Resisting Otherness: Representations of Female Subjectivity in the Italian Renaissance

A THESIS IN ART HISTORY

By

Alexa Zbieranowski

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
for the Degree of Bachelors in Arts
with Specialized Honors
in Art History

at

DREW UNIVERSITY
The College of Liberal Arts

May
2017

Abstract

This project re-examines representations of women from sixteenth-century Italy to consider how experiences of gender impact the works that artists produce. With an interdisciplinary methodology, which incorporates aspects of visual and textual analysis as well as feminist and aesthetic philosophies, the study evaluates how women artists impacted their own representation through depiction of female subjectivity. In a time when all subjectivity was considered male, women artists and intellectuals subverted notions of passive feminine virtue to represent themselves with dignity and professionalism. This study considers the art historical implications of women who began to take control of the way they were perceived in socio-cultural arenas.

This study begins by contextualizing the historiographic treatment of women artists and intellectuals to evaluate the reasons for their historical under-representation in the art historical canon. It continues with two case studies, of poet Vittoria Colonna (1492-1546) and portraitist Sofonisba Anguissola (1532-1625) to examine how each impacts her public image through her authorship. Vittoria Colonna's passionate Petrarchan sonnets were visualized by artists like Michelangelo in his 1540 presentation drawing *Pietà for Vittoria Colonna*. Sofonisba Anguissola's self-portraits like *Self-Portrait at the Clavichord* (1556) contain systematic symbolism which aligns her works with masterful male painters like Titan and Raphael. In effect, the works of Colonna and Anguissola suggest that sixteenth women engaged thoughtfully in self-representation which would create an alternative and empowering narrative of sixteenth-century womanhood.

The self-fashioning of women like Vittoria Colonna and Sofonisba Anguissola, even at a small scale, presents a view of sixteenth-century femininity from those who enacted its meaning in their daily lives. The crux of this discussion is to understand why sixteenth-century female subjectivity needs further representation in dominant art historical narratives. Ultimately, Colonna's poems and Anguissola's portraits reveal that women who are in control of cultural images demonstrate professional ambition, intense spirituality, and masterful skill.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful for the support and guidance of my Thesis Advisor, Margaret Kuntz, PhD. I am also deeply appreciative for the support of my committee members, Marguerite Keane, PhD. and Erik Anderson, PhD. Thank you.

Contents

Image List

Introduction

Women's Cultural Production and the Italian Renaissance

In the simplest sense, this project developed out of curiosity for the artistic representations of femininity. My original interest arose from historical depictions of women that differ drastically from my own experience as a twenty-first century woman, let alone the reality of most historical women. Female figures who are depicted in lavish, jewel-encrusted garments, or in no clothing at all, represent an idealized woman that does not exist outside of the frame that contains her. Moreover, I was struck by implementation of the female body as a metaphor for larger cultural values, for it seems that a woman's body represents everything but individual personhood. In such instances, I am reminded of Sandro Botticelli's *Primavera* (C. 1480) [Fig. 1]. The three distinctive groups of female figures occupy many roles within the nearly life-sized painting. The forest scene, contextualized only by a border of lush vegetation, depicts mythological figures who manifest in the form of ideally beautiful women. Venus, the goddess of Love and Beauty, is at the focus and her raised arm forms the pinnacle of the composition. Venus's physical grace and peacefulness reigns over a scene of springtime transformation, but her swaying pose is physically unachievable. To the left of Venus are the Three Graces who allegorize values of fertility, creativity, beauty, and nature among other feminine virtues. They are scantily covered by sheer garments which emphasize their bodies not as flesh, but manifestations of greater goods. Flora is located to the right of Venus as the embodiment of Spring and the luxuriant flowers on her dress indicate renewal and rebirth. While there are varied interpretations of this painting, the

associations of springtime rebirth and Neoplatonic love are accepted by most.[1] Collectively, the female figures in *Primavera* epitomize allegorical femininity and idealized beauty in the art historical canon. Works like Botticelli's led me to question: To what extent are allegorical representations of the female body universal in western art, and would a woman artist depict her own body similarly?

Though I began by considering Botticelli's fifteenth-century painting, I observed a stylistic change within the sixteenth-century that inspired notably different representations of women. The transformation from idealized bodily representation in the fifteenth century, to more accurate and naturalistic views of the female body in the sixteenth century piqued my curiosity. I began to trace the evolution in feminine representations, and was surprised to find evidence of sixteenth-century women's self-representation that disrupt images like Botticelli's *Primavera*. In this project, I saw the need to examine depictions of femininity that are largely controlled by women themselves. As I continued to uncover works completed by sixteenth-century women artists, I encountered prolific feminine representations in the works of Vittoria Colonna and Sofonisba Anguissola, a sixteenth-century poet and a portraitist respectively. I read Colonna's Petrarchan verses and Sofonisba's self-portraits for signs of internal empowerment and soon discovered subtle signs of self-validation, artistic professionalism, and first-person narratives.

---

[1] Many art historian accord this interpretation. Such informative readings on this topic include Barolsky, Paul. "Botticelli's 'Primavera' and the Poetic Imagination of Italian Renaissance Art." (2000) and Trinkaus, Charles. "The Portrayal of Love: Botticelli's 'Primavera' and Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent." 1995.

I also came to understand that sixteenth-century women's artworks were systematically undervalued by Renaissance cultural connoisseurs.[2] Reading the courtly dialogues of Baldassare Castiglione (1528) and the art history and criticism of Giorgio Vasari (1568) revealed underlying tension and conflicting attitudes towards women artists and intellectuals.[3] Even though Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* seems pro-woman in terms of cultural achievement, he fails to include historical women who achieved his standard. Similarly, Vasari in *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* (first published in 1550, and later corrected and expanded in 1556 and 1568) praises women artists, but his critical view of femininity as a social condition largely overpowers his artistic praise.[4] Apart from the very rare exception, it appears that sixteenth-century women were not viewed as capable of producing fine arts.

Observing Castiglione's and Vasari's beliefs regarding women artists inspired further research into cultural images of the female body. How did the gender of the artist impact her representation of the female body? Sixteenth-century women artists appeared to model gendered self-fashioning relative to cultural images of femininity. I use the term cultural images here to describe not only artworks, but the sixteenth-century art historical literatures which represent women's socio-cultural position in a male-dominated cultural

---

[2] This assessment stems from a close reading of Jacob Burckhardt's Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy from 1860 (Burckhardt, Jacob. *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*. (Kitchener, CA: Batoche Books, 2010), accessed January 10, 2017.) I am also informed Paola Tinagli's discussion of Burckhardt in her book *Women in Italian Renaissance Art.: Gender, Representation, Identity*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press: 1997).

[3] Giorgio Vasari's *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* was originally published in 1550, revised and republished in 1556, and published as a third edition in 1568. I will be working primarily with the 1568 because it includes the most developed information on women artists.

[4] Jacobs, Fredrika H. "Woman's Capacity to Create: The Unusual Case of Sofonisba Anguissola." Renaissance Quarterly 47, no. 1 (1994): 74-101.

sphere. Self-representation for men seemed to epitomize Renaissance birth of individualism, effectively bolstering Man's centrality in intellectual and social realms.[5] It seems that women who control their images through artistic production might also gain greater access to education, careers, and ultimately autonomy.

Therefore, my curiosity for the artistic representation of women's bodies narrowed to explore women's own artistic self-representation. To understand Renaissance women's self-fashioning, I looked to research conducted by women's art historians, art theory, and post-structuralist feminist methodologies all of which aim to re-examine the works of women artists and in turn situate them relative to their socio-cultural climates.[6] Through subtle art historical analysis of works by Vittoria Colonna and Sofonisba Anguissola, I hoped to gain greater understanding of alternative images of femininity by way of women's self-representation. The self-fashioning of women like Vittoria Colonna and Sofonisba Anguissola, even at a small scale, presents a view of sixteenth-century femininity from those who enacted its meaning in their daily lives. Colonna's poems and Anguissola's portraits reveal that women who are in control of cultural images demonstrate professional ambition, intense spirituality, and masterful skill. For art historians and museum-goers alike, this study promotes visibility of sixteenth-century female subjectivity within the art historical narrative.

---

[5]King, Margaret. Women of the Renaissance, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). King details the self-fashioning of courtly men and women in the chapter titled "Virgo et Virago: Women and High Culture".

[6] Woods-Marsden, Joanna. Renaissance Self-Portraiture: The Visual Construction of Identity and the Social Status of the Artist. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 191. Woods-Marsden coins the term self-fashioning as she understands the origin of the English phrase to imply a sort of curation of one's public image via behavior, clothing, and commission of artworks, etc.

Why Sixteenth-Century Italy?

This examination of female subjectivity continues with a brief description of sixteenth-century Italy as the foundation of systematic cultural shifts. In the introduction to *The Blackwell Companion to The Renaissance and Baroque*, editors Babette Bohn and James M. Saslow describe the Renaissance as an "early modern" period of "revolutions" which would shape the ideals of our modern society.[7] Bohn and Saslow argue that the term "emphasizes how this period links the pre-industrial world to the industrial, political, and scientific-intellectual revolutions that ushered in our 'modern' age in the later 1700s."[8] Broadly speaking, these factors would give rise to modern western cultural systems. However, for the purposes of this project, I chose to narrow my examination to the sixteenth-century artistic conventions which enhanced the vivacity of painted images. One central convention that began to develop towards the beginning of the sixteenth-century was the favor of realism as opposed to fifteenth-century idealism. Under the practice of realism, portraitists began to paint highly detailed, yet imperfect portraits that emphasized the likeness of the sitter as an individual rather than idealized beauty.[9] A classic case is Piero della Francesca's portrait of Frederico de Montefeltro (c. 1472) [Fig.2]. In this profile portrait, the Duke of Urbino is depicted at the center of a half-length image set against the landscape of the Duke's reign. Firstly Piero della Francesca represents the Duke of Urbino on his good side, for his other eye was lost in a joust.

---

[7] Bohn, Babette, and Saslow, James M. Ed. Blackwell Companions to Art History: A Companion to Renaissance and Baroque Art. (Hoboken, US: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), accessed April 10, 2017, XXV.
[8] Ibid., XXV
[9] Woods-Marsden, Joanna. "'Ritratto al Naturale': Questions of Realism and Idealism in Early Renaissance Portraits." Art Journal 46, no. 3 (1987): 209-211.

