in French dress, but his tutor Gentile Becchi noted that Lorenzo’s grave body language was particularly Florentine.²⁰ In this case the messages expressed by comportment outweighed that of attire.²¹ This selection of sources indicate a shared mentality of physically engraining socially-coded behaviours and ways of thinking about morality, the body and the self across a diverse range of anticipated public identities, from priests, to prostitutes, and to nobles.

Literary Education and Identity

Education differed for people at different levels of the social hierarchy. Without a standardised pedagogic program Florentine people brought their children up to learn the skills that would best prepare them for the roles of their foreseeable future.²² This approach excluded people from the kinds of knowledge deemed inappropriate or unnecessary for who they were going to be. This is evident in the contemporary arguments against the education of women and in the distinction between humanist and mercantile literary milieus.

The pride Florentines placed in their literacy is reflected in humanists’ debate concerning education. Florentine merchant author Paolo da Certaldo’s *Libro di Buoni Costumi* advised readers on social behaviour household management, education, dress, hygiene, friendship,

occupati con amore circa il divino santuario, lasciandogli guastare le frascoline loro faranno, acciò abbin bisogno di rifarle.” [my translation].

¹⁸ Daniel Bornstein, 1998. “Spiritual Kinship and Domestic Devotions.” In *Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy*, edited by Judith C. Brown and Robert C. Davis, 173-192. London: Longman. p. 188.

¹⁹ Mary Rogers, 2000. “Fashioning Identities for the Renaissance Courtesan.” In *Fashioning Identities in Renaissance Art*, edited by Mary Rogers. England: Ashgate. p.91-93.

²⁰ Trexler (1980), p. 429.

²¹ Jones & Stallybrass, p. 46.

²² Robert Black, 1991. “Italian Renaissance Education: Changing Perspectives and Continuing Controversies.” *Journal of the History of Ideas* (University of Pennsylvania Press) 52 (2): 315-334.

religion and economy. The introduction to his text indicates the significance of education to the minds of the Florentine merchant-class. Da Certaldo commenced his work by outlining “five keys to wisdom” which were, first, fear God; second, honour your teachers and accept their discipline “because without a teacher you cannot have perfect wisdom, without wisdom you cannot have virtue”; third, continually and carefully read new things; fourth, continue to unashamedly ask questions; fifth, “retain well in the mind what you have read and learned.” The ultimate goal of this discipline was to “consider the counsel and customs you will read in this book and others, putting the good into effect and leaving the bad, and you will be wise and mannerly.”²³ The ‘keys,’ therefore, represent the core process of learning stemming from religion, humility, study, inquisition, memory and application. This learning process built on the ideas of Quintilian who wrote that when words were read and copied by a youth “he will remember such aphorisms even when he is an old man, and the impression made upon his unformed mind will contribute to the formation of his Character.”²⁴ Memorised text, like imitated behaviour, formed the values and identity of the person.

Over the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the Florentine merchant community grew and dispersed, which increased the necessity of record-keeping and letter-writing as a means to maintain business and familial relationships. Italian cities responded to this necessity by appointing and paying teachers for small schools of boys to learn the skills they would need to maintain their cities’ success. Ecclesiastically funded monastic schooling dwindled with the increase of commune-funded schools and parent-funded independent schools.²⁵ Florentine boys between the ages of six to eleven could attend one of the three types of elementary school. Schools typically taught students to read (whether they focused on the vernacular or Latin is subject to debate), eventually using the grammatical treatise of Aelius

²³ Certaldo, 1986 pp.3-5: *"cinque chiavi de la sapienzia [...] Molto e da onorare il maestro, pero che senza il maestro non puoi avere perfetta sapienzia, e senza sapienzia non puoi essere virtudioso; [...] La quinta chiave de la sapienzia si e che tu ritenghi bene ne la mente tua quello che leggi e che t'e insegnato, pero ch'a non ritenere quello che leggi e che t'e insegnato e che 'mpari e uno perdere di tempo. dunque, se non vuoi indarno leggere e fare perdere la fatica al maestro tuo che t'insega, ritieni gli ammaestramenti e' costumi che leggerai in questo libro e negli altri, mettendo in opera con effectto il bene e lasciando il male: e verrai savio e costumato."* [my translation].

²⁴ Quintilian as quoted in Carruthers, 178.

²⁵ Paul F. Grendler, 1985. “The Organization of Primary and Secondary Education in the Italian Renaissance.” *The Catholic Historical Review* 71 (2): 185-205, p. 188. And: Annemarieke Willemsen, *Back to the Schoolyard, The Daily Practice of Medieval and Renaissance Education*. Turnhout: Studies in European Urban History 100-1800, Brepols, 2008. p. 31.

Donatus. The texts the boys learned from were predominantly religious, such as psalms, which would simultaneously guide them in the construction of their moral outlook.²⁶ Following elementary school (which many did not complete) most students pursued vocational work, taking up an apprenticeship. However, wealthy and ambitious parents could send their sons to an abacus school for another two years to learn the mercantile skills, or to a grammar school for roughly five years to learn advanced Latin and to read ancient authors in order to pursue literary professions.²⁷ From the early-fifteenth century the *artes liberales* began to give way to the *studia humanitatis* which maintained a focus on grammar and rhetoric but raised moral philosophy, history and poetry above the scientific arts including geometry, astronomy and music.²⁸ Florentine literacy exceeded that of its surrounding regions by the early-fifteenth century and was central to its economic and cultural influence in Europe.²⁹ Literacy was necessary for Florentine enterprises including banking, trading in textiles, translating, preaching, record-keeping and lawmaking.

Different literary, and sartorial, expectations were laid on girls who were intended to marry elite men from those who were destined to be merchants' wives, nuns or servants. Girls typically received their literary education at home. If families were wealthy enough they might employ a private tutor or governess.³⁰ There is debate about whether fathers or mothers typically took responsibility for teaching their daughters to read. Historically mothers have been assumed to be their daughter's teachers; however, there is evidence for both occurring, and it was conventional for women to acknowledge their mothers' virtuous influence in teaching them etiquette but to acknowledge their fathers' contribution to their literary education.³¹ This accords with the cultural delineation of the elegance to women and intellect to men.

²⁶ Witt, Ronald. 1995. "What did Giovannino Read and Write? Literacy in Early Renaissance Florence." *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 6: 83 – 114, p. 85 & 99-100.

²⁷ Witt, p. 84 – 87 and Debby (2001), p. 116.

²⁸ Debby (2001), p.103.

²⁹ Witt, p. 98.

³⁰ Witt, p. 86.

³¹ Witt (p.86) states that women received their education from their mothers. Ross (pp. 19, 31 & 35) demonstrates that women acknowledged their fathers regardless of the degree of tuition they received from either parent. She presents the two examples of Christine de Pizan who was educated by her father and used that literary lineage to justify her pursuits, and Isotta Nogarola whose mother Bianca is known to have supported her education but Isotta publicly acknowledged her father. For an example of a noble literate daughter thanking her mother for her example of Christian virtue and charity rather than literary instruction see Ippolita Sforza's 1464 wedding speech delivered to her mother Biana Maria, the Duchess of Milan (see King

Alternately, elite parents could, at great expense, send their daughters to convents to be educated in the company of novices and nuns. This would shield the girls from the corrupting temptations of lay society and so help them avoid social suspicion about their purity which would lower their chances of securing an advantageous marriage in later life.³² This practice, termed *serbanza*, was appealing for travelling merchants and wealthy widowed men. *Serbanza* increased in popularity in Florence after 1480, particularly in times of political strife when fathers feared the arrival of enemy soldiers who may despoil their daughters and ruin their marriageability.³³ From 1400, the Augustinian nuns of the convent of Santa Maria del Fiore (called Lapo), who already produced textiles for the professional market, made devotional books for friars and wrote memoranda for illiterate women, established one of the most successful girls' boarding schools in Florence.³⁴ Convent schools allowed the girls to emerge for the event of their marriage as pious virgins trained in domestic tasks, virtuous behaviour and a degree of literacy.³⁵ In this way, cloistered communities played an important role in training the new generations of laywomen to be practical wives with skills and values they could pass on to their own daughters even if they had prematurely lost their mothers' example.

In Florence, when one had several daughters, their futures as either wives or nuns would be determined when they were still very young, depending on the family's financial and social situation and the girls' beauty or character. Nuns required a less extravagant dowry than a bride so the number of cloistered women rose along with dowry prices. In 1336, 1.2% of the female population of Florence lived as nuns in one of the city's sixteen convents, but this increased by 1427 to 6.7% of Florentine women living in, what was by then, twenty convents, which would continue to increase to approximately thirty-three convents by

and Rabil, p. 45). In a Venetian example of a father facilitating his daughter's education, although not teaching her directly, Francesco Barbaro support of his daughter Costanza's intellectual by sending her to a convent, where she could continue her study, and continuing to write her affectionate letters full of references to classical and theological texts (see King and Rabil, p. 19).

³² Rogers and Tinagli, p. 105.

³³ Strocchia, (2001), p.149.

³⁴ Strocchia, (2009), pp.115-116.

³⁵ Paul F. Grendler, 1991. *Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Literacy and Learning 1300-1600*. The John Hopkins University Press, ACLS Humanities e-book. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-index?c=acls;view=toc;idno=heb00473.0001.001>. p.97, and: Robert Black, and Aurélien Berra. 2004. "École et société à Florence aux XIVe et XVe siècles: Le témoignage des ricordanze." *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* (EHESS) 59 (4): 827 - 846, p. 830, and: Strocchia, (2009), pp. 147-149.

1478.³⁶ Female kin continued to visit and socialise with their cloistered sisters, creating one of the few settings for private female sociability that was not related to childbirth.³⁷ The influx of vocationless women into the cloister generated claims that nuns were hypocritical, maintaining their interest in the concerns of the world, from social status to sex.³⁸ Nevertheless, when discussing how to raise a daughter, Paolo da Certaldo recommended, “if you want her to become a nun, place her in a convent before she is mischievous enough to understand the vanity of the world, and there she will learn to read.”³⁹ Reading was thereby assumed to be only valuable to a woman if she were a nun who had as little experience of the outside world as possible. The dangers of women’s bodies were akin to the dangers of their minds; both needed to be controlled.

Even when women’s literacy was considered beneficial to their duties as wives and to their spiritual edification, they were less frequently taught to write. Handwriting was considered a laborious task and so learning to dictate eloquently was a more relevant practice for women. This perhaps acted as an equivalent to the masculine humanist activity of public speaking. However, dictating often led to a more discursive tone in women’s writing.⁴⁰ The fact that the pen was not in the women’s hands has also led to speculation concerning female autonomy and the extent to which scribes might embellish or alter the meaning of their dictator’s words.⁴¹ The practice undermined women learning to write and it limited their ability to communicate privately between themselves. Despite restrictions, female literacy

³⁶ Stanley Chojnacki, 1998. “Daughters and Oligarchs: Gender and the Early Renaissance State.” In *Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy*, edited by Judith C. Brown and Robert C. Davis, 63-86. London: Longman.p.71.

³⁷ Strocchia (2009), p. 40

³⁸ Strocchia (2009) pp. 171-184 discusses the unprecedented Florentine action of establishing an Office of Convent Guardians in 1421 to prevent nun’s from having sexual affairs which would ruin their morals and potentially elicit divine punishment on the city. For an example of fourteenth century fiction written on the theme of nun’s sex lives see Boccaccio, (1822) Vol. 2, Day 3 Story 1 pp. 5-19, For an example of concern for illicit scandal from within the monastic setting see “The Rule of Saint Francis of Assisi.” In *Readings in Medieval History*, edited by Patrick J. Geary, 472-473. Canada: Broadway Press, 2003. pp. 472-473 which commands the brothers “not to have suspicious intercourse or to take council with women. And, [...] let them not enter nunneries. Neither may they become fellow god-parents with men or women, lest this cause a scandal.” For a discussion of recorded instances where men were punished for having secret sexual liaisons within the cloisters see: Samuel K. Cohn Jr., “Sex and Violence on the Periphery, the Territorial State in Early Renaissance Florence.” In *Women in the Streets*, 16-38. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1996.

³⁹ Certaldo as quoted in Rogers and Tinagli, p. 102.

⁴⁰ Bynum, p.196.

⁴¹ Ann Crabb, 2007. ““If I Could Write”: Margherita Datini and Letter Writing, 1385-1410.” *Renaissance Quarterly* 60 (4): 1170-1206.p. 1176.

increased in the fifteenth century and led to women being able to develop their personal, familial and social identities through sending and receiving letters.⁴²

The diverse objectives of female and male education are demonstrated in Morelli's *Ricordi* which provided admiring accounts of three generations of his family's education. He recounted the difficulty his father faced in obtaining an education, as an orphan, eventually asking all potential teachers to sign a contract promising not to beat him when he struggled. Morelli also described his sister Mea's refined skills and honest appearance. He said Mea had a good figure, beautiful pale soft skin and long fingers (which he notes looked like those painted by Giotto, suggesting the way people interpreted and articulated their experience through a store of remembered cultural images), with blond hair, "and with those beauties were corresponding virtues." He noted that she had all the virtues "a woman would require" including "delicate speech, pleasant, honest in acts [and] temperate." He described her speech in masculine terms as "bold, frank" and "virile." He expressed pride in her ability to "read and write so well as any man, she knew perfectly how to sing, to dance and to serve a feast for men and women" and she cared for her household affairs without "avarice or poverty" but with "good morals, living happy and cheerfully."⁴³ Morelli also wrote of his son's education which follows the standard elementary school program, albeit at a young age:

At four, he wanted to go to school, at six he knew the Psalter and the Donatus by eight, he was able to write and sent letters in his own hand to his cousins or mother when they were at the villa, at nine he read Latin and started to read merchants' letters. He had a good memory, good language, good recollection, good looks, was polite and mannerly.⁴⁴

⁴² Crabb, p.1181. Crabb notes that the Strozzi family saw little value in women's letters so much of their correspondence was lost. In contrast, the Datini archive culled very little, revealing rich textual life of Florentine women from influential families.

⁴³ Morelli pp.178-180 *"E con quelle bellezze rispondeano le virtu, che di sua mano ella sapea fare cio ch'ella voleva, che a donna si richiedesse; e'n tutte sue operazioni virtuosissima: nel parlare dilicata, piacevole, con atto onesto e temperato, con tutte effectuose parole: baldanzosa, franca donna e d'animo verile, grande e copiosa di tutte virtu. Leggeva e scrivea tanto bene quante alcun uomo: sapea perfettamente cantare a danzare, e arebbe serrvito a una mensa d' uomini o di donne cosi pulitamente come giovane uso e pratico a nozze o a simili cose. Era saputa nella masserizia della casa, e non con punto d'avarizia o di miseria; ma traeva il sottile del sottile, ammunendo e dirizzando la sua familia con tutti buoni assegnamenti e buoni costumi, vivendo lieta e allegra."* [my translation].

⁴⁴ Morelli, p. 457 *"La quale, da se istessi, nel tempo d'anni quarto, volle ire a bottega, in sei seppe il Saltero, in otto il Donadello; e seppe iscrivere per modo mandava lettere di sua mano a' nipoti o alla madre quando erano in villa; in nove anni fece laitini e apparo di leggere lettere mercantantesche. Avea buona memoria, buona*

Morelli indicates that literacy, speech and comportment were important factors for both male and female education. He gave significantly greater attention to appearance and comportment when discussing his sister, speaking of literary skills as an additional accomplishment, whereas the reverse was true of Morelli's male subjects; he focused on his son's memory and literary education and only noted his physical demeanour as an additional sign of accomplishment. Although the trajectory between 1348 and 1498 was toward an increased acceptance of female literacy, there was contemporary disagreement on the worth of teaching women to read.

Quills and Distaffs

Literature by and for men enforced a close association between textiles with femininity and literacy with masculinity.⁴⁵ Prior to Morelli's *Ricordi*, Paolo da Certaldo provided advice on what fathers should teach their daughters in order to receive social approval and, conversely, what would be unseemly or irrelevant for their daughters to learn:

Teach her to sew and not to read, because it is not very good for a woman to know how to read, unless you want her to be a nun. [...] Dress your daughter well, [...] teach her how to do all the deeds of the chattel of the house, that is, [make] the bread, [...] do the laundry, make the beds, spin and weave French bags or embroider silk with a needle, cut linen garments and wool, repair stockings and all such things, so that when she marries she will not seem foolish, nor raised in the wilderness. And you, who raised her, will not be cursed.⁴⁶

Leon Battista Alberti also disapproved of laywomen learning to read. He expressed concern that female literacy could lead to too great an interest in other masculine affairs that may put men's businesses at risk. Alberti's protagonist Giannozzo, in his *Book of the Family*, described the way he opened his house to his wife. He showed her all his possessions, but refused to allow her into his study, or to read books, and he demanded that she immediately hand him any writing she found in the house "to take away any taste she might have for

lingua, buona ritenitiva, buono aspetto e gentile e costumato: era un poco peritoso e salvatico." [my translation].

⁴⁵ This continued into the sixteenth century, as evidenced by art theorist Ludovico Dolce (1508-1568) who recommended that "A daughter should be able to sew at least sufficiently well, because sewing belongs to women as writing does to men." Dolce, Ludovico, (1547), in: Rogers and Tinagli, p. 99.

⁴⁶ Certaldo, p. 37: "*E s'elle fanciulla femina, polla a cuscire, e none a leggere, che non ista troppo bene a una femina sapere leggere, se gia no la volessi fare monaca. [...] La fanciulla femina vesti bene, [...] E'nsegnale fare tutti fatti de la masserizia di casa. cioe il pane, [...]e far bucato, e fare il letto, e filare, e tessere borse francesche o recamare seta con ago, e tagliare panni lini e lani, e rimpedulare le calze, e tutte simili cose, si che quando la mariti non paia una decima e non sia detto che venga del bosco. E non sarai bestemmiata tu che l'avrai allevata.*" [my translation], also see: Rogers and Tignali, p. 102.

looking at my notes or prying into my private affairs.”⁴⁷ ‘Giannozzo’ further expressed cynicism of the extent to which mothers prepared their daughters to run a household. He assigned himself the most credit for his wife’s admirable housekeeping, explaining that her mother had taught her nothing practical but only to sew and be virtuous.⁴⁸ It seems that, for Alberti, women were barely qualified to teach their daughters the most essential feminine skills.

The idea that housework was an essential practice for women but reading was unnecessary and potentially dangerous is evident in both humanist and merchant correspondence. However, in contrast to Alberti’s dire assessment of the practice, having a literate wife could be a valuable asset to a merchant. Margherita Datini (like many merchants’ wives) learned to read late in life in order to maintain communication with her husband Francesco when his work as a merchant banker took him away from the home. This allowed Margherita to receive instructions for Francesco’s employees and to report local information and household affairs to him.⁴⁹ However, Francesco expressed only cautious support for his wife continuing her education by reading widely and practicing handwriting instead of dictating letters. In a 1395 letter, Francesco instructed her not to “spend such a long time reading that you will then do everything else badly: first take care of everything else, then you can read.”⁵⁰ Francesco did later send his illegitimate daughter to school.⁵¹ This suggests that he did consider female literacy beneficial so long as it was learned at a young age making the adult woman more practical as a merchant’s wife.

In contrast to the debate around literacy, women at every level of the social hierarchy were encouraged to engage in the monotonous yet essential task of spinning thread, which supposedly focussed women’s attention on ‘honest’ industry. The only debate in this situation was the degree of skill and the kinds of production thought appropriate to women according to their status and trajectory. In 1443, two years before joining a convent in order to continue her education, Cecilia Gonzaga, the daughter of the Marquis of Mantua received a letter of encouragement from humanist Gregorio Correr advising her:

⁴⁷ Alberti, (1969), p. 209.

⁴⁸ Alberti, (1969), p. 208.

⁴⁹ Crabb, 1170-1206.

⁵⁰ Datini, Francesco, (1395), in: Rogers and Tinagli, p.155 (italian source: E. Cecchi, ed, *Le lettere di Francesco Datini alla moglie margherita* (1385-1410, prato, 1990 p.135).

⁵¹ Witt, p. 86.

Not to embroider anything for secular use. And I recommend that you weave with coarse rather than fine cloth [...], so that you may always be busy. For I don't want you to be like Lyda or the many virgins of the world who think that their fingertips deserve to touch nothing but silk.⁵²

Repetitive needlework allowed respectable women to assist their families financially, it kept them humble and indoors, away from men and temptation.⁵³ The production of cloth was a key commercial enterprise in Renaissance Florence and women from all corners of society were involved in that production.

Women from nobles to nuns and peasants were involved in the production of cloth. Their particular rank and state influenced the tasks they were assigned and the conditions under which they worked.⁵⁴ Noble women spun and embroidered, but their work was primarily a means of cultivating their own virtue. By contrast, the labour of fifteenth-century Florentine nuns facilitated the success of the city's silk industry.⁵⁵ Sharon Strocchia's research shows that, as well as nun's engagement with the masculine-driven industry, the Lapo nuns made textile products for the uncloistered female community, including trousseau items, silk purses, undershirts and embroidered cuffs.⁵⁶ From the mid-fifteenth century nuns also managed a workforce of lower-class women, including girls and widows, who did the essential but unskilled work of reeling and spinning silk thread.⁵⁷ This allowed women to earn an admittedly minimal wage, and contribute to the city's textile production without the greater indecency of dealing directly with the masculine arm of the industry.

The preparation of thread and cloth was a physical act by which human hands controlled and altered raw materials into a socially useful and aesthetic form.⁵⁸ The production of a piece of cloth, let alone an item of clothing, required the involvement of many hands in over twenty-five stages. Silk, linen and wool each began in a rural setting of harvesting worms, growing flax and shepherding sheep. Underpaid female workers were involved from the earliest stages. In an urban setting this meant winding and boiling silk thread, retting and refining

⁵² Correr (1443) quoted from King and Rabil, p.101.

⁵³ This idea was advocated a similar time and in similar terms by Christine de Pizan who instructed women to embroider beautiful images on fine linen or silks following their prayers as "such worthy occupations prevent idle thoughts." (Christine de Pizan (1989), p.144).

⁵⁴ Luca Mola, 2000. *The Silk Industry of Renaissance Venice*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, p. 35.

⁵⁵ Strocchia, p. 113.

⁵⁶ Strocchia (2009), p.115.

⁵⁷ Strocchia, (2009), p. 118.

⁵⁸ Jones & Stallybrass, p. 116.

flax, and cleaning, combing and spinning wool. Whether hired to work in a community, working domestically to supplement their families' income or displaying their virtue through the humble utility of their hands, essentially all women spun thread.⁵⁹

Women's opportunities to learn literary skills were diminished by the propagation of the idea that spinning and literature were gender-exclusive. Elite convent culture proved the exception to this rule. As Strocchia has shown, seven Florentine convents produced and sold books. In these cases, the quiet and laborious task of copying devotional texts afforded parallels with the focused task of embroidery, both of which could be set aside to allow the nuns to pray. Among their repertoire, nuns produced devotional and liturgical texts for monasteries and Books of Hours which were popular devotional texts for laywomen.⁶⁰ Laywomen read devotional texts and increasingly read and wrote letters. It is therefore evident that practice did not always accord with the ideals expressed by men and in fact, even male writers were divided on the question of whether women should also be taught to read and on what they should read if they were to learn.

Literary Censorship

The texts one was exposed to were influential in the development of identity. Male humanists, friars and merchants attempted to dissuade women from reading secular texts but allowed them to read devotional texts like Books of Hours, hagiographies, psalters and the scriptures.⁶¹ These texts promoted devout introspection and humility. Authoritative voices sought to ban women from reading romantic poetry, claiming that such works would lead to vice. Women's access to influential works of ancient thinkers and new philosophy was also denied with the argument that there was no acceptable avenue for women to apply such ideas.

Censorship prevented women from having sufficient references to confidently engage learned men in intellectual debate. Therefore, literacy censorship proved to be a means of

⁵⁹ Margaret F. Rosenthal, 2009. "Cultures of Clothing in Later Medieval and Early Modern Europe." *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 39 (3): 460-482. p. 469, and: Ruth Mazo Karras, 2004. "This Skill in a Woman is by no Means to be Despised: Weaving and the Gender Division of Labour in the Middle Ages." In *Medieval Fabrications: Dress, Textiles, Clothwork, and Other Cultural Imaginings*, 89-104. New York: Palgrave MacMillan. p.92., also see Warr (2010), p.185, and Strocchia, p. 116.

⁶⁰ Strocchia, (2009), pp. 144-145.

⁶¹ Benson, p.40.

promoting feminine silence. In order to be applicable, information must reside within the mind. The more one had inscribed on the memory the more prepared one was to understand further stimulus.⁶² As the Tuscan historian Leonardo Bruni argued:

The one who lacks knowledge of literature will neither understand sufficiently the writings of the learned, nor will he be able, if he should himself attempt to write, to avoid making a laughingstock of himself.⁶³

A strong foundation of study and memory was therefore important for the calibre of one's communication. For the most part, women read and expressed themselves in the vernacular, rarely having the opportunity (unless they belonged to the privileged noble classes) to learn Latin.⁶⁴ This language barrier limited the literary genres (and associated concepts) they had at their disposal. The degree to which different demographic groups received literary training and the breadth of material they had to read, affected the formation of their identities in terms of their ability to express themselves and to understand and engage in discussions with other members of the society.

That books of devotion were available to women indicates the importance religious texts and the values expressed in them had in the moral landscape that informed women's identities. Moral reading has a long history in Christian thought. As the sixth-century pope Gregory the Great put it, "we devour the book when with eager desire we clothe ourselves with the words of life."⁶⁵ St. Augustine taught that "Holy Scripture to the mind's eye is a kind of mirror, that our internal faces may be seen. For there we know our shame, there our beauty."⁶⁶ Having read (devoured) the scriptures readers contemplated, internalised and applied their meaning to their own self-understanding.

As a fourteenth-century mother advising others on the education of their daughters Christine de Pizan argued that for noble women, "proper development of their habits, especially their moral and intellectual instruction, is even more critical than the care of their

⁶² Carruthers, pp. 30-31.

⁶³ Leonardo Bruni. 1987. *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni: Selected Texts*. Edited by Gordon Griffiths, James Hankins and David Thompson. Translated by Gordon Griffiths, James Hankins and David Thompson. New York: Binghamnton. p.242.

⁶⁴ Crabb, p. 1183.

⁶⁵ Quoted after Carruthers, p.169.

⁶⁶ Carruthers, p.169, Original text from Augustine, In Psalmo 130 '*Scriptura sacra mentis oculis quasi quoddam speculum opponitur, ut interna nostra facies in ipsa videatur. Ibi etenim foeda, ibi pulchra nostra cognoscimus* [my translation].

bodies.”⁶⁷ She reminded mothers that “the greatest protection and ornament she can have is her children.”⁶⁸ She therefore advised that daughters “be taught to read and thereafter learn her Hours and her prayers. Then she will be given devotional books and others describing virtuous behaviour. She will not be allowed to read of vain things.”⁶⁹ The fact that daughters’ behaviour reflected on their mothers has been noted earlier; however, Christine moved the discussion of mothers’ responsibilities to their daughters’ moral upbringing into the realms of literary instruction while maintaining restrictions on the range of texts permissible for female readership.

Writers justified restrictions on secular reading with the commonly held belief that reading influenced thoughts and behaviour. The idea that reading (giving voice to other people’s ideas in one’s mind) culturally valued narratives, would influence the way people thought about themselves, and therefore how they behaved, is consistent with postmodern thought. Feminist sociologist Bronwyn Davies argues (from her twentieth-century context) that traditional romantic narratives instil damaging cultural and personal expectations about the submissive and nurturing role of women in a relationship which can form a basis for interpreting the role of the self in lived encounters. Davies gives the example of women, having grown up on fairy tales, mistakenly interpreting flawed men as “their prince”. However, she does not blame the individual for this misconception or for the misenactment of expected roles. Instead, she criticises the cultural perpetuation of narratives that provide a harmful framework by which many members of the community measure and construct their identities.⁷⁰ This analysis echoes fears expressed in late-Medieval and early-modern Europe, that reading about love and illicit behaviour would influence the readers’ actions.

Rhetoric common to authors and preachers propagated fear of the fragility of young people’s minds (especially women’s), that made them susceptible to being misled by love poetry.⁷¹ In the second circle of the *Inferno*, Dante describes being confronted by an eternal tempestuous cloud of adulterous lovers, many of whom were murdered or committed

⁶⁷ Pizan, (1989), p. 102.

⁶⁸ Pizan, (1989), p.103.

⁶⁹ Pizan, (1989) p.104.

⁷⁰ Davies, pp. 68-69.

⁷¹ Landry (p. 169) suggested that women falling unadvisedly in love may “have ben deceived of hit by false councelle of bawds.” For an analysis of the cultural division amongst Florentine thinkers of the fourteenth and fifteenth century on the issue of poetry see Debby (2001) pp 106-111.

suicide because of their lust and infidelity. Among them, Dante is struck by the sight of the lovers Paolo Malatesta and his sister-in-law Francesca da Rimini (who had recently been murdered by Francesca's husband Giovanni Malatesta) clinging to each other in the maelstrom. Dante, weeping for them, asks Francesca how their affair began, to which she replies:

One day we, reading for pleasure
Of Launcelot, how Love did him enthrall
Alone we were and without any fear.

Many times our eyes were impelled to meet,
That reading, drained the colour from our faces;
But at only one point we were overcome

When we read how the desired smiled
Being kissed by such a lover,
This man who shall never from me be divided,

Kissed my trembling mouth.
Gallehaut was' the book and who wrote it:
That day we read no longer therein.⁷²

The book acted as Gallehaut, the knight who facilitated Launcelot and Guinevere's affair. Dante used the Italian version of his name 'Galeotto' which means prisoner. In this context then, the act of reading facilitated the seduction by which they were captivated. Carruthers argues that this narrative demonstrates that late-Medieval people believed there was an ethical dimension to reading aloud because it was a sensory activity which engaged the voice and body in the stimulation of emotion and memory.⁷³ In this tragic cautionary tale, reading about love and sexuality engendered those feelings in the readers so that they "read no longer therein" but, in effect, continued the written narrative through their own imitative actions. Similarly, Bernardino of Siena encouraged young men to read for ethical, practical and intellectual development, and considered that the right kind of study should act as a

⁷² Dante, *Inferno*, Canto 5:124-138, *Ma s'a conoscer la prima radice / del nostro amor tu hai cotanto affetto, / dirò come colui che piange e dice. // Noi leggiavamo un giorno per diletto / di Lancialotto come amor lo strinse; / soli eravamo e senza alcun sospetto. // Per più fiate li occhi ci sospinse / quella lettura, e scolorocci il viso; / ma solo un punto fu quel che ci vinse. // Quando leggemmo il disiato riso / esser baciato da cotanto amante, / questi, che mai da me non fia diviso, // la bocca mi basciò tutto tremante. / Galeotto fu 'l libro e chi lo scrisse: / quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante* [my translation]

⁷³ Carruthers, p. 186.

counter to lust and carnality, but he condemned the reading of love poetry because it was likely to have the opposite effect.⁷⁴

Courtly romance typically occurred between a married noblewoman and a bachelor of equal or slightly lower social standing to herself, who fall in love but remain chaste. Joan Kelly argued that courtly romances rejected contemporary patriarchal society which treated sex solely as a means of procreation between a couple bound together by familial ambition and secular law, and, instead, promoted refined consensual (divine) love.⁷⁵ The language of courtly romances, therefore, posed challenges to the patriarchal society and women's demure, chaste role within that society. Decontextualized from literature, courtly romances were illustrated on many domestic objects associated with marriage, including small ivory boxes, combs, mirrors, belts and shoes, emphasising virtues associated with love.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, the adulterous behaviour of the stories' heroes and heroines was incompatible with Florentine social values. Romances praised men who attempted to elevate themselves in shows of strength and virtue to attract the attention of worthy women. However, if a man were inspired by such an exemplum but acted on his adulterous desires, both the man and woman would face corporeal punishment.⁷⁷

Opposing the view that reading love stories would inevitably encourage people to engage in immoral behaviour, Leonardo Bruni wrote a letter to female humanist Battista Malatesta of Montefeltro in 1424, stating:

Having no clear case against them, he charges the poets with containing tales of love affairs and unnatural vice. But I would dare affirm that in no other writers can be found so many examples of womanly modesty and goodness [...] Many such instances can be read in the poets, the finest patterns of wifely arts. Yes;

⁷⁴ Debby (2001) p. 96 referring to Bernardino, *Prediche volgari*, 1940 [Firenze 1425] vol. I, pp.306-311

⁷⁵ Kelly, p.25.

⁷⁶ For a discussion of shoes embroidered with the story of Tristan and Isolde see: Kathryn Starkry, 2004. "Tristan Slippers: An Image of Adultery or a Symbol of Marriage?" In *Medieval Fabrications: Dress, Textiles, Clothwork and Other Cultural Imaginings*, edited by Jane Burns, 34-53. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 34-53, also see: Michelle A. Laughran, and Andrea Vianello. 2011. "'Grandissima Gratia': The Power of Italian Renaissance Shoes as Intimate Wear." In *Ornamentation: The Art of Renaissance Accessories*, edited by Bella Mirabella, 253-289. Michigan: Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

⁷⁷ Kelly, in Hutson, p.36, and: Chad Coerver, 1997. "Donna/Dono: Chivalry and Adulterous Exchange in the Quattrocento." In *Picturing Women in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, edited by Geraldine A. Johnson and Sara F. Mathews-Grieco, 196-221. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p 219.

amours are sometimes described [...] but who is so doltish as not to understand that such things are fictional and allegorical?⁷⁸

Bruni therefore recognised the exemplary values conveyed through secular love poetry, and women's ability to decipher morals from allegory. He accepted that educated women should be allowed to read, interpret and learn from secular texts but it is important to note that the value he saw in these texts was that it taught women to internalise examples of "womanly modesty" and "wifely acts."

By analysing the development of Bruni's thoughts in his 1424 letter in support of Malatesta's pursuit of literary knowledge, one can begin to appreciate the degrees of conflicting, engrained ideas about gendered behaviours in various social spheres. Bruni outlined the stages of education, from learning to speak and absorbing knowledge from childhood influences, to the more formal influences of grammatical instruction and finally the private study of literature. He then restricted reading to the "best and most approved authors," initially from an ungendered perspective. Acknowledging the effect reading had on character-formation he argued:

Reading of clumsy and corrupt writers imbues the reader with their own vices, and infests his mind with a similar corruption. Study is, so to speak, the pabulum of the mind by which intellect is trained and nourished.⁷⁹

Bruni then suggested the literature women should read, from both sacred and secular authors including Augustine, Jerome, Ambrose, Cyprian, Cicero, Virgil, Livy and Sallust. He specified the value of this reading for a woman's ability to express herself verbally:

With them she will train and strengthen her taste, and she will be careful, when she is obliged to say or write something, to use no word she has not first met in one of these authors [...] I would not have her ignorant of writing.⁸⁰

This approach to study evidences Carruthers' argument that both religious and politically powerful men restricted women and laypeople to 'ethical' reading. The ethical restriction of literature was echoed by the restriction of certain adornments and the behaviour of the same demographic. People derived their sense of self from an amalgamation of what they

⁷⁸ Bruni, 249.

⁷⁹ Bruni, p. 242.

⁸⁰ Bruni, p. 242.

had learned (memorised) and applied (through reading and experiencing).⁸¹ By this method, texts resided in the readers' experience to be recalled and to give voice to current circumstances.⁸²

Further into his letter, Bruni constructed a metaphor which associated the less-common practice of women writing, which he was promoting, with women's traditional domestic context and behaviour:

I would have our writer possess a rhetorical *garniture de toilette*, a fine wardrobe, an abundant stock of domestic furniture, if I may call it that, which she can produce and display as the need arises.⁸³

Despite his encouragement of literary aspirations, Bruni recognised limits to women's ability to apply certain kinds of knowledge, specifically geometry, arithmetic, astrology "and even, perhaps, in the art of rhetoric." Rhetoric was the crowning pursuit of humanist education. Oratory required an ability to utilise remembered literary references and to couple words with appropriate vocal tone and bodily movement. Christine de Pizan's *The Book of the Body Politic* used the support of the ancient orator Valerius to observe the holistic sensory and emotive effect of oratory rhetoric: "When eloquence is combined with gentle movement [...] it affects the spirit of some and the ears of others, and it seduces and sweetens the eyes of others."⁸⁴ Bruni justified his restriction of rhetoric, which he valued highly in his own education, as a waste of effort for women who would never be called upon to speak publicly in a political capacity.⁸⁵ He situated the act of public speaking on the observed comportment of the gendered body, saying that if a woman were to:

Gesture energetically with her arms as she spoke and shout with violent emphasis, she would probably be thought mad and put under restraint. The contests of the forum, like those of warfare and battle, are the sphere of men.⁸⁶

Cultural values dictated that only men could maintain their dignity while shouting, gesticulating and fighting. Having thus delineated the separate spheres of men and women, Bruni returned to a more traditional position saying "When then, do I encourage her, when

⁸¹ Carruthers, pp 180-181.

⁸² Carruthers, p.180.

⁸³ Bruni, p. 244.

⁸⁴ Pizan, (1994), p. 46.

⁸⁵ For further discussion of Bruni's recommendations for female humanist education see: Grendler, (1991), p.87.

⁸⁶ Bruni, p. 244.

do I spur her on? Just when she devotes herself to divinity and moral philosophy.”⁸⁷ Having proposed a female education without an oratorical aspect he reasserted the importance of listening to religious men speak, asking:

Where else is virtue praised with such passion, and vice condemned with such ferocity? It is the orators who teach us to praise the good deed and to hate the bad [...] all these things the philosophers do, it is true, but in some special way anger, mercy and the arousal and pacification of the mind are completely within the power of the orator.⁸⁸

In making this statement Bruni betrayed the full significance of the censorship on oratorical expression which he proposed along with the majority of his male contemporaries. He indicated that the dynamic, physical and verbal expression of the male orator was the most emotive and effective form of communication, yet those very behaviours in the same cultural setting would be read as unrefined and ridiculous if enacted by a woman. Engrained perceptions of gender-appropriate behaviour, therefore, outweighed the sense of virtue attached to particular actions. Cultural practice excluded women from public speaking, and as their prospective futures did not require training in rhetoric their education was limited, predominantly to sacred texts which, again, advocated modest silence.

Silence

Drawing on the idea of unity of internal virtue with external signs, arguments for women’s silence connected immodest words with immodest appearance which implied a willingness to engage in immodest acts. Bernardino of Siena advocated women’s silence by labelling gossip evil and stating that the Virgin Mary spoke only seven times.⁸⁹ Francesco Barbaro idealised a silent wife who never opposed her husband. He wrote that “loquacity cannot be sufficiently reproached in women, as many very learned and wise men have stated, nor can silence be sufficiently applauded.”⁹⁰ Barbaro encouraged women to moderate their speech and comportment in accordance with their husbands’ mood, saying “if a husband, excited to anger, should scold you more than your ears are accustomed to hear, tolerate his wrath silently. But if he has been struck silent by a fit of depression, you should address him with

⁸⁷ Bruni, p.244.

⁸⁸ Bruni, p. 246.

⁸⁹ Weissman, p.31.

⁹⁰ Barbaro, p.204.

sweet and suitable words.”⁹¹ Wives’ behaviour, then, had to be an adaptable, conscious construction.

Similar to the concept that virtuous works are translated into ornaments on a celestial garment, Barbaro argues that “women should believe they have achieved glory of eloquence if they will honour themselves with the outstanding ornament of silence.”⁹² Two Italian proverbs, “keep your mouth shut and your eyes open” and “if you cannot speak, shut up, and you will be taken to be more wise,”⁹³ were intended for the instruction of both women and men and suggest that one learns more, reveals less of one’s faults, and gains more respect through observation and silence. However, silence took on greater cultural significance in relation to women. Moralists recommended women couple silence with a modestly-guarded gaze which in effect limited the potential advantages of the ‘open eyes’ of the proverb. Barbaro associated speech and uncultivated movement with the vices, including temptation, vanity and dishonesty, advising women to:

Preserve evenness and restraint in the movements of the eyes, in their walking, and in the movement of their bodies; for the wandering of the eyes, a hasty gait, and excessive movement of the hands and other parts of the body cannot be done without loss of dignity, and such actions are always joined to vanity and are signs of frivolity.⁹⁴

This supports Bruni’s argument that it would be undignified and absurd for a women to exhibit the embodied activities associated with oratory.

In his *Decameron*, Boccaccio suggested that the silence society imposed on women as an expression of modesty was in fact a symptom of women’s poor education.⁹⁵ The pattern of behaviour Simmel identified, that new fashions (methods of individualisation) arise when other modes of expression are denied to the wearer, is useful for reading Boccaccio’s

⁹¹ Barbaro, p.193.