Furthermore, he does not idealize Montefeltro's figure; instead Piero depicts Montefeltro with signs of aging, a hooked nose, and blemishes which make him imperfect but recognizable.

As a foundational scholar on Renaissance portraiture, art historian Joanna Woods Marsden suggests that recognition of the sitter became increasingly important during the fifteenth- and sixteenth-centuries.[10] Portraiture came alive through the power of patronage as patrons used their wealth to commission works that would capture their likeness and describe their social status.[11] In her essay "The Meaning of the European Painted Portrait, 1400-1650", Joanna Woods-Marsden expands on this notion where she suggests:

> An individual's sense of place in society was defined collectively…Exploration of self was made in conscious relation to the groups to which an individual belonged…. this was a culture in which identity was constructed largely through externals, one in which outward appearance was interpreted as, in effect, "reality," a factor that was particularly relevant to the portraits it produced. [12]

In other words, as individuals worked to assert their identities in a public sphere, they needed to rely on visual cues which would describe their economic and social position to viewers. Portraiture's goal of depicting a sitter's wealth, achievement, and personality explains one possibility for favor of naturalism towards the sixteenth-century.

---

[10] Ibid., 211

[11] Reiss, Sheryl E. "A Taxonomy of Art Patronage in Renaissance Italy". *Blackwell Companions to Art History : A Companion to Renaissance and Baroque Art*. Bohn, Babette, and Saslow, James M., Ed. (Hoboken, US: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

[12] Woods-Marsden, Joanna. "The Meaning of the European Painted Portrait, 1400-1650". *Blackwell Companions to Art History : A Companion to Renaissance and Baroque Art*. Bohn, Babette, and Saslow, James M., Ed. (Hoboken, US: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 15100Z,

As individuality was celebrated by patrons, artists too began to establish themselves as independent masters. Even though professional guilds and workshops still flourished into the sixteenth-century, the Renaissance gave birth to the individual artistic genius. [13] As artists began to sign their images, they communicated authorship. One such example comes from artistic genius Michelangelo who famously inscribed "Michel Angelus Bounarotus, Florentinus, Faciba (Michelangelo Buonarroti, Florence, Made This)" across the chest of the Pietà in the Vatican as an assertion of his artistic prowess.[14] With such artistic heroes like Michelangelo, the perception of artists and creative authority evolved into our modern conception of the artist.[15] The rise of the artistic genius also reinvigorated the pursuit of art history and art criticism. Bahn and Saslow remind readers that "the early modern period enjoys both the blessing and the curse of having invented modern art history, and with it the self-conscious professions of art critic, historian, and theoretician."[16] Such quintessential voices like Giorgio Vasari in *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* (1568), not only establishes a chronological development, but defines the role of the artist as a genius. Vasari praises artists as individually brilliant outside of their artistic achievements, and "even

---

[13] Wallace, William E. "The Artist as Genius*". Blackwell Companions to Art History: A Companion to Renaissance and Baroque Art*, Bohn, Babette, and Saslow, James M., Ed. (Hoboken, US: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013). Wallace further draws attention to the idea of an artist signing their works, as he suggests Michelangelo transitioned from signing "Michelangelo Scultore" to his full family name.

[14] Lavin, I. "Divine Grace and the Remedy of the Imperfect. Michelangelo's Signature on the St Peter's Pietà." *Artibus Et Historiae* (2013), 277, accessed April 3, 2017.

[15]Wallace: "The Artist As Genius". Wallace says "Thanks to Michelangelo and his many Renaissance contemporaries and successors, modern artists rightfully claim status as unique individuals, creative geniuses, social superstars, and media heroes. The artist as genius was born and bred in the Renaissance.", 2298k

[16]Bahn and Saslow, *Blackwell Companion*, Xxxviii.

Michelangelo might have faded from our attention if not for writers."[17] The notion of the individual, both in the sense of the sitter and the artist, helps to underscore the pertinence of the sixtieth-century within this study.

Disrupting Hierarchies of Power through Female Cultural Production

My methodology in this project is informed threefold by feminist art history, literary analysis, and traditional art history because it synthesizes symbolic meaning and cultural significance of the works produced *for and by* influential sixteenth-century women. To appreciate the interconnectedness of creativity and social climates, this approach must begin with a definition of cultural production in art. The way I am defining cultural production stems from a constructivist perspective. In his book *The Philosophy of Art*, Stephen Davies provides an explanation of constructivist art theory.[18] As per Davies, constructivism describes the relationship between the formalist meaning of artworks and the cultural significance of the outside world. In other words, an artwork possesses meaning from the semantic or symbolic properties like iconography and composition within a painting. The significance refers to art's broader relationship to the world beyond the canvas.[19] This combines a dual reading for artwork: one that inwardly examines the formal qualities, and one that outwardly connects formal elements to culture influences. This means that an artwork coming from sixteenth-century Italy needs to be situated within Italy's ideological and cultural traditions to appreciate the fullest

[17] Wallace, "The Artist As Genius", 2298I.
[18] Davies, Stephen. Davies, Stephen. *The Philosophy of Art*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).
[19] Ibid., 129.

narrative that an image can offer. Therefore, what I am referring to as "cultural production" in this project is a way of explaining the interaction of meaning (pictorial) and significance (cultural) in an artwork.

As I favor the view that sixteenth-century women began to emerge as cultural producers, the gender of the artist is undeniable in situating the work in a historical context. In subsequent chapters, I will underscore the ways in which sixteenth-century art critics and historians developed gendered parameters for successful artworks.[20] This cultural milieu which developed a gendered language of art criticism deeply roots sixteenth-century artworks within enculturated values and sex-roles. [21] Davies too supports the notion that one cannot separate factors of gender from cultural production.[22] Davies contextualizes this notion through an anecdote that male artists are often attributed works actually created by women:

> The critics now detect a lack of skill or power, where formerly no 'feminine weaknesses' were apparent. But the paintings did not change, they look the same as ever…So the change in opinion reveals a sexist bias against women artists....where the artist's gender is a relevant consideration, obviously it cannot be assumed always to operate to the detriment of women's art. Where it should be considered, it often draws attention to the distinctive ways in which women's art is meaningful and valuable.[23]

---

[20] Vasari, Giorgio. *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* (1568). Translated by A.B.Hinds. (London: J. M. Dent & Co. Ltd., 1900), as well as Armenini, Giovanbattista. De' veri precetti dellapittura. (Ravenna: 1587)

[21] Sohm, Philip. "Gendered Style in Italian Art Criticism from Michelangelo to Malvasia." *Renaissance Quarterly* 48 4 (1995):759-808.. Sohm outlines the premise of his argument: I propose a more oblique approach that locates femininity and masculinity not so much in the depicted bodies of women and men, and still less in their social realities, but in an acculturated set of values that informed the literature of art criticism.", 760.

[22] Davies, *Philosophy,* 72.

[23] Davies, *Philosophy,* 73-4.

In other words, the discovery of gender in an artwork does not change the meaning of the formal elements. To believe that the formal elements, which have not been altered for centuries, have physically changed represents a sexist bias. Instead, gender influences the significance of artworks within a sixteenth-century socio-cultural milieu.

The task of identifying gendered significance and situating women's artworks in a cultural milieu ultimately falls upon the reader. It is an unfortunate reality that historical women often left behind little material culture, and this leaves art historians with the task of greater detective work. As a methodology, art historians assume the role of the viewer to understand the context of women as cultural producers. This becomes a central tenant of the following argument because it promotes nuanced reading of symbolic meaning as an indicator of larger cultural phenomena pertaining to gender. As I focus on the cultural production of women, I must also acknowledge the ways in which historical restrictions to female agency affect the significance of their works (and cultural production).[24] The notion of readership within the examination of women's artworks is therefore necessarily more nuanced than reading works by male artists.

Considering the historical oppression of women, is also crucial to understand cultural production as it relates to systems of power within society. In this case, power refers to the patriarchal institutions in Renaissance Italy ranging from domestic spheres to the papacy. Systems of power provide further context for the way that artists use their works to catalyze change. To emphasize the relationship between cultural production and

[24] Such understandings of limits to women's agency are informed by the research of Margaret King in her book *Women of the Renaissance*.

power, I draw from Pierre Bourdieu, a twenty-first century sociologist and philosopher. For the purposes of this discussion, Bourdieu illustrates how art can relate to society beyond an aesthetic value. Bourdieu provides the analogy of three levels, or "fields", of cultural production. [Fig. 3] The innermost field is the realm of art and literature. The realm of power encircles artistic production and the outermost field reflects systematic class relations. The field of art and literature is central in this theory because it is the root of access to power and change. When one produces art or literature, they may slowly gain power as they influence common understanding through the control of language. Bourdieu explains this as hierarchization, where the "the specificity of literary and artistic fields… tends to suspend or reverse the dominant principle of hierarchization…"[25] This means as artworks are created to communicate innovative ideas, they are more disruptive of power hierarchies.[26] The power of cultural production is ultimately cultural capital, a sociological concept that describes an individual's ability to ascend the social ladder. Therefore, one who gains power through these artistic, linguistic, and intellectual skills can perpetuate common cultural traditions from generation to generation.

The question becomes why does Bourdieu's discussion matter to representations of female subjectivity in the Italian Renaissance? Bourdieu's observations matter because it relates women as cultural producers to power in the outside world. When we read the symbols and images within their artworks, we understand how this assertion of control

---

[25] Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. (New York: Columbia of University Press, 1993). 39

[26] Francis, Kimberly A., "Her-Storiography: Pierre Bourdieu, Cultural Capital, and Changing the Narrative Paradigm." Women And Music: A Journal Of Gender And Culture (2015): 169, accessed April 10, 2017; Adkins, Lisa, and Beverley Skeggs. Feminism after Bourdieu. (Malden, MA : Blackwell Pub., 2004). In many instances, which I will not discuss here, Bourdieu's theory is adopted by such feminist philosophers.

relates back to their socio-cultural situation. In depicting her own female subjectivity, how does a woman artist hope to change her own social position? When we define cultural production as related to power in a larger sense, we understand why women were largely not considered cultural producers. Women have historically remained static and subservient to men and attempts to change this social status are often deemed unwomanly and subversive.

Since Bourdieu helps contextualize the relationship between cultural production and power, we may also appreciate cultural production as an issue of gender. One way that women's cultural production allows greater access to power is through the assertion of feminine subjectivity. In her essay "The Concept of Agency: A Feminist Post Structural Analysis", Bronwyn Davies defines female subjectivity in cultural discourses. Davies's definition begins with the humanist conception of subjectivity as synonymous with selfhood. As synonymous ideas, selfhood and subjectivity interchangeably emphasize "individuality and self-awareness".[27] One claims subjectivity by asserting her self-awareness (through female authorship) in relation to her socio-cultural setting. The power that women garner through assertions of subjectivity is referred to as agency. The principle of agency underscores personal autonomy and moral authority relative to larger constructs of power.[28] In the context of sixteenth-century women artists, depictions of

[27] Davies, Bronwyn. "The Concept of Agency: A Feminist Post Structural Analysis", The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice 30. (1991): 42-53, accessed April 3, 2017, 47.
[28] Ibid., 42.

subjectivity portray women as dynamic and capable individuals rather than static objects of someone else's pleasure. [29]

Definitions of cultural production, power, and feminist subjectivity are central to the following argument. The purpose of these definitions is to describe a methodological base for the research that follows. As I consider the formal elements of Colonna's poetry and Anguissola's artworks, I will draw upon these definitions to argue that sixteenth-century women artists began to claim a role as cultural producers and represent female subjectivity. My methodology operates on connecting symbolic meaning within the socio-cultural situation of a woman artists, and in these instances gender is central to the cultural significance of these artworks. The evidence of women's valuable cultural production within the sixteenth century is exhibited through depictions of female subjectivity that challenges male artistic authorities.

In Chapter One, *Perspectives: History, Feminism, and the Cultural Production of Renaissance Women,* I will establish the scholarly context for my discussion. I situate my argument amid historical and modern scholarship on women of the sixteenth-century ranging from Baldassare Castiglione (1528) and Giorgio Vasari (1568) to Joan Kelly (1977) and Fredrika H. Jacobs (1997). Largely, it was not until the twentieth-century that (art) historians began to broaden the discourse on the accomplishments of women artists. Historian Margaret King and art historian Fredrika H. Jacobs each examine how gender impacts the creative lives of women artists and intellectuals. Additionally, in the 1970's

[29] Ibid. 51, Davies notes that "Agency is never freedom from discursive constitution of self but the capacity to recognize that constitution and to resist, subvert and change the discourses themselves through which one is being constituted."

such scholars as Anne Sutherland-Harris and Linda Nochlin undertook the task of curating exhibitions that valorized women artists. Combined, these efforts publicly proclaimed that modem views might benefit from studying sixteenth-century women. I then move to consider the larger historiographic representation of women artists, analyzing influential texts like Baldassare Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* (1528) and Giorgio Vasari's *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* (1568). These foundational writings clarify why sixteenth-century women artists were not valued as cultural producers by their male peers. In my concluding section, I expand on the role of feminist post-structuralist theory in the readership of women's cultural images. I propose a methodological supplement for current art historical analysis, looking to theorists Paola Bono and Wolfgang Iser who emphasize the interpretive position of the reader. My first chapter assesses the ways that current scholarship reclaims the cultural images of historical women, and proposes places where art historians might expand.

In Chapter Two, *Visualizing the Other Voice: Artworks Gifted to Vittoria Colonna,* I will move to apply the theoretical foundations to the case of Sixteenth-Century female poet Vittoria Colonna. Vittoria Colonna (1492-1547), penned numerous volumes of Petrarchan sonnets which are characterized by her passionate, spiritual tone. As a cultural producer, Colonna's works advocate her own subjectivity through self-fashioning and biographically-informed writings. Colonna often aligns her own experience as a young widow with the narratives of biblical heroines who epitomize hope, like the Virgin Mary. As I will argue, Colonna's literary self-fashioning was translated into artworks by none other than Michelangelo. I will re-examine the

compositional and rhetorical similarities between Colonna's poems and the artworks that "visualize" them. Michelangelo's *Pietà for Vittoria Colonna* presentation drawing (1540), a form of finished pencil-and-paper artwork often made as a gift. I will building upon the conclusions drawn by art historians like Sarah Adler (2015), Alexander Nagel (1997) and Marjorie Och (1993) to conduct a comparative reading between Colonna's poetry and the artworks of Michelangelo to understand the master artist re-envisions a scene of mourning to empower the Virgin Mary as a spiritual medium. As I move to conclude the chapter, I will consider why Vittoria Colonna's reputation complicates her historiography; her own role as an artist and a patron has doubly defined her role as a female cultural producer.

In Chapter Three, *The Hermeneutics of Portraiture: The Case of Sofonisba Anguissola*, I will evaluate the self-portraiture of sixteenth-century self-portraitist Sofonisba Anguissola (b. 1532-1625). Through habitual self-representation in more than twenty documented portraits, Anguissola asserts control of her own cultural image through systematic use of symbols. Her successful self-images lead to her residency as an artist of the Spanish Royal Court and the patronage of Pope Julius II. In such central examples as *Self-Portrait at the Clavichord* (1561) and Self Portrait (1554), I will examine the compositional elements which allude to Anguissola's gendered experience beyond the canvas. Drawing from the research of Fredrika H. Jacobs in *Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa* (1997), Joanna Woods-Marsden's *Renaissance Self-Portraiture: The Visual Construction of Identity and the Social Status of the Artist* (1998), and Jodi Cranston's research in *The Poetics of Portraiture in the Italian Renaissance* (2000), I

assess the artistic conventions that Anguissola employs to assert her subjectivity. In many ways, Anguissola works within the conventions of male portraiture though self-referential inscriptions, the mirrored gaze, the performativity of painting, which each serve to disrupt conventional representations of women. After I evaluate Anguissola's successes in her self-representation, I will discuss the way she is represented in Giorgio Vasari's *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* (1568). Though Vasari often praises Anguissola, the larger rhetorical implications of his text indicate gendered criteria of art criticism. Ultimately, the art historical canon dictates that women's artworks are inherently different from those of master painters, yet the true difference lies in the surrounding rhetoric of art criticism.

At times this methodology may appear to be self-evident; connecting visual meaning to cultural significance is a common art historical research method. However, I maintain that amid the plethora of research on sixteenth-century Italian art, we should apply these philosophies more robustly to works by women artists. Viewers and art historians alike should consider the way women's artistic subjectivity through self-representation can inscribe new significance for femininity. In this project, I will discuss the art historical implications of women who began to take control of the way they were perceived in socio-cultural arenas. Traditional art historical methodologies are complimented here by women's studies which may expand our perception of women as cultural producers. The crux of this discussion, supported by an interdisciplinary approach, is to understand why sixteenth-century female subjectivity needs further representation in dominant art historical narratives.

Chapter One

Perspectives: History, Feminism, and the Cultural Production of Renaissance Women

Working towards better inclusion of female subjectivity in the art historical canon begins with a nuanced understanding of their previous omission. Renaissance dialogues on ideal femininity, as well as a male-dominated art culture, creates a cultural image of womanhood that was incompatible with an artistic career. Even though elite women were encouraged to participate in the arts as amateurs, they were not seen as producers of culture before the mid sixteenth-century.[30] To be a producer of culture is to contribute social *meaning* through language, ideas, and artistic symbols. The men who occupied this role have impacted all aspects of our historical memory from the languages we speak to our aesthetic values. This makes sporadic successes of Renaissance women artists within the realm of cultural production even more significant. From Baldassare Castiglione (1528) and Giorgio Vasari (1568) to Joan Kelly (1977) and Fredrika H. Jacobs (1997), researchers have worked to identify individual female artists who worked prolifically in the sixteenth-century art world. It is not until the twentieth-century that Renaissance (art) historians created new conversation which highlighted the exclusionary rhetoric directed

[30] Cox, Virginia. "The Female Voice in Italian Renaissance Dialogue." MLN 53 (Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press: 2013), accessed March 1, 2017, 56.Here, Cox discusses women as writers of dialogues (Patrizi's L'amorosa filosofia, Landucci's Atalanta Donati dialogue, and Filetico's Iocundissimae disputationes). She highlights that these progressive women's manuscripts were narrowly circulated and only published formally by twentieth-century women's historians. Still, Cox notes "The mere presence of women in cultural conversation is an important gesture… It signified both recognition of the significance of women as a readership for vernacular literature, and a statement of faith in women's ability to follow complex arguments on extra-domestic issues thought by traditionalists to lie beyond their interests. …"

towards sixteenth-century women artists. Since then, much has been done to underscore the historical women who were successful producers of cultural meaning.

In this section, I hope to consider three components which contextualize the status of sixteenth-century women artists for the chapters that follow. I will begin with a discussion of the current state of the literature. Since the 1970's, feminist (art) historians have worked to identify the socio-cultural limitations placed upon women in a patriarchal environment. They broaden the discourse on women's daily experiences and celebrate the accomplishments of the women artists time forgot. Then, I will explore historical literature which includes sixteenth-century court dialogues and art criticism. An examination of historical art criticism will attempt to answer questions like *What cultural values informed writers like Castiglione and Vasari?* and *Which values informed the allegorical treatment of feminine bodies?* The juxtaposition of modern scholarship with historical writings introduces a central claim: historical scholarship overlook women artists even though some were quite prolific. I will end with a methodological supplement to current sixteenth-century studies in art history. I will consider the ways that feminist post-structuralist theory identifies women as cultural producers. The definition of cultural production, which describes the relationship between artistic meaning and cultural significance, is complimented by feminist principles. Such feminist principles root women's access to socio-cultural power within the production of artworks. This means that women can gain access to social opportunity through the production of images.

The caveat to the success of female cultural producers is the legibility of their images. Since artists can only control the formal elements of a painting (composition,

color, symbolism), it falls upon the responsibility of readers to complete the exchange. As I will argue over the course of this this chapter, readers alone can situate women's images within a socio-cultural context that lies beyond the formal aspects of an artwork. Feminist post-structuralist theories can help to bridge the gap between symbolism and significance. As I will later explain, feminist principles encourage readers to be mindful of how experiences of gender surface through artistic images which connects women's self-representation to a larger cultural arena. Additionally, several hundred years of distance better enables viewers to experience the way women's self-fashioning stands out against the mainstream narrative. This helps us understand how a woman's self-representation creates significant images of female dignity in a world of female nudes and allegorical femininity. With the aid of feminist principles, we may learn to connect symbolic meaning with cultural significance and begin to celebrate women artists as revolutionary.