⁹² Barbaro, 206.

⁹³ Certaldo, p. 6 “tiene la bocca chiusa e gli occhi aperti” and p.9 “se non sai parlare, taci, e sarai tenuto piu savio” [my translation].

⁹⁴ Barbaro, p. 202. This instruction connecting body, eyes and character frequently occurs in early Renaissance Courtesy literature from across Europe, notably even female writer Christine de Pizan’s *A Medieval Woman’s Mirror of Honour* argued “Sobriety also should be evident in all the lady’s senses, as well as her actions and costume. Her glance will be slow and deliberate and without vagueness. Sobriety will protect her from too great curiosity about sweet scents, to which may ladies give great attention, spending large quantities of money on perfume.” p. 92.

⁹⁵ For more on Boccaccio’s views on women’s honesty, education and silence see: Franklin, Margaret. *Boccaccio’s Heroines, Power and Virtue in Renaissance Society*. Burlington: Ashgate, 2006.

account of contemporary, fourteenth-century women.⁹⁶ Boccaccio placed a negative assessment of female verbal competence in the mouth of Pampinea, one of his female heroines and 'queen for the day', who argued that women supplemented their limited education and meagre understanding with loud fashions:

The virtue that was previously in the souls of the women in the past, modern women have directed into ornaments of the body, and the woman who we see wearing clothes increasingly dappled and speckled with more ornaments, believes herself all the more capable and the most honoured, not thinking that if such adornments were put on the back of an ass it could carry much more but it would not be honoured as any more than an ass.⁹⁷

By likening women who attempt to express virtue through attire rather than the mind to a dumb animal Pampinea blatantly mocks contemporary feminine values. Nevertheless, she goes on to nostalgically suggest that women had the potential to rekindle the virtues of past women. Self-consciously acknowledging the female speaker, Boccaccio added:

I cannot say that and avoid speaking against myself. These women so ornamented, so painted, so mottled are like statues of marble, mute and insensitive. Yet if they do answer a question it would be much better if they had remained silent. They share a longstanding belief that their silence precedes from purity of mind, [...] stupidity in the name of modesty.⁹⁸

The *Decameron*, written for the enjoyment of ladies as well as men, seems to suggest contemporary values engendered a fault in women by encouraging excessive intellectual and vocal restraint while promoting external decoration. 'Stupidity' was imposed by literary censorship and the ideal of silence.⁹⁹

Biblical references to female silence strongly contributed to late-Medieval cynicism about women's ability to comprehend, let alone teach theology. In *On Eloquence in the Vernacular*

⁹⁶ Simmel, p.196-197.

⁹⁷ Boccaccio, (1822), Vol. 1 Day 1 Story 10, p. 104 "Percio che quella virtu che gia fu nell'anime delle passate, hanno le modern rivolta in ornamenti del corpo; e colei la quale si vede indosso il panni piu screziati e piu vergati e con piu fregi, si crede dovere essere da molto piu tenuta, e piu che l'altre onorata; non pensando che, se fosse chi addosso o in dosso gliele ponesse, uno asino ne porterebbe troppo piu che alcuna di loro, ne percio piu da onorar sarebbe che uno asino." [my translation].

⁹⁸ Boccaccio, (1822), Vol. 1 Day 1 Story 10, pp. 104-105 "Io mi vergogno di dirlo, percio che contro all'altre non posso dire, che io centro a me non dica. Queste cosi fregiate, cosi dipinte, cosi screziate o, come statue di marmo, mutole et insensibili stanno, o si rispondono, se sono addomandate, che molto sarebbe meglio l'avere taciuto; e fannosi a credere che da purita d'animo proceda il non saper tra le donne e co'valenti nomini favellare, et alla loro milensaggine hanno posto nome onesta, quassi niuna donna onesta sia..." [my translation].

⁹⁹ Benson, p.40.

(c.1303) Dante denied women's right to speech in a manner that also denied the biblical account of Adam and Eve's Fall, saying

Although we find in Scripture that a woman spoke first, it is still more reasonable to believe that it was a man. It is improper to think that so humble a human action did not originate from a man.¹⁰⁰

Fourteenth- and fifteenth-century society typically only considered men fit to teach. St. Anne, the mother of the Virgin Mary, was frequently depicted as Mary's teacher, training her to read devotional texts; this led some historians to speculate that St. Anne be considered a patron saint of female literacy.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, even when mothers are known to have supported their daughters' literary education, daughters accredited their learning to their fathers or their male tutors before or even instead of their mothers. The scholarly world was framed in masculine terms.¹⁰²

Restrictions placed on women's reading minimised the range of references and rhetorical skills women were able to utilise in discussion with men. Rhetorical tropes, evident in texts intended for recipients on multiple levels of the social hierarchy, criticised women who attempted to speak in masculine circles and so betrayed their ignorance. Educational impediments and limited social recognition of the female voice subjected women to silence. For women, imposed silence placed greater emphasis on tangibly embodied signs as expressions of identity. However, it also perpetuated the perception of women as dumb, frivolous mannequins within male dominated rhetorical discourse. Being an educated woman was not necessarily a social advantage and to be 'exceptional' in one's literary pursuits required exceptional circumstances. Men used physical, often sexualised rhetoric when discussing the few women who did take on more linguistically advanced roles as humanists or tutors. This rhetorical terminology is even evident in the texts which ostensibly intended to defend educated and outspoken women.

¹⁰⁰ Dante, *De Vulgari eloquentia I, iv*, as quoted in: Sister Prudence Allen, 2002. *The Concept of Woman*, Vol. II The Early Humanist Reformation 1250-1500. Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, p. 241.

¹⁰¹ Willemsen, p. 150, and: Susan Schibanoff, 1994. "Botticelli's Madonna del Magnificat: Constructing the Woman Writer in Early Humanist Italy." *PMLA* (Modern Language Association) 109 (2): 190-206. Accessed 06 07, 2012. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/463116>. and: Christina Gröninger, *Picturing Women in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997, p. 51.

¹⁰² Ross, p.35.

In Defence of Literate Women

Defences of women, written by men, rarely argued that men and women had equal intellectual ability. They often praised individual women by articulating their accomplishments in masculine terms, identifying 'exceptional,' even 'miraculous' women as displaying manly 'virtù.' Such praise did more to exhibit a positive perception of masculinity than to improve society's perception of femininity. Fifteenth-century wedding orations delivered by humanists praised women for their learning, but, according to the rhetoric of the age, they framed brides' learning as exceptional and in so doing only compared them with other women, not with men.¹⁰³ By comparing an educated woman with the majority of stereotypically unpraiseworthy women, defenders only congratulated the woman for overcoming her femininity.¹⁰⁴

Even when women's praises were sung, the association between women, textiles and vanity was unshakeable. Angelo Poliziano, author and tutor to the Medici, used terms from archetypally vain feminine practices when he wrote to female humanist Cassandra Fedele (1465-1558) saying:

Only you, a girl, exist, who would rather comb a book than wool, paint with a quill rather than rouge, stitch with a pen rather than a needle, and who would rather cover papyrus with ink than her skin with white powder.¹⁰⁵

Poliziano's praise of Fedele implies that women usually displayed greater interest in textiles and cosmetics than in literary knowledge. This seems to blame women for their limited education. Poliziano drew parallels between the actions associated with applying make-up to those of writing text. By rhetorically noting the absence of makeup on the female writer's face, jewellery around her neck or fine silken garments encapsulating her body, a male writer could make those tangible, feminine elements present in the minds of their readers.

Another rhetorical device for the 'defence' of women was to argue that women were mentally and morally weak and so deserved greater leniency. Humanists utilised the story of Adam and Eve to support this method of defence, while also outlining the responsibilities of

¹⁰³ For further discussion of rhetoric concerning female learning expressed in wedding orations see: Anthony D'Elia, 2003. "Marriage, Sexual Pleasure, and Learned Brides in the Wedding Orations of Fifteenth Century Italy." *Renaissance Quarterly* 55: 77-92.pp. 414 – 421.

¹⁰⁴ Benson, p. 48 and Schibanoff, p. 198.

¹⁰⁵ As quoted in: Rogers and Tignali, p.305, For another translation of this letter see: King and Rabil pp.127-128. For a discussion of Poliziano's use of antifeminist symbolism in this letter see: Schibanoff, p. 195.

husbands and wives and recommending caution against trusting women. In 1480, the Tuscan librarian Vespasiano da Bisticci, for instance, wrote a defence that argued that Adam should be blamed for giving in to Eve's temptation:

Since he, as the head, should have guided her away from such an error [...] and it follows that this sin should be attributed more to man than to woman, since he was more capable of reason.¹⁰⁶

A re-examination of the story of Adam and Eve was a recurring trope used by humanists, who in many cases defend women against the accusation of being evil temptresses by denying them rationality, willpower or accountability.¹⁰⁷ Regardless of its nature, by writing a defence men positioned themselves as protectors, and thus implied the weakness of those whom they defended.¹⁰⁸ The common rhetoric of defence reminded women of the inferiority expected of them in general, and particularly in their literary pursuits. Women's writing indicates their awareness of the double-edged nature of the praise they received from their male counterparts.¹⁰⁹

Self-Defence

Elite and well-educated women defended their ability to write and to be heard via two rhetorical methods. One method of self-defence was to admit the essential disadvantages of being a woman and to credit men or divine assistance for their achievements. Another was to claim legitimacy outright and to criticise the social values and attitudes which dared to discredit women's capacity for thought. Despite the sustained silencing of women and limiting their education, the small community of elite Italian female humanists challenged the rhetorical practice of belittling women's abilities in the same breath with which they were praised.

¹⁰⁶ Vespasiano da Bisticci (1480), as translated in: Rogers and Tinagli, p.16, also see: Benson, p. 37.

¹⁰⁷ For a discussion of Renaissance Rhetoric in the interpretation of Women see: Benson. For further defenses of women which utilize Adam and Eve see: Bernardino, of Siena. "Two Sermons on Wives and Widows." *Internet Medieval Source Book*. Edited by Paul Halsall. Fordham University. August 1996, For a discussion of Bernardino of Siena's treatment of the Temptation in his sermons and its implication for contemporary attitudes toward women see: Mormando (1998) pp. 25- 27. For further examples of the story's interpretation see: Dante, *De Vulgari eloquentia* I, iv, as quoted in: Allen, Sister Prudence. *The Concept of Woman*, Vol. II The Early Humanist Reformation 1250-1500. Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002, p. 241, and see: Landry, p. 63. For a discussion of visual representations of masculine and feminine skills personified by Adam and Eve see: Warr, (2010), p.188, and for a discussion of early sixteenth century references to Adam and Eve as a justification for female silence and inability to teach see Rogers & Tignali, p.15.

¹⁰⁸ Benson, p. 12.

¹⁰⁹ King & Rabil, p.81.

Nogarola adhered to the first method of defence. She introduced her letters with a rhetorical declaration of modesty and acknowledged the encouragement of learned men that convinced her to step beyond of the confines feminine behaviour. In a 1436 letter to Guarino Veronese she wrote:

I shall collect myself and impose a limit to my words, once I have begged you to view these trifling works of mine not with a critical eye, but by your humanity to emend and correct them, and to not condemn me if I have overstepped the bounds of silence especially imposed on women and appear ignorant of Vergerio's precept that the young should say little, since in much speech there is always something to blame. And Sophocles also called silence women's special adornment. But impelled by your praise of me, which I have set to myself as a spur to virtue, I could neither stay silent nor fail to send you this letter.¹¹⁰

In this letter Nogarola acknowledged her position as a member of the weaker sex who should remain silent, but she simultaneously legitimised her speech by referring to the encouragement she had received. She demonstrated her ability to engage in the male humanist rhetorical practice of validating her own arguments by identifying their origins in ancient Greek philosophy.

In one of the first public orations given by a woman, Casandra Fedele reclaimed the rhetorical battlefield denied to women by writers like Bruni.¹¹¹ Her speech began by repeating an argument she had made in a public letter which said "The study of literature polishes intelligence [...] completely washes away every blemish of soul, [...] and adds great ornament and beauty to the advantages of fortune and body."¹¹² In her later oration, having spoken of the power of study to elevate the mind and to increase one's beauty and virtue, she reflected on the unwinnable nature of women's battle for equal education. She contrasted her intent with the traditional "lowly and execrable"¹¹³ symbols of domestic femininity saying:

Armed with distaff and needle - women's weapons - I march forth [to defend]
the belief that even though study of letters promises and offers no reward for

¹¹⁰ Isotta Nogarola, 2004. *Isotta Nogarola, Complete Writings: Letterbooks, Dialogue on Adam and Eve, Orations*. Edited by Margaret L. King and Diana Robin. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. (2004), *Isotta Nogarola to Guarino Veronese, Verona, after October 11, 1436*, p.52.

¹¹¹ Casandra Fedele, 2000. *Cassandra Fedele, Letters and Orations*. Edited by Margaret L. King and Albert Rabil Jr. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press., p. 154. See the above quote by Bruni (from Bruni, p. 244).

¹¹² King and Rabil, p. 76.

¹¹³ Fedele, p.162.

women and no dignity, every woman ought to seek and embrace these studies for that pleasure and delight alone that [comes] from them.¹¹⁴

Letter-writing was the primary medium through which female writers defended themselves to men and encouraged one another. Correspondence between female humanists is testament to a literary community among elite Italian women. For instance, in 1492, Florentine poet Alessandra Scala (1476-1506) wrote to Cassandra Fedele, in Venice, to praise her learning:

Admirable and almost incredible things are told us about your intellect, learning, and manners. For this reason I congratulate you and give thanks, because you have made illustrious not only our sex but also this age.¹¹⁵

While elite female humanists may have supported one another, they faced criticism from both men and women. Nogarola wrote in a private letter about the criticism she received from the “cruel tongues” of other women for her bold, unfeminine literary pursuits.¹¹⁶

In 1487, Laura Cereta penned a public letter to a probably fictitious recipient ‘Lucilia Vernacula’ (Lucilia Plain-Speech) about women who looked down on female education. She used the traditional trope concerning speech, saying “let them fall silent, these insolent little women” whose “inactivity of mind maddens these raving women.” She continued to explain her position saying that her “disgust for human failings” lay not in women’s inability but in their lack of interest, as “they could easily [attain possession of human arts] with application of skill and virtue. For letters are not bestowed upon us, or assigned to us by chance.”¹¹⁷ One may assume that Cereta spoke primarily of the women of her own station who would have greater opportunity than most to learn to develop their literacy but who were more concerned with achieving social approval than to make an applied effort to achieve skills that would not necessarily raise them in the estimation of the people in their lives.

Laura Cereta advocated female education in the liberal arts. In doing this she not only raged against the disinterest displayed and silence imposed on women but also the discouragement and arrogance in the speech of men. Cereta was aware of her marginalised place in society and complained that “I am too hurt, and my mind too offended [...]

¹¹⁴ Fedele, *Oration in Praise of Letters*, as quoted in: King and Rabil, p.77.

¹¹⁵ Scala, Alessandra (October 6, 1492), Letter translated in King & Rabil, p. 87.

¹¹⁶ See: Nogarola *letter to Guarino Veronese: Verona April 10 1437* pp. 53-55.

¹¹⁷ Laura Cereta (1487) as quoted by King & Rabil, p.86.

conscious of the obligation to defend my sex.” In a scathing letter written in 1488 Cereta used the allegorical language of garments to address the deceptive character of male humanists’ condescending flattery. She addressed this public letter to a figure she called ‘Bibulus’ (Drunkard) Sempronius, saying:

Showing your contempt for women, you pretend that I alone am admirable because of the good fortune of my intellect. [...] You disguise your envy in dissimulation, but cloak yourself in apologetic words in vain.

Armed with her literary knowledge, Cereta reversed the more traditionally-expressed gender roles of her society. Having associated men like ‘Bibulus’ with deception she then added the vices of vanity and excessive speech to her male enemy and wrote of her own social mission in terms of masculine virtue and military enterprise:

I, therefore, who have always prized virtue, having put my private concerns aside, will polish and weary my pen against chatterboxes swelled with false glory. Trained in the arts, I shall block the paths of ambush. And I shall endeavour, by avenging arms, to sweep away the abusive infamies of noisemakers with which some disreputable and impudent men furiously, violently, and nastily rave against a woman.

Despite Cereta’s vengeance in the aforementioned letter she had, just one year earlier, written to a trusted male friend, Augustinus Aemilius, in a different tone:

For [woman's] nature is not immune to sin; nature produced our mother [Eve], not from earth or rock, but from Adam’s humanity. To be human is, however, to incline sometimes to good, but sometimes to pleasure. We are quite an imperfect animal, and our puny strength is not sufficient for mighty battles.

In this earlier, introspective and less-defensive letter, Cereta expresses her embarrassment for “those who are captivated by beauty” but don’t recognise that “virtue excels the brilliance of beauty.” For herself, Cereta said she preferred to be “an ordinary woman, drab of face and drably dressed – for I care more for letters than for flashy clothes.” The social preference for women to express their virtue through their appearance rather than their speech evidently weighed heavily on those elite women who had the opportunity and will to express themselves in writing.

An alternative defence made by female authors was to position themselves, as having been inspired or directed by a force greater than mere feminine intelligence. Catherine of Siena claimed that her dictation to a scribe was itself a dictation from the voice of God. Christine

de Pizan rhetorically claimed to be directed by a personification of Reason, and to be carrying on the literary pursuits begun by her father.¹¹⁸ This style of female defence is also evidenced in a story from the *Decameron* in which a female doctor defends her profession by diminishing her own agency, saying:

You disdain my art, because I am young and a woman, but I would remind you that I practice medical science with the help of God and with the knowledge of Master Gerardo Nerbonese, who was my father and a famous doctor.¹¹⁹

Learning under the tutelage of a reputable father appears to have been a favourable circumstance for a woman to become a doctor. Katherine Park has shown that two of the five women who graduated (alongside 345 men) from the Florentine Guild of Doctors, Apothecaries and Grocers between 1345 and 1444 were the daughters of doctors.¹²⁰ Even considering this rare occurrence, women protected themselves from scrutiny or suspicion by dismissing their own learning as a mere imitation and by acknowledging the fault and misfortune of their sex before men had the opportunity to.

As noted, many cultural critics suggested that only daughters destined to be nuns should be taught to read. However, women of the mercantile aristocracy to the nobility had a greater need for literacy.¹²¹ Bruni encouraged noble women to read and write and so be prepared to work to their family's unique political agenda.¹²² To remain acceptable to men, literary women typically maintained a religious tone in their writing.¹²³ Lucrezia Tornabuoni de' Medici (1425-1482), Florentine noblewoman and wife to Piero de Cosimo de' Medici, played an important political role within her family as well as being an accomplished poet. Tornabuoni utilised the example of biblical women as the subjects for her sacred poetry. Tornabuoni's descriptions of female heroines legitimised the sartorial language through which women were usually limited to speaking.¹²⁴ For instance, in a poem about Esther, who

¹¹⁸ Ross, p.19.

¹¹⁹ Boccaccio, (1822), vol. 2, *Day 3 Story 9*, pp. 107-108 "*Voi schifate la mia arte, perche giovane e femina sono; ma io vi ricordo che io non medico colla mia scienza, anzi collo aiuto d'Iddio e colla scienza di maestro Gerardo Nerbonese, il quale mio padre fu e famoso medico mentre visse*" [my translation]. Also see: Siraisi p.27 for a discussion of the rare existence, and the restrictions on, female doctors of the Renaissance.

¹²⁰ Park, (1998), p. 136.

¹²¹ King, (1991), p. 88.

¹²² Franklin, p.117.

¹²³ Kent (2001), p. 37.

¹²⁴ Rogers, p. 77.

used her beauty to appeal to her husband the king so that he would listen to her plea for her Jewish people, Tornabuoni wrote that Esther:

attired her in her regal insignia,
draping her in rubies, pearls, and infinite treasures
so that anyone who saw her would be thunderstruck.
Dressed in this way, she concealed her grief¹²⁵

Esther's beauty validated her speech. Her adornments were appropriate to her station and were not adopted for vanity's sake. Tornabuoni's account of this tale is exceptional for the way she addressed the play of gender dynamics while establishing Esther's virtue. Tornabuoni contrasted Esther's motivations with the vainglorious king who "was enjoying his wealth, he was spending time in amusements and pleasure."¹²⁶ Not only did Tornabuoni use her education as a noble woman to defend women's ability to discretely and virtuously adapt themselves to their husbands but she legitimised the expressive language of female attire.

Literacy and the Virgin in Devotional Domestic Images

In 1483-1485, Sandro Botticelli painted a portrait of Tornabuoni which further legitimised her literary pursuits as virtuous and acceptable. However, as a defence for a woman it adopted the rhetoric of divine (masculine) assistance in place of female ability. In *Madonna della Magnificat* (Figure 14) Tornabuoni is allegorically depicted as the Virgin Mary. Vasari noted the admiration the painting received as it hung in the church of San Francesco, by the gate of San Miniato.¹²⁷ The painting is circular, which echoed the roundness of the eye through which one sees the material and understands the spiritual.¹²⁸ The shape was unusual for devotional images or portraits but was used for birth trays, so it would make sense if this were a reference to maternity. It depicts Mary/Lucrezia composing a text, surrounded by angels in the guise of young noble boys. The boys/angels look on as she writes, while holding her inkwell, supporting her book, and holding a crown over her head. The naked baby Jesus sits on his mother's knee, with his right hand resting on her writing arm, his finger pointing to the word *humilitas*. The light of the Holy Spirit shines down on

¹²⁵ Tornabuoni, Lucrezia, *La Storia di Hester Regina* as quoted in: Rogers & Tignali pp. 77-78

¹²⁶ Tornabuoni, as quoted in: Rogers and Tignali, pp. 77-78

¹²⁷ Vasari, p. 228

¹²⁸ Loren Partridge, 2009. *Art of Renaissance Florence 1400-1600*. Berkley: University of California Press, p. 109

Mary from above and the infant Jesus looks up at her from below. Thus, Mary/Lucrezia is surrounded and guided by divine influences.¹²⁹ As Susan Schibanoff has noted, when Botticelli depicted religious male authors he used a conventional visual language. Male authors were depicted alone, untouched, looking to other books or heavenward for



Figure 14 Sandro Botticelli, *Madonna della Magnificat*, Tempera, Uffizi, Florence, 1481-1485

¹²⁹ For further discussion of this painting see Schibanoff, pp. 190-206.

inspiration.¹³⁰ The crowd of figures assisting Mary, therefore, would have been all the more notable. This tacitly legitimised Lucrezia as a writer by aligning her with a story of a divine female role-model but it also minimised her autonomy.



Figure 15: Filippino Lippi, *Madonna and Child*, Tempera, Oil and Gold on Wood, 81.3 x 59.7cm, The Jules Bache Collection

¹³⁰ Schibanoff, p. 199.

Devotional artworks featuring the Virgin Mary created for domestic settings in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries often reflect idealised motherly and wifely practices, in terms of literacy and housework. Devotional images placed biblical figures and narratives in familiar contemporary settings, allowing the viewer to more easily empathise with, interpret, remember and mimic the virtuous example of the saints. The *Magnificat* or the *Book of Hours* frequently appear in domestic depictions of the Madonna which echoed the use of Books of Hours in elite households of the fifteenth century. The books were designed to guide the reader mnemonically through a privately practiced ritual of hourly prayer. Filippino Lippi's 1483-84 *Madonna and Child* (Figure 15), commissioned for domestic devotion by Filippo Strozzi, depicts two devotional books.¹³¹ There is a closed book, likely to be a Book of Hours placed on a bench behind her left shoulder. The baby Jesus leans over a second, open book, crumpling the pages in his chubby fingers. His body blocks Mary's view of the book as she kneels on her cushion, as the Virgin of Humility, supporting her baby with her hands. Rather than viewing the words in the book she views Jesus who, according to the Bible is Himself the word made flesh.¹³² This emphasises Jesus' prophetic status, but on a secular level the image also reflects gendered and familial status as the son pays attention to a book and the mother pays attention to the child.

Domestic and portable representations of the *Virgin of Humility*, an iconographic genre that developed in the mid-fourteenth century, give an intimate account of humility in the context of motherhood. Mary sits on the floor in a Renaissance interior, and has set aside her industry and meditations to breastfeed her son. This differed from larger public representations in which Mary is usually seated on the ground outdoors, not breast-feeding but surrounded by adoring saints.¹³³ In domestic examples, Mary is represented as literate, with a small *Book of Hours* placed near her. As well as her book, indicative of her status and

¹³¹ For more on this painting see: Keith Christiansen, 2010. "Catalogue Entry, The Collection Online." The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Accessed 2014. <http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/436892?rpp=30&pg=1&ft=Filippino+lippi+Madonna&pos=1>.

¹³² John 1:1-14.

¹³³ Comparative observations are made from viewing a range of examples which are exhibited in international galleries and their online catalogues including but not exclusive to; Private/portable examples: Niccolo di Buonaccorso, *The Madonna of Humility with Saints*, Timken Museum of Art, San Diego, 1356-1388; Niccolo di Buonaccorso, *The Virgin of Humility*, believed to be a panel from a triptych, Louvre, Paris, c. 1380-85; Benedetto di Bindo, *Madonna of Humility and St. Jerome*, Diptych, Tempera, Silver, and tooled gold on panel with vertical grain, 30.2x42.2 cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, c.1400-1405; Public/church examples: Filippo Lippi, *Madonna of Humility*, Castello Sforzesco, Milan, 1430; Giovanni di Paolo, *Madonna of Humility*, Tempera on panel, 61.9 x 48.9 cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, c. 1442.

devotion, the *Virgin of Humility* is also shown to be a practical housewife, with different colours of spun thread on bobbins sitting on a bench behind her, ready to be knit into Jesus' seamless garment.¹³⁴ The *Virgin of Humility* demonstrated that the locus of female virtue rested first in motherhood and then in personal devotion and in spinning and sewing. The cyclical nature of hourly prayer guided by the *Book of Hours* is perhaps intentionally echoed in the cyclical practice of spinning thread. Female domestic as well as spiritual identities, then, relied on internalisation through the repetition of prayers and behaviour.



Figure 16: Benedetto di Bindo, *Madonna of Humility and St. Jerome*, Diptych, Tempera, Silver, and tooled Gold on panel with vertical grain, 30.2 x 42.2cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art, c.1400-1405

The *Virgin of Humility* is typically depicted as a panel in a series which make up a small portable or domestic altarpiece. The panels that accompany the image of Mary indicate how the work should be interpreted. In Benedetto di Bindo's Diptych, Mary is paired with St. Jerome (Figure 16). On the right panel, St. Jerome is seated, quill in hand, at a writing desk

¹³⁴ Warr, (2010), p. 190.

with two large and one small book that he uses to translate the gospel of St. John from Greek to Latin. On the left panel, Mary's Book of Hours is opened, just above the baby Jesus' head, to a prayer recited at 3pm in memory of Jesus' death on the cross.¹³⁵ As a female reader, contrasted with a male writer, Mary's virtue is expressed through private actions rather than (ultimately) public words. St. Jerome's full attention is absorbed by his studies, whereas Mary's attention has been diverted to her son. As a woman and a mother, Mary models devotion expressed through domestic tasks. The presence of the Book of Hours is reflective of elite female devotions. In the course of daily recitations, women would memorise the text. This allowed for books to be constructed with fewer words and more decorative elements to add emotive colour to the devotional experience. Bindo's diptych is designed on a hinge so that it was opened and closed like a book. Therefore, when opened and viewed, it would lead its user to interpret or mentally narrate the images. This tangible association supports the idea that, to understand Renaissance literacy, one cannot isolate one's observations to text but must also extend one's thinking to the mnemonic image as a legitimate means of learning and reinforcing moral and social philosophy.

Conclusion

Florentine girls' education established their adherence to gendered and hierarchical behaviours. Over the 150 years that this thesis focuses on, textual literacy increased and came to accompany sartorial literacy in constructing the terms of embodied morality. Florentine education was tailored for the hierarchical and gendered expectations the society had for different children. Social products and practices reinforced the philosophies that informed this diversity of experience. Significantly, moralists recommend gendered restrictions on literary education to steer women away from texts that might instil questionable values, in favour of devotional texts. Elite men's discussion of women in defences, letters and books of advice maintained a rhetoric of female moral weakness that was exemplified in women's adornment and that justified restrictions on women's literacy. As female literacy increased, a minority of elite women responded to cultural perceptions and expectations of women, not only through their embodied behaviour but using the masculine genre of writing, directly discussing the virtues and vices of the female adorned

¹³⁵ Sarl Brandon Strehlke, 1995. *Philadelphia Museum of Art: Handbook of the Collections*.
<http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/101891.html?milR=11608>.

body. Nevertheless, pedagogic and cultural practices encouraged women to guard their speech with the same vigilance with which they guarded their bodies. The combined pedagogic methods of observation and instruction embedded ideas about how to understand and present oneself in society. These influences encouraged noble women to strive for an ideal, for the sake of their own and their family's reputation. According to this ideal, they should be beautiful and modestly dressed, spin, sew or otherwise employ themselves with domestic tasks, read (to the extent approved for their precise social context), speak eloquently but rarely, move gracefully, and play the roles assigned to them by society in general, and their male guardians in particular. The following chapters discuss women's familial identities, demonstrating the way men orchestrated the sartorial shifts in women's lives that accompanied their transitions from daughters to wives, to mothers and to widows. In doing so, the chapters will further demonstrate various embodied applications of the lessons women learned in their youth through the rhetoric of morality, beauty, etiquette and domesticity. They also demonstrate how the rhetorical messages embedded in the domestic space itself contributed to women's ongoing moral, embodied, education.

Chapter Six - Marriage

When Beatrice was seventeen her father finalised negotiations for her marriage to a thirty-one year old merchant banker named Giovanni Vecchietti. Beatrice's father settled 1000 florins on her as a dowry. In addition he had a pair of *cassoni* built and decorated with the story of Lucrezia, as a wedding gift to hold Beatrice's trousseau and reside the marital bedroom. Once the *impalmamento* was drawn up, Giovanni showered Beatrice with gifts, beginning with a sweet *fede* ring that reassured her of his affection. He provided her with a *gammura* of blue damask with the five ermine from the Vecchietti family crest embroidered in silver thread and ornamented with pearls, interwoven with foliate tendrils. This new dress seemed bold and strange in comparison with the pale yellow she was used to wearing in honour of her father's family crest of yellow with criss-crossing black lines. Giovanni gave her jewellery including a brooch designed like a little cherub and set with pearls. She wore these when she made the public procession from her father's house to that of her husband. She had never felt so beautiful and important, although it was strange to have so many eyes on her and to know that those eyes saw her as a vision of a man's family that she barely knew. Over the next couple of years she grew accustomed to proudly wearing her bridal attire but a law instituted in the year of her wedding, 1427, meant that she was not allowed to dress that way after three years of marriage. Giovanni took the clothing apart and sold the jewellery. Beatrice was disappointed to lose the precious ornaments that made her feel so welcome and admired, but she reminded herself that this was part of life. It meant that her transition was complete, she wasn't just a daughter, she was Giovanni's established wife and she should honour him by her gracious and modest dress and behaviour. Besides, she would have to give up the dress soon anyway, it was made for a smaller frame and she was pregnant.

Nuptial rituals, adornment and domestic decoration utilised literary and cultural tropes to reinforce for the bride, and for witnesses, that a wife had to be a chaste, yet fecund, beautiful, modest, loyal, valuable and honourable.¹ During the process of arranging a marriage, a bride's father and fiancé established her worth and reconstructed her sartorial identity to make her the bride they needed her to be. Once her identity was established, her husband began to deconstruct her bridal identity by reclaiming and on-selling her adornments until he had adorned her anew as his wife. This process typically took place in a

¹ Current research in Florentine wedding rituals owes a great deal to the work of Christine Klapisch-Zuber, notably her collection of essays: 1985. *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*. Translated by Lydia G. Cochrane. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

number of stages. Marriage provided an opportunity to evaluate, alter and communicate social and domestic identities, both of one's own family and of the families of one's future spouse. During marriage celebrations, both families displayed manifestations of their social, economic and political status. The bride's natal family provided a dowry for their daughter. The groom could incorporate that dowry immediately into his assets by purchasing adornments for his bride. A bride's attire publicly demonstrated how much her male guardians were able and willing to pay for her. The garments utilised heraldic devices indicating to which family she now belonged. The jewellery included stones and motifs symbolic of wifely virtue. The combination of these sartorial elements idealised the bride's worth, loyalty and character, which would have aided in shaping her self-perception as a wife. Fifteenth-century portraits usually depicted women in their wedding attire, transposing the ephemeral experience into a lasting high-status object. The decoration of domestic furnishing commissioned as wedding gifts reflected and reinforced society's expectations concerning married people's conduct. Fifteenth-century literature discussed the value of domestic furnishing for providing tactile and allegorical inspiration for feminine self-reflection. The traditions and the cultural symbolism present in the home and expressed through attire demonstrate the range of tangible reminders that made up elite women's experience. These tangible symbols were designed with the intention of influencing women's self-perception and comportment outdoors and at home.

Weddings

There was no standardised method for conducting a wedding but there were recognised traditional ceremonies that took place among the elite. Arranging a marriage required observation, reflection and judgment of the social worth of one's family against that of the family with which one wished to align. Once the family was identified, the first formal ritual was the settling of the *dote* (dowry), conducted by the father of the bride with the groom and their male kin. A marriage contract – the *impalmamento* – would then be signed and from this time the groom wooed the bride by giving her wearable tokens, for instance an engraved pin or ring which she was to wear as a symbol of her consent. In a later ceremony – the *anellamento*, the first ceremony at which the bride's presence was strictly necessary, the bride received a ring and the couple exchanged vows. This usually occurred in the bride's natal home, however, elite families with important political functions occasionally held this

ceremony in a semi-public, permeable space like a loggia.² From the time the dowry price was agreed, the groom made arrangements for his bride's wedding attire which would publicly encase her body with emblems of her new identity as his dependent, and incorporate her dowry into his accounts. Various elements of bridal attire, including embroidered sleeves and bejewelled brooches, held familial and talismanic significance. The bridal attire was intended to be worn during the *menare a casa*, when the bride would process from her father's house to her husband's (very occasionally attending a Mass between the two).³ Large wooden chests (called *cassoni*) containing the bride's trousseau would accompany her on the public procession and would ultimately be positioned in a newly-furnished nuptial bedroom. *Cassoni* were decorated with the families' heraldic emblems and with allegories that reinforced Florentine ideals of wifely virtue. A banquet would be held to welcome the bride to her new home, affording both families the opportunity to demonstrate their wealth, taste, influence and allegiances before their guests.⁴ For instance, in 1466 when Giovanni Rucellai celebrated the arrival of his bride Nannina de' Medici (daughter of Lucrezia Tornabuoni and Cosimo de' Medici) he held a sumptuous banquet for 500 guests in the piazza outside his home; blocking off the neighbouring streets, he hung tapestries and set up a canopy of flowers.⁵ From the fifteenth century, humanist orators were called upon to speak of the virtues and joys of marriage, alongside performances by poets and musicians.⁶ These orations coupled Christian ideals with those of ancient Rome to praise physical beauty and to elevate the virtue of sexual pleasure (which Christian teachers of the same era condemned in favour of humility and celibacy).⁷ Brides left their childhood home and potentially a church (smelling of incense and

² Tinagli, p.67.

³ Deborah L Krohn, 2008. "Marriage as a key to Understanding the Past." In *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*, by The Metropolitan Museum of Art New York, edited by Andrea Bayer, 9-16. New Haven: Yale University Press, p.12.

⁴ For a discussion of the ceremonies and the commemorative objects associated with Italian Renaissance weddings see: Andrea Bayer, 2008. "Introduction: Art and Love in Renaissance Italy." In *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*, edited by Andrea Bayer, 3-8. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, for a discussion of the material expenses of wedding feasts see: Musacchio, pp. 17-18. For a brief outline of the late 15th century instances when elite grooms, including Bernardo Rucellai and Roberto di Biccio Martelli, demonstrated their influence by gaining permission to hire the *Trombetti della Signora* to play music at the wedding see: Prizer (2004), p. 200.

⁵ Muzzarelli, p. 87.

⁶ D'Elia, p. 380 and Bayer, p. 4.

⁷ D'Elia, p. 388.

decorated with myrtle, associated with Aphrodite – Roman goddess of love⁸) and entered their new home, wearing the weight of their dowry in clothing and jewellery, and listened to speeches about their need to embody conflicting ideals of honour, beauty and sexuality.

As we often see, secular traditions of display and celebration attracted moralising criticism, expressed through shaming imagery. In his treatise *Della Vita Civile*, Matteo Palmieri (1406-1475) used the voice of a protagonist called Agnolo to criticise the *menare a casa*. He first recounted the practices of the Ancient Romans to suggest they were more humble and discreet than his contemporary Christians. He described the Roman husband, visiting his wife's home at night, on foot, by torch light and consummating the marriage while relatives made noise around the house so no one heard them losing their virginity. By comparison he said:

Today, in the middle of Christian observance, virgins appear publicly on horses adorned in as much as they can be, and painted with all lasciviousness, with trumpets ahead of them calling the people to see the unbridled audacity of meretricious boldness, they bring the desired on to the jousting field, circle them around the piazza, and make a show that they are going to no longer be virgins.⁹

Palmieri's cynical perspective was a minority in the broader humanist commentary on the virtues of marriage celebration.¹⁰ However, it does align with the rhetorical language typically utilised by moralists in response to women's simultaneously powerful attire and fragile virtue.

Communal ideals, customs and circumstances influenced the ages at which people married. Fathers usually tried to organise marriages for their daughters early so that, in relinquishing prime responsibility for their daughters, they could enjoy the benefits of a family allegiance and avoid the potential embarrassment of sexual scandals and suspicion which accompanied older unmarried women and their families. Fathers would often enlist the assistance of a marriage broker to identify and help to negotiate a profitable match for their daughters

⁸ Jacqueline Marie Musacchio, 2008. "Catalogue Numbers 1-86: Gifts and Furnishings for the Home" in: *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, edited by Andrea Bayer. New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 102.

⁹ Matteo Palmieri, 1825. *Della Vita Civile*, Milano: G. Silvestri, p. 150, "*Oggi nel mezzo dell'osservanza cristinana le vergini pubblicamente a cavallo ornate quanto piu possono, e dipinte d'ogni lascivia con le trombe inanzi chiamando il popolo a vedere la sfrenata audacia del meretricio ardire, ne portano al campo della desiderata giostra, intorniano le piazza, e facendo mostra ne vanno a non esser piu vergini.*" [my translation] Note that the word *meretricio* also has connotations of prostitution.

¹⁰ D'Elia, p. 379.

before they reached marriageable age.¹¹ Contrastingly, men preferred not to consider their own marriage until they had established themselves in a profession and were able to financially support a family. This resulted in a gradual increase in the age gap between partners. From 1351-1400, men and women marrying for the first time had average ages of 23.9 and 18.0 respectively, but this shifted drastically to 30.9 for men and 16.6 for women from 1401-1450.¹² By studying Florentine family records and tax declarations, Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber showed that between 1426 and 1430 the modal age for Florentine women's first marriage was 16 and 97% of women married before they reached 26. By contrast, in the same period fewer than 50% of men were married by the age of 25.¹³ Looking at specific years, in 1427 the average age at first marriage among the patrician class was 17.6 for women and 30.3 for men (the age of marriage for women from poorer families averaged at 20 for this period); in 1458 it rose to 19.5 for women but barely increased to 30.5 for men; and in 1480 there was a slight increase in both cases, women marrying at an average age of 20.8 and men at 31.4.¹⁴ Of course, the age gap between husbands and wives in each of these periods could be even wider given that marriages were not always between first-time spouses, so a girl's first marriage could be her husband's second or third.

Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber's research has further shown that mass mortality, from plagues or wars, was often followed by a decrease in the ages of first-time grooms. Birth rates increased in the wake of plagues, causing a natural drop in marriage rates when the resultant female offspring reached marriageable age but were faced with a limited number of potential husbands from the devastated older generation.¹⁵ So long as plagues abated, the resulting 'baby-boom' generation had less incentive to marry young, so the average ages for first marriages increased until the next major shift in communal circumstances.¹⁶ Men's ages at first marriage show the greatest variation in relation to drastic communal events, whereas concerns for women's virtue and finite fertility meant that their ages at first

¹¹ Krohn (2008), p.12.

¹² Kovesi, p. 54.

¹³ Herlihy & Klapisch-Zuber, p.210 & 215.

¹⁴ Herlihy & Klapisch-Zuber, p.87. For a comparison of the marriage statistics and related sexual politics between wealthy and poor Florentine families see: Klapisch-Zuber (1985), "Chapter 8, Female Celibacy and Service in Florence in the Fifteenth Century" pp. 165-177.

¹⁵ Herlihy & Klapisch-Zuber, p. 81.