Current Perspectives on the Renaissance Female Experience

To begin this discussion, it is important to elaborate on the work that has been done thus far bringing greater visibility to the sixteenth-century female artists. This study is informed by research that began by unearthing the status of historical female personhood. Beginning in the mid twentieth-century, scholarship simultaneously questioned and claimed legitimacy for the social and intellectual agency of Renaissance women. These progressive voices began to challenge the problematic historical representation of the female lived experience. They appear to be in direct conversation with an outgrowth of historiographically influential works like the nineteenth-century study *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* by Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt

which inaccurately represents the equity of men and women. In a section titled "The Equality of Men and Women", Burckhardt explains that "…women stood on perfectly equal footing with men."[31] However, in the late 1970's, scholars of women's history like Joan Kelly in "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" and Merry Wiesner- Hanks in "Do Women Need the Renaissance?" questioned whether women benefitted from the period colloquially remembered as a civic, intellectual, and cultural rebirth. Art historians have joined the movement begun by Kelly and Wiener-Hanks to bring back the nuance to the study of historical women. This includes exhibitions like Anne Sutherland-Harris and Linda Nochlin's 1977 exhibition titled *Women Artists 1550-1950,* which is dedicated to the inclusion and celebration of female artists despite restrictive conditions for their creativity. Scholars of Renaissance women's history work tirelessly to illuminate gendered experiences in a period where Man stands in for all of humanity. Much has been done to identify artists who were excluded from the art historical timeline, and understand the complex grounds for their omission. This section is dedicated to existing feminist (art) historical research that informs my own perspective.

In 1977, feminist historian Joan Kelly penned a pioneering essay titled "Do Women need the Renaissance?". Kelly analyzes the lived experiences of sixteenth-century women to conclude that women did not reap the same benefits as their male counterparts during a period of "rebirth". Despite Italy's technological and social advancements, Kelly considers the ways in which women were disadvantaged by the

[31] Burckhardt, *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, 317.

"quality of their historical experience" through female sexuality and cultural roles. [32] Kelly predominantly examines the "changes in sex-role conception" to demonstrate that contemporary texts construct female identities within definitions of virtue and female subordination.[33] She considers the way the Renaissance overturns medieval ideals of courtly love, whose feudalistic society permitted voluntary relationships for men and women that flourished outside of the patriarchal institution of marriage. [34] This idea was unfounded in sixteenth-century Italy whose monarchical and proto-capitalist state restricted all avenues of power previously granted to women under feudalism. Dante and Petrarch's definition of ideal love overturned medieval notions of etiquette and female pleasure to promote chastity and a-physicality.[35] Kelly describes the outcome of this new relationship of the sexes as the aestheticizing of female bodies, making them "decorous" and "doubly dependent" on husbands and male political leaders.[36] Kelly's work is central to this discussion because it juxtaposes the ideology of the Renaissance with the reality of the historical female experience.

In conversation with Kelly, scholars like Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks attempt to redeem the sixteenth century as an important point in women's history. In an essay titled

---

[32] Kelly, Joan. "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" *Women, History, and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), 19-50., 20.
[33] Ibid., 21. Kelly explains "This essay examines changes in sex-role conception, particularly with respect to sexuality, for what they tell us about Renaissance society and women's place in it."
[34]Ibid., 25-6, 30. "Religious feeling and feudal values thus both fed into a conception of passionate love that, because of its mutuality, required that women, too, partake of that passion, of that adulterous sexual love…The sexual nature of courtly love, considered together with its voluntary character and the nonpatriarchal structure of its relations, makes us question what it signifies for the actual condition of feudal women….Courtly love, which flourished outside the institution of patriarchal marriage, owed its possibility as well as its model to the dominant political institution of feudal Europe that permitted actual vassal homage to be paid to women"
[35] Ibid., 31, 35-37.
[36] Ibid., 47.

"Do Women Need the Renaissance?" (2008), Wiesner-Hanks provides her own literature review to answer Kelly's question. [37] As a scholar of the Protestant Reformation, Wiesner-Hanks's research notes that the very word "Renaissance" carries "intellectual baggage".[38] She carefully weighs the contributions of contemporary historians to determine whether the word "re-birth" appropriately refers to the experiences of sixteenth-century women. Despite its gender-exclusivity, "Renaissance" meaning "rebirth of man" is simply accurate. Men were undoubtedly the stars of the Renaissance memory.[39] This semiotic debate has further implications in the way historic time periods are delineated. While some historians argue for a rejection of periodization, Wiesner-Hanks maintains that the sixteenth century remains historically pivotal.[40] The turning point lies in the development of new technologies, intellectual traditions, and increasing sense of globalization from the fourteenth- through sixteenth-centuries. Wiesner-Hanks prefers the label "Early Modern" as a descriptor of the developments that would eventually enable modern lifestyles. This more inclusive terminology can also denote the start of an evolution in the quality of lives for women. Wiesner-Hanks references artists and poets where she notes "female humanists clearly regarded the new learning as liberatory and understood themselves to be engaged in self-fashioning."[41] In other words,

---

[37]Wiesner-Hanks, Merry E. "Do Women Need the Renaissance?" *Gender & History*, Vol.20 No.3 (2008): 539–557. Wiesner-Hanks writes to engage Kelly.
[38] Ibid., 543.
[39] Ibid., 539-540. This refers to an address of William Bouwsma, the president of the American Historical Association.
[40] Ibid., 545.
[41] Ibid., 540. This is one of the strongest ways in which she speaks against Kelly's essay. She implies that education was a tool for change, even in its patriarchal humanist tone. Women participating in a male institution was far better for collective progress than total exclusion.

"self-fashioning" helps women control their personal images within a cultural arena. Wisner-Hanks' research asserts that feminine self-awareness marks a slow trajectory towards a feminine symbolic discourse. She concludes in saying "The story of 'modernity'…needs our continued assertion that women were important agents in its creation and that gender is central". [42] Modern women may not *need* the "Renaissance", but we do benefit from studying sixteenth-century women's cultural production.

In the 1990's the historian of women Margaret King continued to reveal the larger image of the Renaissance woman's experience. Margaret King contributes to this dialogue as she explores the many capacities of the Renaissance woman, exploring the roles of both queens and those of less esteemed social positions.[43] I argue that King's contributions to the field are significant because she illuminates numerous realms of sixteenth-century female life; domestic, religious, and women who overcome social limitation to make extraordinary achievements. This indicates a movement to understand even the experiences of women who will remain nameless in historical recollection. Though a small percentage of women exhibited a higher sense of subjectivity and agency, countless Renaissance women's accomplishments are buried under the words of their male heritors. King notes:

> Extraordinary in their personal strengths and achievements, they have left no residue: their capital passed through the male line of decent and not to their female heirs—at least not in the centuries of which we speak, but as women who held command, even if briefly and without issue, they deserve our attention.[44]

---

[42] Ibid., 55.
[43] King, *Women of the Renaissance*, 157.
[44] Ibid., 157-8.

Women's contributions to a common culture have "left no residue". King's observations demonstrate the tendency towards invisibility of women, including many who ought to be remembered. Like Wiesner-Hanks, King recognizes the dichotomous nature of female humanist experience; women who challenged traditional sex-roles were marked as deviant. King argues against this notion: "Not monsters, not defects in nature, but the intelligent seekers of a new way, these women wielded the picks of their understanding to build a better city for ladies".[45] King's work helps us to realize that what we now take for granted as women's history was previously buried underneath layers of patriarchal collective memory.

While feminist historians worked to rediscover the historical female experience of the sixteenth-century, feminist art historians began to question the representation of women artists in the art historical canon. In 1977, the same year that Kelly wrote her foundational essay, Linda Nochlin and Anne Sutherland-Harris took steps to celebrate female artists from all eras in an exhibition of unprecedented scope. Nochlin and Sutherland Harris co-curated an exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art titled *Women Artists: 1550-1950*. This exhibition was accompanied by a catalog that combines images, artist biographies, and critical analyses of works by female artists. In the preface to the exhibition catalog, they state that "our intention in assembling these works by European and American women artists active from 1568 to 1950 is to make more widely known the achievements of some fine artists whose neglect can be in part

[45] Ibid., 138.

attributed to their sex…"[46] This exhibition marks one of the first major encyclopedic celebration of female artists, introducing many of them for exhibition on an international scale for the first time. This exhibition is important to collective women's art history because of its exhaustive didactic catalog and the mission of celebrating that which was once "neglected". Nochlin and Sutherland-Harris brought these marginalized creative forces to the forefront, and their mission was to expose them as valuable because of their gender, not despite it.

The attention that many women artists received in Nochlin's and Sutherland-Harris's exhibition inspired further research into their lives, work, and collective legacy. Towards the turn of the twenty-first century, feminist art historians worked to produce new knowledge about Renaissance women artists. A major contributor to this conversation is Fredrika H. Jacobs for her book *Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa: Women Artists and the Language of Art History and Criticism*. Jacobs advocates greater visibility for female artistic geniuses. Her close readings of ancient scholars like Pliny, Plutarch, as well as Renaissance art critics like Vasari allow her to deconstruct the rhetoric and language of art criticism. She considers the masculine descriptors of creativity to consider the grounds for this historical exclusion of women. Jacobs also works to categorize the Renaissance woman as an artist and an intellectual in her own right—a *Virtuosa*. [47] Jacobs reclaims the word *virtuosa*, as the female equivalent of the

---

[46] Sutherland-Harris, Anne. and Nochlin, Linda. *Women Artists 1550-1950*. Los Angeles County Museum of Art. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977).
[47] Jacobs, Fredrika H. *Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa: Women Artists and the Language of Art History and Criticism.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1.

artistic *virtuoso*, and abolish the word's historical association with feminine modesty.[48] In this pursuit, Jacobs considers the lives of Sofonisba Anguissola among many other women painters who were active in Italy during the sixteenth century.[49] She further demonstrates the problematic treatment of women artists as she notes:

> …in a significant number of cases, we have no images to associate with a name, no way to evaluate an artist's style, and no visual means of assessing critical pronouncements about a woman's artistic abilities.[50]

Jacobs does stress that some art critics looked favorably upon women artists, but she concludes that historical voices deem women artists undeserving of equitable praise.[51] I find Jacob's work central because it studies the ways historiography has shaped lasting attitudes towards women artists. With Jacobs as a model, it becomes clear that feminist art historians must develop criteria for assessing the role of gender in women's cultural production.

Jacobs elsewhere identifies two themes in the historical attitudes about women artists: (pro)creativity and the problem of praise, which relate the biological production of the female body to its place in art criticism. Jacobs examines the life of female portraitist Sofonisba Anguissola to assess Vasari's account of her biography. Vasari, she notes, developed a complex "rhetoric of praise and blame" that celebrated the intense emotional

---

[48] Ibid., 4. Jacobs clearly demonstrates the lack of literature referring to women, specifically women artists, as a Virtuosa. Virtuosa was used in the sixteenth century to describe women of virtue, but not necessarily intellectual or artistic talents. This means that, despite the usage of the term Virtuoso to describe a talented or learned Renaissance man, the term rather implies a virtuous, pious woman. Jacobs writes here to reclaim and redefine the term to apply to the overlooked women artists of the Renaissance.
[49] Ibid., 2.
[50] Ibid., 1-2.
[51] Ibid., 26.

qualities of her portraiture but condemned her for lacking innovation. [52] Jacobs believes that Vasari considered portrait painting appropriate for women based on the procreativity that was implied in painting human flesh; "Artists produce art works, just as parents generate children".[53] Vasari's rhetoric has precedent in Socrates's dialogues. Socrates identified the male creative process as intellectual gestation while the female body was fecund in its production of earth-bound life.[54] This platonic sex-differentiation contextualized Vasari's voice. In such instances where he describes the intellectual component of artistic design, or *disegno*, he speaks of a propagation of the mind which ontologically parallels material birth.[55] Portrait painting, however, did not require *disegno* as much as it required the ability to capture the likeness of the sitter. Jacobs notes that this establishes the "problematical nature of the (pro)creative metaphor" in sixteenth century texts.[56] Based on Jacobs's observations, I argue that Vasari both praises Sofonisba for rendering bodies lifelike and denies her as a cultural producer. Though these claims did not prevent women from working, Jacobs concludes that a woman's biology almost

---

[52] Jacobs, Fredrika H. "Woman's Capacity to Create", 74-101. These ideas were later developed in full in her book *Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa.*

[53] Ibid.,27. This is merely one justification for the limits placed on women's painting. Another reason for this genre was restrictions on the training that women could receive. They could not study nudes because it disrupted their moral purity. Beyond this, Renaissance female artists generally did not paint histories or iconographic paintings during this period. Jacobs, however, presents convincing evidence for the link between reproduction and painting.

[54] Ibid., 29-32. Here, she cites Plato "a state of capacity to make…[and] is concerned with coming into being, with contriving and considering how something may come into being [formal and telic causes],…and whose origin is in the maker [efficient cause] and not in the thing made [material cause]. Where she says this is sufficient grounds to say that Plato viewed artistic and biological processes of creation parallel. Yet, the rhetoric surrounding these classical dialogues places biological (i.e. female procreativity) as base because the body is separate from the masculine mind.

[55] Ibid., 44.

[56] Ibid., 39.

always impacted the way her works were assessed.[57] A woman's mere capacity for biological procreation impacted how others perceived her artistic contribution to culture. I emphasize Jacob's research here because it helps us to understand how basic issues of biology further limited women's cultural signification.

From Kelly to Jacobs, (art) historians have moved to recontextualize Renaissance women's history. Within the span of a few decades, scholars transitioned from challenging the relevance of the period to fighting for women's inclusion in the narrative. The direction of this scholarship assesses the female experience and accounts for the social and biological obstacles to success. The discussion continues to expand as art historians begin to treat women's work as symbolically significant. Feminist art historians celebrate in greater numbers the women created works despite the vice of virtue, which emphasized women's moral character above their artistic talents. I hope to expand this subject through an exploration of female self- representation by women artists. Through an examination of the women who visualized their subjectivity in artworks, we might better understand how early modern women began to monitor their own representation. Women's images of subjectivity describe intellectual and creative agency in a way that contributes new meaning of the female image. In a cultural milieu where intellectual agency was reserved for men, women's works were not always seen as innovate or culturally significant. Through this study, which is fueled by the current research of women's (art)history, I will examine how women's artistic self-fashioning

[57] Ibid., 40. She continues here to say "And even when, as sometimes and infrequently happened, a woman artist achieved critical parity with her male peers, her singularity served to underscore the deficiencies of all others. Nowhere is this more evident than in discussions of portrait painting".

creates culturally significant images. Cultural images of women, by women, deserve further attention.

Complicating Historical Voices: The Root Women's of Exclusion

The current literature on female artists is written as a reaction to historical documentation, and an analysis of these primary texts grounds our knowledge of sixteenth-century women. Therefore, this section traces a chronological historiography of women (artists) to understand their exclusion from the art historical canon. Dialogues that predate the sixteenth century root ideals of femininity in the female body, beauty, love, and religious virtue. The rediscovery of the Classical past brought with it the standards of Plato's philosophical traditions. As Jacobs illustrates, the celebration of Classical principles strengthened the physical, emotional, and intellectual divide between male and female bodies.[58] Women produced the material, which was earth-bound and imperfect. Men produced the immaterial through intellection, whose production of the mind was both transcendent and immortal. This classical sex division impacted the philosophies of the Renaissance and Christianity complicates the moral expectations of women. These developments would influence the dialogues that followed, from Giovanni Boccaccio (c.1360) to Baldassare Castiglione (1528) to Giorgio Vasari (1568).[59] These texts share the common thread of troping the feminine experience as they each define the ideal womanhood through characteristics, and vastly exclude actual historical figures. Even the progressive views of womanhood such as those described by Castiglione, which

[58] Ibid., 29, 32.
[59] Among many others including Petrarch, Dante, Alberti, Firenzuola Artisto, to name a few. For the sake of this argument, I will only discuss those who relate most directly to Sofonisba Anguissola.

encourage education and agency, fail to recognize individual identities. Even in Vasari's scarce writings on women artists, he speaks to their virtue as much as their accomplishments. Jacob's definition of the *Virtuosa,* or a master woman artist, allows modern readers to further identify the problematic rhetoric in these chronicles. This historiography poorly represents women artists because historical literature emphasizes the rhetorical ideal of femininity rather than the person attached to that descriptor. Close readings of these texts provide the context for the critiques against them and reveal more clearly how women's cultural production is subversive.

One such early example of masculine attitudes towards women is Giovanni Boccaccio's early Renaissance text *De Mulieribus Claris (Concerning Famous Women* of C. 1360). It is comprised of 106 biographies of women who were deemed notable for either good or bad qualities. Here, I focus not on the text itself, but the effect of the author's resolve. Mary Franklin outlines Boccaccio's authorial intent in her book *Boccaccio's Heroines: Power and Virtue in Renaissance Society*. Franklin notes that Boccaccio's audience is male and aims to "contribute significantly to the genre of *viri illustri* (illustrious men)."[60] He writes in Latin as if to exclude even a highly educated female readership. "Invoking a male spirit to explain female accomplishment…Boccaccio goads men to strive to be among the best of their sex, and certainly better than the best women."[61] In the first section of Boccaccio's text, he outlines the dangers of women of vice: those who have too much ambition. He begins

[60] Franklin, Mary. *Boccaccio's Heroines: Power and Virtue in Renaissance Society* (Vermont: Ashgate Publishing, 2006).
[61] Ibid., 29.

with Eve as a Judeo-Christian exemplar of a woman who exceeds the limits of her sex. Generally, these ambitious women are each an intellectual and bodily "hazard society cannot afford to countenance."[62] The women admired by Boccaccio are not merely virtuous figures as loyal wives, chaste widows, prophetesses or obliging queens, they also exemplify the best virtues of Renaissance *men*.[63] Here, I agree with Franklin in that the original text uses women to inspire men to further greatness. The effect of this writing condemns women who deviated from Boccaccio's ideal values and reinforces chastity for secular women. Franklin points to a dichotomy in modern scholarship on Boccaccio, which both chastises him as chauvinistic and celebrates his female paragons to which women could aspire. Within the scope of my argument, this text normalizes cultural beliefs about ideal femininity.

One historical scholar that worked towards shifting Boccaccio's fundamental attitudes towards women is Baldassare Castiglione in *Book of the Courtier* first published in 1528.[64] As a critical source in the historiography of Renaissance studies, Castiglione's dialogue fleshes out the social, economic, and intellectual background from which female humanists emerged. In the predominantly fictionalized dialogue that takes place at the home of the Duke and Duchess of Urbino, Castiglione establishes a standard for courtly behaviors that emphasized mild manners, classical education, and artistic interest. He defines the early modern gentleman as his text epitomizes Renaissance nobility and

---

[62]Ibid., 40.
[63] Ibid., 57.
[64] I am choosing to write primarily on Castiglione for simplification of ideas in this study. I acknowledge the important and lasting influence of writers Ludivico Artisto, who coined the term humanism. I will exclude a discussion of these texts but acknowledge what they have done in a historiographic sense.

humanistic practices. Such qualities of the ideal "courtier" range from grooming behaviors that are sufficiently masculine, to acceptable leisurely sports for dignified men.[65] Castiglione also provides perspectives on women humanists, as he defines comportment and educational standards for gentlewomen. Perhaps to the surprise of modern readers, his tone implies that courtly expectations of women paralleled those of men: "I will that this woman have sight in letters, in musicke, in drawing, or painting, and skillful in dancing…[and] the other principles also that have beene taught the Courtier"[66] Essentially, these progressive attitudes of women qualify Castiglione as a proto-feminist, meaning that he challenges the conventional position of historical women. This is especially true where he supports women's intellectual abilities. Castiglione even directly challenges Aristotelian dialogues which suggest the biological inferiority of women: "If in the minde, I say, what ever thinges men can understand, the selfe same can women understand also…[67] He even goes on to say that he would not dare to argue that noblewomen are less worthy than men in receiving this sort of upbringing because their "prowess" would belie him.[68] With the exception of one openly misogynistic voice in the dialogue, I maintain that Castiglione's text is equally as critical in its construction of courtly masculinity.[69] This is not to say that sex-role limitations were not placed on

---

[65] Castiglione, Baldassare. *The Book of the Courtie*r Trans. Sir Thomas Hoby. Ernesyt Rhys, Ed. (New York: E.P.Dutton &CO. Inc., 1928), 39.
[66] Ibid., 195.
[67] Ibid., 197.
[68] Ibid., 196. Castiglione writes: "Now that women are unperfect creatures, and consequently of lesse worhtinesse than men, and not apt to conceive those vertues that they are, I purpose not to affirme it, because the prowes of these Ladies were inough to make me a lyar".
[69] Ibid., 27. Octavian Fregoso is a character that expresses open contempt for women, largely because he has not been successful in courting them. He displaces his own sense of inadequacy and blames women instead.

women of the court, it is incorrect to assume that all attitudes towards sixteenth-century women contribute to their oppression. However, it does indicate that the mind of the *gentildonna* was expected to be a cultivated companion to her male counterparts.