¹⁶ Herlihy & Klapisch-Zuber, pp. 80-82.

marriage remained relatively stable.¹⁷ Therefore, marriage patterns were affected by broad social concerns and shifts in demographics, custom, and familial interests of honour and advantage.

Wedding Negotiations: Honour and Dowry

Paolo da Certaldo referred to a good wife as “the crown of her husband, his honour and status.”¹⁸ The degree to which society recognised a woman as possessing honour (primarily assessed according to her status, beauty and virginity) impacted on the society’s judgement of her male kin. A man had to consider how well his potential bride conformed to socially approved values and thereby how well a connection with her would reflect on his social honour, and eventually that of their children. Standards for honour varied according to the social sphere and character of the prospective couple. From a potential husband’s point of view, the factors that contributed to a bride’s honour included beautiful appearance (denoting virtue), good reputation, financial security and political significance. Da Certaldo advised that when considering a woman to be one’s wife, one should first consider her parents’ and grandparents’ reputations and their physical and mental health (lest she pass any social stigma, corporal or emotional faults on to her offspring) and to choose a wise, good-looking woman to ensure that these qualities be passed on to her children.¹⁹ Marriage was not merely about a bride and a groom but about the generation of legitimate and well-positioned progeny and the union and fortification of two households. The negotiations that surrounded this assessment of honour and of the social or financial advantages of a match indicate how people reflected on and actively sought to communicate their social identities.

Fathers attempted to secure an advantageous association through their daughters’ marriages, but three measures of familial worth - wealth, ancestry, and political influence - made the comparative assessment of potential social ascent or descent through marriage indistinct and subjective.²⁰ Marriages mostly occurred between people of similar social

¹⁷ Herlihy & Klapisch-Zuber, p. 211.

¹⁸ Certaldo, p. 37 “*le buona moglie e corona del marito e onore e stato*” [my translation].

¹⁹ Certaldo, pp. 15-16.

²⁰ For a quantitative study, drawn from a dataset of archival evidence relating to 55,638 men and women identifiable as belonging to one of 1,697 Florentine families from 1282-1500, to shed light on marriage patterns and social mobility see: John F. Pagett, 2010. “Open Elite? Social Mobility, Marriage, and Family in Florence, 1282-1494.” *Renaissance Quarterly* 63 (2): 357-411.

standing, according to their claim to elite status.²¹ From the mid- to the late-fifteenth century, particularly following political or demographic upheaval, patrician fathers were more likely to marry their daughters to men of slightly lesser status in monetary or aristocratic terms due to a shortage of suitable grooms for their women.²² Historian Francesco Guicciardini (1483-1540) reflected on the importance of making a suitable match, not to sell one's family short by anxiously accepting the first, albeit inferior, offer made, or to reject appropriate offers in an attempt to elevate one's family through marriage. He suggested that a marriageable daughter's father must honestly reflect and critically assess his own family's status in order to rationally scrutinise and compare his daughter's status with that of his potential son-in-law.²³ Therefore, having a strong sense of one's social worth and the ability to accurately decipher the worth of others, often based on their external appearance, was crucial in the business of matrimony.

Alessandra Strozzi discussed the interests of both sides of the marital exchange in letters to her exiled son Filippo, for whom she was attempting to find a bride. She wrote to inform him of her progress in scrutinising the social advantages and personal qualities of her potential daughter-in-law. This was important for Filippo because he could not assess his future Florentine bride for himself. Alessandra's assessment of the girls was based on their family backgrounds and on their appearance and comportment in social situations, particularly while attending church. Alessandra informed Filippo that "I liked that da Vernia girl, but I have heard it said she is clumsy and has the air of a peasant."²⁴ She therefore wished to pursue an alternative match with the daughter of Francesco di Messer Guglielmino Tanagli as he "is a well esteemed man, and is in the government." She assured Filippo that his status as an exile should not ruin his chances for three reasons:

The first is that there are scarce young respectable men with the virtue and wealth to match. The second, she has little dowry: I think they are offering a thousand florins, which is an artisan's dowry, [...] The third reason I think he

²¹ Padgett, p. 359.

²² Herlihy & Klaspisch-Zuber, pp.226-227, and Padgett, pp.259 & 371.

²³ Guicciardini, pp. 202-203, this passage is also discussed in: Luke Syson, and Dora Thornton. 2001. *Objects of Virtue: Art in Renaissance Italy*. London: The British Museum Press, p.39.

²⁴ Strozzi, "Lettera Quarantacinquesima, to Filippo degli Strozzi in Napoli, 20 April 1465" p. 395 "*Quella da Vernia mi piaceva; ma eli' hanno del goffo e aria di villa*". [my translation]. Looking like a peasant can be understood to mean her skin was not pale like a girl who lived a housebound lifestyle.

would [accept their proposal], is that he has a large family, and he needs to be helped settling them.²⁵

In this assessment of the situation, Alessandra demonstrated a consideration of the political influence and economic situation of her son's potential in-laws and the appearance of the potential bride, and weighed that against her own family's current, but hopefully temporary, political circumstances.

Leonardo Bruni translated the pseudo-Aristotle's *Notes on Economics* (1420), for his contemporaries, concluding that the most successful marriages were those in which the couple's characters as well as social circumstances were well matched.²⁶ He therefore recommended that men marry young virgins, under the assumption that maidens had particularly malleable characters. Bruni also wrote about the importance appearance traditionally played in assessing a potential bride. However, Bruni was mindful of cosmetic deception and warned against selecting a bride predominantly according to appearance, saying "just as one should not base one's relations with others on false character, neither should one base one's relations on a false figure."²⁷ Bernardino of Siena likewise disapproved of the way clothing was used to attract a spouse. Addressing the bride rather than the groom, he expressed a wish to instil a nostalgic custom whereby:

All women should go dressed in one fashion, even as the Roman women [...] they all wear white linen, [...] no labor or drawn thread in their garments, no spoiling of the stuff with snippings and slashings, [...] Wherefore I say to you, lady, take no husband who loves your stuff more than your body.²⁸

Yet, external appearance remained a significant means through which young women's families attempted to 'advertise' them in public situations and by which grooms interpreted the worth and character of their potential brides. Neighbourly opinions gained a high level of social influence in part by virtue of the narrow urban streets leading to homes with

²⁵ Strozzi, "Lettera Quarantacinquesima, to Filippo degli Strozzi in Napoli, 20 April 1465" p. 395 "*La prima, che ci è iscarso di giovani dabbene, che abbino virtù e roba. La seconda, che l'ha poca dota: credo siano mille fiorini ; che è dota d'artefici [...] La terza perchè credo la darebbe, si è eh' egli ha gran famiglia, che ha bisogno d'essere aiutato avviargli.*" [my translation].

²⁶ For further discussion of Cosimo de' Medici's patronage of translations for the cultural benefit of Florentine humanists, and his particular interest in Aristotelian moral philosophy including Bruni's translation of *Notes on Economics* see: James Hankins, "Cosimo de' Medici and the 'Platonic Academy'." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* (Warburg Institute) 53 (1990): 144-162., p. 147-48.

²⁷ Bruni, p.314.

²⁸ Fra Bernardino of Siena, Two from 45 sermons, preached in great square of Siena August and September 1427.

unglassed windows making many ostensibly private conversations audible to one's neighbours and gossips. This is likely to have been a contributing factor in the idealisation of the modest, silent bride.²⁹ Prior to sumptuary laws of 1472, relatively few sartorial restrictions were placed on young unmarried girls.³⁰ Perhaps in sympathy with the silence imposed on women, external adornment was imperative for nubile girls' expression and ability to attract a husband.

Writers expressed concern that fathers' financial interest tended to outweigh interest in their daughters' happiness or security. Similar to Bernardino's assertion that a husband should love the woman rather than her appearance, writers including Paolo da Certaldo and Boccaccio repeated the popular Greco-Roman proverb "when you marry off your daughter; [marry her] to the man not the money."³¹ Leonardo da Vinci, likewise, adapted this proverb and criticised the exchange of women through the marriage market by writing "you will see fathers giving up their daughters to the sensuality of men, and rewarding them, and abandoning all their former care - when the girls are married."³²

Compatibility of character, class and reputation also had to be balanced with economic compatibility, which was manifest through dowry negotiations. A woman's dowry was her sole property and was intended to support her even if her husband were to die. However, the sum was entrusted to the care and use of her husband as long as they both lived.³³ Gregorio Dati's *ricordi* notes, of his second wife Isabetta's personal accounts, that once he had received the dowry he took command of it and "invested it in the shop of Buonaccorso Berardi."³⁴ In 1427 Bernardino of Siena gave a sermon that denounced the attention people focused on dowries and counter-dowries while arranging a marriage. He believed concern with dowries limited the value placed on compatibility and affection between spouses. He warned those looking for a partner that if they:

²⁹ Colleran, p. 370.

³⁰ Rainey, p. 519.

³¹ Certaldo, (and accompanying footnote), p. 38: "*Quando mariti la tua figliuola, dalle uomo e non danari.*" [my translation].

³² Leonardo da Vinci, p.1115.

³³ Julius Kirshner 1991. "Materials for a Gilded Cage: Non-Dotal Assets in Florence, 1300-1500." In *The Family in Italy*, edited by David Kertzer and Richard P. Saller, 184-207. New Haven: Yale University Press, p.184.

³⁴ Dati, in: Patrick J. Geary, 2003. *Readings in Medieval History*, third edition, Broadview press, Peterborough, p.839.

Take a wife for her good dowry's sake: if then they be affianced, and the dowry come not, what shall be the love betwixt them both? [...] I say to you lady, take not for your husband the man who would fain take your money and not yourself.³⁵

Thinking of economics rather than marital happiness, Giovanni di Pagolo Morelli warned a young groom against “greedily” treating his bride’s dowry as his own wealth, as often occurred. He reminded his reader that “nobody has ever profited from a dowry: if you have to give it back they [her family] will destroy you. Be happy with this: use only what you and your wife need.”³⁶ Nevertheless, Alessandra Strozzi’s 1447 letter to Filippo claimed that those in search of a wife in fact wanted money, and that the more politically significant the groom the larger dowry he would expect.³⁷ As she negotiated marriages for her daughters, she had to balance political advantage with financial ruin. Women’s marriage prospects, and therefore one of the most significant influences on their domestic experience and social identities, relied on the amount of money her family was willing and able to spend on her dowry and on how much her future husband needed that money.

Fear that providing too large a dowry would ruin the family, but also that providing too small a dowry would shame them, led Florentine fathers to feel disappointment and anxiety at the birth of a daughter, and subsequently a larger number of vocationless daughters were sent to convents, which required a smaller dowry. Too great a number of women being denied a marriage threatened the strength of the city’s economy, its population growth and its moral behaviour. In 1425, the Florentine government attempted to counteract personal and communal anxiety caused by dowry inflation by introducing the *Monte delle Doti*, a dowry insurance fund.³⁸ Fathers were initially tentative about using the fund as the money invested was non-transferable between daughters. A father would wait until his daughter had survived infancy before investing money for the period of eight to fifteen years it should take him to secure his daughter’s marriage.³⁹ The return was paid directly to the groom on the consummation of the marriage, assuring that the wedding was legitimate.⁴⁰ The fund, set up, in part, as a response to increased wealth dedicated to female sartorial display, came full-

³⁵ Fra Bernardino of Siena, Two from 45 sermons, preached in great square of Siena August and September 1427.

³⁶ Morelli as quoted in Rogers and Tignali, p.117.

³⁷ Strozzi, “Lettera Prima, to Filippo degli Strozzi in Napoli, 24 August 1447,” p.4.

³⁸ Chojnacki, p.76.

³⁹ Frick, (2002) p. 138.

⁴⁰ Musacchio, (1999), p.19.

circle as the interest on the initial investment was subsidised by money acquired through tax and fines paid for breaking sumptuary laws.⁴¹ Bernardino of Siena (and later Savonarola) condemned the fund, saying fathers and grooms gained their wealth from “robbery” or “usury.” Bernardino believed that being conscious of nuptial expenses increased fathers’ reluctance to part with their money through charity.⁴² The costs of dowering a daughter generated moral criticism and financial risk but remained essential to the social networks and economic communal cohesion.

Florentine grooms faced similar anxieties born from the society’s display culture. The groom’s family had to provide a counter-dowry consisting of tangible materials, to be worn by the bride and to furnish their home. Like any economic exchange in Florentine society, the safest marriages occurred between acquaintances and carried obligations of reciprocity.⁴³ This was manifest in the dowry and counter-dowry which were largely exchanged as tangible, even wearable, objects, the values of which were scrupulously recorded (with the intention to liquidate the materials and convert them to real property following the wedding). Beyond their monetary value, these objects held symbolic meaning and publicly displayed the couple’s honour.

Displaying the Dowry through Bridal Attire

The first formal marriage ceremony was the families’ agreement on dowry terms. Once this had occurred, and with the dowry price in mind, a groom would set about preparing his bride’s wedding attire. The outfit would include a dress and jewels which she would wear for the *menare a casa*.⁴⁴ The wedding dress was not a mere frivolous affair but was the first, and most powerful public symbol of the groom’s wealth and his possession of his bride’s body and identity.⁴⁵ To make an impressive bridal outfit, a groom would have to consult a range of people including family members, tailors, embroiders, jewellers, lenders and even poets.⁴⁶ An ideal dress would fit and complement the bride’s body, would display symbols of family

⁴¹ Hunt, p.270 and Kirshner, Julius.1978. *Pursuing honour while avoiding sin: The monte delle Doti of Florence*, Milano: Mvltà Pavcis AG, p. 34-40.

⁴² Bernardino of Siena as translated in: Rogers and Tignali, p. 12, also see Musacchio, (1999), p.19.

⁴³ Weissman, p.40.

⁴⁴ Bayer, Andrea. 2008. “Introduction: Art and Love in Renaissance Italy.” In *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*, edited by Andrea Bayer, 3-8. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, p. 4.

⁴⁵ Kent, (2001), p. 30, and Muzzarelli, p.91.

⁴⁶ Frick, (2002), p.2.

worth and wealth through heraldic devices and high quality textiles, and would include precious stones in the embellishment of the dress and adornments which referenced both the virtues typically associated with a bride and those which complemented the virtues the woman or her natal and marital families were reputed to possess. For example, over several months in 1448, the wealthy merchant Francesco Castellani designed, sourced materials for, and oversaw the production of an elaborate dress for his second wife, Lena Alamanni. The dress included a motif of a large eagle flying upward toward the brilliant rays of the sun embroidered over her torso and spilling across onto her upper sleeves, in silver and gold thread and embellished with pearls. As a socially significant object, this wedding dress allowed Castellani to mark his ownership of Lena's body.⁴⁷ It gave him the opportunity to engage in the elevated language of visual design, indicative of his gentility and creativity. As a financially significant object, the garment allowed Castellani to cover Lena's body while displaying her value in a quantitative as well as a qualitative manner.

Despite its social importance the great wealth and effort lavished on the bridal gown received some criticism. Bernardino of Siena spoke against the bridal gown as indicative of a diminishing social conscience. He graphically argued that the labour required to produce bridal adornments came from the exploitation of the poor.⁴⁸ He shamed his listeners saying:

If somebody picked up one of those gowns and squeezed it and wrung it, he would see blood oozing from it. Alas, do you not think how cruel it is that you are dressed with the clothes [made from] the earnings of someone who is [now] dying of exposure!⁴⁹

However, the motivation of gaining honour through well-appointed display, which doubled as a financial strategy, proved stronger than moral guilt and grooms sought this honour, sometimes to the point of ruin.

There were significant financial drawbacks for men in the early years of their marriage when the community was particularly conscious of the bride's appearance. Grooms who achieved advantageous matches often found the expense of dressing their bride overwhelming. In a

⁴⁷ Frick, (2002), p. 119.

⁴⁸ For an earlier discussion of the guilt laid on the wealthy for their use of extravagant garments despite the poverty of their neighbours see page 114

⁴⁹ Bernardino of Siena as translated in: Rogers and Tignali, p. 12.

1427 tax declaration, Mariotto di Nozzo Lippi justified his extravagant spending with the tone of a martyr, saying, in relation to his new, fifteen year old bride:

I spend a lot of money on her every day, to keep her in clothes and other things, as her peers are accustomed. And I cannot spend any less, because she is the daughter of a well-to-do family, and she wants to show off in front of her peers and relatives. Please, have some consideration for this matter.⁵⁰

Lippi's complaint rhetorically plays on the social convention that having a young bride was an expensive proposition. Nevertheless, Lippi's bride would be justified in her eagerness to be displayed in her wedding regalia given that the wedding was often the only time a woman gained such social visibility and praise. A woman's bridal attire carried symbolic meaning regarding her new identity as a wife and all the moral and social codes which this new identity entailed.⁵¹ Grooms would sometimes spend the equivalent sum of their bride's dowry so that, during her public appearances, she would wear the price her father paid to give her to a husband. The novelty of bridal adornment traditionally engenders a festive mood not only for the bride but in those who witness her.⁵² The time for which women were permitted to appear in their bridal attire was limited, which maintained the sense of honour and celebration associated with the garments.

Establishing a tradition that brides' attire could only be worn for a finite period provided a means by which the dowry could be smoothly integrated into the husband's accounts. A sumptuary law of 1427 cemented this practice, by insisting that women only dress as brides for a three-year period.⁵³ A law of 1464 made three years the minimum amount of time any garments could be worn before being traded.⁵⁴ Both laws aimed to curb excess; the earlier law was concerned with extended prideful displays of wealth, where the later law reacted to concerns that wealth was being misdirected through the continual and superfluous replacement of attire.

From 1427, after three years of marriage wives had to settle into a more subdued long-term appearance. In the early fifteenth-century, Florentine women were usually approximately

⁵⁰ Rogers & Tinagli, p. 147.

⁵¹ Richardson, pp. 217-218.

⁵² Roach & Eicher, (2007) pp. 110-111.

⁵³ Syson & Thornton. P. 42.

⁵⁴ Herald, p. 151.

sixteen at their first marriage and twenty when they became first-time mothers.⁵⁵ I would argue there is a link between the three years women would normally be permitted to wear their heavily ornamented bridal attire, and the leeway of roughly three years before they became pregnant. Throughout the period under investigation *mantelli* were popular maternity garments.⁵⁶ Furthermore, married women, past their bridal transition, wore *mantelli* when traveling outdoors.⁵⁷ This supports the link between giving up bridal finery and adopting a new identity as a mature wife and mother.

Sumptuary laws claimed that heavy adornments were taking their toll on the physical form and reproductive function of women. Health issues reinforced economic and social concerns in the preamble to a Florentine statute of 1433. The lawmakers insisted they had “an honest desire to control the barbarous, untamed bestiality of women who are not mindful of the frailty of their nature” and who utilise their “base, diabolical nature” to convince their husbands to submit to their desire for “expensive ornaments.” The statute claimed that, observing the increasing costs of dressing wives, men were choosing not to marry and that in the pursuit of “gold, silver and jewels and clothes” that cripple their weak bodies, women jeopardised their nature as “a bag to hold natural seed” in order to give birth to children and “fill the free city.”⁵⁸ The government thereby utilised the community’s ideas about the gendered body to realign conflicting objectives of marriage with the city’s current economic and demographic challenges.

Although the expense of dressing a bride was great, the groom would gradually repurchase the attire and resell or return any borrowed jewels. For instance, the silk merchant Marco Parenti showered his patrician bride Caterina Strozzi with adornments up the value of 700 florins when her dowry was only 500. Caterina’s mother Alessandra wrote to Filippo in 1447 to communicate that:

⁵⁵ Herlihy & Klapisch-Zuber, pp. 210 & 247.

⁵⁶ Musacchio, (1999), p. 38.

⁵⁷ Rainey, p. 252-253.

⁵⁸ Archivio di Stato di Firenze. 1 settembre 1433 al 31 ottobre 1433. “Deliberazioni dei Signori e Collegi.” In *Ordina Autorita* 42, Classe II. Distinzione 6 num. 77 stanza II. Armad. 5v-6r. “...cupiditatem honestam magnum in modum habuerunt ad refrenandum barbaram et indomitam feminarum bestialitatem qui non memores sue nature fragilitatis et quod viris subdite sint eorum pravum mutantes sensum in reprobam et diabolicam naturam ipsis viros cogunt mellisius venenis ipsis subiecte, immemores quod viros portante qui ab ipsis homini procreantur, ipsi que taquem sacculum semen naturale perfectum ipsorum virorum retinent ut huminoes fiant, et quod non est nature conforme ut tantis sumptuosis ornamentis se hornent cum ipsi homines propter hoc desistant, a, matrimonii copula, propter incomportabiles sumptua, et sic ipsorum hominum natura deficit cum femine facte sint ad resplenda liberis civitatem...” [my translation]

Marco, that is her husband, who always says, 'Ask for what thou wilt.' He had a crimson silk and velvet cape made, and a dress to match, and it is the most beautiful fabric that is in Florence, that he had made in his shop. He made a *Grillanda* [large fifteenth-century headdress] with plumes and pearls, which cost eighty florins, [...] two strands of pearls, which is sixty florins or more: so that when she goes out she will be wearing more than four hundred florins. He ordered a crimson velvet dress to be made, with big sleeves lined of martens [fur], for when she goes to her husband. And he is having a pinkish mantle made, embroidered with pearls. He cannot be satiated having things made, for she is beautiful.⁵⁹

Parenti gradually removed these items so that by the end of three years he possessed practically nothing of what he had so lavishly offered for the festivities (although it was another eleven years before he sold more sentimental items, like Caterina's belt).⁶⁰

Because bridal ornaments represented an important financial investment, Florentine merchants' *ricordi* include some very detailed accounts of their bride's attire and a breakdown of the cost of the bride's trousseau, listing the couple's combined wealth for the first time. For instance, three weeks after exchanging rings on 5 July 1466, Luca Landucci recorded the material components of his wife's dowry:

A bridal dress with narrow sleeves, embroidered with pearls. A *gamurra pagonazza* [a dress of ornate textiles worn on special occasions⁶¹], with sleeves of brocade. A white *gamurrino* [under-gown], 24 hand-woven handkerchiefs, 6 linen towels, 24 *benducci da lato* [decorative handkerchiefs pinned to dress] 8 *camice* [shirts] with half almond design - new, 12 *cuffie* [coifs] a white belt with silver thread, 3 caps of different kinds, a green bag with silver, a pincushion with pearls. They were estimated by two dealers to be worth 38 florins.

Landucci listed the cost of each of the materials in her trousseau, and then continued to list his contributions to her bridal attire, including such small details as "the glaze, between the

⁵⁹Strozzi, "Lettera Prima to Filippo Strozzi, 24 August, 1447" pp.5-6 "O! non ti dico di Marco, cioè il marito, che sempre gli dice : Chiedi ciò che tu vuoi. E come si maritò, gli tagliò una cotta di zetani vellutato chermisi; e così la roba di quello medesimo: ed è 'l più bel drappo che sia in Firenze; che se lo fece 'n bottega. E fassi una grillanda di penne con perle, che viene fiorini ottanta; e l'acconciatura di sotto, e' sono duo trecce di perle, che viene fiorini sessanta o più: che quando andrà fuori, arà in dosso più che fiorini quattrocento. E ordina di fare un velluto chermisi, per farlo colle maniche grandi, foderato di martore, quando n'andrà a marito: e fa una cioppa rosata, ricamata di perle. E non può saziarsi di fare delle cose; che è bella, e vorrebbe paressi vie più: che in verità non ce n'è un'altra a Firenze fatta come lei, ed ha tutte le parti, al parere di molti : che Iddio gli presti santà e grazia lungo tempo, com' io disidero." [my translation].

⁶⁰ Christine Klapisch-Zuber, 1985. *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*. Translated by Lydia G. Cochrane. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 227-228, and King, (1991) p. 53 and Deborah L Krohn. 2008. "Rites of Passage: Art Objects to Celebrate Betrothal, Marriage, and the Family." In *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*, by The Metropolitan Museum of Art New York, 60-67. New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 63; and see Muzzarelli, pp. 91-92.

⁶¹ Muzzarelli, p. 88.

necklace beads 2.3 lire” and larger details including “blue silk for the gown: 6 lire.” He included production costs for the work of a number of tailors and jewellers in the list including “For cutting the coat, to Lorenzo, tailor: 5.12 lire,” “For brokerage to Tomaso di Currado: 12.14 lire” and “For setting the stones in the pendant 14 lire.”⁶² As this account of materials and of the payments made to named artisans indicates, consumers were careful to remember the value of their attire and the hands that constructed it. It was good etiquette to commission or purchase materials, perfumes, the tailoring of garments or otherwise rendering domestic objects from vendors and artisans in one’s own neighbourhood.⁶³ This meant that the local community were well positioned to recognise the quality and worth of their neighbours’ attire. This close relationship between personal expenses, appearance and social recognition helps to contextualise the visual impact, and degree of skilled judgment, that a new bride in an entirely new outfit could elicit.

Bridal Jewellery: Talismans and Gift-giving



Figure 17: Fede Ring, artist unknown, Silver Engraved, Italian fifteenth century, © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Ornamental and talismanic jewellery and other wearable gifts were offered to brides by their grooms and marital family at various stages throughout the wedding. The jewellery grooms offered their brides was intended to increase affection and to make their agreement, his wealth and her value visible. Rings and small circular or heart shaped, pins engraved with messages of love, affection and constancy could be exchanged in anticipation of an engagement. An ancient Fede (faith) motif of clasped hands was a

common design for affectionate tokens or wedding rings. In one fifteenth-century example (Figure 17) the opposite side of the ‘faith’ motif is two hands clasping a heart indicative of love. As the law required both bride and groom to consent to the match, wearable gifts

⁶² Landucci pp. 6-8 “Per fattura della cotta, a Lorenzo sarto – 5.12 / Per ismalti, per tramezzare el vizzo – 2.3 / Per maglie, per la cotta – 1.2[...] Per seta azzurra, per la giornea 6 [...] Per senseria a Tomamaso di Currado – 12.14 [...] Per fornitura del pendent - 14” [my translations].

⁶³ Currie, pp. 485 – 486.

became an important sign of mutual acceptance. Wearable gifts were more evident and significant amongst poorer people who had fewer ornaments.⁶⁴

On arriving in her new home, the bride's married, female in-laws gave her additional gifts of rings, and sometimes necklaces or a girdle. She would, in turn, offer the objects to the next woman to marry into the family.⁶⁵ The limited time sumptuary laws allowed women to dress as brides reinforced the practicality of the system. The bride also gave wearable gifts from her trousseau to her new family members. These gifts did not carry the weight of family pride or tradition, but were more personal tokens from a woman making a daunting transition, and so they were usually smaller gifts of linen, possibly exhibiting the bride's own handicraft, rather than expensive heirlooms of metal or stone.⁶⁶ The temporary nature of more costly gifts indicates that they were not meant for long-term memory but to sartorially aid brides in establishing an alteration of their identity. In the years that followed, jewellery that was hired was returned, the dress was taken apart and family heirlooms were re-gifted. This integrated the wife's dowry into the family's wealth and solidified family ties through mnemonic ritual and shared material experiences.

A belt decorated with courtly narratives and protestations of love was a typical wearable gift ceremoniously given by grooms to their brides.⁶⁷ Belts drew symbolism from religious and literary traditions as well as appearance and function. Due to the Virgin Mary's miraculous girdle in Prato, belts were associated with fertility. Belts also gained an association with sexual allure due to reference to Venus' belt in the *Illiad* and to the way that the loose end of the belt swayed with the motion of a woman's dress. Additionally, belts became symbols of fidelity due to the way a belt bound the body. All of these associations made a belt an appropriate bridal adornment.⁶⁸ Unlike many bridal gifts which were temporary, a belt would usually become a woman's own valuable, decorative, symbolic and practical possession. Even fourteenth-century women from the Florentine countryside (of moderate

⁶⁴ Richardson p.216, for more on 15th century Italian rings in marriage see: Musacchio, Jacqueline Marie "Catalogue Numbers 1-86: Gifts and Furnishings for the home" in *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*, pp. 100-102.

⁶⁵ Klapisch-Zuber (1985), pp. 231-233.

⁶⁶ Klapisch-Zuber (1985), p.240.

⁶⁷ Herald, p. 28.

⁶⁸ Krohn, Deborah L. 2008. "Rites of Passage: Art Objects to Celebrate Betrothal, Marriage, and the Family." P. 62, and Jacqueline Marie Musacchio, "Catalogue Numbers 1-86: Gifts and Furnishings for the Home" p.105 both in *The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*. Edited by Andrea Bayer. New Haven: Yale University Press.

to low social status) were likely to own a precious embroidered belt.⁶⁹ Landucci recorded the presence of a white silk and silver girdle in his bride's trousseau.⁷⁰ In Florence, embroidered belts were a specialty product of female artisans and so it may be fair to speculate that such articles held an additional significance for women as representative of female industry.⁷¹ A law from 1459 limited the cost of a belt to three florins, but a law of 1467 increased their maximum value to five florins, allowing for the use of silver but not of pearls or crimson decoration.⁷² A 1472 law forbade women, aside from the wives of doctors and knights, from wearing gilded chains anywhere other than their belts. A subsequent review of laws and prosecutions in 1483 indicates that women had responded to the restriction by adding silver chains to their belts long enough to wrap around their shoulders like necklaces.⁷³ This shows that following the giving of belts at weddings, they remained important symbols of marital status, wealth and decorative initiative.



Figure 18 Unknown Italian Maker, Pomander, Partially gilded silver, niello, Height: 6.5 cm, Width: 4 cm, Victoria & Albert Museum, London, c. 1350 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Pomanders were also given as wearable gifts among the uppermost European elite. Pomanders are spherical pieces of jewellery attached to the belt, intricately worked with internal containers for dispensing perfumes. The elite used pomanders in the fourteenth and fifteenth century, in part, for the protection they believed sweet scents offered them against the plague and its

⁶⁹ Frick, (2002) p.46.

⁷⁰ Landucci, p. 5.

⁷¹ Frick (2005), p. 134.

⁷² Rainey, pp. 551-552.

⁷³ Rainey, pp. 522-523.

associated evil odours.⁷⁴ One example made in Italy in approximately 1350 has four sections that fold out like a quartered apple (Figure 18). The woman who wore the pomander would most likely have received it from a lover. It reflected features of her social identity as well as the nature of her relationship with the gift-giver. She would have to have been wealthy, to be in a position to be offered it, and probably literate, in order to appreciate its textual decoration. The silver pomander is inscribed in Latin with the story of the *Judgment of Paris* in which Hera, Athena and Aphrodite asked Paris to offer a golden apple to the most beautiful of the goddesses and Paris chose Aphrodite, the goddess of love. Renaissance representations of apples as gifts from men to women made reference to this ancient allegory in praise of women's beauty, whereas reverse images, of women offering men apples evoked biblical associations of sinful sexuality.⁷⁵ This implies an underlying assumption that women should be the object of pursuit and praise, but should not be the pursuer. It is likely that the recipient of this pomander would have appreciated the inference that the gift-giver saw her as possessing unrivalled beauty and, by extension, that he saw her as virtuous and worthy of love.

Less-expensive gifts were given to the bride for her continued use but larger 'gifts' of bejewelled brooches, headdresses and necklaces were temporarily given as a symbolic gesture and were increasingly hired.⁷⁶ Elite families' records, including those of Francesco Castellani, indicate that once a piece of wedding finery had outlived its initial use, the groom who purchased it could hire it out to kin for specified periods. The men who hired the jewellery would each pay for small alterations to be made to the piece. This would disguise its reuse to a degree but the piece's predominant continuity lent it a sense of family taste and tradition and would not be interpreted as a sign of financial difficulty.⁷⁷ Christine de Pizan noted the Italian tradition for reusing materials, saying the garments were "covered in pearls, gold, and precious stones, still they are not extravagant. Those ornaments last. They are put on one robe after another."⁷⁸ Francesco Barbaro likewise made a distinction

⁷⁴ Evelyn Welch, 2011. "Scented Buttons and Perfumed Gloves: Smelling Things in Renaissance Italy." In *Ornamentalism: The Art of Renaissance Accessories*, edited by Bella Mirabella, 13-39. Michigan: Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, p. 16.

⁷⁵ For a brief discussion of the golden apple offered by Paris to Aphrodite, as a symbol for sexual allure which recurs in western art as a counter to the sinfully sexual apple offered by Eve to Adam, see Bendiner, pp. 16-17.

⁷⁶ Syson & Thornton, p. 40.

⁷⁷ Syson & Thornton, p. 43.

⁷⁸ Pizan, (1989), p. 176.

between brides' jewels and their garments. He accepted that jewels were "more durable, and less likely to entail poverty than money put into rich clothing. Moreover, jewels and gold may often easily be of great use in business and public affairs." He then cited an instance when the ancient Romans had pooled their material wealth to win a war. However, Barbaro advised restraint:

I think that wives ought to display their jewels even less than the present sumptuary laws permit. Therefore, I would like them to abstain from wearing very licentious apparel and other bodily adornments, not out of necessity but because they desire to win praise by showing that 'they can do without those things that they are legally allowed.'⁷⁹

Barbaro thereby indicated the economic role that bridal jewellery played as a male investment, as well as indicating the way women could express virtue by limiting their display.

Sumptuary laws likewise tried to quell elaborate ornamentation, blaming women's vanity for its proliferation. A sumptuary law from 1342 condemned the wastefulness of wedding festivities and gifts.⁸⁰ A law in 1349 recorded its purpose to be to respond to "the unbridled licentiousness in the ornaments of women, and weddings, and feasts [...] opposed to appropriate order."⁸¹ Another law, from 1377, stated its purpose as recording the provisions made by the office of Twelve Good Men in discussion with the Sedici *gonfaloni* (neighbourhood representatives), having "attentively considered the ornaments of the women and about curbing unnecessary expenses in funeral rites and weddings, and many other things connected to the above" in keeping with the tradition of observing the community's expenses and judging how to curb "the ambitions of the very ornaments of women or of men or boys."⁸² In 1419, a renewal of the laws of 1412, a law cited its purpose

⁷⁹ Barbaro, p. 209.

⁸⁰ Archivio di Stato di Firenze. 1342 March. *Provvisioni Registri* 31, 1v.

⁸¹ Archivio di Stato di Firenze. 1346. *Provvisioni Registri* 36..f.54v "Item considerantes effrenatam lascivi suprum que in ornamentis mulierum et nuptiis ac con viviis connitant et alia que conventi contra ordinati, dicti comunis duodicem".

⁸² Archivio di Stato di Firenze. 1377 September 12. *Provisioni Registri* 65..f.157r "...attenda ornamenta mulierum et circa refrenandos superfluos sumptus funerarium et exequiarum et nuptiarum et alia multa ad predicta coherentia, [...] Indicatione va quindecima quod domini priores artium et vexillifer iustitie populi et comunis florentie una cum gonfaloni sotietatum populi et cum duodecim bonis viris comunis florentie et regulatoribus introiit et expensarum dicti comunis et dues partes eorum aliis absentibus et inquisitis possint semel et pluries et quotienscumque omnia et singula ordinato hactenus edita sive facta ad coherentia sive pro coherento superfluos sumptus, seu ambitiones ornamentorum mulierum seu hominum vel puerorum seu qui fiebant in ipsis ornamentis."

as to place “restraint on the ornaments of women.”⁸³ Despite the proliferation of sumptuary legislation, sumptuous attire remained an important tool for self-promotion in the marriage-market and jewellery continued to play a significant symbolic role in Florentine wedding custom.

Bridal jewellery included a range of symbolically and economically legible gems. Pearls were the most typical embellishments for bridal attire. Indeed, the largest personal expense Landucci listed for his bride’s adornment was “a pearl necklace, 120 fiorini.” He listed pearls a number of times, in relation to the objects they were purchased to embellish.⁸⁴ Spherical, polished, precious and fragile, pearls were symbolic of virginity, wealth, childbirth and the moon.⁸⁵ Varagine used the symbolic meaning of the pearl to praise the virtues of St. Margaret, saying that a pearl “is white, and little and virtuous. So the blessed Margaret was white by virginity, little by humility, and virtuous by operation of miracles.”⁸⁶ Biblically, pearls were the substance from which the gates of heaven were constructed but were also seductively worn by the whore of Babylon.⁸⁷ Religious, symbolic and financial associations informed the social treatment of pearls in fifteenth-century Florence. As noted earlier because pearls were beautiful and valuable they were deeply coveted by, yet legally restricted from, the poorer classes.⁸⁸ Pearls’ connotations of beauty and virtue were therefore most accessible to the wealthy. Pearls’ religious connotations of purity and their social implication of wealth, complemented their typical use as bridal ornaments. In her temporary array the patrician bride appeared angelic, valuable and virtuous.

Emeralds were also worn by wealthy brides, as local lore held that the stone would crack if worn by a bride who was not a virgin, and following this test they would promote strength

⁸³ Archivio di Stato di Firenze. 1419. *Provisioni Registri* 109, f. 96v, “...super refrenatione ornamentorum mulierum.”

⁸⁴ Landucci p. 7 “*Uno vezzo perle 120, fiorini*” [my translations].

⁸⁵ For a discussion of the way late Renaissance women, particularly Queen Elizabeth I, wielded the complexly, occasionally contradictory, nuanced language of pearls in their self-fashioning see: Karen Raber, “Chain of Pearls: Gender, Property, Identity.” In *Ornamentalism: The Art of Renaissance Accessories*, edited by Bella Mirabella, 159-181. Michigan: Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011, pp.159-181.

⁸⁶ Varagine, “The life of St Margaret,” Vol. IV, p. 66. And Voragine, p.400 “*Margareta dicitur a quadam pretiosa gemma, quae margarita vocatur: quae gemma est candida, parva et virtuosa. Sic beata Margareta fuit candida per virginitatem, parva per humilitatem, virtuosa per miraculorum operationem.*” Later writers including Landry, used the same imagery of the pearl as “round bryght and whyte and clene” to describe ideal women’s virtue. (Landry, p.165).

⁸⁷ Sara Piccolo Paci. 2003. *Le Vesti del Peccato: Eva, Solemé e Maria Maddalena dell'arte*. Milano: Ancora, p. 50, Revelations 17:4 and Revelation 21:21.

⁸⁸ For an earlier discussion of the way people coveted pearls see page 114

and diminish lust and sadness.⁸⁹ Landucci's bride also wore sapphires, symbolic of intellect and loyalty, and a ruby, symbolic of physical and spiritual passion.⁹⁰ According to Ficino, when such precious stones were worn they had both spiritually and physically protective qualities.⁹¹ Coral beads were frequently worn by brides, symbolic of good fortune and fertility.⁹² Ficino associated coral with the gifts of Venus, including musical harmony, nice scents and flavours, and with jovial thoughts and feelings "that is, steadfast, composed, religious, and law-abiding."⁹³ Pearls and precious stones set in large brooches featuring family crests or symbols of fertility, such as horns of plenty or *putti*, became popular hair and shoulder adornments for brides across Europe.⁹⁴ The sheen of the polished stones with complex metal-work of jaunty decorative golden tendrils would have given the brides a glittery effect as they made their public day-lit procession to their new husband's home. These attention-grabbing celestially powerful stones set in talismanic designs were worn in combinations to reflect and instil virtues in the wearers.⁹⁵ Selecting bridal jewellery appealed to this sympathetic magic while creating a socially legible account of the bride's virtue and the groom's wealth.

Portraits: Idealisation and Memory

Once the time for wearing bridal attire had elapsed, women's sartorial identities shifted to that of wives. This placed women in a double-bind because they were expected to project a beautiful image of virtue while avoiding attire or cosmetics which would seem to express vanity or, worse, sexual availability to anyone but their husband. This transition was marked by donning a *mantello* when going about in public, which acted as a sign of modesty, maturity and womanhood.⁹⁶ According to a 1355 sumptuary law, women's failure to wear a *mantello* in public would incur a fine payable out of their dowry by their husbands.⁹⁷ The overgarment elicited respect and was the preferred garment for depicting female saints but,

⁸⁹ Katherine McIver, 2008. "Daddy's Little Girl: Patrilineal Anxiety in Two Portraits of a Renaissance Daughter." In *Woman and Portraits in Early Modern Europe: Gender, Agency, Identity*, edited by Andrea Pearson, 85-106. Hampshire: Ashgate. pp. 93 & 95.

⁹⁰ Landucci p. 7, and Paci, p. 51.

⁹¹ Ficino, (2002), p. 301.

⁹² Syson & Thornton pp. 62-63, and: Tinagli, p. 77.

⁹³ Ficino, (2002) p. 249 and p.253.

⁹⁴ Syson & Thornton, pp. 43-48.

⁹⁵ This philosophy is discussed in the chapter *The Sensate Body* from page 45.

⁹⁶ Rainey, pp. 252-253.