Modern critiques of Castiglione argue that his constructions of femininity are just that, *constructions*. There is something to be said for the strength of female voices in the *Book of the Courtier* but they only appear to be loosely based on historical female figures. One of the most prominent female presences is the Duchess of Urbino. We know that this historical figure was Elizabeta Gonzaga, a powerful sixteenth-century aristocrat and patron of the arts. Valeria Finucci writes *The Lady Vanishes: Subjectivity and Representation in Castiglione and Ariosto* to examine the subjectivity of these figures. Finucci notes they are "fictional constructs, even when [he uses] real names and characteristics based on the historical individuals…These constructs are not mimetic but ideological, religious, mythical, rhetorical, and political offerings that reflects the author's cultural and intellectual tastes."[70] Therefore, the duchess' actions trope the role of a gracious and witty hostess based on Castiglione's ideal femininity. Joan Kelly also criticizes Castiglione for denying female subjectivity in that his work "aestheticiz[es] the lady's role", asserting that her femaleness is "centered in charm" rather than the intellectual equality for which he argues.[71] In other words, Castiglione's works

[70] Finucci, Valeria. *The Lady Vanishes: Subjectivity and Representation in Castiglione and Ariosto*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1992), 14. Here she argues that they are protofeminists: "I examine the construction of femininity in the *Cortegiano*…precisely because they are open-minded toward women, because they give women positive roles, and because they have written some of the most celebrated passages in praise of this gender to appear before, during, or after the sixteenth century."
[71]Kelly, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?", 33.

emphasize ideal qualities of humanist gentlewomen rather than representing women as equal in their ability to establish cultural tastes.

Literary historian Maryann Tebben also notes the distinctive lack of feminine voices in *Book of the Courtier*. She works to demonstrate that women are not important in a text by their mere presence.[72] Tebben keenly notes that there is a complete lack of personal pronouns on the behalf of female speakers.[73] This furthers the notion that Castiglione presents not women, but ideal womanhood throughout his three volumes. Though Castiglione is able to express positive attitudes towards women's education and creativity, he is unable to account for women enacting these ideals. More importantly, he speaks of amateurish contributions of women, but not active participation in cultural creation. I contend, then, that one should not naively accept that Castiglione represents the experiences of women. The effect of Castiglione's texts on the lived experiences of Renaissance women is more nuanced. In the case of women artists, he normalized humanist education for the women of noble families. This means that such humanist upbringing enabled the creative careers of female artists like Sofonisba Anguissola. Even if Castiglione did little to formulate the subjectivity of his female characters, *The Book of the Courtier* illuminates the cultural milieu from which female artists emerged to assert their proper identities.

Giorgio Vasari's contribution to the way we study the Italian Renaissance is indisputably unparalleled. His text *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors,*

---

[72] Tebben, Maryann.. "A Transgressive 'Female' Space: Moderata Fonte's Il merito delle donne." *Nemla Italian Studies* 25-26, 200: 45-61, accessed January 13, 2017, 46.
[73] Ibid., 46.

and Architects not only helps scholars define the stylistic chronology of the period but develops a set of criteria by which to evaluate artistic excellence. As Fredrika H. Jacobs observes, Vasari references approximately 160 *uomini valenti* (able, talented men) in his *The Lives,* whereas the only woman artist to have a section in her own right is sculptress Properzia de Rossi.[74] Properzia's chapter begins: "It is remarkable that women have always succeeded and become famous in all the exercises to which they have devoted themselves, as might be proved by countless examples."[75] Vasari appears to share in Castiglione's perplexing rhetoric as he begins by discussing not Properzia's accomplishments, but the female condition at large. This is demonstrated where he proceeds to reference numerous classical female figures like Sappho (a Classical female poet) for her skill as a writer and Hippolyta (a mythical Amazonian queen) for her domestic prowess. In *Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa,* Jacobs notes that Properzia is identified as virtuous and thereby grouped with women that Vasari also considers exemplary in other facets.[76] However, Vasari's tone implies that her work as an artist is less valuable than the improbability of her success as a woman. This is true because Vasari is imprecise in defining "virtuous" because he notes that:

> She was talented as a maiden both in household duties and in other things, so skilled in sciences that all men might envy her. She was beautiful in person…And because she had an intellect both capricious and very ready, she set herself to

[74] Jacobs, "Women's Capacity to Create", 76.
[75]Vasari, Giorgio. *The Lives,* Vol. 2, page 325
[76]Jacobs, *Virtuosa,* 17. Some translations use the term "*virtuosa*", but many do not, including the ones I have worked with in this study, do not include this specific language.

> carve peach-stones, which she executed so well and with such patience, that they were singular and marvelous to behold.[77]

Praise of her household duties seems altogether out of place in a celebration of her artistic accomplishments.

It is also crucial to note that Vasari omits an extended discussion of her chosen medium. He does not speak of her unprecedented talents as a female stone sculptor. Vasari elsewhere esteems the physical process of stone sculpting, but here he emphasizes the delicacy of Properzia's images. Sally Quin elaborates on this notion in her article titled "Describing the Female Sculptor in Early Modern Italy: An Analysis of the *Vite* of Properzia de Rossi". Here, she notes that Vasari does not acknowledge Properzia's physicality due to the "opposition which emerges between the archetypal body and composure of an elite female, more readily related to gentle activity and graceful movement, and the overtly masculine task of chiseling stone..."[78] Her aptitude for stone carving disrupts Vasari's depiction of her ideal feminine virtue. Instead, Vasari writes of her miniature fruit pit carvings before he mentions her numerous and reputable commissions.[79] Perhaps the delicacy of the works where considered more feminine than her masterful stone sculptures. Moreover, Quin touches upon what she refers to as the

---

[77]Vasari, *The Lives*, Vol. 2, page 326. Also, Properzia died penniless and alone after she was brought to court under the accusation of garden vandalism and assault of an artist. (Schwartz, Therese. "Catarina Vigri and Properzia de Rossi." Women's Studies 6, no. 1 (1978): 13.) Schwartz also writes one this: She was also believed to have died of venereal diseases. Her "beauty" therefore may also allude to the availability of her "other talents". briefly elaborates on the extent to which Properzia's beauty affected her career when she says "She was a vivid source of public interest" which made her life as a professional woman risky.

[78] Quin, Sally. "Describing the Female Sculptor in Early Modern Italy: An Analysis of the vita of Properzia de' Rossi in Giorgio Vasari's Lives." *Gender & History* 24, no. 1 (April 2012): 134-149, accessed March 20, 2017.

[79]Vasari, *The Lives*, Vol. 2, page 327. Here, Vasari says Her fame spread through Italy and at last reached the ears of Pope Clement VII, who directly after the coronation of the emperor at Bologna asked for her…"

"*Paragone* discourse" which suggests that "physical strength, ungainly movements and less dignified demeanour of the sculptor diminished any claims for the nobility of the art."[80] Considering the historical trend towards the rhetorical treatment of femininity, it is not surprising that Vasari emphasizes the delicacy of her works rather than her physical strength as an artist. Outside of Properzia de Rossi, Vasari only mentions three other female artists, all of which are painters. [81] As the only woman sculptor that appears in *The Lives*, Properzia's skill was undeniably extraordinary.

The language of *cinquecento* art criticism is also central to understanding the historiographic exclusion of female artists. The semantics of sixteenth-century art criticism is surrounded by male adjectives, and art historian Philip Sohm studies Vasari's gendered rhetoric to observe how language favors masculinity. Sohm notes that prior to the mid-sixteenth century, art criticism was not gendered. Sohm references satirist Firenzuola's writings on female beauty as a possible source of inspiration for Vasari's masculinized rhetoric.[82] After the publication of Firenzuola's satirical dialogue on female artistic beauty, Vasari appears to openly praise artworks in their "f*orte, franco, risoluto,* and *robusto",* each which refers to stylistic ingenuity and vigor.[83] Female artists like Properzia are regarded as oppositional in their virtue and beauty which are passive

[80] Quinn, "Describing the Female Sculptor", 142.
[81] Here, it is also important to note that Vasari lived during the high Renaissance. This is to say that other female artists that have garnered more attention in recent years, such as Artemisia Gentileschi, lived after Vasari's time. It should also be noted that Sofonisba Anguissola may have served as a role model for subsequent female artists, including Lavinia Fontana. Following her lead, they may have also worked after Vasari's lifetime.
[82] Sohm, "Gendered Style", 760-3. Agnolo Firenzuola was an Italian poet who predominantly wrote satire. This text, *Dialogo delle bellezze delle donne,* is written to describe the types of female figures that artists represent, and translates to "discourse on the beauty of women".
[83] Ibid., 774.

descriptors. Curiously, Sohm notes that this adoption of gendered language further complicates Renaissance constructions of femininity:

> I propose a more oblique approach that locates femininity and masculinity not so much in the depicted bodies of women and men, and still less in their social realities, but in an acculturated set of values that informed the literature of art criticism. Femininity in particular was frequently disembodied in Renaissance criticism and wielded as a rhetorical weapon usually against objectionable art...[84]

Here, Sohm not only observes the disembodiment of femininity that concerns Tebben and Kelly, he highlights the way feminine modifiers have negative implications in art criticism.[85] Furthermore, "when woman ceased to be conceived as man's passive creation or the hypostasis of beauty… and became instead the creative force, the (male) critic was faced with an anomalous situation that he resolved by applying conventions of femininity."[86] This means that when women became cultural producers, which so disrupted Vasari's notion of passivity, he resorts to deploying tropes of femininity. Vasari's monitoring of artistic meaning and value through language did not allow women to do the same. Sohm's research is interesting because it highlights the linguistic factors that contributed to women's inequitable treatment amongst Vasari's "Most Excellent" artists.

Given that Vasari is referenced as a nearly singular authority for establishing the Renaissance canon, historians benefit from contextualizing his motivation for writing. This includes his motivation for writing around women. In Paul Barolsky's essay titled

---

[84] Ibid., 760.
[85] Disembodiment here means the symbolic separation of femininity from women's physical forms; depersonalizing. This can be problematic because diminishes female subjectivity as a valuable lived experience. Instead, it contributes negative symbolic meanings like passivity, weakness, or fragility.
[86] Sohm, "Gendered Style", 761.

"The Ultimate Paradox of Vasari's 'Lives' ", he assesses Vasari's commanding tone for the underlying personal motives in his writing. Barolsky underscores the lack of study on the so-called core of Vasari's writings: the link between religion and aesthetics as a way to express an inert personal piety of the author.[87] He asserts that modern art historians generally overlook this reading because of the predominantly secular approach to the discipline. Even still, as Barolsky notes, Vasari's vocabulary includes terms like *affetti* (trans. A religious sentiment towards an artwork or the representation of emotions), a term that deserves the same attention as "*difficolta, diligenza, disegno, facilita,…*"[88] The term *affetti,* whose definition is partially rooted in the expression of religious sentiment, emphasizes Vasari's theological stance in his writings. Barolsky captures this sentiment as he says "…when Vasari describes a devotional work of art in a compelling way, he is not just describing the pious intentions of the artist whose work he describes. He is also giving voice to his own piety".[89] Vasari's pious tone expresses his desire of salvation, and his identification of religious themes in masterful artwork furthers his cause. Barolsky thusly implies that it is incorrect to assume that Vasari's contribution to the historiography and art criticism of the Italian Renaissance is without deep connections to his ulterior personal motivation. Aligning his personal piety with the celebration of art, Vasari also upholds the belief that Christian women are virtuous, modest, and passive

[87]Barolsky, Paul. 2011. "The Ultimate Paradox of Vasari's 'Lives' *". Notes in the History of Art* 31, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2011), 10-13, 10. Here Barolsky argues that "Like Dante and Michelangelo, Vasari is concerned above all else with the salvation of his soul. Although the idea of redemption is not his theme, it shapes Vasari's worldview. If in unexpected ways, it informs his book."
[88] Ibid., 10.
[89] Ibid., 11.

artists. For these reasons, we must understand how art criticism also self-and religiously-motivated; Vasari's personal objectives have impacted the study of women artists.

With several hundred years of distance from Vasari's *The Lives*, nineteenth-century Renaissance historian Jacob Burkhardt imagined a cultural landscape of gender egalitarianism.[90] During the late nineteenth-and early twentieth-centuries female scholars began to identify the complexities of gender in the art-making process as they drew from their own experiences as women to examine the Renaissance. In 1907, female art historian Laura M. Ragg wrote *The Women Artists of Bologna* to detail the lives of four women artists. She discusses their biographies, accomplishments, and their works to give voice to the artists time forgot. The introduction to her text is sparse, but she notes the women in her study each "achieved a name and fame by their own exertions, before or independently of marriage".[91] She is clever as she hints that biographies purport multiple meanings, the surface text and the allegorical implication underneath. She draws analogy between biographies and the two sides of a coins where one side presents the face while the other side presents an allegorical device. Both sides of the coin are essential to telling its whole story. [92] This suggests that the biography of a woman artist means more than praising the four artists featured. Ragg demonstrates that we should read both sides of the coin, the face value and the story underneath, to understand the impacts of women artists. While Ragg's work is no longer considered pertinent in the scope of feminist art history,

---

[90] Burckhardt, *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, 317. Burckhardt notes "There was no question of 'woman's rights' or female emancipation, simply because the thing itself was a matter of course. The educated woman, no less than the man, strove naturally after a characteristic and complete individuality."
[91]Ragg, Laura M. *The Women Artists of Bologna*. (London: Methuen & Co, 1907), 1.
[92] Ibid., 2.

the existence of this publication is pioneering. As a woman historian, Ragg sheds light on the understudied realm of women's cultural production.

Ultimately, there is a long and complex historiography of women artists and intellectuals. There are trends of progressive attitudes about sixteenth-century women as well as misinformed conclusions about what it means to be a woman artist. From the beginning, the perceived biological capacity and moral fibers of the female body placed limitations on the types of works that women produced. These Classical delineations of female procreativity and male intellectual creativity established a gender divide that was adopted by Renaissance scholars. More importantly, they undermined women's effort to participate in cultural production through writings and artwork. Art critics like Vasari normalized masculine descriptors which contributed to the women's marginalization. Moreover, women of virtue (artistic and religious) were an ideal more than an identity. This problem reinforces the treatment of womanhood rather than *woman* dating back to the early fourteenth century. Even nineteenth-century male historians spoke to the female condition rather than the subjective, lived experiences of historical women. And, with Laura Ragg's 1907 text on women artists, it seems that women care the most about women's issues. Understanding these perspectives is essential to understanding why sixteenth-century women were not viewed for their participation in culture through the arts. It also helps modern readers to create an alternative narrative that better includes talented women artists.

Overcoming Masculinized Rhetoric: Self-Portraiture and Literary Phenomenology

These historical passages evidence the long-standing duality of celebration and contempt surrounding the works of women artists. As per Boccaccio, Castiglione, and Vasari, sixteenth-century women should be educated, modest, and artistic—but not so much as to threaten the position of masculine cultural authority. Since art creation and criticism are historically masculine disciplines, women's participation pushes the boundaries of acceptable femininity. Though they largely abstained from physically challenging genres like sculpture, women indeed produced works that are symbolically charged. As in literature, the symbolic artistic devices that women employ can tell their self-affirming narratives. These devices contribute meaning about their self-fashioning, ranging from their religious devotion to their desire for artistic commissions.[93] Modern feminist principles can supplement the story of female cultural production typically studied in women's art history. Women's images, through poetry or portraiture, are subversive because they provide an internal and intimate view of femininity. Feminist post-structuralism can aid art historians in identifying which symbols within art works speak to female subjectivity. In this section, I hope to introduce a feminist reading that will later inform my interpretation of women's artistic subjectivity.

In Italy, the "other" female voice emerged to demarcate separate intellectual spaces for women as early as the sixteenth-century.[94] With increasing frequency, proto-

[93] As I will explain in later chapters, Vittoria Colonna's poetry is semi-autobiographical and her poetic voice aligns with biblical role models. In painting, Sofonisba Anguissola often used pictorial devices to advertise her painting skills (possibly in the hopes of receiving commissions).
[94] Cox, "The Female Voice", 56.

feminist writings evidence women's attempt to create cultural meaning for other female readers. One such example is Moderate Fonte, who writes *Il merito del donne* (*The Worth of Women*, c.1600) in response to Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*. Fonte not only celebrate women humanists but reproaches the men who dismiss them. Such works mark a turning point where women writers represented themselves with the purpose of challenging the master narrative of femininity. Fonte's writings gave women names, personalities, and experiences worth remembering. Modern feminist principles provide another lens for viewing the gendered subjectivity that lies beneath visual texts. I will adopt from theorists Mary Jacobus (1986), Paola Bono (1997), and Wolfgang Iser (1972) to establish a relationship between reading representational narratives and self-portraiture. This connection traces women's subjectivity in the written word as well as the painted composition of women's artworks.

In *Il merito del donne* (1600), Moderata Fonte exemplifies an early attempt to create uniquely female spaces in literature that would become essential to modern women's empowerment. She pens a dialogue of exclusively women which both praises women and criticizes men at its core. Moderata Fonte, born Modesta Pozzo, was a Venetian writer and female intellectual who wrote innovatively on the worth of women. Her family was supportive of her endeavors as they even posthumously published her works (in 1600) after she died in childbirth in 1592 at the age of thirty-seven. Fonte's partially autobiographical publication as a woman writer was not revolutionary as many women writers preceded her. Semi-autobiographical dialogues in the genre "defenses of

women" date back to the late fourteenth century. [95] Fonte's dialogue is unique in the way it responds to the *Book of the Courtier*, as a feminine parallel of the foundational text. Maryann Tebben author of "A Transgressive 'Female' Space: Moderata Fonte's *Il merito delle donne*.", notes that Fonte's dialogues may respond to contemporaneous attitudes towards Venetian women's public lives.[96] Effectively, Fonte creates an intellectual, safe setting for the dialogue: "In choosing to write in the form of private conversation, a nearly exclusive female domain, Fonte made woman not other but only."[97] The characters in this dialogue reinforce their positive personal qualities, cultural aptitude in painting and poetry, and recognize their internal value as women. As we see the problematic lack of subjectivity in Castiglione's text, Fonte claims a subjectivity that is self-assured and progressive. Therefore, it is important to note that Fonte's characters have striking parallels to her own biography, the dialogue she creates acts as an overarching symbol for her own desire to be culturally valued.

Twentieth-century feminist scholars examine similar instances of female representation through works that highlight the female lived experience. Otherwise known as biographical "life-writing", this form of literature generates socio-political

---

[95] Fonte, Moderata (Modesta Pozzo). *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe : "The Worth of Women : Wherein Is Clearly Revealed Their Nobility and Their Superiority to Men".* (Chicago, US: University of Chicago Press, 2007), accessed December 11, 2016. http://site.ebrary.com.ezproxy.drew.edu/lib/drew/detail.action?docID=10210005Here, Cox describes: "As has already been noted, Fonte's The Worth of Women forms part of a long-established tradition of writings on women's nature and capacities, dating back ultimately to Boccaccio's On Famous Women (c. 1360) and Christine de Pizan's Book of the City of Ladies (c. 1405). The issue of women's equality with men became a fashionable debating point in the courts of Northern Italy in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, and the commonplaces of this debate were shortly afterward given European circulation in works like Castiglione's Book of the Courtier (1528)…" and Moderata would have been familiar with them in the humanist tradition.