⁹⁷ Rainey, p. 155.

as Frick has noted, *mantelli* were rarely featured in portrait depictions of living Florentine women.⁹⁸ Although wives' attire in a public setting had to demonstrate their modesty through the use of a *mantello*, portraits displayed in the home usually preserved the beauty and stature of the woman as a bride. Before the second half of the fifteenth century, portraits of women were rarely commissioned with the express purpose of commemorating a wedding. Yet earlier portraits of wives did depict them in bridal attire.⁹⁹ Matrons were painted as brides, suggesting that once established as a members their husbands' households wives ceased to receive social recognition in the form of sartorial distinction, but their former glory as objects of exchange in marriage remained worthy of painterly distinction.

Portraits converted the memory of wives as brides into precious objects in their own right. In the fifteenth century, a fashion developed for husbands to have portraits painted of their wives, with flat, idealised faces wearing meticulously detailed bridal attire. These portraits were sometimes posthumously commissioned by women's widowers and were used to commemorate the woman at the height of her value as a virginal object of exchange, adorned in attire that (through its representation) continued to bring honour to the male purchaser.¹⁰⁰ At other times, the father of the bride commissioned a portrait as a gift to his son-in-law. In these cases the portrait expressed the bride's social status as the newly acquired property of her husband and it immortalised the bride's youthful beauty even as the living wife matured. When the paintings were of living brides, they reminded the sitter of her new family's expectations for her. They would outlast the flesh-and-blood woman and remain in the home to inspire her daughters with the image of their unblemished and

⁹⁸ Frick, (2002), p. 164.

⁹⁹ John Pope-Hennessy and Keith Christiansen. 1980. "Secular Painting in 15th-Century Tuscany: Birth Trays, Cassone Panels, and Portraits." *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 38 (1), p. 57.

¹⁰⁰ Tignali, pp. 49 & 53, and see Wright, Alison. 2000. "The Memory of Faces: Representational Choices in Fifteenth-Century Florentine Portraiture." In *Art, Memory and Family in Renaissance Florence*, edited by Giovanni Ciappelli and Patricia Lee Rubin, 86 - 113. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.108: Tignali's claim that female portraits were created after the women's death, is supported by a number of extant records in diary entries, inventories and contracts. However, as noted by Wright, there are not extant records for the majority of individual secular portraits which often suffer imprecise dating. Wright also acknowledges that a genre for representing deceased men existed in the form of funerary monuments but no such practice existed for women. It is, therefore, acceptable to talk about a cultural practice of commissioning posthumous portraits of women, however, one must exercise caution against assuming that this was the most frequent reason to commission a portrait of a woman.

virtuous mother.¹⁰¹ Portraits would be displayed, along with other allegorical images, in the bedroom, which acted as a comfortable public space for entertaining kin and honoured guests.¹⁰² By painting women as brides, artists captured their image at a moment when they most perfectly fulfilled their role as idealised “mannequins,” on which men displayed symbols of virtue, power and exchange.¹⁰³ Later generations could meditate on such portraits displayed in their homes as allegories of virtue, coupled with ancestral respect, with implications for their own identities. Embodied identity, was thereby transferred from body to image to another body.

Portraits developed a coded visual language according to pre-established cultural symbolism. The traditions for both male and female portrait painting attempted to express status and wealth through the nature of the objects surrounding and enveloping them. Female portraits mostly appeared in profile (seen, not seeing) whereas male subjects looked out, as though to make eye contact with the viewer and so make a judgement whilst being judged. In the late-fifteenth century, portraits began to represent men with their possessions and objects belonging to their trade to align them with various communities. By contrast, women’s portraits typically depicted them as the repositories of virtue, through their stylised beauty, against a sparse backdrop so that the focus rested on their bodies. Rather than having possessions, women were the possessions of men, adorned in symbols of marriage or mourning.¹⁰⁴ Recurring stylistic features of female portraits included; depicting the woman from her shoulder-up, in profile (suggestive of modesty), painted on a flattened plane (indicative of internal beauty), with pale skin and blonde hair (symbolic of virtue), wearing pearl and precious stone-encrusted jewellery (expressing wealth and purity), and a garment with an embroidered family crest (conveying marital loyalty). Drawing on a Platonic concept of beauty (popularised in the mid-to-late-fifteenth century by philosophers including Ficino and artists including Botticelli) portraits of women were often painted on a flattened picture plane, removing harsh shadows and the distorted effect of perspective, using distinct line and smooth colouration creating an ethereal and gentle effect, to express

¹⁰¹ Patricia Simons, 1988. “Women in Frames: The Gaze, the Eye, the Profile in Renaissance Portraiture.” *History Workshop Journal* (Oxford University Press) 25: 4-30, p.17.

¹⁰² McIver, p.92 and Tinagli, p.25.

¹⁰³ Trexler (1980), p. 249.

¹⁰⁴ Jones & Stallybrass p. 49.

essential truth over visual artifice.¹⁰⁵ This effect was heightened by painting bridal attire, the symbols of identity, with greater emphasis on form and texture. A later school of thought, emerging in the late-fifteenth century and early-sixteenth century, popularised by Da Vinci, focused on form, shadow, foreshortening and movement over line and colour, and used dark subdued attire to emphasise the details of the face (now looking out at the viewer) as a means to understand the female sitter's identity and character.¹⁰⁶ In the mid-fourteenth to the late-fifteenth century then, representations of women gradually shifted to reflect contemporary philosophies. The effect of this shift moved from reading female identity through the socially imbued symbols that encased her body, to searching for answers to her character in the details of her face.

Early-Renaissance artists initially derived the profile position from the society's strong intellectual and nostalgic idealisation of antiquity.¹⁰⁷ The sense of stillness invoked by the practice of painting brides on a flattened plane, in profile encouraged the viewer to calmly survey, assess and read both the figure and the symbolic, adornments and objects surrounding the subject. Positioning the female sitter this way accorded to social anxieties, discussed earlier in this thesis, concerning women's vanity and the dangerous temptations sparked through meeting the female gaze.¹⁰⁸ The profile placed the sitter's shoulder in the centre of the image, a significant point because detachable sleeves were one of the most extravagant features of the bride's garment; they were often symbolically embellished and were a prime location for displaying brooches. The shoulder was a common location to mark one's loyalties. Members of confraternities and *commese* likewise displayed the symbols of their communities on their shoulders.¹⁰⁹ Husbands marked their brides' clothes, with signs of ownership in the same way that families marked the exterior of their homes, with *stemmi*, or coats of arms.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ David Hemsoll, 1998. "Beauty as an Aesthetic and Artistic Ideal in Late Fifteenth-century Florence." In *Concepts of Beauty in Renaissance Art*, edited by Francis Ames-Lewis and Mary Rogers, 66-70. Hampshire: Ashgate, pp. 68 -70.

¹⁰⁶ Hemsoll, p. 73.

¹⁰⁷ Tinagli, p. 48, Wright pp.92-100.

¹⁰⁸ Simons, p. 21.

¹⁰⁹ Weissman, p.82.

¹¹⁰ Crum & Paoletti, 2006, p. 276.



Figure 19: Anonymous, Florentine, *Profile Portrait of a Lady* Tempera and Oil on Wood Panel, 42.9x29.6cm, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, c. 1475

The anonymous 1475 Florentine *Profile Portrait of a Lady* (Figure 19) is a typical profile portrait of a bride. Her face is pale and without blemish or distinct shadows, reminiscent of ivory. She wears a sleeveless overdress called a *giornea* of blue with a pearl neckline, and a

brocade pattern of an encircled palm made with loops of uncut gold thread. The sleeves beneath this dress are of gold brocade with a fanning foliate design in red. Her yellow hair is gathered, with the aid of a white sash, strings of pearls and a hair brooch (made with a cluster of pearls set in gold) pinned between two cones from which fine veils fall. These fashionable and extravagant cone shapes accentuate her adherence to another Florentine fashion for plucking the hairline to raise the forehead and give the impression of height.¹¹¹ She wears an exquisite brooch on her shoulder featuring three large jewels and three pearls set in gold and topped with a finely crafted gold cherub. The detailed baby face of the cherub is likely to have been intended to encourage the woman to envision the babies she should now produce as a wife.¹¹² Her pearl embellishment is completed with a necklace of small pearl clusters. This portrait's portrayal of high fashion, expensive and symbolic accessories, and idealised hair and pale youthful facial features, captured and so prolonged the memory of the finite time in which the husband possessed and the bride wore the garments and embodied their associated virtues.

Alesso Baldovinetti's 1465 *Portrait of a Lady* (Figure 20) exhibits many of the same traits. She sits in profile wearing a sleeved dress called a *cioppa* of embellished yellow, possibly cloth-of-gold, that boldly contrasts with a large black family crest embroidered on her facing shoulder. This crest of three palm leaves and two feathers has been identified as that of the Galli family, leading to the tentative identification of the sitter as Francesca degli Strati, the second wife of Angelo Galli.¹¹³ Her blond hair is plucked but a black band rests at approximately the point of her natural hairline. She wears a hairpiece featuring a cluster of pearls and a simple coral bead necklace with a pearl pendent. This portrait combined symbols of beauty with jewellery associated with good fortune and purity. These symbols were representative of the bride's virtue but were also reflective of the hopes the family had for the marriage.

¹¹¹ Bosiljka Raditsa, Rebecca Arkenberg, Rika Burnham, Deborah Krohn, Kent Lydecker, and Teresa Russo. 2000. *The Art of Renaissance Europe: Resource for Educators*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, pp.23 & 96.

¹¹² The role of imagery in the bedroom to shape the maternal imagination is discussed further in the following chapter, particularly from page 308

¹¹³ Tinagli, p. 53.



Figure 20: Alesso Baldovinetti *Portrait of a Lady* Tempera and Oil on Wood, 62.9 x 40.6 cm, The National Gallery London, c. 1465

In the final quarter of the fifteenth century, idealisation in the domestic portrait genre developed to the point that paintings of imagined ideal or historic women were commissioned in the style of a bridal portrait. Their function was no longer to honour the memory of a family member but simply to promote virtue.¹¹⁴ This development of portraiture represents an amalgam of domestic painting genres. Allegorical images of virtue, providing intimate exempla for both women and men, were already common in narrative *spalliere* and *cassone* commissioned to celebrate weddings and decorate the couple's bedchamber.

Bedroom Furniture, Sentiment and Settling In

Cassoni, large fabric-lined boxes used like wardrobes, decorated with detailed allegorical narratives, containing garments, linen and devotional objects, were a staple in Florentine households. They entered the home during the *menare a casa* when they were filled with the bride's trousseau. The grandeur of the *cassoni* and their decoration publicised the familial and economic alliance.¹¹⁵ In the mid-fifteenth century, the groom's family, who had previously commissioned furniture such as beds, birth trays, mirrors and small altarpieces to decorate the marital bedroom, also took over the responsibility of commissioning the *cassoni*.¹¹⁶ In the fifteenth century, even lower-class families owned decorative *cassoni*. As Jacqueline Musacchio demonstrates this was likely because of the significant role these objects played both in the marriage ritual and, subsequently, in allegorically reflecting and daily reasserting expectations of a good wife.¹¹⁷

Once the wedding procession reached the home, the contents of the chests were triumphantly displayed to family and friends.¹¹⁸ The contents tended to include such practical things as linens, a comb and mirror, a belt, a spindle, and devotional items like a holy doll or Book of Hours.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ Tinagli, p. 77.

¹¹⁵ Rubin (2000), p. 69

¹¹⁶ For a typical example of the objects commissioned by a groom's parents see the 1493 list of furniture on the occasion of Andrea Minerbetti and Maria Bini's marriage in: Rogers and Tinagli, p. 128.

¹¹⁷ Jacqueline Marie Musacchio, 1999. *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance Italy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, p.7.

¹¹⁸ Syson & Thornton, p. 70.

¹¹⁹ Krohn "Rites of Passage" p. 63, and Syson & Thornton, p. 61.

As with so many fifteenth-century practices related to material culture, *cassoni*, having fulfilled their initial function on a public display, took on a more intimate meaning in the home. As a method of storage, the chests required patient unpacking and repacking, this would have given people time to pay closer attention to details in the decoration which may be missed during the procession. Luke Syson and Dora Thornton discussed evidence from frescoed domestic scenes such as the *Birth of the Virgin*, that demonstrate women's practice of sitting on low benches and daybeds (*lettucci*) in the bedroom when visiting one another. This placed them at eye level with narratives painted on the chests, the same eye-level as young children being raised in the house, providing ample opportunity to enjoy and learn from the images.¹²⁰ The chests, which took roughly a month to paint, usually depicted the couple's family crests as well as illustrations of familiar stories of exemplary heroines from folklore or antiquity.¹²¹ The paintings encouraged their viewers to identify with the figures and so to try to behave with corresponding virtue. Depending on differing social expectations of the various members of the household, and so their store of remembered experiences, the personal and applicable meanings of such narratives may have varied.¹²²

When the wedding ceremonies were done, and the *cassone* and *spalliere* (decorative backboards placed on the wall above chests) were established in the nuptial bedroom, the bride had to begin her duties as a wife in her husband's home. Humanist guides for domesticity argued that the different natures of male and female bodies predisposed them to the public and domestic spheres (respectively). Francesco Barbaro's *On Wifely Duties* (1417) stated:

Since women are by nature weak they should diligently care for things concerning the household. For weakness can never be separated from cares nor cares from vigilance. What is the use of bringing home great wealth unless the wife will work at preserving, maintaining and utilizing it?¹²³

Alberti made a near-identical statement in his *Book of the Family* (1432).¹²⁴ Alberti advised that a husband ought to allow his young bride a few days, "after the pangs of longing for her mother and family had begun to fade," before taking her around the house and showing her

¹²⁰ Syson & Thornton, p. 72, also see: Pope-Hennessy & Christiansen, p. 12.

¹²¹ Rogers & Tinagli, p.74 and Krohn, "Rites of Passage", p.64.

¹²² Tinagli, p. 29.

¹²³ Barbaro, pp. 215-216.

¹²⁴ Alberti, (1969), p.207.

all the possessions for which she was to care.¹²⁵ While rhetorically prescriptive texts like Alberti's and Barbaro's cannot be considered direct evidence of domestic practice, they do demonstrate the popular ideology of elite society. They reflected current philosophy and cultural values and their works influenced the expectations and practices of the day.

It is worth noting that both idealised guides argued that women's (divinely appointed) physical and so psychological condition inclined them to remain at home and guard their husband's possessions. Men acquired belongings from the public sphere, most significantly when furnishing their nuptial bedroom, as signs of their taste, interests, needs, wealth and marital status.¹²⁶ These possessions were valuable for their utility, the meaning they carried from the external world and for the allegorical meaning they offered for the domestic world.¹²⁷ The use of gendered allegory on domestic objects does indicate an expectation that women would see and contemplate the meanings of the materials. Arguments for natural gender division were evidently shared and reinforced among the literate Italian community, suggesting that women had a recognisably more intimate and sustained relationship with the materials in the home than men.

Many domestic objects required household members to touch them in order to expose their more significant decorative elements. Nude figures were concealed in *cassoni*, only visible when the lid was raised. Elite women's trousseau included jewellery boxes, decorated externally with images of courtly love, in which to keep rings, pearls and other small items. Bernardino of Siena spoke of these boxes containing letters from loved ones and cited a practice of perfuming the boxes with musk (a perfume of animal origin which continues to be associated with sexuality¹²⁸) so that when women unlocked the container of precious sentimental treasures the air would be filled with emotive scents, instinctively inspiring feelings of love for their husbands.¹²⁹ Small personal altars, to the Virgin Mary or the Crucifixion, were also kept in the bedroom, with their panels closed or protected beneath a

¹²⁵ Alberti, (1969), p. 208.

¹²⁶ Crum & Paoletti, pp. 286-287.

¹²⁷ For further discussion of the relationship between the domestic interior and public, political life, see: Crum, & Paoletti, pp. 273 – 291.

¹²⁸ For more on affectual olfactory communication see Marks, p. 126.

¹²⁹ Original Italian quoted in: Adrian W.B. Randolph, 2009. "Unpacking Cassoni: Marriage, Ritual, Memory." In *The Triumph of Marriage: Painted Cassoni of the Renaissance*, 15-30. Boston: Isabella Steward Gardner Museum, p.17. For more on musk in the Renaissance see: Fornaciai, pp. 42-53.

veil to conceal the holy images until members of the household choose to view them.¹³⁰ Creating the necessity to approach and touch objects in order to see, or even smell, what lay within maintained the objects' connection with particular rituals and emotions and discouraged people from becoming complacent and inattentive to the objects' messages.

Elite women, who spent the most part of their lives at home, daily negotiated the memories and meanings associated with their domestic objects and images. The initial furnishings of the nuptial bedroom, including the *lettucci*, *cassone* and *spallieri* would be thematically planned, usually depicting secular narratives of love and honour as well as displaying the couple's family arms.¹³¹ However, as life continued in the home the objects acquired could be eclectic, even if they ultimately adhered to similar cultural values. Homes contained objects of devotion as well as secular materials such as plates, cups, chests, toiletries, and paintings that told different stories and sparked different memories, sometimes based on recent experiences, sometimes based on biblical or mythological stories. These objects, with their explicit and implicit allegorical meanings, shared a space and were often seen together. Collections of materials tend to develop their own meaning and mental cohesion for those who collect, use and see the objects.¹³² Objects directed the user or viewer to think of particular cultural values, and consequently their own part in upholding them. Examining the intended purpose of objects, like *cassoni*, and the additional allegorical meaning expressed through decoration, can help to develop a more comprehensive idea of women's mental and imaginative lives.

Griselda: Gender in Text and Paint

Stories of happily transformed obedient brides represented on *spalliere* and *cassone* helped to remind brides of the shift of loyalty, identity and behaviour expected of them as wives. A c.1494 set of *spalliere* panels, most likely commissioned as a wedding gift intended for

¹³⁰ For instance, consider Figure 16: Benedetto di Bindo, *Madonna of Humility and St. Jerome, Diptych*, Tempera, Silver, and tooled Gold on panel with vertical grain, 30.2 x 42.2cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art, c.1400-1405.

¹³¹ Krohn, Deborah L. 2008. "Rites of Passage: Art Objects to Celebrate Betrothal, Marriage, and the Family." In *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*, by The Metropolitan Museum of Art New York, 60-67. New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 65.

¹³² John Berger makes a similar point when discussing the way in which twentieth-century people display a personalized assortment of photos, postcards, newspaper-clippings etc. in their homes. These images are given relatively equal visual standing because of their shared setting and they reflect their owner's personal memories and experience: Berger, p.23.

display in the couple's bedroom, depicts the sequential narrative of Griselda, the final story in Boccaccio's *Decameron*. John Pope-Hennessy and Keith Christiansen note that visual renditions of contemporary tales by Boccaccio provide insight into what people visualised as they read, creating a link between the literature and the fifteenth-century imaginative landscape.¹³³ Jill Ricketts demonstrated through her discussion of domestic, scholarly, visual and textual responses to Boccaccio's *Decameron* that people received and interpreted narratives in different ways, refashioning them according to their own purposes and perspectives but building on the familiarity of the story.¹³⁴ This is evident in the 1494 *spallieri* that illustrate the story of Griselda while reinforcing cultural ideals of wifely behaviour while maintaining a festive tone reflective of their role as a wedding gift for the nuptial bedroom. Therefore, although the subject of Griselda has already received much scholarly attention it is a significant example worthy of further examination in relation to messages it conveyed (whether explicitly or implicitly) about the ways Florentine men understood a woman's adorned body to reflect her social, familial and moral identity, the artistic choices that emphasised this feature of the narrative while reconceiving it to relate to more familiar contemporary experiences, and the particular meaning this narrative would have carried when depicted on an object that was most likely commissioned as a wedding gift for a young woman making the first of the meaningful transitions it depicts.

The story is a satirical expression of female transition and submission contrasted with masculine dominance and suspicion. It is a Cinderella-like storyline of a shepherdess turned marchioness who endured trials set by the suspicious marquis Gualtieri. It touches on many themes which Renaissance society found fascinating and disturbing, including nudity, the unity of attire with social worth, women's changing identities, marital respect, and the very value of narratives for moral instruction. The first existed in spoken folklore and it was in this context that Boccaccio's *Decameron* introduced it into literature.¹³⁵ Intellectuals considered its moral value as written literature, while visual artists refashioned it to align with familiar cultural experiences. The story made it into the canon of rhetorical narratives deemed acceptable for furniture decoration. As such, the tale provides a fascinating introduction to

¹³³ Pope-Hennessy & Christiansen, p.6.

¹³⁴ Jill M. Ricketts, 1997. *Visualizing Boccaccio, Studies on Illustrations of the Decameron, from Giotto to Pasolini*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹³⁵ David Dudley Griffith, 1973. *The Origin of the Griselda Story*. Folcroft Library Editions reprint of 1931 ed. Washington: University of Washington Press.

Florentine society's verbal, written and visual reinterpretation of narratives in accordance with varying perspectives on women's identities and their connection to the material culture of clothing.

The 1494 *spallieri* tell the story across three panels. The story begins with the Marquis Gualtieri's subjects pressuring him to marry. Their request is fitting with the contemporary perspective that marriage was a microcosm of civic unity and those who were to run a state should first govern a family.¹³⁶ Gualtieri relented to his subjects' desire but to assert his dominance and annoy his advisors, he chose a deliberately inappropriate match in Griselda, the beautiful shepherdess. The scenario of a courtier seducing a woman of lower rank in the countryside, an inverse of the chaste love of courtly romance, had literary origins in the poetry of Troubadour songs. William Prizer notes that these songs were popular in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Italy, and that the end of the fourth day of the *Decameron* even makes direct reference to opening lyrics of several such songs.¹³⁷



Figure 21: Master of the Story of Griselda, *The Story of Griselda, Part I: Marriage, Spalliera panel*, Oil with some tempera on wood, National Gallery, London c.1494

On the upper left of the first panel (Figure 21), which can be read similarly to a cartoon strip, Gualtieri spots the distant Griselda, who is plainly dressed with loose hair. In keeping with Boccaccio's story, on the lower left Gualtieri, with his court in tow, approaches Griselda as she carries a jar of water she collected from a well. Florentine records show that village women were most likely to be raped when collecting water from the well and that young

¹³⁶ D'Elia, p. 391.

¹³⁷ Prizer, (1991), pp. 17-19.

country-girls were often raped while herding sheep in isolated landscapes.¹³⁸ Bringing this contemporary context to the reading of the painting indicates that it is possible that both Griselda's status as a shepherdess and her location near a well would have tapped into late-fourteenth- and early-fifteenth-century connotations of poverty and vulnerability.

Gualtieri returned home with Griselda and, with her father as witness, received her consent to be his wife, on the proviso that she be unceasingly obedient. On the far right of the panel, he walks Griselda away from her father's house. Once outdoors ordered her to strip before the gathered nobles, symbolically and materially shedding her former identity as a poor man's daughter before donning the attire and recognition of her new identity as a marchioness. This is depicted at the centre-right of the panel: she stands naked in the foreground as Gualtieri hands a servant a shift and gold brocade gown to dress her. This feature of the tale symbolically paralleled the marital experience of Florentine women, who were dressed in bridal attire by their grooms.¹³⁹

The unusual condition of Griselda's transition, involving the humiliation of complete exposure, shares conceptual and iconographic language with visual representations of the transformation of baptism.¹⁴⁰ Boccaccio's rendition of the story noted that:

The young bride seemed to change her soul together with her attire and her customs. She was, as we have already said, beautiful of face and person, but she became likewise beautiful, attractive, delightful and so well-mannered, that she did not seem the daughter of Giannucolo and a shepherdess, but the daughter of some noble lord.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Samuel K. Cohn Jr., 1998 "Women and Work in Renaissance Italy." In *Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy*, edited by Judith C. Brown and Robert C. Davis, 107-126. London: Longman, pp. 108 -109.

¹³⁹ Klapisch-Zuber (1985), pp. 228-9; also see Jones & Stallybrass, p.120.

¹⁴⁰ The sacrament of baptism marks the moment when a person formally adopts a Christian identity. Accounts of baptism in hagiographies talk about being stripped of one's previous clothes and identity to be new-clothed both spiritually and physically in a baptismal gown, (for instance St. Pelagia's request to be stripped and new-clothed in: Virginia Burrus, 2004. *The Sex Lives of the Saints, And Erotics of Ancient Hagiography*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, p.142.) Paintings of Jesus' baptism emphasis his humanity by depicting him undressed for baptism, often with other figures around Him eagerly undressing to be likewise transformed. See, for instance: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Baptism of Christ by Saint John*, Tornabuoni Chapel fresco cycle, Santa Maria Novella, Florence, c.1485-90; Niccolò Di Pietro Gerini, *The Baptism of Christ*, Altarpiece, Egg Tempera on Wood N6579, The National Gallery, London, 138; and Piero Della Francesca, *The Baptism of Christ*, Tempra on Poplar, 117x168 cm, National Gallery, London, 1450s.

¹⁴¹ Boccaccio, (1822), Vol. 4 *Day 10 Story 10*, pp. 187-188 "*La giovane sposa parve che coi vestimenti insieme l'animo et l costume mutase. Ella era, come già dicemmo, di persona e di viso bella, e così come bella era, divenne tanto avvenevole, tanto piacevole e tanto costumata, che non figliuola di Giannucolo e guardian di pecore pareva stata, ma d' alcun nobile signore: di che ella faceva maravigliare ogn'uom che prima conosciuta l'avea.*" [my translation].

The way that Griselda's marriage and re-clothing is interpreted as genuinely re-shaping her bodily appearance, her physical expression of status (*habitus*) and her character is consistent with the idea (demonstrated in chapter four) of that virtue, combined with honesty resulted in true beauty; and that the attired dignity of the wealthy best facilitated and polished virtue.¹⁴²



Figure 22: Master of the Story of Griselda, *The Story of Griselda, Part II: Exile*, from *Spalliera Panel*, Oil with some tempera on wood, 61.6 x 154.3 cm, The National Gallery London, c. 1494

In the centre of the *spalliere* image Gualtieri places a ring on Griselda's finger, they are both dressed in gold brocade with a crimson cloak but despite her regal attire Griselda's hair remains wild and unkempt. This more naturalistic and less idealised artistic choice perhaps visually foreshadows Griselda's continued instability of identity. Gualtieri did not trust Griselda's transformation or her promise to obey and so "a new thought entered his soul, that he wanted to test her patience with long experiments and intolerable things."¹⁴³ The second *spalliere* panel depicts Griselda's trials and ultimate exile (Figure 22).

In Boccaccio's story, one of the trials Gualtieri enacted was to have a servant take Griselda's children from her, telling her (falsely) that he was having them killed because they were the offspring of a woman of such low birth. This event is depicted on the far left of the panel. In

¹⁴² For a discussion of the ability of attire to reflect or to create truth see "Chapter Four – Fashioning Beauty and Honesty." The idea that external signifiers were needed to consolidate virtue remained in later iterations of the Griselda story. Chaucer's English version of the tale described Griselda as possessing the natural beauty of one uncorrupted by vice and increased by the virtue of hard work, but noted that Gualtieri's people only recognized her nobility once she had been "despoiled" of her "olde geere" and "translated" by her husband's riches. (Geoffery Chaucer, n.d. "The Canterbury Tales." N.C. Alex Catalogue, eBook, EBSCOhost. *The Clerk's Tale* lines 210-216, p. 191, and lines 380-85, p.194).

¹⁴³ Boccaccio, (1822), Vol. 4, *Day 10 Story 10*, p. 188 "*Ma poco appresso entratogli un nuovo pensier nell'animo, cioè di volere con lunga esperienzi e con cose intollerabili provare la pazienza di lei*" [my translation].

the scene a servant removes Griselda's baby. However, the image does not make Griselda's understanding that the child was to be killed explicit. It is therefore my contention that this portion of the image could also be intentionally suggestive of the usual but temporary separation of mothers from their babies, as the children were nurtured in wet-nurses' homes.¹⁴⁴ Images can take on multiple meanings, either intentionally through compositional allusions or through personal mnemonic associations. The association of giving up one's infant to the wet-nurse would have been an appropriate reference for a young bride.

Continuing his trials, Gualtieri humiliated Griselda; he publicly announced that he wanted to divorce her and sent her home to her father. The rest of the panel focuses on the divorce with a central arrangement of Gualtieri and Griselda facing each other on either side of a cardinal, dressed in their gold brocade, her hair now securely veiled as befitted a wife. Slightly right of this scene, Griselda is halfway to removing her gold brocade dress in a similar compositional position to her bare body in the first image. However, in this image although people are present, only Gualtieri looks at her. Her hair has been loosened but is still wrapped, modestly, in a white lace veil. On the right, Griselda walks away with her hair uncovered and loose (as it had been prior to her marriage) and with her breasts prominent beneath her white shift. In the distance on the far right one can see her returning to her father's house. Griselda's prominent breasts are reflective of Boccaccio's text which went into great detail to emphasise the bodily humiliation involved in this scene. It reads:

'You received me naked, and if you honestly judge that the body in which I have carried your children be seen by all I will leave naked, but I beg, for the sake of my virginity which I brought here with me but cannot take back, that I be allowed to take at least one chemise over my dowry.' Gualtieri [...] said 'you may take one chemise.' The many witnesses begged that he might give more to [...] his wife of thirteen years [...] but their entreaties were in vain, and the woman in her chemise, barefoot, and without anything on her head [...] returned to her father [...] [who] had looked after the clothes which she had been stripped of the morning she married Gualtieri in which she reclothed herself.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ This practice is discussed in the following chapter.

¹⁴⁵ Boccaccio, Vol. 4, *Day 10 Story 10*, pp. 193 "...di mente non m'è che ignuda m'aveste. E ae voi giudicate onesto che quel corpo, nel quale iò ho portati figliuoli da voi generate, sia da tutti veduto, io me n'andànò ignuda; ma io vi priego in premie della mia virginità, che io ci recai e non ne la porto, che almeno una sola camiscia sopra la dote mia vi piaccia che io portar ne possa. Gualtieri, [...] disse: e tu una camiscia ne porta. Quanti dintorno v'erano il pregavano che egli una roba le donasse, che non fosse veduta colei, che sua moglie tredici anni e più era stata [...] Ma in vano adarono I preghi: di che la donna in camiscia e scalza e senza alcuna cosa in capo [...] et al padre se ne tornò [...] guardati l'aveva I panni, che spogliati s'avea quella mattina che Gualtieri la sposò: per che recatiglielle et ella rivestitigli si" [my translation].

By including a lengthy discussion of Griselda's minimal adornment, Boccaccio made the situation more tangible, encouraging the reader to imagine Griselda's dramatic walk to her former home.

Although the particular circumstances of divorce outlined in this story were not regular in a Florentine context, the despondent situation of a recent widow did have parallels with this scene. It was often the case that a young widow would find herself recalled by her natal family to be remarried.¹⁴⁶ If this occurred she would have to break ties with her former husband's family, including her children, return all the clothes she had been given by him, and would have to request that her dowry, tied up in her marital family's economy, be returned to her. There are, consequently, records of widows begging their former marital family for some simple clothes to wear so that they could return to their father's house or new husband's home with dignity.¹⁴⁷ Again, I contend that while telling a popular story the artist has drawn imagery from cultural experience to further personalise the tale, and to create a work appropriate to its function as a nuptial gift and domestic object.



Figure 23 Master of the Story of Griselda, *The Story of Griselda*, Part III: Reunion, Oil with Tempera on Wood, 61.6 x 154.3 cm, The National Gallery London, c. 1494

¹⁴⁶ This is discussed further in Chapter Eight.

¹⁴⁷ Klapisch-Zuber (1985), pp. 226-227 & p. 230 demonstrates this with the archival material the *ricordanze* of Cambio and Manno Petrucci in the Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Strozzi, 2d ser., and an account of the Andrea Nacchianti's new bride Madelena in the *Estranei*, 633, fol. 98 (18 May 1491) in the archive Innocenti.

Griselda's story was not over, Gualtieri made plans to remarry and called on Griselda to act as his servant, plan the wedding and greet the guests, still dressed in rags. The third *spalliere* panel (Figure 23) depicts a wedding feast under the golden arches of a loggia with a bridal procession visible in the background. Extravagant wedding feasts feature in several *cassoni* and *spalliere* paintings. This component of the celebration was crucial for the groom's public identity because it allowed him to impress his guests (and those uninvited neighbours who saw and heard the festivities) with his wealth, success and taste.¹⁴⁸

At the wedding Gualtieri asked Griselda her thoughts on his new bride, which she answered approvingly, with the additional request:

That those bites, you gave to she who was yours, do not give to this woman, for I do not believe she could sustain it as she is younger and was raised more delicately than the other woman who endured continual labour since birth.¹⁴⁹

This indicated that Griselda continued to define herself (in the third-person) by her natal upbringing, just as the Gualtieri remained suspicious of her low birth. Her inability to escape her former identity is perhaps also suggested in the *spalliere* paintings as her father's house appears, to a lessening degree, in all three of the panels.

Following her reply, Gualtieri revealed that he had never divorced her and that his 'new bride' was their daughter. Then:

The ladies rose from the tables and departed the room with Griselda, and with best wishes, unbound her of rags and dressed her once again in the robes of a noblewoman, (although she seemed a lady even in rags) and brought her back to the hall.¹⁵⁰

Griselda was finally able to dress out of the sight of men. This, coupled with the suggestion that people viewed her as a noble even when in rags, indicated that Griselda's identity as

¹⁴⁸ For a discussion of wedding feasts see: Musacchio (2002), p. 18.

¹⁴⁹ Boccaccio, Vol. 4, Day 10 Story 10, p. 196 "*...ma quanto posso vi priego, che quelle puncture, le quali all'altra, che vostra fu, già deste, non diate a questa: che appena che io cred ache ella le potesse sostenere, si perchè più giovane è, e si ancora perchè in dilicatezza è allevata, ove colei in continue fatiche da piccolina era stata.*" [my translation].

¹⁵⁰ Boccaccio, (1822) Vol. 4, Day 10 Story 10, p.197 "*Le donne lietissime levate dale tavole, con Griselda n'andarono in camera, e con migliore augurio, trattile i suoi pannicelli, d'una nobile roba delle sue la rivestirono, e come donna, la quale ella eziandio negli stracci pareva, nella sala la rimenarono.*" [my translation].

wife was irreversibly established at her wedding, in the minds of the people. The artist met the challenge of expressing Griselda's peculiar identity in the third panel as chaste ex-wife and dignified servant, by dressing her in a less tattered version of the black attire of her youth, but wearing a heavy white veil. Her black dress and opaque veil are reflective of the attire worn in widowhood.

The gendered sartorial messages in these paintings also warrant attention. Griselda is the only woman in the first two *spalliere* panels. In these images she is surrounded by men of varying rank. However both men and women are depicted at the wedding feast in the third panel. This perhaps echoes the multiple nuptial arrangements made by men in Florentine practice, prior to women's involvement at the final banquet. The visual medium required the artist to depict the sartorial diversity of male identity. In the first panel Gualtieri wears a doublet of gold brocade with long, dagged, sleeves and a red, gold hemmed, cloak across his body and over one shoulder revealing red hose beneath. As a married man in the second panel, he has adopted the style of dress worn by other mature noblemen around him, a long garment with a full length heavily pleated skirt and a cloak of contrasting colour, although he remains the only one in gold brocade. The young men wear long sleeved garments flared from the waist to the knees, with hose. The servants in all three images are identifiable by their hose and very high bright-coloured doublets in good condition, as befits the livery bestowed by a wealthy marquis. The diverse lengths of their garments, and so the exposure of their legs, sartorially defines the social divisions between men. By contrast, using the one person of Griselda the artist sartorially touched on each of the major female identities of maiden, wife, and widow, and the range of social statuses from shepherdess to marchioness. Her embodiment of all these positions at extreme levels of the social hierarchy through the course of the narrative suggests that she represents all women and the importance of adaptability and conformity for women's identities.

The Griselda story dramatically exaggerated the potential for female social mobility. However, the story may have struck a chord with the society in which the rising merchant class was beginning to provide financially tempting matches for their social superiors. Boccaccio made a number of jabs at uneven social matches. In one story, after a husband assaulted his wife for adultery his mother-in-law called him a "trader of donkey dung, that

came out of the countryside” who, “as he has three coins, wanted the daughter of a nobleman.”¹⁵¹ This insult suggests a prejudice felt by those who judged their status according to noble ancestry against those of the merchant classes whose wealth, particularly in the republican system, allowed them to rise in the hierarchical ranks. In this case, the wife and her mother’s superior social status threatened to undermine the traditional dynamic of male authority.

In Griselda’s case, her blatantly inferior social and financial status placed her in an extremely vulnerable position in relation to her husband. It was therefore to her credit that Griselda gracefully accepted and adapted to the drastic social changes, and the additional trials of her husband’s devising. This questions the idea of divine allocation of social rank. Indeed, this element is made clear in the Boccaccio’s conclusion that “even in the poorest homes divine spirits rain down from heaven, just as in the royal houses are those who would be more worthy to guard swine than have dominion over men”¹⁵² Boccaccio’s storyteller further pushed the boundaries of social justice and decorum with his assessment that “It might not have been bad if he’d invested in a woman who, once knocked down and expelled from the house in her chemise, would have found another lover from whom she might have received a beautiful dress.”¹⁵³ This implied that the treatment Griselda received would justify her taking a lover who could offer her a more comfortable lifestyle.

Boccaccio’s imagined listeners, and the *Decameron*’s genuine readers, provided a commentary on the piece, viewing Gualtieri’s behaviour as inexplicably cruel. Yet what Gualtieri does, through his dominance and suspicion, is to take the accepted patriarchal values of the society to their extreme limits, just as Griselda is the epitome of female subservience. Earlier in his *Decameron* Boccaccio placed in the lips of Emilia, one of his female storytellers, an acceptance that; “women, by nature, by customs and laws are

¹⁵¹ Boccaccio (1822), Vol. 3 Day 7 Story 8, p 116 “*Col mal anno possa egli essere oggimai, se tu dei stare al fracidume delle parole d’un mercatantuzzo di feccia d’assino, che venutici di contado et usciti delle troiate, vestiti di romagnuolo, con le calze a campanile e colla penna in culo, come egli hanno tre soldi, vogliono le figliuole de’gentili uomini e delle buone donne per moglie, e fanno arme, e dicono: l’son de’cotali, e quei di casa mia fecer così.*” [my translation].

¹⁵² Boccaccio, (1822), Vol. 4 Day 10 Story 10, p. 198, *Che si potrà dir qui, se non che anche nelle povere case piovono dal cielo de’divini spiriti, come nelle reali di queglii che sarien più degli di garder porci, che d’avere sopra uomini signoria?*” [my translation].

¹⁵³ Boccaccio (1822), Vol. 4, Day 10 Story 10, p.198, “*Al quale non sarebbe forse stato male investito d’esserai abbattuto ad una che, quando fuor di casa l’avesse in camiscia cacciata, s’avesse si ad un altro fatto scuotere il pelliccione, che riuscita ne fosse una bella roba.*” [my translation].

submissive to men” and that women’s “dainty, soft bodies, timid and fearful souls, compassion, frivolity, pleasant voices and gentle movement, are testament that in all things we need another’s government.”¹⁵⁴ From this combination of physical, kinetic, aural and psychological characteristics, embodied by nature and reiterated by culture, the story-teller concluded that women must be chaste and accept their husband’s guidance, chastisement and physical discipline. This view was reasserted in many contexts. A proverb recounted by da Certaldo and by Boccaccio’s Emilia held that: “the good horse and bad horse want the spur, the good woman and bad woman want a lord and a stick.”¹⁵⁵ Bernardino of Siena, similarly, gave a sermon that suggested beating was a praiseworthy pedagogical practice for husbands or fathers, to correct women’s vanity and other vices.¹⁵⁶ Beyond idealistic sermons and fictional narrative, women did not always welcome this assessment of husbands’ rights over their wives. In lightly chastising letters to her husband Francesco, Margherita Datini expressed typical spousal dynamics saying her role was “always to obey” whereas “you can do as you wish, since you are the master, which is a fine office, but it should be used with discretion.”¹⁵⁷

Gualtieri’s abuse of his dominance led the storytellers in Boccaccio’s rendition of Griselda to express dissatisfaction in the ‘happy’ ending which rewarded the marquis for his pride, suspicion, cruelty and contrariness. Other authors and artists altered the tone of the story to make the allegory more acceptable, praising patience, modesty, house-keeping and subservience. However, renditions of this story frequently conclude by questioning if any woman would be capable of imitating Griselda’s patience. This debate was a familiar one in reference to literary heroines, who were presented seemingly as moral examples, only to have them reinterpreted as exceptional and beyond the bounds of imitative possibility.¹⁵⁸ Petrarch’s translation even suggested that the figure of Griselda was not a model for women

¹⁵⁴ Boccaccio, (1822), vol. 4, Day 9 Story 9, p. 58 “...femine, dalla natura e da’costumi e dale leggi essere ali uomini sottomessa [...] corpi dilicate e morbide, negli animi timide e paurose, et hacci date le corporali forze leggiere, le voci piacevole, et I movimenti de’ membri soave: cose tutte testificanti noi avere dell’altrui governo bisogno.” [my translation].

¹⁵⁵ Certaldo, p. 43 “buon cavallo e mal cavallo vuole sprone; buona donna e mala donna vuol signore, e tale bastone.” [my translation], also from Boccaccio (1822), vol.4, Day 9 Story 9, p. 59.

¹⁵⁶ King, (1991), p.44.

¹⁵⁷ Margherita as translated in: Crabb, p. 1173.

¹⁵⁸ Roberta Krueger, 2004. “Uncovering Griselda.” In *Medieval Fabrications: Dress. Textiles. Clothwork and Other Cultural Imaginings*, edited by Jane Burns, 71-88. New York: Palgrave MacMillan p.73. This rhetorical pattern was discussed in the previous chapter.

but for the patience of Christian men who must submit their souls and wills to God as Griselda submits to Gualtieri.¹⁵⁹

By contrast, the *spalliere* paintings, likely to have been commissioned as a wedding gift highlighted different components of the narrative more fitting to the mix of male and female viewers and to consideration of spousal roles. The initial context of the works accounts for the visual emphasis on wedding imagery, ceremonies and feasts, and the articulation of the drastic transition experienced by a bride and, to a lesser extent, a husband. By removing the most part of Gualtieri's bad treatment of Griselda and placing a central composition reminiscent of a ring-giving ceremony between gold clad figures in the first two images and a wedding feast under a golden loggia in the third, the three *spalliere* maintain a festive tone. In the meantime, they touch on the values of chastity, obedience, nudity before a husband, and being adaptable to reinvent yourself at your male guardians' behest. When the paintings were viewed in more detail, in the daily lives of the husband and wife, they perhaps revealed more of the story of Gualtieri's cruelty, and so may have taken on different nuances, for instance praising wifely loyalty and reminding husbands to be just and kind.

The contemporary popularity of the story, therefore, stems from its scope for debate about power dynamics (whether between husband and wife, rich and poor or even God and Christian) which could be easily reinterpreted to reflect values and context of the readers or viewers. As a narrative it was an effective foundation with which to educate. The story of Griselda built on a wide range of familiar cultural images and behaviours and was ambiguous enough to be reinterpreted and utilised in different settings. The *spalliere* paintings placed particular emphasis on the imagery associated with the transitions of women's identities, particularly marriage and values of chastity, obedience and grace that society expected them to embody. These changes in moral expectations were demonstrated through changes of Griselda's attire. The changes in this visual narrative reflect the social and personal impact of the continual sartorial shifts by which female identities were fashioned. Domestic viewers, both male and female, derived various instructive conclusions about marriage and the nature of transition from allegorical renditions of popular matrimonial narratives on

¹⁵⁹ For a discussion of Petrarch and the broader contemporary rhetoric construction, reception and moral analysis of the Griselda story see: Jones & Stallybrass, pp. 221-223; Ricketts, p.227; and Glending Olson, 1976. "Petrarch's View of the Decameron." *MLN* (John Hopkins University Press) 91 (1): 69-79.

household furniture. The imagery in the paintings therefore acted in a similar fashion to the religious frescos discussed in chapter two in that they took a familiar text laden with moral lessons and coupled it with allusions to contemporary experience while setting standards of behaviour for the viewer to internalise and imitate.

Conclusion

The orchestration of cultural rituals, literature, paintings, and economic and sartorial choices made by men communicated masculine expectations of female virtue. Rhetorical reflections on female value, garnered from the layers of socially constructed meaning examined in the previous chapters, had to be negotiated by women through their daily practice. The nexus of ideal and practice formed the rhetoric of embodied morality. Marriages marked a significant alteration in the rhetorical values that women had to negotiate through embodiment. The values expected of a bride and wife were expressed through material culture both in representations of the body and in adornments for the body. Materials helped to educate and tangibly solidify the women's changed identities on a familial, spiritual and social level. Brides were the embodied status symbol of a largely masculine kinship alliance based on social concerns of economy, nobility, virtue and beauty. Wedding attire, purchased according to the bride's dowry and steeped in symbolism of kinship and virtue, tangibly signified the bride's worth for her whole community to see. It also assisted the bride in developing the appropriate emotions, loyalties and attitude to transform herself from the daughter of one man to the wife of another. Sumptuary laws established a time limit for women to indulge in the sartorial signs of their bridal status. This allowed husbands to dismantle and on-sell the adornments and encouraged women to settle into the more modest attire and comportment expected of a wife. Popular stories with diverse rhetorical implications for female identity were interpreted for domestic consumption. The story of Griselda, both in the *Decameron* and as a subject for domestic decoration, condensed and satirised the key states of women's transitional lives. Both the sartorial experience of marriage and the subsequent embodied experience of motherhood (discussed in the following chapter) were overlayed with tangible, socially recognisable symbolism that added moral weight to the transitional stages of women's identities.

Chapter Seven - Motherhood

Beatrice had been nervous the first time she shared a bed with Giovanni. Her whole life she had been told how virtuous virginity was, but she knew the reason her virginity was important was so that one day she could be a loving wife and give legitimate sons to a respectable husband. Giovanni was older than her and although she thought he was a good man she didn't think he was handsome. She knew how important it was to picture the perfect human form to make sure she would conceive a healthy son so she thought about the beautiful naked sleeping youth painted on the inside of her *cassone* and the cheerful naked cherubs carved around her bed. Her first pregnancy was frightening and exciting; she feared having a miscarriage or dying in childbirth. Thankfully, St. Margaret heard her prayers and she had an easy labour and a beautiful son, Lorenzo. The next few days, Beatrice felt triumphant, appreciated and happy. Her room was made up splendidly with new sheets with embroidered edges and sparkling silver-wear and the walls were hung with soft fur pelts reminiscent of the Vecchiotti family chest. Her father-in-law sent her lovely date-cakes and Giovanni sent her fruit on a *dechi de parto* painted with a scene of the 'Judgment of Paris' on one side and a checker-board on the other. She wore a new mantello when the women of her family came to visit. The women admired the baby and used the *dechi de parto* to play board games with Beatrice while she recovered her strength. Giovanni even hired a nurse to live in the home with them so that they wouldn't have to part with baby Lorenzo. When her next child was a daughter, the disappointed Giovanni sent the infant to live with a wet-nurse. Even though Beatrice knew that this was what was done, she found it hard to let her daughter go.

Brides encountered new challenges as they became sexually active, learned how to present themselves as faithful wives, conceived children, faced the dangers of childbirth, celebrated delivery, breastfed, and cared for their children. The Renaissance association between material culture, imagination, identity and the body is clearly expressed in the objects and advice offered to women in relation to their most important social function – conceiving and giving birth to healthy, legitimate sons. The decoration of domestic objects guided women in their role as wives and mothers. This often followed a scheme that responded to the contemporary belief that during conception and pregnancy women's bodies, and thereby the bodies being formed within their wombs, became highly responsive to sensate and imaginative impressions. With this in mind (so to speak), images of idealised infant and adult

male bodies decorated the marital bedroom. Childbirth itself was a dangerous task and so mothers-to-be sought comfort from saints and supernaturally imbued objects. Having been delivered of a child, a Florentine mother would lie in her bed and receive praise from visiting women. She would be served strengthening food presented on a *descho da parto* (a tray decorated with family crests, baby boys, and allegorical stories of romance and parenthood). Once born, the baby was usually sent to be nurtured by a wet-nurse, saving the mother's body from the task and allowing her to become pregnant again. Decorated objects provided models against which women could assess their maternal attitudes and behaviour. As well as secular imagery, religious paintings elevated the spiritual status of the maternal domestic experience.

Allegory and Sexuality

Images, sermons, and advice directed to unwed girls continually reminded them that their virtue and value depended on their virginity. However, once married, the woman's greatest virtue was to mother legitimate sons. The shift from attractive humble virgin to modest caring wife and mother demanded a shift in attire and in body language. The conflicting moral, behavioural and sexual expectations laid upon young girls entering marriage are reflected in the decoration of furniture and domestic objects provided in the trousseau. The decoration of the marital bedroom could include reclining naked figures inside *cassone* lids and naked male cherubs painted and carved into the furniture. Nudes were qualified by being seen alongside narratives that praised the values of love, fidelity, female submission, modesty and chastity. Remembering that to the Renaissance mind images inspired mnemonic, empathetic and imitative responses in the viewer, it is clear that the intent of such images was to inspire physical and emotional stimulation.

A young bride's trousseau would typically include a life-sized baby doll, intended as a comfort and to encourage the woman to contemplate her duty to produce offspring and so increase her husband's love.¹ Nannina de' Medici's trousseau, for instance, included a small statue of the baby Jesus dressed in damask and pearls.² Similarly, nuns were given holy dolls, to be used for contemplation and devotion, and as a spiritual outlet for their suppressed

¹ Syson and Thornton, p. 61.

² Muzzarelli, p. 88, and Klapisch-Zuber (1985), p. 312.

maternal instincts.³ Dominici recommended that mothers offer holy dolls to their children to play with, contemplate and learn virtuous behaviour from.⁴ Girls learned, practiced and imagined motherhood by holding, dressing and caring for the dolls.⁵ Dolls were given to brides to impress the image in their minds, to be transferred to their wombs, to engender similarly ideal children. Cuddling and caring for the dolls may also have had psychological value for women whose babies were removed from them to be suckled by wet-nurses.⁶ Therefore, dolls functioned as devotional objects, conceptive talismans, pedagogical tools and psychological comforts, assisting young brides in their transition toward motherhood.

³ Musacchio (1997), p.54; Frick (2002) p.110; Simons, p.17, and for a textual account of a doll as part of a nun's trousseau see *Bernardiino Zambotti 'Diario ferrarese dall'anno 1476 sino al 1502'*, as translated in: Rodgers & Tinagli, p.212, and: Trexler (1980), p. 88.

⁴ Debby (2001), p. 144.

⁵ Kent, (2001), p. 32, and Klapisch-Zuber (1985), p. 311.

⁶ Klapisch-Zuber (1985), p. 326 & 328.



Figure 24: Gherardo di Giovanni del Fora, *The Combat of Love and Chastity*, Tempera on wood, 42.5 x 34.9 cm, The National Gallery London, c. 1480

The bride's trousseau entered her new home in painted *cassoni*. A number of *cassoni* and *spalliere* paintings were inspired by Petrarch's *I Trionfi* and in particular the *Triumph of Chastity* over erotic love.⁷ Gherardo di Giovanni's c. 1480 series of *spalliere* represented a

⁷ Cristelle Baskins, 2008 "Catalogue of the Exhibition" in *The Triumph of Marriage; Painted Cassoni of the Renaissance*, Boston: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, p110.

number of scenes including the (now damaged and incomplete) *Battle of Love and Chastity* (Figure 24), the *Chastisement of Cupid* and, finally, the *Triumph of Chastity*.⁸ While being an allegorical battle between two approaches to sexuality, the *Battle of Love and Chastity* has strongly gendered overtones which, perhaps, anticipate women's apprehensions, or even their hopes for a degree of sexual control in their marriage. Chastity is depicted as a young woman, dressed in white flowing garments gathered around the waist in the way servants and angels were depicted during this period, and she swings chains over her head which she hopes to use to bind Cupid. Love is depicted as an adolescent rather than cherubic cupid, a naked man forcefully attacking Chastity with his arrows which she deflects with her shield. Following the battle and the subjugation of Cupid (whose wings are plucked and arrows broken), Chastity is shown riding in a triumphant procession around the walls of Florence with the conquered, naked Cupid at her feet. The *Triumph of Chastity* is populated with figures of identifiable chaste, virtuous women for viewers to identify and to interpret in relation to their own moral conduct.⁹ While this story clearly supported the superiority of marital chastity over the erotic, other furniture decoration, including that within *cassone*, was more ambiguous in its treatment of the diverse values of marital love.

Cassoni were typically decorated on their side-panels with personified virtues, babies or coats of arms, with a facing panel (painted on a small scale to encourage careful viewing) depicting allegorical narratives which promoted virtues like marital chastity. By contrast, the inner lids of *cassoni* were likely to be decorated with large-scale images of sensuous textiles, nudes, or images of baby boys, to promote fecundity.¹⁰

⁸ Gherardo di Giovanni, Florence, c. 1480, *The Battle of Love and Chastity*, Tempera on Wood, 42.5x34.9cm, The National Gallery London, and *The Triumph of Chastity*, Tempera on Wood, 42x65cm, Galleria Sbauda, Turin.

⁹ For further explanation of this series see: Baskins, (2008) p. 113 and see: Bayer, Andrea, "Catalogue Numbers 118-153: The Camera: Spalliere and Other Paintings" in *The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. 2008. Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*. Edited by Andrea Bayer. New Haven: Yale University Press. pp. 295-297.

¹⁰ Krohn, Deborah L. 2008. "Catalogue Numbers 1-86: Cassone Panels and Chests" in: *The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*. Edited by Andrea Bayer. New Haven: Yale University Press. pp.134-163.



Figure 25 Giovanni di Ser Giovanni Guidi (Lo Scheggia), *Reclining young man*, Interior cassone panel: Musée du Petit Palais, Avignon, c. 1450

Paola Tinagli argues that, without the conceptual English-language distinction between *naked* and *nude*, the figures painted inside *cassoni* lids could simultaneously inspire a range of associations from lust to aesthetic aspirations of beauty and virtue.¹¹ However, considering the style and context of *cassoni* paintings, one can hazard an argument for their intended purpose. The chests were usually a set depicting a male nude inside the lid of one and a female on its pair. The male nudes had minimal underwear or, like Lo Scheggia's *Reclining Youth* (Figure 25) had a leafy branch painted across their groin. This accords with Alberti's *On Painting* that suggested nudity could be depicted without the figures losing dignity so long as it could be narratively justified and "always observe decency and modesty. The obscene parts of the body and all those that are not very pleasing to look at, should be covered with clothing, leaves or the hand."¹² In this example, the young man is propped on a pillow, his body turned on his side facing the viewer. By contrast, the *Sleeping Naked Woman* by 'the Paris-master' (Figure 26), depicts a woman who makes no modest gesture to hide her nakedness; instead, the fact that she is asleep and unaware of the viewer prevents her nudity from being immodest and wilfully seductive. Yet, seductive she is with her soft naked body set against a backdrop resembling expensive golden brocade which would incline the viewer to think of the sense of touch.

¹¹ Tignali, p.5, also see Gabriele, Tommasina. 1996. "Aspects of Nudity in the Decameron." In *Gendered Context: New Perspectives in Italian Culture*, Literature in History, edited by Laura Benedetti, Julia L. Hairston and Silvia Ross, 31-38. New York: Peter Lang.

¹² Alberti, (1972), p. 79.

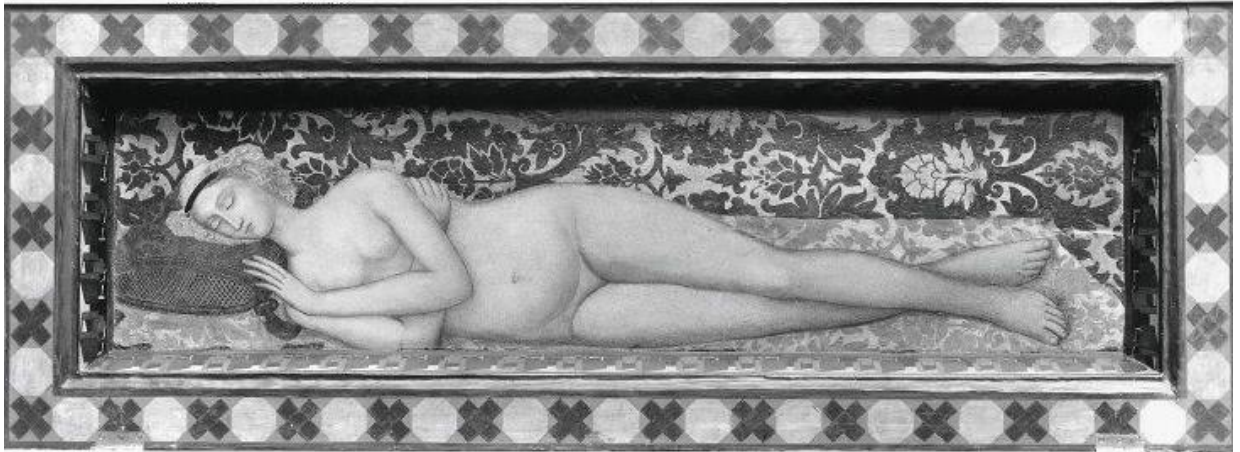


Figure 26 'The Paris-Master', Florentine School, *Sleeping Naked Woman*, Cassone lid, Tempera on Panel, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Fifteenth century

In 1496, Savonarola encouraged his listeners to consign nude images to the bonfire of vanities, arguing that such paintings would entice young people to unchaste behaviour.¹³ This warning confirms that the images were indeed believed to elicit sexual desire in the viewer. As Partridge notes, the word *cassa* was used as slang for female genitals, which further suggests that the sexual connotations of the nude figures would have been all the more explicit.¹⁴ Despite Savonarola's concerns, the figures' concealed location, allowed owners some discretion about when and by whom the images could be seen. However, as wedding gifts and essential furniture containing clothing and linens the images were certainly intended to be seen frequently by wives. The fact that the figures display no shame in their nakedness, and were intended to be seen in tandem with the external narratives of wifely virtue, suggests that these nude figures were intended to inspire and remind the bride of the condoned, sexual nature of her wifely duty. Young brides were thereby assured that procreation in the context of marriage was a virtue.¹⁵

Tanja Hundhammer and Thomas Mussweiler's research on sex priming and self-perception demonstrates that subtly referring to nudity or suggestive words in a context which was not inherently sexual momentarily foregrounded ideas about one's sexual identity. This change in perception resulted in the increased display of (culturally learned) gendered behaviours, including women deferring more frequently to men.¹⁶ Reconsidering this

¹³ Tinagli, p.122.

¹⁴ Partridge, p. 91.

¹⁵ Musacchio (1997), p.49.

¹⁶ Tanja Hundhammer and Thomas Mussweiler. 2012. "How Sex Puts You in Gendered Shoes: Sexuality-Priming Leads to Gender-Based Self-Perception and Behaviour." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 103 (1): 176-193.

psychological experiment in the context of Renaissance domestic decoration suggests the degree of success such images may have had in influencing the way women behaved and viewed themselves as being sexually available to their husbands.



Figure 27: Piero di Cosimo, *A Satyr Mourning over a Nymph (or The Death of Procris)*, Oil on Poplar, 65.4 x 184.2 cm, National Gallery London, c. 1495

A c.1495 *spalliera* panel *A Satyr Mourning over a Nymph* (Figure 27), identified as a scene from the tale of Procris and her husband Cephalus from Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, ends (as a number of popular themes for furniture decoration did) with the death of a wife. In this story, Procris suspects Cephalus of having an affair so she follows him when he goes out hunting. Hearing her, Cephalus mistakes Procris for game and kills her. The *spalliera* depicts the moment after her death, she lies on her side (in a similar fashion to the *cassoni* nudes) in an open landscape balanced on either side by a mourning satyr (a creature associated with lust) on the left and an immortal hunting dog (a gift from Procris to her husband and a symbol for fidelity), sitting at her feet on the right. The addition of the love-sick satyr is believed to be a reference to Niccolò da Correggio's rendition of the tale, as a play, written as a wedding gift for Ercole d'Este in 1487.¹⁷ This beautiful and tender image, would perhaps have served as an allegory to encourage its viewers to balance their lust with fidelity and to avoid the deadly behaviour of jealousy and distrust. Tempesti and Capretti also note that the birds in the background of the image, a pelican and herons, were (respectively) symbols for sacrifice and the desire for wisdom and innocence, further confirming this work as a cautionary allegory of marriage, designed as a wedding gift.¹⁸

¹⁷ Anna Forlani Tempesti and Elena Capretti. 1996. *Piero di Cosimo*, Catalogo Completo, Firenze: Octavo, pp. 115-116.

¹⁸ Tempesti & Capretti, p. 116.

As noted previously, multiple messages could be conveyed through a single narrative. People of both genders were likely to identify with different narrative threads. The ancient story of the noblewoman Lucrezia was a very popular subject for Tuscan furniture decoration, and had a dual allegorical function. Unable to defend herself from being raped, she vindicated herself by informing her husband and father of her rapist's identity and then committing suicide to avoid claims of adultery and to preserve her husband's honour. Lucrezia's rapist was the son and emissary of the last king of Rome and his actions toward Lucrezia led to the overthrow of the monarchy and the establishment of the Republic. When this story was painted for elite homes in republican Florence, then, it is likely that men were reminded of the value of their political system and of the necessity to defend their wives, like their city, against tyrants. However, for women the story strikingly emphasised that female honour relied on chastity, that their lives were less important than the honour of their patrimony, and that their means of influencing their fate only extended so far as their own flesh.¹⁹ Domestic depictions of women who preferred death and honour to adultery and shame were especially significant given that the society allowed for honour killings of wives or daughters who were discovered in the act of committing adultery. Lucrezia's story reminded viewers of women's responsibility to avoid male company and keep their bodies chaste, not only for their own souls but for their fathers' and husbands' honour.²⁰

Attraction and Adultery

As wives' virtue relied on their faithfulness, and the production of legitimate offspring, both religious and secular authorities offered advice on wives' appearance as a means of protecting their virtue while also maintaining the sexual interest of their husbands. In Florentine sermons of 1424 and 1425, Bernardino of Siena noted that women were more carnal than men and so, for the sake of their souls, their sexuality should be suppressed by

¹⁹ Katherine Park, 2006. *Secrets of Women: Gender, Generation, and the Origins of Human Dissection*, New York: Zone Books, pp 156-157.

²⁰ For a survey of Italian laws relating to honour killing in Italian history see: Eva Cantarella, 1991. "Homicides of Honor: The Development of Italian Adultery Law over Two Millennia." In *The Family in Italy, From Antiquity to the Present*, edited by David Kertzer and Richard P. Saller, 229-244. New Haven: Yale University Press. An example of another popular subject, Susanna, who faced potential death to avoid adultery see the panel from a Florentine Cassone painting of *Episodes from the Story of Susanna* currently owned by the Art Walters Museum <http://art.thewalters.org/detail/39896/episodes-from-the-story-of-susannah/>. Landry also used Susanna as an example for women due to her ability to "kepe trewely her maryage" even at the threat of death (Landry, p.131), also see Paci, p 18, see: Kathryn A. Smith, 1993. "Inventing Marital Chastity: The Iconography of Susanna and the Elders in Early Christian Art." *Oxford Art Journal* 16 (1): 3-24.p.3, and see: Grossinger, p.45.

various means including ascetic acts, confinement and wearing clothing to bed.²¹ Guides for wifely behaviour made the balance between pleasing a husband and pleasing society a difficult distinction to navigate. Wifely adornment was framed as a moral responsibility; wives had to dress modestly to avoid attracting men other than their husbands but be beautiful enough to deter husbands from lusting over and sinning with other women.

Recognising that women had to remain attractive to their husbands, theologians and secular writers grudgingly condoned women wearing the clothing appropriate to their custom and status but, they remained cynical of women's motivations for dressing up.²² Francesco Barbaro's *On Wifely Duties* assented:

We ought to follow the custom [...] that our wives adorn themselves with gold, jewels, and pearls, if we can afford it. For such adornments are the sign of a wealthy, not lascivious, woman and are taken as evidence of the wealth of the husband more than as a desire to impress wanton eyes.

Barbaro tempered this statement by expressing the view that extravagance in a wife bred justified distrust:

I think that wives wear and esteem all those fine garments so that men other than their husbands will be impressed and pleased. For wives always neglect such adornments at home, but in the market square 'this consumer of wealth' cannot be sufficiently decked out or adorned.²³

By suggesting that "if we were to deprive most women of their sumptuous clothes, they would gladly and willingly stay at home" Barbaro expressed sentiments shared by many of his generation.²⁴ Barbaro compared "uxorious" men who indulged in their wives' sumptuous appearance to men "who are so pleased with splendid exteriors on their houses while they are forced to do without necessary things inside. Hence, they present a golden facade to give pleasure to neighbours and the passers-by."²⁵ This assertion indicates the superficiality

²¹ Debby, (2001), p. 140 quoting: Bernardino, *Prediche volgari* 1934 [Firenze 1424] I, 412-13 '*Nell'anima la moglie e eguale all'anima del marito, ma nella carne il marito e maggiore che la moglie [...] molto e peggio quando la donna rompe la fede al marito che quando el marito la rompe alla moglie [...] perche elle non a altra virtu che perdere*'; Bernardino, *Prediche volgari* 1940 [Firenze 1425] III, 48, 221.

²² Newton, p.12, For further discussions of how fifteenth-century women utilised Aquinas' reasoning in their own appeals against sumptuary legislation see Kovsei, pp 103-105, and see: Dominici, p.136.

²³ Barbaro, *On Wifely Duties* p.208.

²⁴ Barbaro, p. 208, also see: Rainey, pp. 498-90.

²⁵ Barbaro, p. 208.

associated with vain husbands as well as their vain wives while hinting at the moral and financial cost husbands incurred through the acquisition and display of adornments.

Christine de Pizan argued that extravagant attire “can lead to evil gossip and even more dangerous results” and that the attractive woman “may never have contemplated such an idea” as adultery and yet “men of various sorts will pursue such women and devise ways to attract their love.”²⁶ Allegorical narratives of female saints and classical figures warned women that their beauty could make them the objects of desire and assault. Rape and other negative effects of the male gaze on female beauty carried particular moral complications in a society which blamed women for their sexuality. Exemplary Christian and Classical figures, including Lucrezia, atoned for being raped by committing suicide.²⁷

Christian practices and allegories established preventative warnings for adulterous wives. People knew they would face the humiliation of having to articulate the details of their conduct in the confessional.²⁸ Leonardo da Vinci expressed this scenario saying: “The unhappy women of their own accord shall go to reveal to men all their wantonness and their shameful and most secret acts.”²⁹ The practical social arguments against female adultery were bolstered by the church declaring sex outside of marriage, or without the possibility of conception, were mortal sins.³⁰

Penalties existed for men who raped women but their punishment depended on the social status of their victim, ranging from 500 lire for having sex with a virgin or respectable woman to 100 lire for a poor socially insignificant woman.³¹ Poor women who worked and could not remain indoors were offered little protection.³² Advice for men regarding their sexual exploits focused on economy and masculine honour, not female dignity. Paolo da Certaldo advised husbands, “look not to fall in love with a woman other than your wife, think that they are all female and all made the one way” and there was “great danger” in pursuing

²⁶ Pizan, (1989), p. 191.

²⁷ See: Grössinger, p. 45 and: John Rooks, “The Boke of the Cyte of Ladyes and its Sixteenth-Century Readership.” In *The Reception of Christine de Pizan from the Fifteenth Through the Nineteenth Centuries*. 83-100. Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1991. pp 85-86.

²⁸ Katherine Crawford, 2014. “Sexuality of Man, Woman, and Bestly Business” in *A Cultural History of the Human Body in the Renaissance*, London: Bloomsbury, p. 56.

²⁹ Leonardo da Vinci, p. 1111.

³⁰ See Debby (2001), pp 129-131.

³¹ Michael Rocke, 1998. “Gender and Sexual Culture in Renaissance Italy.” In *Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy*, edited by Judith C. Brown and Robert C. Davis, 150-170. London: Longman. pp.156-161.

³² Wiesner-Hanks, p. 58.

other women as it risked “dishonour, shame and sin” and there were “expenses in acquiring a woman.”³³ Literature and practice equated paying to clothe a woman with acquiring the rights to her body.³⁴

Men sometimes chose to raise their illegitimate sons, but rarely recognised daughters.³⁵ Foundling hospitals were established in the mid-fifteenth century to prevent infanticide resulting from rape-pregnancies or poverty. Bernardino addressed this issue, saying, “put your ear to the ground and listen: you will hear [...] the voices of the innocent babies thrown into your Arno and your privies or buried alive in your gardens and your stables, to avoid the world’s shame.”³⁶ Female servants were punished if caught abandoning their offspring to a foundling hospital but no punishment existed for wealthy married men who had sex with their servants.

In his 1348 work *Reggimento e costume di donna* on the etiquette required to mother a son, Francesco da Barberino (1264-1348) acknowledged the sexual danger young female servants faced. Rather than dwelling on rape, pregnancy, or dishonour, Barberino advised that she “beware not to let the master touch her, provoking a deadly war with her mistress, for in the end she will be the loser.” He further suggested that the danger could be averted if “she look out [...] for flattery and false promises: which she will see to be heavily mocking,” and to be cautious of men, and not provoke her master or “study flattery or go around too well adorned, than is fitting for her station.”³⁷ Thus, Barberino blamed the woman’s stupidity, poor morals and vain attire for her being the victim of sexual assault (an attitude which

³³ Da Certaldo, p.29 “*Guardati non t'innamori di femina niuna se non e tua moglie; e pensa che tutte sono femine, e tutte sono fatte a uno modo: [...] che troppo e grande pericolo. In pero che tutti i grandi disinori, vergogne, peccati e spese s'acquistano per femine*” [my translation].

³⁴In recognition of this tradition Christine de Pizan advised women to refuse any gifts offered to her by a man as “she who accepts a gift sells herself.” Pizan, (1989), p.191, also see for fifteenth-century examples of men paying the families of their victims of sexual assault to avoid public censure see: Coerver, p.219.

³⁵ Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber’s study of the 1427 Florentine Catasto found that of the 128 illegitimate boys and 44 girls listed, 86 percent lived with the richer half of the community, p. 245, they also found from hospital records that a significant number of the abandoned children were the children of servants and their masters and the greater proportion of those abandoned were female, pp. 145-146.

³⁶ Bernardino, as quoted by King, (1991), p. 9.

³⁷ Francesco Barberino, 1876. *Del Reggimento e Costumi di Donna*. Bologna: Gaetano Romagnoli.p. 302 “*Se donna serve col signiore, o sola, riguardi, com’ o detto, in quella Parte ch’ e dinanti a questa Parte scritta; E tanto piu cautele attenda, e guardi Ch’ ella si guardi andando e ritornando Dalle lusinghe e ‘npromesse false: Che spessamente si vedra beffata, e non da molti molto riguardata. Guardisi ben che ‘l singnior nolla tocchi, che della donna aia Guerra mortale, ed alla fine ne rimaria perdente. [...]Non studi in lisci, o churi andare addorna; che si sconviene allo stato suo molto.*” [my translation].

persists to some degree in Western societies³⁸), and identified the worst consequence of being raped as being poor relations with her attacker's wife. Andrea Gatari's chronicle (completed in 1454) recounts a wealthy woman's response to learning of her husband's infidelity with a servant. Her initial inclination was to throw off the shackles of feminine conformity and to take up arms against her husband but "remembering that she was a woman" she instead "swore never to lie with her husband for the rest of her life."³⁹ She restricted her action to her own body.

The politics of sexuality differed according to gender and status but maintained certain underlying assertions. Moralists relied heavily on Paul's first letter to the Corinthians which stated that:

The husband should fulfil his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife. Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you.⁴⁰

This passage provided an influential foundation from which Christians developed their moral sensibilities concerning sexual fidelity.⁴¹ Leonardo Bruni's 1445 *Treatise on Economics* argued that to maintain a loyal union "they should accustom themselves in such a way that they should neither refrain from intercourse when together, nor, when separated, be able to rest content with abstinence."⁴² Bernardino of Siena preached about sexuality in terms of marital 'duty,' encouraging women to consent to sex whenever their husband requested it but to refuse to do anything the church considered unnatural, which included anything

³⁸ For instance, see: Madeleine van der Bruggen and Amy Grubb. 2014. "A review of the literature relating to rape victim blaming: An analysis of the impact of observer and victim characteristics on attribution of blame in rape cases." *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 19 (5): 523-531. This article reviews research on victim blaming considering the influence of various factors from gender, ethnicity, dress, attractiveness and status (pp.524), the theories and which contribute to victim blaming, including the 'Just World Theory', the 'Defensive Attribution Hypothesis' (by which victims are blamed less the closer their social status resembles their attacker), 'Victim Characteristics' and 'Victim-Perpetrator Relationship' (pp. 524-526), and it considers variables in observer perceptions, notably 'Gender Role Attitudes' (which identifies the persistent argument that women should remain at home, p.528).

³⁹ Cronaca Carrarese confrontata con la redazione de Andrea Gatari (1318-1407) in Rogers and Tignali, p. 162.

⁴⁰ 1 Corinthians 2-5.

⁴¹ See Upton-Saia p. 78 for an account of St. Augustine's dialogue with the aspiring ascetic Ecedicia who wrote to Augustine for comfort when her husband committed adultery but instead received blame for her having refused him sex and dressed in an unappealing manner.

⁴² Bruni, p.315.

physicians believed prevented pregnancy (for example, the woman being on top).⁴³ Bernardino added that men should predict their wives' desires and so spare them the immodesty of requesting sex.⁴⁴

However, the ability of a woman to reject her husband's advances seems constrained through the influence of broader cultural expectations. Barbaro suggested in his treatise *On Wifely Duties* that sharing a bed, if not necessarily having sex, could be a means of resolving conflict saying:

I would criticize wives who when they are happy and contented sleep with their husbands but when they are angry sleep apart and reject their husbands affections, which through pleasantness and pleasure easily bring about reconciliation⁴⁵

Barbaro suggests that it was unacceptable for women to deny sex to their husbands. Bernardino's suggestion that men predict their wives' desires also implied that sex should be initiated by a husband and accepted by a wife. Michael Calabrese argues that in fourteenth-century literary rhetoric 'no' meant 'yes.' He demonstrates this point with Boccaccio's Fiammetta, who recounted her coy behaviour saying the reader might behave that way to "search for the strength to do what you want to do and what you know women in love want to do."⁴⁶ Rhetorical elements shared across diverse genres then, perpetuated the attitude that women should and usually did want sex even when they felt constrained to say 'no' to appear modest or if they said no in spite of their husband. This would have made it harder for a woman to assert moral blocks against certain of her husband's desires.

It is also important to briefly consider Renaissance treatments of the sexuality of Adam and Eve, as a central narrative through which theologians discussed the once-perfect but now corrupted relationship between men and women. As noted in Chapter One, lust was rhetorically associated with gluttony. The association between sex and eating is evident in interpretations of Adam giving in to the temptation offered by Eve. From the moment they

⁴³ Roche, pp. 153 & 156, For a discussion of 'unnatural' practices as a discouraged form of birth control, sometimes taking advantage of female naivety, see: Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, pp.251-2.

⁴⁴ Roche, p.155.

⁴⁵ Barbaro p. 195.

⁴⁶ This translation by Calabrese is accompanied by the Italian "si come voi medesime, le quali forse forza cercate a cio che piu vi sarebbe a grado, sapete che sogliono le donne amate fare" on page 40. His discussion of Fiammetta in light of Ovidian literature, which suggests the rhetorical impossibility of women claiming 'date rape' in literature see pp. 30-38.

ate the forbidden fruit “the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realised they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.”⁴⁷ In this way the story of Adam and Eve established the necessity of attire for post-lapsarian humanity. However, for some early theologians, because the Fall was one from (naked) innocence to (clothed) sensuality, attire acted not as a remedy to shame but as tangible evidence of vanity, and a reminder of the sexualised body beneath.⁴⁸ This association provides important context for appreciating the evident suspicion directed toward wives’ potentially vain or promiscuous attire. However this did not relieve nudity of its shameful connotations; rhetorically speaking, by exhibiting no shame in nakedness one appeared to be like an animal, without cognitive or emotional depth.⁴⁹ Barbaro recommend that a woman wear clothing during sex to “seem decent to her husband in the dark.”⁵⁰ In private, clothing acted as a sign of modesty that elevated fornicators above their obscene, albeit necessary, actions but in public, clothing could be a sign of lasciviousness. Florentine Christian society simultaneously encouraged women to be beautiful, modest, chaste, to satisfy their husbands sexually, and to be fecund.

Procreation and Imagination

The cultural insistence on female fidelity and strictures on the manner in which a married couple had sex were prescribed to promote the conception of legitimate, healthy heirs. Medical and instructive texts ascribed great significance to sensation and imagination as a means to imprint moral virtues and physical beauty on children during conception. Alberti repeated the common advice that beautiful images of virtuous subject matter be painted in the bedroom so that when men and women conceived children the images of nobility in the parents’ minds would form the foundation for the begotten child.⁵¹ Visual and written advice focused on ways to conceive sons rather than daughters. Similarly to bridal jewellery, idealised talismanic images could be hired to aid in the imaginative aspects of conception

⁴⁷ Genesis 3:6.

⁴⁸ Jane E Burns, 2002. *Courtly Love Undressed: Reading Through Clothes in Medieval French Culture*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press., p.150, and: Kovesi, p. 118.

⁴⁹ Hallam, p.252.

⁵⁰ Barbaro, p. 213.

⁵¹ Leon Battista Alberti, 1966. *L'Architettura*. Vols. 1-2. Milan: P.Portoghesi. p.804.

and childbirth.⁵² Therefore, domestic images not only functioned to remind women of the values ascribed to their roles in life, but they also directly affected the mental landscape and generative power of a couple as they conceived offspring.

Following the theories of antiquity, notably those of Aristotle and Galen, the father provided the seed from which the child received its form and character, whereas the mother provided substance and nourishment.⁵³ In terms of gendered complexions, men's dry heat transformed their blood into semen while women's cold and moist nature produced menstrual blood and milk. Hot and dry qualities being dominant meant that men's contribution was more significant in the formation of the child. These biological foundations influenced the philosophical interpretation of generation which argued that mothers loved their children more because they gave more of themselves to their offspring but children loved their fathers more because they owed them their identities. Husbands' love for their wives would also increase when they gave birth to sons, especially when the sons resembled their fathers' more than their mothers' family.⁵⁴ Therefore, family dynamics between parents and their children were physically established through procreation. The balance of hot, dry, wet and cold qualities which contributed to the conditions of the child's conception and gestation further determined whether the child would be a perfectly formed male or a deficient female.

Humanists including Alberti believed that a person's emotional state, personal ambitions and visual experiences at the crucial time of conception would influence the physicality and temperament of the child conceived. This had to do with the balance of the couple's humours and mental impression at the moment the child modelled itself on its parental blueprint. Even the intelligence, temperament and appearance of an adult could be traced back to the physical, emotional and imaginative state of the parents during conception.⁵⁵ For

⁵² Jacqueline Marie Musacchio, 1997. "Imaginative Conceptions in Renaissance Italy." In *Picturing Women in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, edited by Geraldine A. Johnson and Sara F. Matthews Grieco. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 43-45.

⁵³ For a discussion of Renaissance perceptions of the physiological and spiritual role women played in the generation of a child (informed by arguments made by either Aristotle or Galen) see: Park, (2006), pp.141-150.

⁵⁴ Jane Fair Bestor, 1991. "Ideas About Procreation and Their Influence on Ancient Medieval Views of Kinship." In *The Family in Italy: From Antiquity to the Present*, edited by David Kertzer and Richard P. Saller, 150-167. New Haven: Yale University Press, and: Park (2006) p.143-144.

⁵⁵ This logic carried on throughout Europe into the seventeenth-century, for instance, see: Ben Jonson's satirical 1616 poem *The English Monsieur* which suggests that an Englishman's use of French attire either stems from his father's sexually transmitted disease or his mother's imagination 'has his father, when he did him

instance, an early 1450s account written from the perspective of Jacopo Antonio Marcello reflected on the conception of his son Valerio, saying "I am convinced that when his mother conceived this son from me her husband, she was not imagining any human form or shape which [the child] would resemble, but in her mind dwelled on a certain excellent and unique pattern of beauty."⁵⁶ However, if a woman was anxious, immoral or vain she may provide an unstable situation for the early development of the foetus. Renaissance thinkers viewed the danger of maternal imagination, sometimes externally expressed as cravings, as being so influential over the developing foetus that supernatural intervention, which was used to explain serious physical defects, was not required to explain less serious imperfections like birthmarks.⁵⁷ People feared that looking at and internalising ugly images, or coveting fashions that manipulate the body could cause a developing baby's body to be ugly or manipulated.⁵⁸

From one standpoint, 'monstrous births' were suspected to be punishments for sinful or inopportune sexual activities (including adultery, sex on the Sabbath, sex during menstruation, bestiality or sodomy) or as supernatural omens.⁵⁹ For instance, Bernardino of Siena threateningly preached that it was a mortal sin for men to have sex with their wives during their menstruation and that if they were to do so "monstrous creatures can be conceived, either with two pairs of hands, or with six fingers, or without vital organs."⁶⁰ Abnormal birth caused cultural distress because the offspring breached the segregation of self and other which is traditionally the feature that defines monstrosity.⁶¹ Men, notably

get/The French disease, with which he labours yet?/ Or hung some monsieur's picture on the wall,/ By which his dam conceived him, clothes and all?"

⁵⁶ As quoted in King (1994), p. 3. King includes the original Latin, from a letter of condolence to Marcello by Bevilaqua, which reads: "*Sic ego decum crediderim, quod ubi mater ex me viro filium hunc concipiebat, non formam aut figuram humanam aliquam contempletur, e qua similitudinem duceret, sed in ipsius mente species pulchritudinis eximia quaedam et singularis insidebat.*" King, (1994) p. 332.

⁵⁷ Shildrick, p.32-33.

⁵⁸ The association between women's imagination and monstrous births is also discussed in: Ian MacLean, "The Notion of Woman in Medicine, Anatomy, and Physiology." In *Feminism and Renaissance Studies*, edited by Lorna Hutson, 127-155. Oxford Readings in Feminism, Oxford University Press, 1999, p.132.

⁵⁹ Shildrick, p.20 and Debby, p. 131.

⁶⁰ Bernardino of Siena as translated in: Rogers and Tinagli, p. 144, also see Debby (2001) p. 131

⁶¹ Shildrick, p. 2-3. The longevity of this concern can be seen in that it was addressed in the ninth century by Rabanus Maurus, who argued that abnormal offspring were not necessarily born against nature but against that experience of nature with which we are familiar. (Umberto Eco, *On Beauty*. Translated by Alastair McEwen. London: Secker and Warburg, 2004.p. 147) However, in the sixteenth century, Ambroise Paré similarly asserted that as medical science developed it would be able to explain births which seemed monstrous. Reasons Paré cited for abnormal births included divine intervention, poor health or carriage of the pregnant mother and the imperfect quality or quantity of semen, Marie Helene Huet, 2004. "Monstrous

including physicians, were uneasy with the fact that women's unstable, mysterious bodies, susceptible to imagination and supernatural interference, were the site of foetal development.⁶² The lack of a satisfactory explanation of the process of generation increased a culturally established distrust of women and the sense that women's bodies had to be controlled, not only through social conditioning but by engaging their mental lives by inspiring sensory memory.

According to the contemporary theories of biology, which remain consistent with society's broader attitude toward gender, a woman's imagination was capable of altering a child's physical form over nine months, whereas a man's temperament at the moment of conception had a profound effect on the child's character. Alberti expressed this view in his *Book of the Family* where he provided instructions for the ideal circumstances under which a healthy child might be conceived: "husbands, then, should be careful not to give themselves to their wives while their mental state is troubled by anger, fear, or some other kind of disturbing emotion." Alberti's explanation for this uses the argument that external experiences and emotions hindered the normal functionality of the body:

Those passions that inflame and excite the mind disturb and provoke to rebellion the masters whose task it is at that moment to form the human image. Hence it may often be found that a father who is ardent and strong and wise has begotten a son who is fearful, weak and foolish.

When it came to physical health, however, responsibility was divided between the father and mother. Alberti recorded doctors' advice that "it is unwise to come together if body and limbs are not in good condition and health" lest the children adopt their ailments. He suggested that some of the afflictions unwell parents may bestow included leprosy, deformity, incomplete limbs and other "things one certainly does not want to see happen to one's own children."⁶³ It is significant that Alberti treats physical abnormalities as lamentable biological events without continuing, as writers commonly did, to propose divine chastisement as an alternative explanation. This suggests that people did maintain a sense of control. For the most part, people expected normal births and tried to provide the best physical and psychological opportunities for their offspring by following advice like Alberti's.

Medicine." In *Monstrous Bodies/Political Monstrosities in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Laura Lunger Knoppers and Joan B. Landes. USA: Cornell University Press. p.127 & 129.

⁶² Zwijnenberg, p.21.

⁶³ Alberti, (1969), pp. 120-1.

Bernardino of Siena advised that during sex the husband and wife should think only of one another.⁶⁴ Yet advice from secular texts and material evidence indicates that people continued to use visual aids to direct their imaginations elsewhere. Images in the nuptial bedroom were selected with a procreative agenda, for shaping offspring through directed visualisation, contemplation and internalisation. Secular texts advised married couples to have sex in a tranquil mood, stimulating the senses through perfumes and sensual images, such as those painted inside *cassone* lids, and to never lose sight of sex's ultimate aim - the generation of children. In respect for the gravity of the task of producing heirs, writers advised that couples kept human integrity in mind. Barbaro argued that, to avoid being base like beasts, "the couple must mainly use intercourse in the hope of procreating offspring [...] not for pleasure."⁶⁵

In theory, if a couple took all the necessary precautions and came together under the most ideal conditions they should be rewarded with a mentally and physically healthy son. Florentine society celebrated the birth of a son as an heir to his father's fortune who would potentially enrich and continue the family line through his own sons. The birth of a daughter (a financial burden, requiring a dowry in order to provide heirs for another man's family) elicited a broader range of more tentative reactions. At the end of a 1476 letter to Giovanni Cavalcanti, Marsilio Ficino wrote:

But why do I write nothing about the recent birth of your third daughter? Because you did not write a word to me. Do you wish me to tell the truth? I will not write a word about this before I hear whether I am to congratulate or to console you. But rejoice in the gifts of the great King, whatever they be, for nothing from the great is mean or worthy of scorn.⁶⁶

Ficino anticipates and sympathises with his friend's disappointment at having three daughters but encourages him with the assurance that it was God's will that he should have another daughter. Contemporary texts did proffer alternate conciliatory perspectives. For instance, Marco Parenti wrote to his brother-in-law Filippo Strozzi in 1469 on the birth of Filippo's first daughter and, expecting Filippo to be disappointed despite already having a son, advised:

⁶⁴ Debby (2001), p. 131.

⁶⁵ Barbaro, p. 212.

⁶⁶ Ficino, 1476 *Letter 26*, (1978), p. 34.

You should rejoice at this one being a girl as much as if it were a boy, that is, you will begin to draw advantage sooner than with a boy, that is, you will make a fine marriage alliance sooner than if it were a boy.⁶⁷

Society demanded daughters' loyalty eventually be divided between two households but the human reality of their formalised division caused some paternal jealousy or resentment.⁶⁸ The social and emotional disadvantages of having daughters led men to think about how to avoid conceiving daughters in the first place. *Ricordi* clearly voiced disappointment at the birth of a daughter and frequently understood the accident as evidence of some moral or physical fault during conception.⁶⁹ Morelli suggested having a daughter stemmed from youthful fathers' lack of sexual restraint. He suggested that by tempering sex with their wives, men would have healthy, happy sons, but if they did not, they would make themselves sick, risking dying, harm their wives, and if they managed to have children they would be female.⁷⁰ Bernardino of Siena rebuked men who resented or abused their wives and "when their wife brings forth a little girl, they cannot suffer her, so small is their discretion!"⁷¹

Childbirth and Maternal Death

Bernardino reminded husbands of their wives' suffering during pregnancy and birth and encouraged the husband to "be sure that you help her to bear her pain. If she be with child or in childbirth, aid her so far as it lies in your power, for it is your child also."⁷² Childbirth was dangerous and not uncommonly fatal for women. According to Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber's study, in the early- to mid-fifteenth century there were roughly 14.4 maternal deaths for every thousand births and approximately one-fifth of women who predeceased their husbands died from complications during pregnancy or birth.⁷³ Nowhere in the twenty-first century world reaches the level of mortality experienced in the privileged elite city of fifteenth-century Florence.⁷⁴ Gregorio Dati recorded the deaths of three of his wives, in

⁶⁷ Parenti, as quoted in: Tomas (1992), p. 32.

⁶⁸ Fatherly jealousy of their daughter's divided love was later reflected as a central theme in Shakespeare's *King Lear* and *Othello*.

⁶⁹ Klapisch-Zuber (1985), pp. 101-102.

⁷⁰ Morelli, pp.211-213.

⁷¹ Bernardino, 2 Sermons, Internet Medieval Source Book.

⁷² Bernardino, Internet Medieval Sourcebook.

⁷³ Herlihy & Klapisch-Zuber, p. 277.

⁷⁴ According to Index Mundi. 2013: the figures for maternal mortality from 2009-2011 for Italy and Australia are 0.07 per thousand, and in struggling nations the rate is higher, for instance Timor-Leste has a rate of 5.6 per

1390, 1402 and 1421, due to complications resulting from pregnancy. All together, Dati had four wives and twenty-six children who survived to baptism, but only eight of those children survived infancy.⁷⁵ This high level of maternal and infant mortality tarnished the experience of pregnancy (contextualising the need for immense social pressure to have children) and seemingly limited the affection parents allowed themselves to feel for their young infants, potentially making it easier for them to allow wet-nurses to care for the new-born children.⁷⁶

Alessandra Strozzi's candid letter to Filippo regarding her daughter Caterina's pregnancy in December 1449 illustrates the practical preparations taken by families at the jointly joyous and ominous news of pregnancy:

I believe that Marco notified you that Caterina is pregnant; and expects the baby in the middle of February. To me it would seem, being in that state, you should take out insurance so you don't lose the five hundred florins they have to have from the [Dowry] fund, that you would lose the investment and the person at once.⁷⁷

Alessandra expresses the prudent perspective that anticipation for the joy of birth must be tempered by preparation for the sorrow and financial burden of death. Indeed, in 1477 Filippo's wife Fiammetta di Donato Adimari died due to, what an autopsy (a new and unusual response to death) found was putrefied blood in the uterus after giving birth to their seventh child.⁷⁸

Births were attended by midwives who would only call upon male physicians or a surgeon if there were severe enough complications that the woman was already certain to die but the baby could potentially be saved.⁷⁹ In most cases, women's virtue was placed ahead of their health.⁸⁰ Even when male physicians, with all of their status and education, were called upon, their inexperience with birth meant that they potentially knew less than the

thousand and Zimbabwe has a rate of 9.6 maternal deaths per thousand births.

http://www.indexmundi.com/australia/infant_mortality_rate.html.

⁷⁵ King, (1991), pp. 6-7

⁷⁶For a discussion of the conflicting fifteenth-century arguments for and against allowing oneself to feel love and to take joy in the life of an infant who may not live, see Klapsich-Zuber (1985), pp. 113-114.

⁷⁷ Gregory, "Alessandra, to Filippo degli Strozzi in Salerno, 26 December 1449" pg 50, "*Credo che da Marco se' avisato come la Caterina é grossa; ed ha a fare il fanciullo a mezzo febbraio. A me parrebbe, essendo in quello stato, pigliarne sicurtá che no si perdessi que' cinquecento fiorini s'hanno avere dal Monte; che si perderebbe l; avere e la persona a un'otta: che se Iddio facessi altro di lai innanzi aprile, che gli perderemm*" [my translation].

⁷⁸ Park (2006), pp. 121-122.

⁷⁹ Lianne McTavish, 2014. "Birth and Death in Early Modern Europe" in *A Cultural History of the Human Body in the Renaissance*, London: Bloomsbury, p. 17.

⁸⁰ Rogers & Tinagli, p. 167.

midwives.⁸¹ However, arguments of propriety and modesty began to be overridden in response to waves of plague and an increasingly critical understanding of the human body.⁸² As interest in anatomy increased, as a result of humanist attention to ancient knowledge, the workings of the womb incurred the greatest misogynistic, symbolic and anatomical interest from physicians.⁸³

During the life-threatening experience of birth women appealed for assistance from female saints or from talismanic objects. As noted, Guido Guizzelmi's *History of the Virgin Mary's Girdle* included an account of a strand of the girdle which Florentine noblewomen undergoing a difficult labour placed above them to miraculously grant them an uncomplicated delivery.⁸⁴ Mothers appealed to St. Margaret who, according to Varagine, prayed before her martyrdom "if any woman with child travailing in any place, call on me that thou wilt keep her from peril, and that the child may be delivered from her belly without any hurt of his members."⁸⁵ Additionally, midwives and physicians applied ancient wisdom by seeking help from celestially endowed objects.⁸⁶ For instance, Marsilio Ficino notes, "the stone 'aetites' or eagle-stone has from Lucina (that is, from Venus and the Moon) the power when applied to the womb to incite a quick and very easy child-birth."⁸⁷ Popular belief held that the material and visual property of the aetite, hollow with loose pieces inside, was reminiscent of a woman's womb occupied by a foetus. Mandrake roots were also used to aid childbirth, because their shape resembled an infant.⁸⁸ Some midwives would set up the bedroom during the birth on the same sympathetic premise, opening the drawers and lifting the lids of the furniture to mirror the opening of the birth canal.⁸⁹ Thus, the presence and state of domestic items theoretically influenced the body, even when they were not the object of people's immediate contemplation. Medicine relied in great part on

⁸¹ Musacchio, (1999), p. 22.

⁸² King, (1991), pp.46-47.

⁸³ Zwijnenberg, p. 19.

⁸⁴ Guido Guizzelmi, *Historia della Cinctola della Vergine Maria*, in: Rogers & Tinagli, p.51.

⁸⁵ Varagine, "Blessed Virgin and Martyr S Margaret," Vol. IV, p.69, and Varagine, p. 402 "*pro ejus memoriam agentibus et se invocantibus devote oravit, addens, ut quaecumque in partu periclitans se invocaret, illaesam prolem emitteret*," also see: Grössinger, p. 35.

⁸⁶ Musacchio, p. 43.

⁸⁷ Ficino, (2002), p. 301.

⁸⁸ Musacchio, (1997), pp. 55-56.

⁸⁹ Maurice L. Shapiro, 1967. "A Renaissance Birth Plate" in *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (Sep., 1967), College Art Association pp. 236-237.

astrology and on sensory observations suggesting an intrinsic associative logic between objects, the body, and spiritual benevolence.

Birth Trays and Praise

Following a successful delivery, patrician and middle-class parents took the opportunity to exhibit their good fortune, wealth and honour to visiting friends and relatives. Well-wishers congratulated the new mother as she sat up in bed recovering her strength. The mother wore a colourful buttoned or otherwise detailed nightshirt and a *mantello* (styled as well as her husband could afford) and she dressed her bed with sheets and pillows purchased for the event, possibly embroidered or tasselled.⁹⁰ Being in a position to display expensive linens, from France or Flanders, on the bed was a recognised and desired sign of social status.⁹¹ The mother received gifts including decorated birth trays (popular from the 1370s), gold and silver cups, confectionery and other edible delicacies (like fruit, poultry and white wine) and materials to clothe herself and her child. The parents placed these gifts on display in the bedroom, which would be outfitted with paintings and specially embroidered linens suited to the event.⁹² The birth trays, or *descho da parto*, like *cassone*, were painted with courtly narratives or domestic scenes on the upper-side and with heraldic symbols or images of healthy infants on the bottom. They were allegorical but joyful in tone and were often kept by the child whose birth it marked into his or her adult life.⁹³ The immensely physically taxing task of childbirth was therefore socially acknowledged through ritualised practices of material display and gift giving. Gifts of food strengthened the new mother's body, gifts of clothing marked her motherly status on her body's surface, and allegorically decorated gifts imprinted beautiful moral images in their minds.

As well as the birth tray offered by her husband, a patrician mother's kin would offer her a silver cup decorated with the insignia of her natal and marital families. This celebratory gift acted as a renewal of the bond established through gift exchange during the couple's

⁹⁰ Musacchio (1999), p.38

⁹¹ Thornton, p. 73.

⁹² Musacchio (1999), pp. 35- 36, 42 & 59.

⁹³ Pope-Hennessy, John, and Keith Christiansen. 1980. "Secular Painting in 15th-Century Tuscany: Birth Trays, Cassone Panels, and Portraits." *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 38 (1), p.4, also on birth trays see: Shapiro, pp.236-243.

wedding.⁹⁴ Such gifts appear in Giovanni Rucellai's 1468 record of the joyous exchanges that followed the birth of his grandson. He wrote that the new mother, his daughter-in-law Nannina (Lucrezia de' Medici) received a silver basin full of small gilt cakes and a silver jug from her father Piero di Cosimo de' Medici. She also received a silver goblet full of cakes from Pier Francesco di Lorenzo de' Medici. Nannina's brother-in-law gave her a silver goblet full of pine-nut cakes. In addition to gifts of silver, doubtless emblazoned with familial insignia, Nannina received materials from family and friends, including crimson velvet and silk to be made into clothing for herself and her child. The midwife was given gifts of satin and damask for clothing and a sugared almond loaf.⁹⁵ Gold and silver plates were put on display in the mother's room as she lay in and received visitors.⁹⁶ Food, family, paintings, cups and clothes were all put to use to celebrate the birth of a child and to strengthen the woman's internal body and external identity as a mother.

The birth tray was one of the most prominent household objects associated with birth, and was purchased as a visual investment even before pregnancy. The function of these trays was as surfaces on which to present the mother with nourishment. While in use, an embroidered linen cover was usually placed between the tray and the food to protect the painting.⁹⁷ They continued to be used and displayed, usually on bedroom walls, as honourable and visually enticing objects for the approval of guests and to promote spousal love and procreation. The most popular decorative themes for the facing side of the tray were mythology, secular romances, biblical narratives or childbirth scenes, while the other side was painted with images of plump male babies, the parents' family crests, game boards or allegories.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Klapisch-Zuber (1985), p. 237.

⁹⁵ Rogers and Tinagli, pp. 178-179.

⁹⁶ The practice of displaying golden plates and cups is visually demonstrated in Domenico Ghirlandaio's fresco of the *Nativity of St. John the Baptist* (Figure 31) to be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

⁹⁷ Musacchio (1999), p. 61 & 63.

⁹⁸ Musacchio (1997), pp. 45-48 & (1999) p. 66



Figure 28: Masaccio, *Childbirth Scene*, Tempera on wood, 56.5cm diameter, Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, c 1425

Another birth tray, painted by Masaccio in 1425, depicts a *Childbirth Scene* (Figure 28). The subject matter reflects the developing interest rising elite families had in commemorating the everyday, as further evidenced in merchant-writer's diaries and *Ricordi*.⁹⁹ The painting provides evidence of the idealised celebration of the safe delivery of son to an elite Florentine family. The scene is set as a cross-section of a Florentine courtyard, leading into the bedroom where the new mother awaits her guests. Architectural columns (reminiscent of the Ospedale degli Innocenti¹⁰⁰) divide the scene into three uneven sections. The smallest section, on the left, is inhabited by male figures in profile. The two men, furthest to the left,

⁹⁹ Jacqueline Marie Musacchio, 2008. "The Triumph of Everyday Life", in *The Triumph of Marriage; Painted Cassoni of the Renaissance*, Isabella Steward Gardner Museum, Boston, pp 35-36.

¹⁰⁰ This association is noted by Partridge, p. 93

are representatives of the new child's kin. Each bears a gift; one holds a gold plate and the other a circular lidded box, or tureen, which would have contained sweetmeats for the mother's recovery.¹⁰¹ Male servants, of this evidently significant family, announce the approach of guests with horns, on which flags of the Florentine lily hang, one of which crosses the male portion of the painting to the central aisle. This central section depicts three lay-women in noble dress and extravagant hairstyles kept in place by gold netting, followed by two nuns, all of whom walk toward the viewer on their way to the mother's room. The nun in the centre of the image is perhaps a reference to a cloistered family member or saint but certainly a nod to the family's religious inclinations. The mother lies, propped up in her bed, turning her body toward the open door to see her guests as they arrive. The richly decorated bedroom indicates the family's wealth through the display of golden gifts, flags and ermine-lined walls and imposing architecture. Musacchio notes that many of the details of the room, including the mother's bright red bedsheets, were too precious to use all the time, but were typical embellishments for the occasion of lying-in to allow well-wishing guests to see the best one had to display.¹⁰² The mother is surrounded by neat but modestly dressed women with opaquely veiled hair, including a wet-nurse who sits by the bed with the baby on her knee. The swaddled baby wears a talismanic necklace of black beads and a large piece of red coral, a typical ornament placed around the neck of young infants for protection.¹⁰³ The visual prominence of the female figures - servants, midwives, a wet-nurse, nuns and noblewomen - demonstrated the female-centred workforce of childbirth.

Breastfeeding

The honour accorded to patrician women for fecundity did not translate into an equivalent experience for poorer families for whom additional mouths equated to additional hardship and potential destitution. Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber's assessment of the 1427 *Catasto* indicates that rich Florentine women had three children to every two born to poor women.¹⁰⁴ An explanation for this difference in fertility between women of dissimilar economic means is that the babies of middle to upper-class women were suckled by lower-

¹⁰¹ Musacchio (1999), p. 41.

¹⁰² Musacchio (1999), p. 35.

¹⁰³ Syson & Thornton, p. 62-63

¹⁰⁴ Herlihy & Klapisch-Zuber, p. 245.

class mothers. Poor but honourable women could gain employment as wet-nurses which rendered them infertile for the two years they nursed a child, whereas the wealthier women, who did not suckle their babies regained their fertility earlier.¹⁰⁵

Lactating women's bodies defied the distinction between the self and other, as they produced the food that would nourish young lives.¹⁰⁶ Lactation gave a woman the possibility to work as a wet-nurse and contribute to her family's economy; however, her profession did threaten her autonomy in that she actively gave of herself to another person's child according to an agreement made between her husband and the child's father. Wet-nursing also placed strictures on her behaviour because people of the Renaissance believed that a woman's moral conduct could influence the quality of her milk and in turn alter the character of the child. Wet-nurses were not to have sex lest it corrupt their milk and if a wet-nurse became pregnant, her employer's child would be removed from her care.¹⁰⁷ As a source of food, society encouraged women to deny their personal desires and comport themselves according to society's need of them.

The kinds of characteristics believed to be imparted during gestation continued to be developed in the initial stages of the infant's life through the process of suckling. Physicians interpreted a mother's milk as a converted form of her menstrual blood, meaning the mother's milk was the same product with which the foetus was nourished.¹⁰⁸ Physicians, preachers, writers and humanists believed that breastfeeding one's own child imparted the best sustenance, increased natural affection, and increased the child's ability to develop family distinctiveness.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Herlihy & Klapisch-Zuber, p. 251.

¹⁰⁶ Rebecca J. Lester, 1995. "Embodied Voices: Women's Food Asceticism and the Negotiation of Identity." *Ethos* 23 (2): 187-222, p. 206.

¹⁰⁷ King, (1991), p.15.

¹⁰⁸ King, (1991), p.14.

¹⁰⁹ King, (1991), p.13, also see Wiesner-Hanks, p.48. Although we, in the twenty-first century, do not share the same beliefs with regard to blood transforming to milk, contemporary studies do confirm that breastfeeding increases maternal bonding and has health benefits including preventing allergies, improving the immune system, continuing the post-natal development of the intestines and improving cognitive development. See: Benjamin Mason Maier and Miriam Labbok. 2010. "From the Bottle to the Grave: Realizing a Human Right to Breastfeeding Through Global Health Policy." *Case Western Reserve Law Review* 60 (4): 1073 - 1142. And see: Marcia Maria Tavares Machado and Carole Kenner. 2013. "Breastmilk: Reflections on Immunology and Importance for the Premature Infant." *Newborn & Infant Nursing Reviews* (3): 151-153.

Fifteenth-century medical knowledge suggested that a woman only lactated sufficiently to nurture one child at a time, and that sharing the breast, having sex or becoming pregnant, would corrupt the milk.¹¹⁰ A social effect of this belief was that those hired as nurses would be pressured to have their own babies nursed by other women lower in the social hierarchy.¹¹¹ Patrician parents tended to view breastfeeding as unattractive and animalistic, and so they chose to resume their sex-life and assure themselves of many descendants rather than focus on the virtue and health benefits they might otherwise impart to their already existing babies.¹¹²

Both religious and secular authorities weighed in on the debate concerning the mother's role in nourishing her own child. Bernardino of Siena, in a Florentine sermon in 1424, claimed that it was a sin for women to forego breastfeeding and thereby increase the likelihood that their children would not survive infancy.¹¹³ Francesco Barbaro argued that the position of women's breasts showed that nature intended for women to cuddle and look lovingly on their children as they breastfed. He acknowledged the practice of hiring a wet-nurse but argued that:

Noble women should always try to feed their own offspring so that they will not degenerate from being fed on poorer, foreign milk. [...] In this way the young infant will not imbibe corrupt habits and words and will not receive, with his milk, baseness, faults, and impure infirmities and thus be infected with a dangerous degenerative disease in mind or body.¹¹⁴

Thus Barbaro appealed to the hierarchical conceit that the elite were healthier, smarter and more virtuous. Feeding one's own child, then, not only increased affection between mother and child but it also protected the child from sickness and bad values. Poet Maffeo Vegio (1407-1458) described elite women who deprived their children of their maternal milk and affection as 'monsters.'¹¹⁵ From this perspective (voiced by many disgruntled formerly nurse-fed men) vanity on the part of mothers had resulted in generations of children raised

¹¹⁰ King, (1991), p.14

¹¹¹ Megan Holmes, 1997. "Disrobing the Virgin: The Madonna Lactans." In *Picturing Women in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, edited by Geraldine A. Johnson and Sara F. Mathews-Grieco, 167-195. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 187 – 188.

¹¹² Samantha J. E. Riches, 2003. "'Hyr Wombe Insaciate' The Iconography of the Feminised Monster." In *Pawns or Players? Studies on Medieval and Early Modern Women*, edited by Christine Meek and Catherine Lawless, 177-196. Cornwall: Four Courts Press, p. 190.

¹¹³ Debby (2001), p.143, and see; King, (1991), p. 13.

¹¹⁴ Barbaro p. 223.

¹¹⁵ King, (1991), p.13.

quite literally out of the bosom of their family, under the influence of unloving lower-class women whose milk may have imparted characteristics unsuitable for their social position. Therefore, the philosophical and scientific standpoint that the mother's milk imparted invaluable familial characteristics was countered by parents who viewed breastfeeding as ugly and who disliked the infertility and chastity which accompanied it. However, the impact of this conflict of ideals was the ultimate resentment men felt toward women in general, and their mothers in particular, for risking their health and identities.

Giovanni Dominici promoted maternal nourishment by praising the spiritual role of the mother who cared for her child. Thinking not only of breastfeeding but of the continued nourishment of the toddler, Dominici paints an intimate portrait of fifteenth-century motherhood saying:

Look at the mother who chews the bread and when it is soft puts it in the mouth of her small child. Great mercy has this mother, who makes the effort for her little one and it is nourished by her. Similarly you should imagine God struggling for us.¹¹⁶

By rhetorically reconceptualising familiar domestic experiences with devotional parallels, Dominici made intangible ideas of faith accessible while elevating the spiritual status of tasks which members of the lay-society otherwise attempted to forego on the grounds of social indecency.

Elevating Mundane Motherhood through the Miraculous Madonna

In the fourteenth- and fifteenth-centuries, artists transposed biblical narratives involving the Virgin Mary into contemporary domestic settings, as well as depicting the Virgin and Child in a range of non-biblical, often allegorical, scenarios that reflected and so elevated the ideal domestic experience of patrician mothers. Klapisch-Zuber notes a correlation between the increasingly naturalistic and affectionate depictions of the baby Jesus interacting with mother and viewer, and fifteenth-century men's writing (including both Alberti's and Dominici's) that demonstrate a more affectionate, though cautious attitude toward fragile

¹¹⁶ Debby (2001), p. 144 Dominici's translation from from: Dominici MS Ricc 1301, Predica 41 lines 245-48, Debby provides a transcription of Dominici's otherwise unpublished sermons, and this quote can be seen on page 302. "Tu venrai la mama biasciare il pane et poi cosi biasciato, il mette in bocha al fanciullino picholino. Gran mercie alla mama, che dura la faticha per lui ed egli se ne notricha. Chosi t'ymmigina Iddio Glorioso combatte per noi ed egli e quegli che a la vettoria et vuole che ssia dato a tte."

infants.¹¹⁷ Paintings of Mary as the archetypal spiritual mother idealised a relationship between lactating mother and her own baby son which very few women had the opportunity to imitate. Mary was also depicted in the non-biblical act of spinning thread and making clothing for the infant Jesus. Images of the Holy Family re-imagined in well-appointed Renaissance interiors provided comforting exempla for Florentine women.

Fourteenth- and early-fifteenth-century paintings of the lactating Virgin idealised the mother who suckled her own child. These paintings provide evidence of specially designed maternity attire, included breast-slits, held together with buttons or lacing, which are evident in written accounts of pregnancy expenses but (due to the textiles themselves not surviving) are rarely otherwise seen.¹¹⁸ During the fourteenth century, the Virgin's breast was usually painted unobtrusively and symbolically as a desexualised sphere, above her clothes, on her collarbone.¹¹⁹ However, as the art of the Renaissance turned toward perspective and naturalistic expression, artists' depictions of the *Madonna Lactans* display anxiety about how to depict Mary's naked breast realistically without being disrespectfully sexual or, on the other side of the scale, disrespectfully ugly. Megan Holmes' analysis of the underdrawing of Filippo Lippi's *Madonna Lactans*, that shows the artist redrew Mary's fingers and clothing around her bare breast a number of times, which Holmes interprets as evidence of an attempt to strike an acceptable balance between naturalism and respect. Indeed, as the call for naturalism increased in the mid-fifteenth century, commissions for the *Madonna Lactans* decreased.¹²⁰ By contrast, Caroline Bynum argues that Medieval viewers would have interpreted the Virgin's naked breast more immediately, not as a sexual object but as a sign for both physical and spiritual nourishment, and may even have extended their associative interpretation to consider the base form of human liquids (blood) as the sacrificial and Eucharistic blood of Christ.¹²¹ Such images were successful in expressing their spiritual associations due to people's familiarity with the practical experience of the woman's body as

¹¹⁷ Klapsich-Zuber (1985), pp. 113-115.

¹¹⁸ Musacchio, (1999), p. 37 and Holmes, p. 188.

¹¹⁹ An example of the Virgin's breast being represented as a desexualised sphere on her collarbone above her clothes can be viewed in Figure 16: Benedetto di Bindo, *Madonna of Humility and St. Jerome*, Diptych, Tempera, Silver, and tooled Gold on panel with vertical grain, 30.2 x 42.2cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art, c.1400-1405.

¹²⁰ Holmes, p. 178.

¹²¹ Bynum (1992), p. 86.

the food on which infants depended, and the cultural idealisation of women who breastfed their own children despite the counter-pressure to abandon their children to wet-nurses.¹²²

Images of the Virgin Mary and her Son praised and legitimised typical activities of patrician mothers and exemplified the affection and respect sons owed their mothers. Images which placed the Holy Family in familiar fifteenth-century settings, conducting mundane tasks, helped women viewing the images to identify with the figures and to meditatively draw parallels between the experience of the eternal saints and their own lives.¹²³ Dominici also advised that infants should be exposed to religious images in domestic settings so that they could mirror saintly behaviour. Amongst Dominici's recommended themes he advised:

It is well to display the Virgin Mary with her Child in her arms, and the bird or the pomegranate in His hand. It will be good to have a figure of the nursing Jesus, Jesus sleeping in the lap of Mother; Jesus politely before her, Jesus in profile while His Mother sews his form.¹²⁴

The fresco *Madonna Sewing and the Child Playing* (c.1405-1410, Figure 29) attributed to Giovanni di Tano Fei, from the Benci Chapel, Santa Croce, provided a divine example that elevated the menial domestic task of clothing the family which closely resembles the themes recommended by Dominici, also in 1405. In the fresco, Mary sits on a stool with a basket of different coloured thread, and she puts the finishing touches on a red, long-sleeved garment for her young Son. It is likely that the work's intended viewers would have recognised this martyr-red garment as a reference to Jesus' seamless garment that Roman soldiers took and gambled for during His crucifixion. In the fresco, the toddler Jesus smiles at the viewer and points in appreciation to his diligent mother and his new tunic.

¹²² Bynum (1992), p. 106.

¹²³ Musucchio, (1999), p. 41.

¹²⁴ Dominici, p. 131 *"Bene sta la Vergine Maria col fanciullo in braccio, e l'uccellino o la melagrana in pugno. Sarà buona figura Jesu che poppa, lesu che dorme in grembo della Madre; lesu le sta cortese innanzi, lesu profila ed essa Madre tal profilo cuce."* [my translation]



Figure 29: Giovanni di Tano Fei (attributed), *Madonna Sewing and the Child Playing*, detached fresco, from the Basilica (Benci Chapel), Santa Croce, Florence, c.1405-1410

Mary's task is reflective of Florentine social practice, as women were responsible for making simple *camici* (long undershirts) for their household and, in many cases, among the rising merchant class families, wives also made *camici* as an informal domestically run business.¹²⁵ Clothing made by mothers or wives took on a nostalgic role for Florentine exiles, merchants and soldiers who received or wore the shirts while they were a long way from home. This gift-giving, like that enacted during a betrothal, reminded the recipient of their loved ones and in this capacity such garments took on protective talismanic associations.¹²⁶ As a patrician mother of exiled sons, Alessandra Strozzi sent undershirts to her son Filippo,

¹²⁵ Frick, (2005), p. 127.

¹²⁶ Ornella Morelli, 1994. "Fogge, Ornamenti e Tecniche. Qualche Appunto Sulla Storia Materiale dell'Abito nel Quattrocento." In *Il Costume al tempo di Pico e Lorenzo il Magnifico*, Catalogue. Mirandola Palazzo Municipale, 27 Feb - 1 May 1994., p. 83.

writing:

I am sending [...] four shirts, six handmade handkerchiefs, [...] Shirts cut and sewn in our own way, [...] I have not made more shirts, I do not know if you will like them, and so with the other things, if they are not your style, I can use them for my Matteo, and if you like them, advise me of what you want, and I will send it.¹²⁷

It is evident from Alessandra's letter that she had no qualms on account of her status and was, in fact, pleased with the idea of working with her own hands to provide underclothes for her sons.

The previously discussed images of Mary depict her taking part in domestic but non-biblical tasks. Although images of miraculous biblical births were often commissioned on a large scale for public appreciation, they rarely occurred on domestic art. This can be explained in part by the fact that biblical accounts of the Holy Family proved a difficult model to reconcile with Renaissance values concerning gender, family structure and religion. Of the motherly Saints Anne, Mary and Elizabeth, women identified most comfortably with St. Anne. According to nature, Mary could not be pregnant because she was a Virgin and her cousin Elizabeth should not have been able to conceive because she was elderly and barren. Therefore, although powerful intercessors, they, especially Mary, were not always figures young married women felt would most sympathise with their fears. The fathers Joseph and Zachariah, who doubted their wives and did not spawn their own children, did not provide comfortable examples for men. Furthermore the dynamics between Jesus (the Son of God and Saviour of mankind), His mother the Virgin Mary (God's chosen vessel and Queen of Heaven), and Joseph (the carpenter from Bethlehem, mortal and impotent), did not exhibit a viable example for the Florentine patriarchal system.¹²⁸ According to a Christian understanding of the gospels, Mary remained a virgin and so although Joseph raised Mary's child their marriage was never consummated. In the story of John the Baptist's conception, his father Zachariah, a priest and therefore an authoritative speaker by trade, was struck

¹²⁷ Strozzi, "Lettera Ottava, Alessandra, To Filippo degli Strozzi in Naples, 6 December 1450" pp. 99-100 "*ti mando pel Favilla vetturale, nostro debitore di circa 2 ducati, quattro camice, sei fazzoletti da man, uno sciugatoio: tutto ben rinvolto, come vedrai. Le camice tagliate e cuvite a modo nostro, e cosi e fazzoletti e lo sciugatoioi, come s'usa qua. Non ho fatte più camice, ché non so se queste ti piaceranno; e così l'altre cose: che non sendo a tuo modo, le serneró al mio Matteo: e se le ti piacciono, avvisera'mi di quello che tu vuoi, e te ne manderó.*" [my translation].

¹²⁸ For further discussion of Renaissance images which deal with Joseph's problematic position within the Holy Family see: Grössinger, p.28.

dumb by the angel Gabriel for his disbelief that his wife was with child. Thus, during Elizabeth's pregnancy she was favoured by God and her husband was forced to practice the feminine virtue of silence. The Holy Family would seem to be the most obvious model to draw upon for domestic example, and Mary and the Baby Jesus were prolifically used to this end, demonstrating maternal love. However, the unusual dynamic within the Holy Family meant that paintings of the entire family going about their domestic tasks rarely appeared in domestic settings.

The biblical story of a virgin birth, in a stable exposed to the elements and surrounded by farm animals, provided very little for patrician women to identify with. *The Nativity of the Virgin* provided a solution to this problem as Mary's mother St. Anne had her daughter under relatively normal circumstances. Artists could, therefore, take more liberties, including placing St. Anne in a familiar domestic interior, surrounded with women including wet-nurses, servants and illustrious contemporary visitors. Large-scale commissions for churches illustrating Mary's nativity could even be transposed into the home of the work's patron.¹²⁹ In this way, the patron publicly displayed his wealth and memorialised family members even as he expressed his piety and generosity by decorating churches for the spiritual benefit of his community. Savonarola railed against the use of religious subject matter as a means for personal aggrandisement and of depicting religious figures in the guise of vain, immodest nobles.¹³⁰ Nevertheless, similarly to the way adornments remained important visual expressions of identity despite moral opposition, patrons continued to commission works of this nature as they always had.

¹²⁹ Musacchio, (1997), p. 43.

¹³⁰ Calamandrei p. 3.



Figure 30: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *The Nativity of the Virgin*, Tornabuoni Chapel fresco cycle, Santa Maria Novella, Florence, c.1485-90

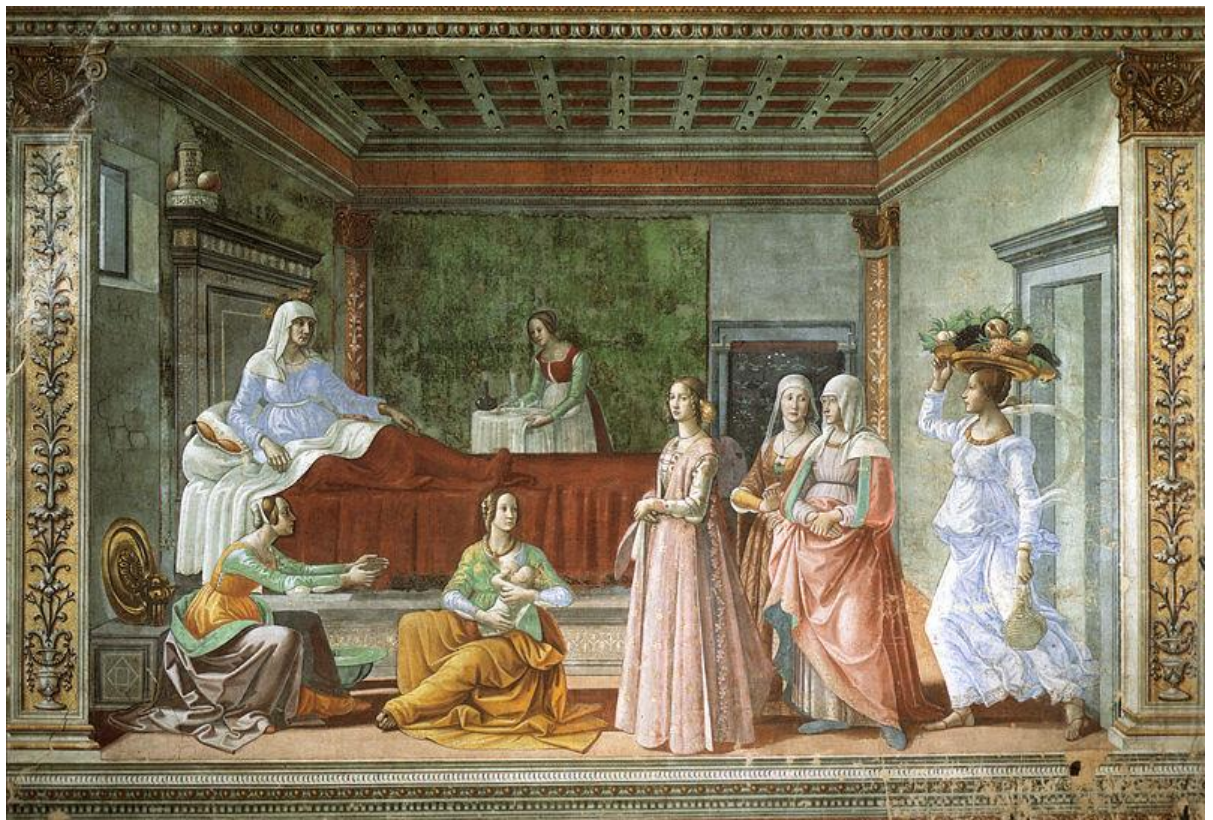


Figure 31: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *The Nativity of John the Baptist*, Tornabuoni Chapel fresco cycle, Santa Maria Novella, Florence, c.1485-90

Giovanni Tornabuoni commissioned the popular artist Domenico Ghirlandaio to paint a fresco cycle of the lives of the Virgin Mary and John the Baptist in the Tornabuoni Chapel of Santa Maria Novella, between 1485 and 1490.¹³¹ The fresco cycle includes references to the city and to specific family members clearly demonstrating the intermingling of religious, secular and domestic cultures. Access of the general public was restricted, allowing these visual records of the family's wealth and connections to be predominately concealed from the general worshiper.¹³² The cycle includes two nativity scenes, *The Nativity of the Virgin* (Figure 30) and the *Nativity of John the Baptist* (Figure 31). These sacred scenes are transposed to a familiar Florentine setting and both illustrate the typical activity in a patrician mother's chamber following the birth of her child. St. Anne's bedroom (believed to be modelled on a room in the Tornabuoni palazzo) represents ideal contemporary aesthetics, and behaviours relating to childbirth.¹³³ It has relief-style panelling at the top of the room which depicts music-playing cherubs, which are typical talismanic exempla of naked baby boys. St. Elizabeth's room has been prepared for visitors with golden plates and flasks on display by her bed. The mothers lie propped up in bed wearing simple but presentable under-dresses and veils over their hair. Noble young women visit the new mothers wearing heavy, long brocade dresses; the vertical drapes indicate that they are either not proceeding any further forward or, if they are, they only move in a slow stately manner. However, the servants move rapidly, breaking with the almost architectural gravitas of the moral elite.¹³⁴ The servants are depicted with clothes tucked over their skirts to allow for rapid movement, and the light fabric of their skirts billow behind them as they go about their work. As noted by Vasari, describing the *Nativity of John the Baptist*, "following Florentine custom, [a woman] brings fruit and flasks of wine from the country" on a birth tray for the mother.¹³⁵ Whereas Mary is usually shown breast-feeding her son Jesus, both St. Anne and St. Elizabeth employ wet-nurses in these frescoes, mirroring the practices familiar to the frescoes' original

¹³¹ Giorgio Vasari (who sought to emphasise Florentine artists' genius and autonomy) recorded that Domenico had sought after this commission for the honour of painting such a prominent chapel and had completed the work for minimal payment, see Vasari, pp214-217. However, later art historians also note that Domenico himself was highly sought after due to the splendid way in which he depicted the people of Florence, in their city, often giving them visual prominence over the religious stories he represented, see: Emma Micheletti. 1990. *Domenico Ghirlandaio*, Florence: Scala, pp. 38-40.

¹³² Rubin (1996), p. 103.

¹³³ Micheletti, p. 44.

¹³⁴ Artur Rosenauer, 1996. "Oservazioni circa lo stile del Ghirlandaio" in *Domenico Ghirlandaio 1449-1494, Atti del Convegno*, 61-70, Firenze: Centro Di, p. 65-66.

¹³⁵ Vasari, p. 219

audience. Live-in wet-nurses were a privilege for the very rich in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Florence.¹³⁶ Throughout his description of the scenes, Vasari noted Ghirlandaio's powerful use of movement and facial expressions to convey and generate emotions, and to this end he admired the *Nativity of the Virgin* particularly for the affectionate and expressive manner in which the women caring for the infant were depicted; he notes "a woman who holds the little Child in her arms and makes her laugh with a smile, expressing a feminine grace that is truly worthy of a painting like this."¹³⁷

Domenico included portraits of Tornabuoni family members amongst the noble women who visit to admire the babies and pay respect to the new mothers. The *Nativity of John the Baptist* includes a posthumous depiction of Giovanni's illustrious sister Lucrezia Tornabuoni. Lucrezia gathers the ends of her matronly *mantello* with both hands, so that they bunch over her belly beneath her high-waist line. This prevented the hem of her skirt from trailing on the ground but it also drew attention to the belly, concealing the body's form, a style which fifteenth-century women adopted to tease their viewers to speculations of pregnancy.¹³⁸ Giovanni's daughter Ludovica Tornabuoni is present at the *Nativity of the Virgin*, dressed in beautifully rendered bridal finery. As a personification of her family's honour, she wears a gold brocade dress with a high waist, train and fitted sleeves slit at the shoulder and elbow, all made up with her paternal family's insignia.¹³⁹ Ludovica's brocade matches that worn by her sister-in-law Giovanna degli Albizzi (mistaken by Vasari as being Ginevra de' Benci) who is depicted on the opposite wall in a scene showing the *Visitation* (Figure 32), a meeting of the pregnant cousins Mary and Elizabeth.¹⁴⁰ A young lady behind Giovanna in the *Visitation* (possibly Ludovico Tornabuoni's second wife Ginevra Gianfigliuzzi), wearing a matching pendant with a red ruby above three large pearls (which belonged to the Tornabuoni family) is depicted a second time leading the visiting women in the *Nativity of John the Baptist*.¹⁴¹ In this image, she wears a pink brocade loose sleeveless overgown a fitted long-sleeved

¹³⁶ King, (1991), p.14

¹³⁷ Vasari, p. 217, also see p. 218 where Vasari likens Domenico's representation of the Massacre of Innocents as "more worthy of a philosopher than of a painter. Many other emotions are expressed in this painting and anyone who looks at it will no doubt recognise that."

¹³⁸ Frick (2002), p. 93.

¹³⁹ Frick, (2002), p. 3.

¹⁴⁰ Vasari, p 219

¹⁴¹ Rubin (1996, p 102) identifies this woman as Ludovico's second wife.

undergown and the pearl-encrusted pendent.¹⁴² Domenico also painted a profile portrait of Giovanna for domestic display in which her clothing, jewellery and hairstyle match those in the *Visitation* fresco (Figure 33).

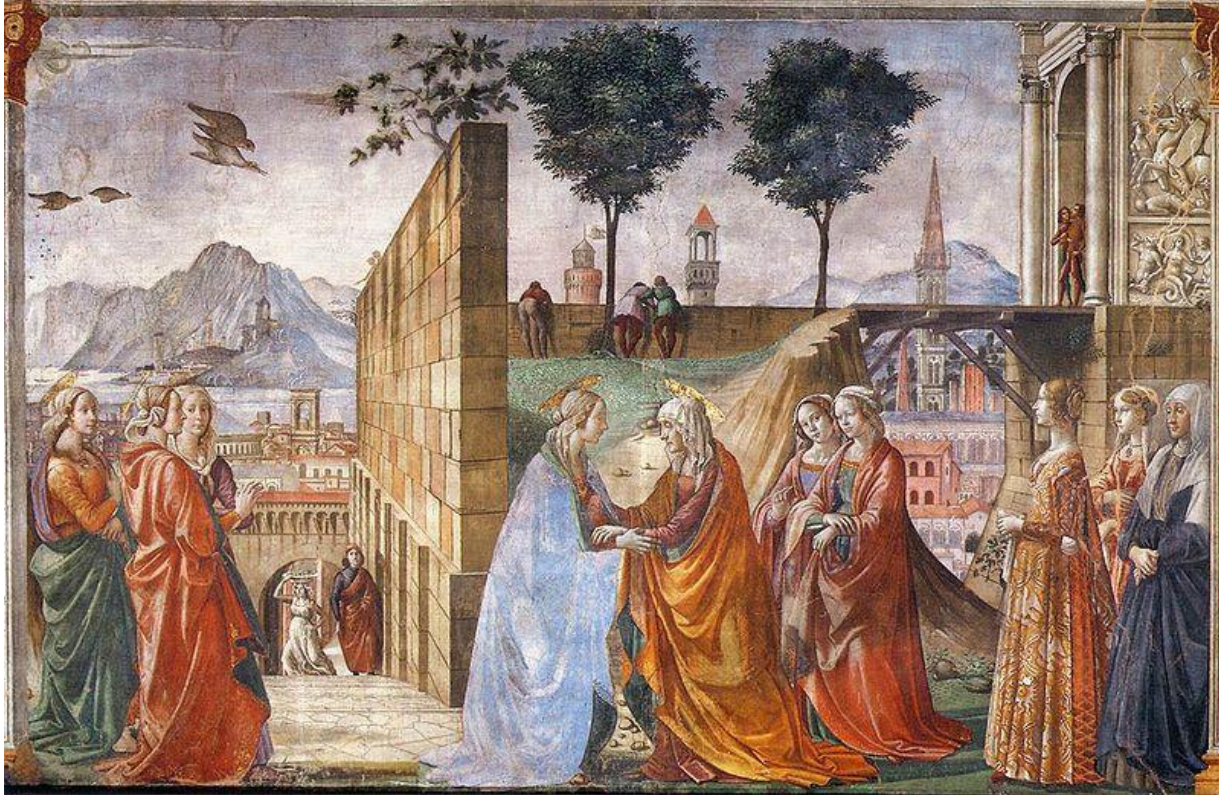


Figure 32: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *The Visitation*, Tornabuoni Chapel fresco cycle, Santa Maria Novella, Florence, c. 1485-1490

¹⁴² Frick, (2005), p. 126.



Figure 33: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Portrait of Giovanna degli Albizzi (Tornabuoni)*, Tempera on Panel, 77cm x 49cm, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, 1488

The stand-alone portrait was commissioned to commemorate Giovanna's death while pregnant (often believed to be due to complications related to pregnancy) in 1488. The portrait includes an epigram which laments the inability of the painting to convey Giovanna's true beauty of character.¹⁴³ Her Book of Hours is placed beneath the epigram to emphasise her intelligence and piety. Dying young and pregnant (beautiful and valuable) Giovanna was immortalised for public admiration in the fresco celebrating miraculous pregnancy, and again for familial contemplation. The individual portrait was displayed (as a Tornabuoni household inventory shows) near her widowed husband's bedroom.¹⁴⁴ The portrait makes

¹⁴³ The epigram reads '*Ars utinam mores animumque effingere posses pulchrior in terris nulla tabella foret mccccxxxviii*' as quoted by Wright, p.88, also see Burke, p. 87 and Paoletti & Radke, p. 277.

¹⁴⁴ Everett Fahy, 2008. "The Marriage Portrait in the Renaissance or Some Women Names Ginevra." In *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*, by The Metropolitan Museum of Art New York, edited by Andrea Bayer, 17-28. New Haven: Yale University Press. pp. 23-25.

further reference to Giovanna's identity as Ludovico's virtuous wife through a white embroidered "L" on the left shoulder of her orange *giornea* (her outer-garment).¹⁴⁵ The three scenes commemorate nubile, pregnant and matriarchal family members, both living and deceased. As Alison Wright argues, these family portraits echo the visual rhetoric which had been reserved for the cult of the saints, and so exemplify the growing cultural drive to fortify family memory and to honour and imitate the example of the virtuous dead.¹⁴⁶ The close nexus of birth and death is evident in the choice of female subjects who, placed alongside biblical figures, echoed the theme of the eternal Christian community, which would surely be a comfort to those dealing with the loss of life which frequently accompanied childbirth.

Conclusion

Rhetoric expressed by men through books of advice and allegorically decorated furnishings provided guidance for patrician women as they grappled with the morality attached to some of the most intimate embodied experiences of their lives. Via this process of internalising ideals to inform practice, masculine ideas about women's bodies informed women's profoundly female experiences of: losing their virginity (as a state by which society had set their virtue and worth), becoming pregnant, giving birth, and facing the dilemma of whether or not to breastfeed. Imagery in the marital bedroom sought to inspire the maternal imagination and encourage women to conceive healthy sons for their husbands. Women's clothing also favoured the pregnant form, further promoting the view that pregnancy was a virtue in a married women. However, while one line of rhetoric encouraged women to remain dutifully attractive and sexually available to their husbands, another criticised wives for appearing too attractive too publicly. The culturally engrained distrust of female sexuality, fortified by the rhetorical trope that men could not be as certain as women about their children's legitimacy, informed the different levels of censure Florentine society placed on male and female fidelity. Encouraging women to think about their social, spiritual and familial value in ways that justified restrictions on their actions, helped to assure men that they were passing an inheritance on to their own, legitimate, sons. Social concerns about legitimacy and inheritance, therefore, contributed to dualistic conceptualisations of

¹⁴⁵ Warr, (2010), p. 13.

¹⁴⁶ Wright, p. 88.

womanhood as sexual or chaste. These rhetorical roles were epitomised in the temptress Eve and the Virgin Mary. Biblical models had implications for the ways the society viewed and judged women. Narrative representations of the archetypal mothers St. Anne, the Virgin Mary and St. Elizabeth elevated the spiritual value of the mother in the household. Commissioning representations of the Holy Family also provided settings through which patrons could honour the memory of both living and deceased female kin. As noted in chapter two, paintings that combined recognisable contemporary figures with biblical figures reminded viewers of the eternal life to which their current lives were leading. The following and final chapter discusses the rhetoric and values that shaped the embodied practices of death and mourning.

Chapter Eight – Widowhood

In 1436, while on a visit to Pisa, Giovanni fell ill and died, leaving Beatrice a twenty-five year old widow and mother to three living children. Giovanni's body was returned to be buried honourably, but at the sight of him, dressed in his best, in his coffin, Beatrice lost all her carefully controlled decorum and wept and wailed. She had a dress made of the darkest black to show her distress and she had it made of silk to honour the memory of his worth. However, soon after the funeral it became clear that her older brothers were eager for Beatrice to marry again. She hadn't learned enough to manage her husband's affairs, her in-laws had already distanced themselves from her and she felt very alone. She was still beautiful and her brothers worried that she may come under suspicion if left unguarded, which could ruin both her and their reputations. Giovanni's family reluctantly returned her dowry but they never treated her kindly again. She went back to live in her brother's home while he arranged her next wedding to a widower named Filippo Mazzinghi. The hardest thing to bear was that she could not bring her dear children into Filippo's home but had leave them in the care of Giovanni's brother. She would see them occasionally but their relationship was permanently tarnished and painful. When Filippo died of plague in 1457 (while his family was staying safely in their country villa) he had thankfully made provisions that allowed Beatrice to live in relative comfort as the head of her household with their four children. As she grew older, the household passed to the control of her eldest son and she lived out her days under his protection, forever wearing dark clothing in memory of his father, her second husband.

Grief was both a personal experience and a public performance in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Florence. This chapter considers stages of living in mourning and thereby experiencing identity through the prism of memory and absence. Preachers spoke on the art of dying well, providing the dying with a model to focus on to make sense of their pain. The rhetoric of grief provided a poignant language through which to talk about death and the virtuous behaviour necessary to be assured of eternal life. Grief was performed as a gendered ritual. Influential elite men were eulogised in public orations. Women and the children of important men received recognition through the quieter medium of consolatory letters.¹ Diary accounts and letters of condolence reveal fourteenth- and fifteenth-century

¹ Natalie Tomas, 2006. "Did Women Have a Space?" In *Renaissance Florence: A Social History*, edited by Roger J. Crum and John T. Paoletti, 311-328. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.314-215.

values, fears, and comforts. For humanists, death inspired eloquent dialogues concerning the human soul and its relationship with the body, rationality and emotion. Their letters exposed their reliance on gendered rhetoric by setting ideal values against the deceased's character to prove the dead person's worth. While letters provided one method for soothing emotions, dark clothing aided in the externalisation of inner turmoil. Sumptuary laws specified who could dress in what mourning garb for the funeral. Traditionally, dishevelled women wept in the deceased's home while men displayed their emotional control outside. The arrayed corpse would be carried on a bier to the church and burial ground. The deceased could have instructed in his or her will to distribute wealth and to orchestrate the manner in which he or she should be mourned by their community. Religious offices could be performed a specified number of times to limit the soul's time in purgatory, while reminding the living of their ongoing responsibilities to the dead.² Widows bore the public burden of mourning on their bodies daily; their appearance expressed their relationship to absent men, their visual identity spoke of rupture and of memory. Widows were enjoined either to remain behind in perpetual ritualistic mourning, raising their children or joining charitable *commese* or, if possible, to remarry. A discussion of the sartorial, economic and familial effects this had on women's identities, therefore, concludes the chapter.

Grief and Consolation

Death due to old age was a rare event in fifteenth-century Florence, owing in great part to plagues, wars, fevers, accidents, infections, executions and complications during childbirth. For Christians, dying was the most significant transitional moment of the soul. In the context of Renaissance Florence, that painful yet spiritual transition was the finale of a lifetime of learned, embodied rituals. Priests gave sermons on the enactment of a good death, suggesting that dying people should confess their sins, comfort family members, suppress their pain and pay reverence to the Holy Family. Images of the Crucifixion played an important role in the ritualistic experience of dying and in grieving. The rhetoric of the good death provided a comforting framework for the grief-stricken seeking to honour their deceased. Further rhetorical devices utilised in letters of condolence involved describing not

² Andrew Spicer, 1997. "'Rest of their Bones': Fear of Death and Reformed Burial Practices." In *Fear in Early Modern Society*, edited by William G. Naphy and Penny Roberts, 167 - 183. Manchester: Manchester University Press, p. 167.

only the death, but the beauty of the corpse (echoing the belief that beauty was a true manifestation of virtue). Many texts remain that reflect on the loss of wives (predominantly to childbirth) and sons (usually to disease). This mode of condolence, however, does not seem to have extended to mourning unmarried daughters. Reflections on the lives of women reinforced the values by which a woman's worth was measured, including beauty, virtue, familial reputation, fecundity and charity. By contrast, reflections on the deaths of sons focused on their learning, their religious aptitude and their potential. Accounts of observing death and grieving exemplify the interconnectedness of spiritual belief, embodied ritual and stylised memories to manage grief.

The spiritual landscape of the fifteenth century, built on rituals and promises of divine beauty and spiritual rewards, was internalised by Christians and culminated in the foundation of condolence rhetoric utilised across the Italian states during times of personal tragedy. This is demonstrated in a 1447 letter from Francesco Barbaro to his cloistered daughter Costanza, informing her of the death of her cousin Lucina. Barbaro used gendered, hagiographic motifs as he recounted the circumstances of Lucina's brave death. She consoled her despairing husband in a way that "showed that virtue should be measured not by sex but by loftiness of soul." Throughout his letter Barbaro expressed the idea that Lucina's spiritual beauty was manifest in the appearance and scent of her corpse, reinforcing the idea that beauty resulted from virtue. He wrote that "while still alive she seemed to be a ghost of a breathing corpse and was unbelievably deformed" but, having passed away:

There was no pallor, no ugliness in her face, no gauntness or meanness or horror [...] her face acquired a certain grace and not unpleasing seriousness, so that she looked lovely and not ugly [...] Moreover, without the help of any medical art all the wounds of her body were [healed] so suddenly [...] and in the place of feter such a sweet fragrance followed.

Barbaro interpreted this miracle as evidence that humility on earth received divine reward in Heaven. He noted that Lucina "had surrendered affectation of dress" and so was "glorified after her death (all due to the cleanness of her soul). Thus the nobility of her mind was clothed, so to speak, in splendid garb." Having assured Costanza of the fate of her cousin's soul, Barbaro drew the moral that they should "balance against the brief span of this life eternal memory and so compose ourselves that we learn to live by dying well and to die by

living well.”³ This account focuses on ritual and on mysticism, particularly regarding the Christian promise of eternal life and spiritual reward, which was appropriate in a letter to a nun.

However, within a secular setting, death allowed people to reflect not only on an eternal spiritual future, but also on the values of the life lived and the memories maintained. Around 1433 Leonardo Bruni wrote a letter of condolence to Nicola di Vieri de’ Medici on the death of his mother, Bice di Pazzino Strozzi. In eulogising Strozzi, Bruni clearly outlined how the success of a female life was measured, stating:

The excellences of a woman's life are reckoned to be (unless I am mistaken) good family, a good appearance, modesty, fertility, children, riches, and above all virtue and a good name. I would add to these also good health and long life, for even the higher excellences are tarnished by shattered health and suffering, and no estimable perfection can be discovered in a short life.[...] Which, indeed, did she not possess abundantly?⁴

Extrapolating on Strozzi’s excellences, Bruni flattered Nicola by highlighting her high lineage. He spoke of Strozzi’s “distinguished and noble” appearance and expressed his philosophical position that:

I for my part hold the opinion of the Academics and Peripatetics, who while condemning as pretence and affection a false belief in one’s appearance, nevertheless thought that a genuine attractiveness given by nature should be gratefully received and numbered among human excellences. I may not praise particularly in this woman her wit and beauty, but rather a certain inborn distinction and venerable dignity.

Bruni discussed her virtue, achievements as a wife and her maintenance of a good reputation while managing her husband’s affairs as a widow:

A unique and singular example of this virtue [modesty] married to a most fortunate man [and] bore him numerous progeny [...] Yet the gifts most visible in this woman were the gifts of her mind: her marvellous uprightness, [...] her charity toward her own, her affection to all [...] whose like, I can honestly affirm, I have found in no other woman! The greatness of her prudence can be estimated from the way she governed a very large household, a large crowd of clients, a vast and diversified business enterprise for more than thirty years after the death of her husband.⁵

³ Francesco Barbaro as translated in: King and Rabil, pp. 108- 111.

⁴ Bruni, p. 337.

⁵ Bruni, p. 338.

The letter then reached an unusual point in the Christian consolatory tradition because Bruni considered views of the afterlife, as alternatives to the contemporary collective imagination of judgement, heaven and hell. He suggested that “either the senses are all of them straightway extinguished and there supervenes a rest and a peace very like a kind of uninterrupted sleep” or “the souls of men are immortal.” He concluded that in all likelihood “having cast off these mortal shadows – she contemplates in pure intuition the spectacle of divinity, and has pity on our weakness, realizing that only now is she truly alive.”⁶

In another example of humanist reflection on the transcendent nature of the deceased’s soul, in 1473 Marsilio Ficino offered Gismondo della Stufa a letter of consolation for his wife Albiera’s death, saying:

If each of us, essentially, is that which is greatest within us, which always remains the same and by which we understand ourselves, then certainly the soul is the man himself and the body but his shadow. [...] the further she is from that misshapen shadow the more beautiful will you find her [...] and as she is far more lovely in her Creator's form than in her own, so you will embrace her there with far more joy.⁷

Within this reasoning the female soul is finally given precedence over her body but even her soul is spoken of in terms of exterior beauty and marital fidelity, as she is imagined awaiting her husband’s embrace in heaven. This further reinforced the idea that there would be continuity from the hierarchical community of earth in heaven. This belief justified the actively prayerful maintenance of relationships with the deceased. Letters of condolence for the death of women evidently offered writers the opportunity to develop their philosophies of the relationship between the external, ritualised and social body with the eternal soul. Such discussions, as evidenced by the Ficino quote above, often distance themselves from reflections on the lives of the specific women being mourned in order to develop their philosophical rhetoric.

Comparing the values attributed to deceased women and boys reveals diverse gendered expectations but also indicates consistent lines of rhetoric regarding the enactment of a good death and surety of heaven. While a deceased woman’s worth was measured through her virtue, a deceased son’s worth was measured through his learning and potential.

⁶ Bruni, pp. 321 & 338-9.

⁷ Ficino, *Letter 15*, (1978), pp.54-55.

Furthermore, the tone of consolatory letters for sons suggests the crippling disappointment and apparently irrational despair of the grieving father, a tone which is rarely taken in reflections on women's lives. Deaths of youthful sons increased in plague years as the disease proved particularly fatal for children. Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber have shown that of the 874 plague deaths in 1430, 604 were children or elderly dependents.⁸ On 14 June 1484 Luca Landucci recorded that "the plague started again, this morning one of the Brogiotti buried three children who suddenly died of the disease, two girls and a boy."⁹ The previous chapter outlined the importance and honour accorded to the birth of a son. A son represented the ongoing legacy of the father into the next generation and so the death of a son had particular implications for the social and economic hopes of the family. The rhetoric of parental grief at the loss of a son maintains certain themes evident in previously discussed examples, including the admiration for a well-enacted good death and reflections on the certainty of the deceased's soul reaching heaven.

Consolatory letters usually encouraged the bereaved to conquer their grief through Christian reasoning. In 1390, Florentine humanist Coluccio Salutati wrote a letter of condolence to the Lucchese chancellor Antonio da Cortona, whose son had died:

Return with your whole mind to your Creator; [...] if you will thus elevate your mind, that you will be ashamed to have grieved in whatever manner concerning your infirmity or your wife's sickness or the death of your son [...] since he departed from his carnal to his spiritual father and was carried from corruptible to eternal things.¹⁰

Salutati thereby directed Antonio to think beyond his own life and reminded him that his son was in heaven and to grieve for a soul in heaven was absurd, selfish, shameful and even "wicked".¹¹

Accounts of mourning and letters of condolence indicate that people drew comfort from internalised examples of consolation from scripture, hagiographies and from ancient stoicism. Jesus' humanity and suffering came to the fore in these instances as a direct source of spiritual empathy. People's recent experience of loss and pain informed or renewed their

⁸ Herlihy & Klapisch-Zuber, p. 275.

⁹ Landucci, p. 47 "*E a di 14 di giugno 1484, la moria ci ricomincio; e in questa mattina sotterro, uno de' Brogiotti, 3 figliuoli a un tratto, di morbo, due femine e un maschio.*" [my translation].

¹⁰ McClure, p. 83.

¹¹ For an extensive comparative discussion of humanists' approach to mourning the death of a son see: McClure, pp 93- 115.

appreciation of the suffering they understood Jesus to have experienced. The Church reminded people of their continuing duty of prayer to aid the souls of the departed, to escape purgatory and gain admission into heaven. Visions of eternity located near cemeteries helped to comfort the mourner for the sake of the deceased and to rekindle the mourner's fear for their own soul in the face of such a personal reminder of mortality.¹²

Giovanni Morelli's *Ricordi* includes a heart-wrenching account of the way he spent a night in physical and contemplative prayer to mark the first anniversary of his son Alberto's death in 1406. Morelli described grief as pain in all his senses, like "a thousand spears piercing my soul along with my body as if crucified."¹³ He had previously described the maturity with which his child experienced his death, including recommending his soul to God and embracing a painting of the *Crucified Christ* which was brought to comfort him in his illness. One year later, Morelli likewise turned to the devotional painting for comfort. He humbled himself before the image both physically and mentally, by kneeling before it with bare knees, no shirt, a halter around his neck and nothing covering his bowed head, and recalled his sins. Thus prepared, he "considered the hard, bitter and dark passion of Jesus Christ Crucified" and, concentrating on the mercy encapsulated in Jesus' death, Morelli tells: "my heart and all my senses turned to tenderness and my eyes bathed my face in tears."¹⁴ He then commenced reciting memorised psalms and prayers, each of which he contemplated in relation to his son's soul. Morelli wrote that the comfort he experienced was as though Jesus' "angelic voice" had spoken, through the image, saying that he had heard and accepted the prayers.¹⁵

Moving deeper into a hallucinatory state, "with the said words resonating in my mind" Morelli answered God and requested that He call Alberto's soul out of purgatory to Himself. In making his request Morelli continued to recite the *Gospel of the Annunciation* and to muse on the comfort Mary and the Apostles had at seeing Christ's resurrected body, the

¹² For instance Andrea di Bonaiuto's *The Militant and Triumphant Church* (Figure 3) and Buonamico Buffalmacco's *Triumph of Death* (Figure 5)

¹³ Morelli, p. 476 "... tutti i miei sensi di dolore affitti, mi pareva tra mille punte di spiedi l'anima mia col corpo essere crociata." [my translation].

¹⁴ Morelli, p.477 "E appresso, considerando con quanta dura, acerba e scura passione Yeso Cristo crocifisso, la cui figura ragguardava, avea dall'eternali pene ricomperato, non patia miei occhi Lui con durezza ragguardare, ma, credo per dono di pietà per Lui a me conceduta, il cuore e tutti i miei sensi rimossi a somma tnerezza, per li miei occhi il viso di lagrime di bagnava." [my translation].

¹⁵ Morelli, pp. 478-479.

precursor for all humanity. He then calmed himself by gazing at the painting and silently praying until his eye settled on Mary and he was struck by a new appreciation for her as a bereaved parent. With renewed bouts of tears, he thought about Mary witnessing the execution of her son and, in musing thus, Morelli felt ashamed for his own grief. Once his tears subsided, he prayed aloud for her mercy. He then kissed the painting where Alberto had kissed it.¹⁶ Following the same formula as he had used with Mary, he recited the *Gospel of St. John*, fixed his eyes on the image of St. John and addressed further prayers to him. Morelli used the painting as a prompt to focus his stylistic penitential grief, he recited memorised biblical passages and prayers, in order to dutifully appeal for the safe delivery of Alberto's soul into heaven. As he contemplated the painting, telling the stories of the pictured figures to himself, he developed a new affinity with the human experiences of its subjects.

Morelli's account of his physical ritual, prayer and actively engaged memory provides support for the theory of "emotional practices" whereby emotions are generated in culturally and historically specific ways.¹⁷ However, the degree to which Morelli's account can be understood as typical in fifteenth-century Florence has been subject to debate. George McClure's study of Renaissance grief and consolation argues that within the body of fifteenth-century reflections on paternal grief, Morelli's account represents a particularly 'medieval' spirituality which opposed the way of thinking championed by his humanist contemporaries, who attempted to come to terms with their grief through intellectual means, musing on philosophy and theology rather than engaging in ritual behaviours and visions.¹⁸ Trexler acknowledges that such embodied grief usually took place in public churches, making Morelli's account of private ritualised grief unique. However, he notes that there is literary foundation for such domestic devotions in the advice offered by contemporary preachers, usually for women.¹⁹ St Antoninus' *Opera a ben Vivere* promotes the same pattern of viewing an image of the crucifixion to spark empathetic contemplation both of Jesus' and Mary's suffering. Contemplation could lead to spiritual comprehension

¹⁶ Morelli, pp. 479-487.

¹⁷ See Scheer, pp. 209-210.

¹⁸ McClure, pp. 113-114.

¹⁹ Trexler (1980), p. 160.

which would impress itself into the viewer's sense of self.²⁰ Elizabeth Bailey notes that Morelli was well educated, was influenced by classical and medieval literature, and he befriended and followed the teachings of both Giovanni Dominici and Archbishop Antonino. This would situate him squarely in the community of religious merchants keen to enact household devotions that worked through the body's senses, emotions and memories.²¹ This ritualistic and spiritual approach to grief did share a common purpose with the newer elite humanist approach in that they both sought to overcome and even utilise grief (and the signs of grief in the body) to achieve a more informed understanding of the divine. However, the humanist movement showed diminishing respect for references to ecstatic experiences and visions. Nevertheless this figurative approach to spiritual and emotional expression evidently continued within broader society.

Embodied rituals of grief do contrast sharply with the elite humanist mode of performing grief through literature. By the mid-fifteenth century the grief-struck elite commissioned treatises on condolence to compile into books through which they could learn, come to terms with their emotions, and honour their lost relatives. For instance, on the death of her husband Benedetto Ciciaporci, the fifteenth-century widow Mona Ghostantia commissioned a book of consolation for herself and her daughter, later bequeathed to the next generation of female kin, made up of both religious and secular texts relating to grief and other defining moments in a woman's life, including marriage.²²

Similarly in 1461 the prominent Venetian female humanist Isotta Nogarola contributed to a book of condolences commissioned by Jacopo Antonio Marcello on the death of his son Valerio.²³ Nogarola noted "we are dealing with two spheres – the mind and the emotions." She wrote of pre-Christian fathers who did not allow grief at the news of their sons' deaths to take precedence over their religious duties.²⁴ Nogarola compared them to "colossal marble statues" and contrasted them with Jesus' emotion, flesh and tears, who "mourned

²⁰ This argument, in relation to the *Opera a ben vivere* is made in: Flanigan, Theresa. 2014. "Art, Memory, and the Cultivation of Virtue: The Ethical Function of Images in Antoninus's *Opera a ben vivere*." *Gesta* (The University of Chicago Press on behalf of the International Center of Medieval Art) 53 (2): 175-195, p, 190.

²¹ Bailey, p. 985.

²² Grendler, (1991), p. 95.

²³ See: Margaret L. King, 1994. *The Death of the Child Valerio Marcello*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

²⁴ Nogarola, pp. 192-3.

over the death of his friend Lazarus.”²⁵ Nogarola thus legitimised an emotional response to death and elevated the Bible above ancient philosophy. Nogarola recalled Valerio’s brave death in which he:

Consoled you, his father, urging you not to want to mourn him or to put on the mourning that women wear since Valerio knew with divine inspiration that mourning and lamentation are suitable for weak women, not for strong and noble-hearted men.²⁶

Nogarola’s account typically utilises rhetoric for condolence. Valerio, Morelli’s Alberto and Barbaro’s Lucina, had ‘good deaths’ as they comforted those who surrounded and blessed them.²⁷ Nogarola’s letter also confirms that excessive grief was read as womanly behaviour. Mourning attire reveals how tightly sartorially-aided displays of emotion were conceptually tied to femininity.

The rhetoric associated with letters of consolation demonstrates the importance of remembered narratives, particularly those of ideal deaths and hagiographies, as a means through which people sought to manage their emotions. Sermons, hagiographies and paintings of the crucifixion provided auditory, literary and visual mediums through which common ideas could be expressed and learned. These ideas included an awareness that death was an essential component of the human condition; however, due to the suffering of Christ, Christians could hope for an eternal life. This hope relied on the devotion one exhibited in life. Humanists coupled these beliefs with ancient philosophy and exempla to come to terms with the human condition. Humanists’ views on grief and eternity are expressed through letters of condolence. The majority of extant letters are dedicated to the memories of wives and mothers (who had contributed to the family lineage and so were women worthy of masculine sorrow) or young promising sons. Foundational social values became the template by which people reflected on the lives, accomplishments and hopes of heaven, of the deceased. In effect, this practice highlighted the importance attributed to women’s beauty, modest demeanour, charitable behaviour, marital loyalty and Christian charity. However the ritual and thoughts surrounding death extended beyond internal

²⁵ Nogarola, p.194.

²⁶ Nogarola p.197.

²⁷ Morelli’s description of Alberto’s ‘good death’ is on pp. 455-459.

emotion translated into words of consolation; the memory of the deceased would also be carried on the bodies of the grieving, who would engage in gendered modes of mourning.

Mourning Attire and Funerary Display

Funerary display, including the use of mourning attire, formed an important part of families' social and spiritual identities. Dressing widows in mourning attire provided another opportunity to remember men and honour the family by adorning the bodies of dependent women. For instance, in 1380 Valorino Ciurianni dressed himself, a servant and his dead father's corpse but spent double the cost of those three outfits on the one mourning ensemble for his father's widow.²⁸ On a social level, this practice accorded with the broader association between women's adorned bodies, family memory and public honour. However, from a civic perspective, the expense relating to funerals diminished the city's resources and impoverished the poor for the sake of the dead. As a result Florentine sumptuary laws restricted the expense, behaviour and amount of luxury textiles which might be used at a funeral.

Funerary rituals reinforced ideas about gendered spaces and ability to control emotion and its physical manifestations. In keeping with fifteenth-century humanists' fascination with dignified and noble behaviour, men's emotional restraint was performed in public, outside the house of the deceased, where they gathered and sombrely conversed in dark garb. Women were enjoined to remain in the house of the deceased where they were expected to weep, wail, and tear at their hair and clothes.²⁹ Reserved men guarded hysterical women.

Francesco Petrarca, in his *How a Ruler Ought to Govern his State* (1346) notes the importance of guarded emotion as a sign of nobility and moral learning. He states:

I do not know whether it is because of human nature or from some long-standing custom that at the death of our close friends and relatives we can scarcely contain our grief and tears, and that our funeral services are often attended by wailings and lamentations.³⁰

²⁸ Strocchia, (1992), p. 25.

²⁹ Tomas, p. 315 and Strocchia, (1992), p. 173.

³⁰ Petrarca, (1978), p. 77.

Petrarca then argued that “plebs are more apt to show their emotions and less likely to be moved by what is proper.”³¹ He discussed the customs which had developed around funerals which demonstrated moral laxity through its sensory disturbance, saying:

Some old dowager dies, and they carry her body into the streets and through the public squares accompanied by loud and indecent wailing [...] when the funeral cortege finally gets to the church [...] and at the very spot where there ought to be hymns to Christ or devoted prayers for the soul of the deceased in a subdued voice or even silence, the walls resound with the lamentations of the mourners and the holy altars shake with the wailing of women.³²

Petrarca suggests that this disregard for the silence appropriate to the church is a moral shortcoming resulting from learned social customs and so advocates for an alternate custom; “that wailing women should not be permitted to step outside their homes.”³³ There were, therefore, varying expectations and judgments of the manner in which people expressed their grief. Women and peasants were expected to have less decorum when managing the visible signs of their grief. However, appreciating the cultural basis of the behaviour did not lead to acceptance of the behaviour. The way one expressed grief, then, could be read (by the educated upper-class) as a measure of one’s nobility and learned comportment.

During prosperous times the wealthy could specify, through their wills, how much money should be spent on their funeral, how many masses should be sung, where they wanted to be buried, how they wanted their bodies dressed and what they wanted various members of their grieving families to wear.³⁴ This practice allowed people to plan for final acts of charity to benefit their soul, and to honour their families. In the introduction to *Decameron*, Boccaccio noted (utilising rhetoric from ancient accounts of epidemics) that in usual circumstances, on the day of the funeral female relatives and neighbours gathered to mourn in the house of the deceased while male relatives, neighbours and clergy gathered outside the house. The dead man was then carried on the shoulders of his peers in a public, candle-lit procession to the church and burial-ground of the deceased’s choosing. However:

³¹ Petrarca, (1978), p. 77.

³² Petrarca, (1978), p. 78.

³³ Petrarca, (1978), p. 78.

³⁴ Syson and Thornton, p. 34, and see Cohn, Samuel K. 1999. “Piety and Religious Practice in the Rural Dependencies of Renaissance Florence.” *English Historical Review* (Oxford University Press) 1121-1142, p. 1135.

With the ferocity of pestilence all or most [funerary practices] ceased, and new ones took their place. So that not only did people die without many women around them, but many left this life without any witnesses and very few were bestowed with the lamentations and bitter tears of their relatives. [...] sparse were they whose bodies were accompanied [...] by neighbours, loved ones or citizens, but were carried by insignificant folk who called themselves gravediggers who did the office for hire and took the coffin hastily, not to the church the deceased had selected, but to the nearest one.³⁵

Following another severe wave of plague, in June 1363 Florence introduced a new sumptuary legislation to restrict funerary display. The articles of this law took account of the social status of the deceased person, for instance it disallowed silk to be draped over the coffin of anyone other than knights, judges, doctors of civil or cannon law or physicians. These distinctions made the social hierarchy more tangible, while it limited the pressure people of lesser means may otherwise have felt to put on an ostentatious display. The commune thereby limited superfluous expenses and prevented those in the funerary and burial business from taking advantage of the influx of customers resulting from the plague.³⁶ Plague temporarily brought drastic changes to funerary customs, the significance of which becomes clearer in light of the society's customary imperative for sumptuous public recognition of the dead.

The bodies of dignitaries, including the Medici, were displayed at various points throughout the city for people to pay their respects.³⁷ This encouraged onlookers to marvel at the great expense that had gone into dressing the corpse and, therefore, the wealth which the family could afford to place forever in the tomb. This processional display caused competition between important families who defined and broadened their sphere of influence through the locations at which they displayed bodies. This led to further legal constraints, reiterated

³⁵ Boccaccio, (1822), vol. 1 intro, pp. 29-30 *"Le quali cose, poiche a montar comincio la ferocita della pistolenza, o in tutto o in maggior parte quai cessarono, et alter nuove in loro luogo ne sopravvennero. Percio che non solamente senza aver molte donne da torno morivan le genti ma assai n'erano di quelli che di questa vita senza testimonio trapassavano, e pochiasimi erano coloro, a' quali l pietosi pianti e l'amare lagrime de'suoi congiunti fossero concesute; anzi in luogo di quelle s'usavano per li piu risa e motti e festeggiar compagnevole: la quale usanza le donne, in gran parte posposta la donnesca pietà, per salute di loro avevano ottimamente appresa. Et erano radi coloro, l corpo de' quali fosser piu che da un diece o dodici de; suoi vicini alla Chiesa accompagnati; de' quali non gli orrevoli e cari cittadini, ma una maniera di beccamorti sopravvenuti di minuta gente, che chiamar si facevari becchini, la quale questi servigi prezzolata faceva, sottentravano alla bara, e quella con frettolosi passi, non a quella Chiesa che esso aveva anzi la morte dispose, ma alla piu vicina le piu volte il portavano dietro a quattro o sei cherici con poco lome, e tal fiata senza alcuno:..."* [my translation].

³⁶ Rainey, pp. 209-210.

³⁷ Crum & Paoletti, p. 280, also see: Strocchia, p. 20.

in the late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth century, to only display the body in front of its home prior to procession, requiem mass and burial.³⁸

The displayed corpses, arrayed in fine adornments, exquisite silken textiles, embroidered with family insignia, and glittering belts and gems, starkly contrasted with the darkly adorned mourners who surrounded the coffin on the body's final procession from his or her former home to the hallowed grave. As they had lived their lives, deceased wives' bodies, paraded through the streets to their final resting place, became a resplendent expression of familial honour.³⁹

In contrast with the pomp and excellence in which wives' corpses were displayed by their husbands, widows were buried in the humble guise of their final condition.⁴⁰ Laws specifically outlined the kinds of material and garments in which the corpse could be buried. However, people of any station could request to be buried in a religious habit, favouring their spiritual identity above their social one.⁴¹ Five popes from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries offered indulgences to those who showed reverence to the monk's habit by dying, being buried in or, as little as kissing the garments.⁴² The Christian mind closely tied the concept of putting on clothes to 'putting on' virtue or emotion. Therefore, people adopted the habit when they wished to prepare their souls for their approaching death. For instance in 1403:

Suor Maruza Bonxi the mother of Suor Franceshina da Moal [...] becoming infirm and near death, out of respect for her daughter she was brought here and vested in our habit and lived 22 days very piously.⁴³

Choosing to die and be buried in this attire acted as a final public statement of one's spiritual identity, above and beyond one's marital identity and economic means, as well as limiting the time one anticipated spending in purgatory.

³⁸ Strocchia, (1992), p.20.

³⁹ Strocchia, (1992), pp. 38-40.

⁴⁰ King, (1991), p. 52.

⁴¹ Strocchia, (1992), pp. 41-42.

⁴² Warr, (2010), p 59.

⁴³ Rogers & Tignali, p. 213, citing the original text from Riccoboni, Bartolomea, *Cronaca del Corpus Domini and Necrologio del Corpus Domini*, in *Dominici, Giovanni, Lettere spirituali*, ed. <-T. Casella and G. Pozzi (Freiburg, 1969) pp. 299, 302, 327-8.

For the living, the honourable performance of the funerary ritual was so important that from the years 1384 to 1392 the Florentine commune sold at least 233 exemptions from sumptuary legislation related to funerary display.⁴⁴ A 1377 law allowed for the sons of a deceased man to choose their own mourning attire for their father's funeral.⁴⁵ Toward the end of the fifteenth century, male descendants of deceased men began to dress in even more extravagant mourning garments than women were permitted to wear.⁴⁶ The attire of respectable widows reached such an excess in the early decades of the fifteenth century that, like wedding jewellery or talismans for conception, it could be hired, from a purveyor of funeral goods.⁴⁷ A 1473 law defined three degrees of mourning attire, including deep mourning, expressed through black embroidered garments, plain black, and finally, dark colours (usually brown), and specified who was entitled to dress in each of these ways and how long they were permitted to do so.⁴⁸ By standardising the bounds for acceptable mourning attire the commune contributed to the sartorial demarcation of social and familial hierarchies at large. However, they also created a legal process to allow wealthy families to purchase exemptions and thereby contribute to their city's wealth while expressing their pride and respect for the dead.

People were attuned to the diverse meanings expressed by different grades of colour and textile and would utilise them to express the degree of their emotional state in balance with their social stature. Just as status, relationship to the deceased, and depth of sorrow could be expressed through the difference between black or dark brown attire, further distinction could be made through the type of fabric used. For instance, when praying for his dying son Valerio's recovery, Jacopo Antonio Marcello made a vow, addressing his son, saying "If you recover [...] we shall both put on a mourning habit; and you shall wear one of silk for a year, but I of wool, and for my whole life."⁴⁹ On one level, mourning attire simply expressed withdrawal from the usual ostentatious distinctions of society and so it could be used as a

⁴⁴ Kovesi, p. 47.

⁴⁵ Rainey, p. 244.

⁴⁶ Strocchia, (1992), p.215.

⁴⁷ Strocchia, (1992), p.25.

⁴⁸ Frick,(2002) p.90, & Strocchia, (1992), p. 10.

⁴⁹ This text was originally recorded in two letters of condolence for Marcello, one by Filelfo and the other Sagundino, it is quoted above as quoted in King (1994), p. 20. King included the original Latin for both records, in her notes, the one by Filelfo reads: "*Meum autem votum, Valeri mi suavissime, illud est, ut ego una texum si convalueris, utar fusca veste, verum tu serica et in annum, at ego lanea idque in omnem vitam.*" King (1994), p. 349.

means of sartorially signifying not only grief but also indebtedness to God. On a tactile as well as an economic level, silk indicated pleasure in the senses and social importance, whereas wool was coarser, cheaper and would have a more profound effect on the way society would interpret the conviction of the wearer, particularly if the wearer was wealthy and socially significant. Valerio chastised his father on these very grounds, insisting that a man of his noble stature should not debase himself and his role by dressing so humbly.⁵⁰

Making a distinct sartorial transition from luxurious nobility to humble mourning was far more acceptable for women. While the letters discussed in this chapter so far relate to the emotional, intellectual and social aspects of grieving, Alessandra Strozzi's letters provide insight into the financial side of mourning. Because her son Filippo lived in exile, Alessandra had to use letters to articulate the prudent and practical aspects of familial situations, which might normally be discussed privately and orally. In early September 1459, Alessandra wrote to Filippo about the necessary costs incurred by herself and her daughters to outfit themselves in mourning garb for the death of her youngest son Matteo. She wrote:

I am here with these two inconsolable daughters, dressed in mourning for the death of their brother. Because I did not yet have the cloth to make myself a cloak, I have got it now, and this will I pay myself. It is thirteen *braccia* of cloth to make each of them, it costs four and a quarter florins in cash per *canna* [three meters], in all six and a half *canna*. I have paid this through Matteo di Giorgio, and he will notify you of it.⁵¹

It was a matter of pride, evident even in the fourteenth century, for mothers and sisters to purchase their own mourning attire as Alessandra did, indicating their own status, economic ability and personal grief.⁵²

Alessandra's letter shows that, in the latter half of the fifteenth century, married sisters still dressed in mourning for their brothers. By contrast, men would only dress in mourning for other men, including their brothers, but would not change their appearance to honour the

⁵⁰ King (1994), p. 20.

⁵¹ Strozzi, "Lettera Diciassettesima, Alessandra to Filippo degli Strozzi in Naples, 6 Settembre, 1459", pp. 181-182 "*Io di qua, con queste due esconsolate figliuole, della morte del lor fratello ci siano vestite: e perch'io non avevo ancora levato el panno per farmi el mantello, l'ho fatto levare ora; e questo paghero io. E braccia tredici di panno do per una di loro; che costa, a danari contanti, fiorini quattro e un quarto la canna; che sono [181] in tutto canne sei e mezzo. Questo faro pagare a Matteo di Giorgio, e da lui ne sara avvisato.*" [my translation].

⁵² For further discussion and examples of the significance accorded to women financially contributing to mourning garb see: Strocchia, (1992), p. 24.

memory of their sisters.⁵³ From 1473, sumptuary legislation dictated that only one woman could dress in deep mourning for a female relative and preference went to the dead woman's eldest brother's wife rather than her biological sister.⁵⁴ This preference meant that the honourable sign of mourning was reserved for the dead woman's patriarchal household and that once a woman was married into a certain kinship group her sartorial identity remained loyal to her marital family. In effect, this limited women's ability to alter their appearance for the sake of other women, and so increased the visual prominence accorded to remembering men.

Hierarchies of society, gender, age and kinship informed the manner in which the living sartorially and ritually expressed their memory of the dead. Far greater reverence was accorded to the memory of men than women. Funerary practices allowed the body to be displayed one last time as a testament to their families' honour. Grief gave men the opportunity to exhibit their stoic self-control whereas women took on the greatest burden of physical and sartorial grief. Sumptuary laws and local customs limited the number of people who could mourn, the length of time they should reasonably mourn and the colours and types of fabric they could acceptably use to do so. Unlike the temporary expressions of sorrow typical of a deceased person's kin, when a woman became a widow her sartorial and social identity was immediately, and for the most part, permanently altered and her adorned body would forever have to identify her as a living monument to her dead husband.

Widows

The life of a widow took on many guises and so when women were forced to make the transition from their identities as wives to that of widows they faced, perhaps, more options than they had ever had before. The paths widows took would depend on a number of factors including their age, their economic security, pressures from both their natal and marital families, their devotion to their children and their devotion to God. Women's adornment and comportment from this point of their lives onward would depend on which of these factors dominated their new identities. A relatively large percentage of the Florentine population of the fifteenth century were widows, making it important that

⁵³ Strocchia, (1992), p.26.

⁵⁴ Frick, (2002) p.90.

widows had legitimate avenues to contribute to their society. Klapisch-Zuber's study revealed that in that in 1427 25% of the Florentine population were living as widows, while only 4% were widowers. One of the main reasons for this disparity was the age gap between spouses and the limitations on female remarriage. Men up to about sixty years old were able to remarry if their spouse died whereas a widow over the age of forty (by which age 10% of women were widowed) would be exceedingly unlikely to remarry.⁵⁵ Elderly widows could participate in charitable institutions, join convents, or offer pre-mortem gifts (usually their dowry) to their married children under the proviso that the families house and care for them in their old age.⁵⁶ However, for a young widow, following the initial period of mourning, her future living arrangements, behaviour and appearance pivoted on the question of whether or not she would remarry.

As a widow herself, Christine de Pizan's advice to elite women makes explicit the embodied social responsibility widows had to honour their husband's memory. She wrote that:

A widow will grieve and cry for her spouse, as good faith dictates. After the burial service she will follow custom requirements and withdraw for a time in dim light, in piteous and mournful costume and headdress, ever mindful of her lord's soul, she will pray and will have prayers said devoutly, and masses. She will organize services, alms offerings and obligations, and will recommend his memory to all devout people, requesting their prayers.⁵⁷

On the death of her husband (c.1487), female humanist Laura Cereta behaved similarly to the ideal outlined by Christine. She grieved and retreated from the city and public view. Like Christine, Cereta took the opportunity of her sudden independence from direct male guardianship to write. This is reflective of a common culture of expectations relating to widows' decorum spanning across the upper echelons of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century educated society. Similarly to Isotta Nogarola and the male authors discussed earlier in the chapter, Cereta sought to overcome her grief through humanist reasoning. About six months after her husband's death Cereta wrote a letter to Augustinus Aemilius condemning female ornamentation in which she recounted her own experience of transition and grief:

Dying myself, I saw him half dead, I cheered him when he seemed to revive, I wept over him when he died, I fell lifeless on his dead body, and the fatal house

⁵⁵ Klapisch-Zuber (1985), p.120 and Herlihy & Klapisch-Zuber, p. 217.

⁵⁶ Kirshner (1991), p. 200.

⁵⁷ Pizan, (1989), p. 119.

which awaited me for marriage admitted me to lamentation. Thus one, and that abominable year, saw me a girl, bride, widow and pauper.⁵⁸

Cereta's statement that she died with her husband accords with the idealised moralists' views on widowhood. Bernardino of Siena advised widows to consider their adornments and their gaze as buried with their husbands.⁵⁹ The social insistence that widows adorn their bodies in dark garb, signalling withdrawal from the concerns of the living, forced the woman's visual identity to maintain its dependence on her absent husband.

Young widows could face conflicting pressures to either remain a widow or to remarry. By insisting their widowed daughters or sisters remarry, widows' natal families asserted their ownership of the women, in competition with the widows' partially severed relationship with their marital families.⁶⁰ For the widow, remarriage would mean reclaiming her dowry from her former husband's family and leaving any children she had by him to be raised by their paternal relatives. The legal and cultural system discouraged widowed mothers from taking their children from their deceased husband's household and introducing them into another man's home. As a result, the children of deceased fathers made villains of their young mothers for abandoning them when they surrendered to the pressure or desire to remarry.

If women remained with their children they might have greater economic independence. Reclaiming a dowry, or acting as the head of a household were also dangerous for an unmarried woman because women were never legally independent, or citizens, so they needed male guardians to defend them. Young attractive women who remained widows had no legitimate sexual outlet or opportunity to have other children. They had no husband to answer to but continued to wield the ability to shame both their natal and nuptial families, which drew the damning scrutiny and suspicion of their community.⁶¹ Advice books, including Francesco Barberino's *Reggimento e Costumi di Donna* (c.1314-1316), advised widowed women not to speak with men, to dedicate themselves to their children's

⁵⁸ Cereta, as quoted in: King & Rabil, p.78.

⁵⁹ King, (1991), p. 60.

⁶⁰ Klapisch-Zuber (1985), p. 123.

⁶¹ For further discussion of Humanist distrust of unmarried women's 'discreet sexual liberty' see: Samuel K. Cohn Jr., *Women in the Streets*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1996.

education and (ominously) to lock their doors early at night and unlock them late in the morning.⁶²

In the late-fourteenth century, it was customary for young widows to return to their natal home once the funerary rituals for their husbands had been completed.⁶³ This custom, however, suffered some resistance in the next generations from the men who had been raised as orphans because their mother had left as soon as their father had passed away. Morelli's father died when he was a child and his mother remarried. Morelli consequently viewed the wife as the member of another man's family, necessary for the creation of sons, but not to be trusted to raise her husband's children or manage his household.⁶⁴ Historians suggest that Morelli's view of women within the family was tarnished by his resentment of his mother's perceived abandonment, a common complaint among Florentine men. Morelli recognised that his situation was common.⁶⁵ He therefore wrote his *Ricordi* to advise his descendants on how to take care of themselves if they became orphaned.

Preparing his imagined reader for marriage, Morelli suggested that husbands make provisions for their wives' widowhood and their children's fate, saying lest "God call you in that time when your family remains small and your lady is young, think and equally examine if your lady is principally faithful and if she brought you love the way a good woman should." He suggests that "if she has love for you and her sons, and if she has a temperate nature that entering the condition you think she may remain a widow" meaning she was honest, modest, capable and intelligent, the husband should make her the executor of his will and affairs.⁶⁶ As previously noted, Bruni reflected on Bice Strozzi's successful thirty-year career

⁶² King, Cathrine. 1995. "Women as Patrons: Nuns, Widows and Rulers" in *Siena, Florence and Padua: Art, Society and Religion 1280-1400*, Volume II: Case Studies, edited by Diana Norman, 243-266, New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 244.

⁶³ Klapisch-Zuber (1985), p. 123.

⁶⁴ Trexler (1980), p.166.

⁶⁵ Morelli, p. 213-14.

⁶⁶ Morelli, p. 213 - 215, "*Come e scritto innanzi che avvenne a noi, così penso che ne' medesimi casi avverrebbe a' piu: cioe che rimanendo senza padre dove la madre rimanga giovane, e figliuoli che rimangono possono fare conto rimanere ancora senza madre e piu d'avere a randere la dota. E volendo ancora pensare a questa parte d'alcun rimedio, si può dire che il migliore ci sia, e a seguire quello proprio istile che detto abbiamo innanzi, dove iscrissi del padre; e volendo quel medesimo dire, in questo non e di bisogno reprecare, ma facendo l'uno ti viene fatto l'altro. Bene ti voglio aggiugnere qui alcuna cosa. Che se tu hai fatto quello che dinanzi e scritto ed e' venga per caso che Idio ti chiami a se a tempo che la famiglia tua rimanga piccola e lasci la donna giovane, pensa in te medesimo e disamina se la donna tua principalmente t'e suta fedele e s'ella t'ha portato amore come debba la donna buona portare al suo marito, e s'ella ha amore a'tuoi e suoi figliuoli, e s'ella e si si temperata natura che accozzata colla condizione sua tu pensi ella possa istare vedova; e appresso ch'ella sia*

maintaining her deceased husband's business.⁶⁷ Wealthy Florentine men allowed their widows the occupation of deciding which charitable institutions should benefit from their property.⁶⁸ Being allowed to make choices about the charitable distribution of their husbands' goods, or to commission devout artworks, gave widows a degree of financial independence and gave them the opportunity to articulate their own social concerns and spiritual affiliations. However, even in these instances, widows had to negotiate their decisions from a position of deference toward their male kin, lawyers and clerics who would also, it must be presumed, oversee communication with male artisans.⁶⁹

Men hoped to encourage their faithful wives to remain widows, as chaste beacons of their own memory. Husbands commissioned posthumous portraits of their wives as beautifully ornamented virtuous brides. Levy notes that nearing the end of the fifteenth century a converse practice arose by which husbands pre-emptively commissioned paintings of their wives as widows. Such paintings perhaps pressured wives to remain unmarried following their husband's demise. Oddly, even women who predeceased their husbands were occasionally memorialised as widows. Paintings, which outlasted their mortal subjects, assured the prolonged memory of the husband as mourned by his exemplary, objectified, spouse.⁷⁰

On the other hand, Morelli suggested an alternate approach to writing a will, for men whose wives did not have the prerequisite virtues to remain a chaste widow and loving mother:

If you know your lady has little wisdom, little love, is vain, lustful, wasteful, and has needy relatives and other defects, as many do, be content in this case if she remarries rather than remain a widow, for as a widow she can cause more damage and more shame for your children than by remarrying, inasmuch as someone who does not manage their own affairs well will never do this well for a companion.⁷¹

leale (questo conoscerai nella cupidigia sua), o se ella avesse fratelli o istretti parenti che fussono bisognosi"
[my translation].

⁶⁷ Bruni, p. 338.

⁶⁸ Nicholas Eckstein, 2005. "The Widows' Might: Women's Identity and Devotion in the Brancacci Chapel." *Oxford Art Journal*, 28 (1): p.109.

⁶⁹ King, (1995. "Women as Patrons"), p.243.

⁷⁰ Levy, p. 223-225.

⁷¹ Morelli pp. 217-218, "*Se tu conosci la donna tua poco savia poco amoravole, vana, lussuriosa, iscialaquatrice, e abbia i suoi parenti bisognosi e degli altri difetti, come ce n'ha assai, sie contento in questo caso ella si eimariti piuttosto che s'ella istesse vedova; pero che istando vedova ne puo uscire piu danno e piu vergogna ne' tuoi figliuoli che maritandosi, imperocche chi non fa bene i fatti suoi non fara mai bene que' del compagno; ma*

Morelli suggested that although honour and duty dictated that one's widow be made an agent in one's property management, she should be answerable to and dependent on other executors, and should only have the rights to the sum of her dowry.

A widow maintained rights to her dowry despite its incorporation into her husband's funds, but her husband could make sure his widow would not continue to benefit from anything belonging to him, even clothing he had given her, if she left his household and children.⁷² By contrast, a law of 1415 legalised widowers' rights to the dowry of their dead wives.⁷³ Even without the emotional manipulation of having to choose between raising their children or living a married life, widows encountered financial difficulty when trying to leave their late husbands' household. A wife's only assured property was the dowry which her father bestowed on her during her wedding. Once a husband had passed away, the widow relied on her dowry to sustain her, either with her children, or for re-use for a second marriage. Grooms quickly integrated their brides' dowry into their own family accounts.⁷⁴ Therefore, if the family resented giving up the dowry that they had treated of as their own property, they could make a virtual prisoner of their widowed dependent. The law of 1415 affirmed widows' right to reclaim their dowries.⁷⁵ However, as women, they were not able to act in their own defence if their in-laws tried to refuse, a situation which Christine de Pizan noted "often happens to widows of both the exalted and the humble."⁷⁶

In 1480 Cornelia de' Martini sought assistance for her daughter Francesca from the influential Medici widow Lucrezia Tornabuoni. Francesca's Florentine husband had passed away and Cornelia wanted her to return to her natal family in Venice but Francesca's in-laws refused to return her dowry. Cornelia wrote:

If you do not help her she will be abandoned by everyone there, for those who should help her keep her there unwillingly. [...] they are not relatives but enemies who have been the cause of all her ills, [...] Pardon me, Madonna Lucrezia, if I write too much, but the passion I feel at seeing my daughter treated as she is by her people, makes me say more than I intended. But I hope to be

provvedi in lasciarla pure facitrice cogli altri manovaldo per onore e per dovere, ma mettile e petto chi l'abia cura alle mani." [my translation].

⁷² Jones & Stallybrass, p. 234.

⁷³ Chojnacki, p. 81.

⁷⁴ The integration of the wife's dowry into the husband's accounts was discussed from page 255.

⁷⁵ Chojnacki, p. 83.

⁷⁶ Pizan, (1989), p.120.

able to act differently with your council, and that of Lorenzo, and to take her away from all these troubles, for since they have her dowry I do not want her to stay there, and they keep it so that she cannot do otherwise.⁷⁷

In this letter Cornelia indicates that wives and widows could feel like outsiders in their marital family. In this era of uneven marriage ages and untimely deaths, the value of marriage as the formation of a permanent family was strained and patrilineage was thereby emphasised. Given the suspicion that could build up around an unattached, attractive, young widow, it was an honourable decision to remarry quickly and a dishonourable action on the part of former in-laws to resist returning the widow's dowry.⁷⁸

As Morelli indicated, men idealised women who could remain widows, and would make provisions for such women to be certain that they could manage. However, aside from their own mothers they distrusted widows, believing that women rejoiced in their independence.⁷⁹ Widows with respectable names and wealth tended to find a new degree of social and economic independence on the death of their husband. However, from a broad societal viewpoint, and from the perspective of church leaders, women's ability to take charge of their husband's affairs and join charitable groups that engaged with the community gave women too much independence, which they feared would corrupt and endanger their families' reputations.⁸⁰ Boccaccio's *Decameron* reflects this aspect of widow's existence in that all twelve widowed characters mentioned throughout the stories were competent women who acted on their own behalf and drove their own narrative.⁸¹ The third day of storytelling concluded with a song about a woman who looks back at how beautiful she was in her mourning clothes and regrets agreeing to remarry and "change my dress."⁸² The lyrics suggest that black clothing even represented a degree of pleasure for women before being made to remarry and so sartorially as well as behaviourally make the transition back to burdensome married life.

⁷⁷ Rogers & Tinagli, p.196.

⁷⁸ Klapisch-Zuber (1985), p. 123 - 128.

⁷⁹ Klapisch-Zuber (1985), p. 119.

⁸⁰ Levy, p.37.

⁸¹ Eugenio L. Giusti, 1996. "The Widow in Giovanni Boccaccio's Works: A Negative Exemplum or a Symbol of Positive Praxis?" In *Gendered Contexts: New Perspectives in Italian Cultural Studies*, edited by Laura Benedetti, Julia L. Hariston and Silvia M. Ross, 39-48. New York: Peter Lang, pp. 43-44.

⁸² Boccaccio, Vol. 2, Day 3 Story 10 (conclusion), pp. 128-129 "*per mutar vesta*" [my translation].

Sumptuary laws attempted to quell widows' sexualised mourning attire. In 1459 a statute introduced a fine of twenty-five florins for mourners wearing trains longer than one *braccia*, slits in the sleeves and sides, or exposing their bosom with a low neckline without a collar fastened at the neck.⁸³ Florentine nostalgia came into play in the justification for this law. It denounced the use of trains and expressed concern that women were departing from the customs established by prudent men by which mourning garb signalled desexualisation and social withdrawal, in order to fuel their own seditious intent.⁸⁴ In 1491 Savonarola wrote a *Book on the Widow's Life* which recommended that widows not remarry but live in devout solitude, and that they signal this choice by showing sartorial restraint, wearing dark sexless garments with a heavy veil.⁸⁵ The sartorial language of mourning attire allowed widows to communicate their intentions to remarry, to remain with their children or to take on a religious retirement, living and working in a charitable lay-community, or join a convent.⁸⁶

The substantial number of Florentine widows who were too old to remarry but could still be the subject of suspicion could defend their respectability by joining a *commese*. The *commese* were charitable societies for respectable widows, formed in partnership with Florentine religious houses. The widows gave away their goods and dedicated themselves to religious works but not to vows or a cloistered life. As a community that valued the power of exempla and imitation, religious figures had to be found for the guidance of widows generally and as patrons for the societies in particular.⁸⁷ The *commese* of the Carmine lay-confraternities *Compagnia di Santa Maria delle Laudi, detta di Sant' Agnese* and *San Frediano*, venerated the memory and example of the biblical widow St. Tabitha.⁸⁸ This saint had made garments for the poor of her community, a practice enacted by *commese* communities (along with other acts of charity including clothing and providing dowries for impoverished girls, and visiting and caring for the sick).⁸⁹ Seeing the outpouring of grief on St Tabitha's death, St. Peter resurrected her and so converted many people to Christianity.⁹⁰

⁸³ Strocchia, p. 175.

⁸⁴ Strocchia, p.174.

⁸⁵ Joyce De Vries, 2003. "Casting Her Widowhood: The Contemporary and Posthumous Portraits of Caterina Sforza." In *Widowhood and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Alison Mary Levy, 77-92. Hampshire: Ashgate, p. 79.

⁸⁶ Vecellino, (1590) noted this practice continuing in Venice, Rogers & Tinagli, p. 192.

⁸⁷ Levy, pp 22, 27 & 37.

⁸⁸ Eckstein, pp. 104-106.

⁸⁹ Henderson, pp. 189-190 & p.200.

⁹⁰ Acts 9:36-42.

Nicholas Eckstein has demonstrated that a fresco illustrating the story of St. Tabitha in the Brancacci Chapel would have made an immediately recognisable association, for its original viewers, with the local history of *commese*.⁹¹ Community members wore humble clothes befitting their modest and charitable life-styles. Henderson notes that *commese* members dressed in a similar fashion to nuns, in subdued tones of grey and white with long tunics and hoods made from simply-cut and inexpensive fabric. Each community would also wear the symbol of their patron saint or other religious emblem to communicate their affiliations. For example the *commese* of the hospital of Santa Maria Nuova wore the symbol of a walking-crutch of their left shoulder, the same position brides might have the insignia of their husband embroidered on their wedding dress.⁹² The widows involved in the *commese* built a positive and honourable reputation for themselves by commissioning devotional works, making embodied allusions to biblical heroines and exemplifying Christian charity collectively and individually within their local communities.⁹³

Widowhood, therefore, introduced new opportunities, as well as restrictions. For the period that women remained widows, the overall message communicated through their sartorial appearance had to be that of mourning. The colourful and luxurious attire that might once have expressed her husband's wealth and nobility would now be read as disrespectfully ignoring the ideal that a wife's interest in life should end along with her husband's death. However, women could utilise their mourning attire in order to signify their intentions, either to marry again or to remain in her husband's household with their children. Husbands could adapt their wills to encourage their wives into one course of action or another, depending on how they assessed their wives' character. If a widow chose to marry again she faced losing contact with her children, and faced the, often challenging, prospect of asserting her rights to her dowry in the face of her in-laws' opposition. If women remained widows they could raise their children, maintain their husbands business or continue to safeguard their own souls and reputations by joining charitable *commese*.

⁹¹ Eckstein, p. 107.

⁹² Henderson, p. 191.

⁹³ See: Eckstein, 99-118. for a discussion of two major *commese* communities located in the vicinity of the Florentine Piazza del Carmine, of the *Compagnia di Santa Maria delle Laudi, detta di Sant' Agnese* established in 1268 and the *Brucciata* established in 1323, and more specifically the artwork from the 1420s in the Brancacci Chapel which commemorated the continuing exemplary work of the local *commese* and the female saints they aspired to.

Bequests

Charity, enacted for the good of the soul as well as the good of the community, was a key focus of bequests. As noted, wills communicated the deceased's choice of burial ground, funerary attire and the distribution of their personal property as bequests. In Florence, the majority of extant wills were written by men and favoured the inheritance of male heirs (sometimes excluding female offspring completely). Following the Black Death, roughly a quarter of all testators (including those of the poor) placed restrictions on the alienation of property. It was also typical that bequests and charity be coupled with obligations to select and distribute further alms or to say prayers for the deceased's soul. These practices allowed the deceased person to continue to influence the lives of their family and community.⁹⁴ As demonstrated in the case of Caterina Strozzi, women could construct wills during pregnancy in preparation for complications during birth.⁹⁵ However, in late-fourteenth-century Florence less than 30% of testators were women, three-fourths of whom were widows, and of the remaining fourth, 40% made their husbands universal heirs.⁹⁶ If a woman were to predecease her husband, according to the *jus proprium* statutes, her dowry could pass entirely to her husband.⁹⁷ When women constructed wills, they accounted primarily for their non-dotal property, a third of which would usually have to go to her husband leaving two-thirds to be distributed to her maternal and paternal kin primarily amongst women, illustrating networks of female wealth and sociability. Gregorio Dati's second wife, Isabetta, for instance, had been left a farm by her mother, the income of which increased her dowry.⁹⁸ A widow was more likely to leave her dowry to her daughters or to female religious institutions, than to her sons. The rules and practices around bequests, therefore, allowed the deceased a parting expression of familial loyalty and religious devotion.

The only personal wealth women had to distribute was their dowry and the clothes, gifts and money their kin had expressly given to them. As demonstrated in this thesis, wearable gifts marked many important moments of transition in women's lives, and so bequests of clothing completed this pattern. Bequests of clothing between women were significant for their mnemonic value. Clothes stretch, mould to, and absorb the scent of the body, which

⁹⁴ Cohn Jr. (1996), pp. 40-42.

⁹⁵ Gregory, "Alessandra, to Filippo degli Strozzi in Salerno, 26 December 1449," pg 50.

⁹⁶ Cohn Jr. (1996) p. 53.

⁹⁷ Kirshner (1991), pp. 185 & 194-195.

⁹⁸ Dati, Gregorio "Ricordi," excerpt in: Geary, (2003), p.839.

increased the sentimental values of clothing bequests. When people owned very few clothes, their friends recognised their garments. It then became possible for familiar attire to inspire recollections in the absence of its owner. It allowed the recipient to don the garments of the person they grieved for, feel what they had felt and smell their scent on the fabric and gain a sense of continuity and shared experience.⁹⁹ By wearing the item, the recipient would incorporate it into her own visual identity, carry it with her to potentially be recognised by others, and thus perform a small but significant memorial ritual.

In another, less sentimental, type of bequest, one could leave a sum of money for basic clothing to be made for the poor. The deceased thereby made people from among the 'virtuous poor' materially indebted to him, in the hope that the carefully chosen recipients would pray for the safe passage of their patron's soul from purgatory into heaven.¹⁰⁰ Florentine Niccolò Acciaiuoli (1310-1365) attempted to use the practice of posthumous bequests to safeguard his soul, but continue his luxurious lifestyle in the meantime. His will stipulated that two poor men be fed in his house and pray for his soul, that his sons each feed a poor man, that twelve paupers be clothed for four named feast days, and that, as a perpetual living memorial to his father, one hundred paupers be annually supplied with enough material for the basic garments, a hood and cotehardie (a long-sleeved, fitted garment, buttoned at the front with a skirt to the ground for women and to the thigh for men).¹⁰¹ By clothing poorer members of society, this type of bequest sartorially elevated the city (meaning that even the poor wore new, respectable clothing), it encouraged paupers to pray for the souls of the wealthy deceased, and it provided people with the reassurance that their souls could be posthumously assisted by their community.

Widows often left bequests to the lay-religious communities in which they participated. Bequests made to convents or other local religious communities were usually offered on the proviso that the deceased be honourably buried within the church dressed in a religious habit or that a daily mass be recited in their honour for a specified period of time.¹⁰² For

⁹⁹ Michelle O'Malley, 2010. "A Pair of Little Gilded Shoes: Commission, Cost, and Meaning in Renaissance Footwear." *Renaissance Quarterly* (University of Chicago Press) LXIII, no. 1 (Spring): p.76.

¹⁰⁰ Ashley, p. 146. Also see: Wiesner-Hanks, p.69. Dolly MacKinnon, 2008. "'Charity is Worth it When it Looks Good': Ritual Women and Bequests of Clothing in Early Modern England." In *Women, Identities and Communities in Early Modern Europe*, 79-94. Hampshire and Burlington: Ashgate, pp.79-80.

¹⁰¹ Newton, p. 72.

¹⁰² Eckstein, p.108.

instance, Gherardello (Chaplin of Santa Maria Novella in the 1340s) left a bequest to his *laudesi* company requesting that they sing a mass for his soul.¹⁰³ Florentine people increasingly left bequests for *laude* to be sung on particular saints' days. This practice provided work for professional musicians, it added to the communal sensory experience while honouring the saint and, ideally, reminded the listeners of the bequester's soul.¹⁰⁴ The practice of requesting masses increased in popularity in the fifteenth century to the extent that some Florentine churches had to say up to one hundred masses a day.¹⁰⁵ This increased the need and visibility of the clergy and it led to the establishment of more, distinct, sacred spaces in churches in which the masses could be said, and so increased the auditory and visual impact of the ritual on the Florentine urban psyche.

Conclusion

Literary, legal and hagiographic rhetoric provided a moral framework through which grief and widowhood was experienced, both internally (as thoughts, emotions and memories) and externally (as modes of practicing embodied signs of emotion and memory). Mourning and consolation led people to reflect on their Christian values and to contemplate religious images in more personal light. Paintings of the crucified or entombed Christ, including Monaco's *Pietà with Symbols of the Passion* (Figure 1) helped Christians to relate to Jesus' suffering, to make sense of their grief and to gain comfort in the hope of salvation. Many of the paintings discussed in this thesis, including Andrea di Bonaiuto's *Military and Triumphant Church* (Figure 3) and posthumous portraits of exemplary family members, such as Ghirlandaio's *Portrait of Giovanna degli Albizzi* (Figure 33), reflect the fact that Florentine identity was centred on aspiring to eternal life while beautifying the visual world and honouring family memory.¹⁰⁶ Preachers, including Savonarola, advised Christians to put on the "spectacles of death" to be continually mindful of their mortality and judgment, and to attend the death of their family members, to impress memories of death on their minds

¹⁰³ Wilson, p. 141.

¹⁰⁴ Wilson, p. 158.

¹⁰⁵ Richard A. Goldthwaite, 1993. *Wealth and Demand for Art in Italy 1300-1600*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press. p.109, also see: Strocchia, (1992), p. 3.

¹⁰⁶ Patricia Lee Rubin, 2000. "Art and the Imagery of Memory." In *Art, Memory and Family in Renaissance Florence*, edited by Giovanni Ciappelli and Patricia Lee Rubin, 67 - 85. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 68

while providing comfort for the dying.¹⁰⁷ These cultural ideas about death helped to shape the internal experience of grief. Expressions of grief, including letters of condolence, took on the rhetorical language of embodied morality in a number of ways. They borrowed hagiographic language to discuss the deceased's body as tangibly exemplifying the person's virtue by the once-pale flesh becoming rosy and the stench of sickness being replaced by a sweet aroma. In terms of gendered rhetoric, obituaries for women focused on their beauty, loyalty and fecundity, whereas boys were remembered for their learning, piety and potential. As demonstrated throughout this thesis, elite male and female bodies carried different social expectations relating to gendered values and yet practicing these embodied moral values shared the ultimate goal of earning a place in heaven.

Besides the internal and contemplative experience of bereavement overlaid by spiritual hope, there was a social level at which mourning was externally exhibited, respect for the dead displayed, and the division of the deceased's possessions enacted. Widow's bodies and clothing bequests carried reminders of dead men throughout the community. Establishing emotive visual connections between those living in the world and those who had died was essential in a community that was so familiar with the sight of untimely death but lived in hope of resurrection. Again, tension arose between religious and secular values as Florentine families attempted to use solemn funerary rituals to publicly display their wealth and influence. Accusations of vanity were primarily directed at women, including young widows, suspected of being unchaste in the absence of a husband. Young widows could remarry, but this presented further moral problems as it meant leaving their children and demanding their dowry. If they remained widows, their public respectability relied on their chastity and charity. As evidenced throughout this thesis, the rhetoric of moral embodiment provided socially recognisable values, encoded in women's adornment and comportment. Women balanced the, oftentimes conflicting, religious and social demands on their appearance and behaviour which, furthermore, shifted as they aged and their marital circumstances altered. Selecting the wrong mode of sartorial expression could result in public humiliation, accusations of vanity and adultery, and to fears of damnation. A woman's appearance spoke of her status, character, piety, emotions and her relationship to her closest male kin.

¹⁰⁷ Savonarola, (2006), *Ruth and Micheas, Sermon XXVIII* The Art of Dying Well, All Souls Day, Delivered 2 November 1496, pp. 44-46. This sermon, and the idea of 'dying well' as a counter to vanity was also discussed on page 162.

Widows' mourning garb, a far cry from glittering bridal attire, externalised internal grief and signified a major alteration in the women's social worth, autonomy and the manner in which they would have to appear in public, potentially for the rest of their lives.

Conclusion

Florentine women were the living vehicles for a rhetoric of embodied moral values. These values were learned through moral rhetoric that encouraged women to internalise and express their identities as they adhered to a set of overlapping gendered hierarchies in the domains of religion, society and the family. Each chapter of this thesis built up a case from different source materials that a hierarchical framework ordered the Renaissance world on a cosmological, social and domestic level. The elite masculine community asserted emotional and physical control over women through their expression of hierarchical divisions to be played out through women's adornment and comportment. Women's experiences, observations and education inclined them to certain perceptions of the world and their place within it.

Sensory practice, including the ways in which one moved, spoke, dressed, ate and thought about the body, depended on what one learned in accordance with the experiences available to a person in one's gendered social position. Within the Florentine religious community, paintings of heaven, matched with sermons, and informed by the framework of Dante's *Paradiso*, indicated the hierarchical tiers of heaven. This hierarchy linked in converse relationship with the pride and vanity displayed by the earthly society. Therefore the common rhetoric held that charity enacted by wealthy members of the community would increase their reward in heaven. This religious rhetoric generated tension with the mercantile values of the city. As the merchant classes rose, they presented a strong economic and political category for establishing status as an alternative to ancestral nobility. Sumptuary laws attempted to force members of the community to consciously communicate their status through their adorned bodies and thereby to sartorially demarcate hierarchical tiers within the community. Philosophical texts further supported hierarchical distinctions through the rhetoric of beauty as the outcome of honest virtue. These secular and religious structures influenced the sartorial cues available to women.

Even if a woman's status never changed in terms of her religious disposition, her nobility or her economic security, the familial hierarchy meant that she would, nevertheless, have to alter her adornment and comportment according to her age and marital status. Marriages were arranged with reference to status, wealth, reputation and appearance. Female fashions

favoured pregnancy, with pleats designed to emphasise the hips and lower-torso and therefore woman's value to the household. Widows experienced a decrease in their social value, no longer able to honour their families through legitimate offspring. Their new familial and social status, as well as their role as the living memory of deceased men, was expressed by their dark garb. Bequests in death, like charity in life, necessitated the givers' judgment of their respective positions on the social hierarchy, to assess the appropriateness of the adornment for the receivers. Despite the Burkhardtian notion of gender equality and the modern individual creatively emerging from Italian Renaissance culture, the concept of hierarchical distinction characterised interactions and self-fashioning in social, religious and domestic contexts.

The rhetoric of cultural values, largely expressed in masculine milieus became the rhetoric of embodied morality when women took those learned values and expressed them through embodied practice. While religious and social ideals of women's roles were set by masculine voices, written words and images, women stood on the knife edge having to negotiate those oftentimes-conflicting ideals in their embodied practice to fashion and re-fashion their identities throughout their lives. For these women the stakes were not only social acceptance and security but the ever-present anticipation of divine judgement. Due to the restrictions masculine rhetoric placed on female expression, it is significant that it was through women's actions that this rhetoric gained meaning. Women responded to and became a part of the rhetoric through their adherence to, and subversion of, the society's expectations. This is evident in the way pious wives wore hairshirts to create a distinction between their religious selves and their social and familial role; it is evident in the ways women worked around the sumptuary laws that aimed (but frequently failed) to restrict women's sartorial expression; and it is evident in the way that educated women took on the masculine rhetorical mode of writing about the relative virtues and vices of the female adorned body in the society.

This study reaggregated Florence's interlaced cultures that made up the layers of meaning by which its elite women's lives were fashioned. The study was supported by extensive engagement with specialist historiographic and sociological literature that focused on each of these cultures, experiences and modes of expression. Contemporary studies into the cognitive processes by which people generate socially legible meaning and identity through

the creation of a shared material culture, through the emotive construction of memory from childhood to inform adult social engagement, and to better understand the ways that people empathetically respond to embodied expressions of culturally recognisable emotions, revealed points of contemporary identification with this discussion of morally coded and socially legible embodied experience. The combination of sources, from different historical contexts, considered through a range of disciplinary lenses and detailed interpretations of visual evidence, results in unique insights into the fashioning of female identities in Renaissance Florence. By discussing the origins and rhetorical expression of these values and the ways in which they characterised the sensory, communal, religious, social, pedagogic and domestic contexts which made up women's lived experience, this thesis has revealed a coherent story about elite Florentine women's utilisation of the rhetoric of embodied morality to engage with their society's expectations of them and thereby to fashion their identities.

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