[96] Tebben, "A Transgressive 'Female' Space", 59.

[97] Tebben,"A Transgressive 'Female' Space", 48.

conversation based on detailed accounts of women's daily lives. In recent decades, theorists have claimed new legitimacy for biography as living theory. In "Women's Biographies and Autobiographies: A Political Project in the Making", Paola Bono details the Italian Feminist narrative of a cultural self-discovery. Bono is interested in *autocoscienza*, the Italian equivalent of consciousness-raising in 1960's American feminism.[98] Dialogues of consciousness raising "[activate] female subjectivity in order to produce a socio-symbolic change… where it can produce its own representations and evaluations of itself and the world."[99] Here Bono suggests that activating a sense of self-awareness through symbolic production is the first step towards shifting social attitudes towards women. [100] Thusly, women's control of symbolic meaning is central to her role in a patriarchal society.

Bono also invokes the analogy of letter writing to elaborate on the phenomenon of women's cultural production. She challenges readers to imagine the ubiquitous task of writing a letter. She explains that one constructs a narrative, decides how much information to include or exclude, predicts the interpretations of this information, and selects an authorial tone for the exchange with the reader.[101] A woman must be conscious

---

[98] Tierny, Helen. "Consciousness Raising". *Women's Studies Encyclopedia*. (Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc, 2001), accessed February 15, 2017. http://gem.greenwood.com/wse/wseDisplay.jsp?id=id144&ss=consciousness-raising Defined as "the process of transforming the personal problems of women into a shared awareness of their meaning as social problems and political concerns." Furthermore, Bono positions these Italian consciousness-raisers within a broader feminist tradition, recalling the voices of bell hooks, Caroline G. Heilbrun, and many others.
[99] Bono, Paola. 1997. "Women's Biographies and autobiographies: A Political Project in the Making" *Resources For Feminist Research* 25, (America: History & Life, EBSCOhost) 38-45, accessed February 15, 2017. Bono says women must "[activate] female subjectivity in order to produce a socio-symbolic change… where it can produce its own representations and evaluations of itself and the world."
[100] Ibid., 2.
[101] Ibid., 2.

of the images they create because all elements of tone, narrative, and even empty space impact the message she relays. Bono's description of *autocoscienza* resonates strongly with Fonte's sixteenth century dialogues since both are self-evaluating and internally affirmative. If women writers participated in early forms of *autocoscienza,* did women artists do the same through careful artistic self-fashioning?

Even still, the calculated textual images that women create mean little if they remain unread. The likening of literary texts to artwork not only implies that women's subjectivity depends on female symbolic production, but it emphasizes that the works must be read to enact meaning. In "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach", Wolfgang Iser draws from aesthetics and literary theory to propose an intimate relationship between written texts and the reader. He offers several conclusions about the action of reading. Firstly, reading aligns with phenomenology which studies the structure of experience. Reading is phenomenological in that the reader's experience enacts the meaning of words on a page. There are two players in this exchange: the author as speaker and the reader whose action performs the authorial rhetoric. In other words, the text on the page "only takes on life when it is realized," through comprehension.[102] Authorial intention means nothing without those to interpret it, and this makes the reader's participation essential to create meaning. Next, Iser draws on the aesthetic lexicon to present the idea of literary *gestalt*; the reader draws from personal experiences to look for consistent images within the whole text. A secondary, subliminal

[102] Iser, Wolfgang. "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach." *New Literary History* 3, no. 2 (1972), 50-69, 50.

image emerges when smaller symbols join to form a literary *gestalt*. Literary *gestalt* parallels cultural significance; individual elements come together to contribute a larger cultural meaning. Finally, Iser attempts to deconstruct the subject-object relationship between reader and text. Though the writer does the initial thinking by creating the text, the reader as interpreter becomes a secondary subject of the experience. Therefore, phenomenology dictates that the reader's imagination fully realizes the author's intentions.[103] I assert that artworks are read in the same way as literary texts. In the analysis of self-portraiture, the effect of communicating a personal narrative is incomplete in the beholder's absence. The beholder draws from their experiences and expectations to observe the meaning of the image.

Women who control symbolic production can successfully communicate their subjectivity. Within the phenomenology of reading, the interpretation of gendered subjectivity is also dependent on the reader. Just as writers skillfully control their production of gendered images, readers should not isolate gender from the meaning of a written work. Would Fonte's dialogues impart the same meaning if they were written by a man? Here, I argue that the phenomenological approach to reading also emphasizes the reader's role in the interpretation of gender within art. As Iser would agree, it becomes the reader's responsibility to identify and interpret the meaning of the consistent symbols within a text. If the consistent symbols within a painting indicate the artist's experience as a woman, it is important to the overall message. Within literature, for instance, one simply cannot isolate Fonte's femininity from her message. If Fonte were a man, the text

[103] Ibid., 60.

would read as satirical rather than empowering. Knowledge of the author's gender helps readers to understand why the image is transgressive. Though readers draw from personal experiences to look for consistent patterns within a text, skillful readers must also make accommodations for gender.

Mary Jacobus in her 1986 essay "Reading Woman (Reading)" studies the experience of *reading* gender that is implicit to the study of women's literature. Jacobus's research on nineteenth-century literature and psychoanalytical feminist theory provides a useful analogy of "costuming of the mind". [104] "Costuming of the mind" describes the phenomenon of reading a narrative that differs drastically from one's own life. Specifically, Jacobus refers to identifying and interpreting gender that may conflict with one's personal experiences.[105] This means that in addition to drawing from personal experiences to look for patterns within a text, readers must assume an additional lens to empathize with the female authorship. The reader dons a metaphorical costume to realize how a writer's womanhood impacts her message. Jacobus's argument is directed towards male readers who must acknowledge a writer's womanhood to enact all dimensions of a text. [106] Since history has structured the human experience as a masculine one, this metaphor helps to explain why sixteenth-century viewers failed to appreciate women artists. Figures like Vasari perhaps omit female artists from the canon because they simply lacked the perspective that gender is interwoven into all narratives. In creating an

---

[104]Jacobus, Mary. "Reading Woman (Reading)". *Reading Woman: Essays in Feminist Criticism.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986): 3-24, 5.
[105] Ibid., 5.
[106] Ibid., 23.

alternative art historical conversation, this lens allows us to make visible the cultural significance of gendered symbols within artworks.

In literature, these symbols may appear through a writer's alignment with fictional characters. In painting, they may appear as self-referential texts, use of clothing, or props within a painted scene. Recall Laura M. Ragg's discussion of the two-sided coin in her nineteenth-century book on the women artists of Bologna. Ragg writes:

> Every biography [and painting] is like a coin with two faces. The one is stamped with an image and superscription, the other with a coat-of-arms, a device, an allegory. The one relates to the individual, and the other to his environment. Sometimes the obverse, sometimes the reverse is the clearer and more interesting. Sometimes both are blurred, and can be deciphered only by comparison with other coins of the period.[107]

The "superscription" refers to the surface, physical attributes of a painting. In Ragg's analogy, the image on the face of the coin lies reverse of the allegorical "device" which alludes to a deeper symbolic meaning. Reading the face value of an image, as well as the underlying symbolic message completes the picture. Still, appreciation for these symbols requires a "costume of the mind" to understand why they are relevant to the women who chose to represent them. What aspects of a woman artist's identity does she highlight as she paints herself playing the clavichord?

Moving forward, I hope to apply this analytical methodology to close readings of the symbols women weave into their artistic narratives. Viewers who experience the cultural production of women artists must also realize the message on the other side of the coin: why gender matters. Women artists of the sixteenth-century fit within in a

---

[107] Ragg, *Women Artists of Bologna*, 2.

cultural milieu that emphasized economic development, artistic rebirth, and religious reform but they largely did not reap equal social benefits. Amid a conversation of puzzlingly proto-feminist texts and unintentional generalizations about the female experience, art historians are charged with detective work. Voices like Boccaccio, Castiglione, and Vasari have been crucial in establishing historical attitudes towards women of the Renaissance. Though progressive in tone, they each fail to recognize both the individuality of women artists and their participation within cultural creation. It was not until recent decades that historians looked to add nuance to these scenarios. Today, scholars expand these narratives by matching artworks to names, and names to faces. Applying feminist art historical methodologies furthers this cause as it helps one identify how women use social-symbolic production to assert their subjectivity. This analytical lens can inform modern art historians to foreground feminist issues of viewership, authorial tone, and self-representation. These theories reassure us that women's self-fashioning is multi-facetted, challenging to the beholder, and most importantly, still relevant. This method places symbolic control back in the hands of sixteenth-century women artists and provides an expanded explanation for their previous omission from the art historical canon.

Chapter Two

Visualizing the Other Voice: Artworks Gifted to Vittoria Colonna

The fruits of women's creative efforts evidence their contribution to an alternative cultural narrative long before they were valued as such. As women write or paint, they contribute perspectives which disrupt the notion that subjectivity is exclusively masculine. Women's participation in authorship claims their important place within symbolic production and the redefinition of female subjectivity and contradict allegorical treatment of women's bodies. In this section, I will begin to explore the precise ways in which sixteenth-century women commanded their self-representation. However, this issue is complicated by the role of viewership. The interpretation of cultural significance within an artwork requires a certain degree of separation for the image. This is true because artists can only control the physical arrangement of images on a canvas even if their intention is to communicate female dignity. The action of interpretation ultimately places the responsibility of understanding on the viewer.

One way that twenty-first century viewers might better connect artistic meaning and cultural significance is by considering feminist principles. As previously mentioned, feminist post-structuralism strives to identify female authorship and female subjectivity through the symbolic production of language and artworks. The experience of simultaneously viewing both significance and meaning invokes the sense of a *gestalt*, a whole image that is greater than the sum of its parts. When the individual pieces of a narrative come together, a deeper and more personal story emerges. Through the idea of an interpretative *gestalt*, I will consider how the individual components of literature and artworks enable us to envision a larger personal narrative of female subjectivity. The way

that we might envision the female voice is through a conscious reading of both artistic meaning and larger significance beyond the image. This analysis may support the claim that sixteenth-century women began to redefine images of femininity through active cultural production.

In this chapter, I will call to attention the case of sixteenth-century Italian female poet Vittoria Colonna (1492-1547) whose symbolic self-fashioning was transformed into artworks by none other than Michelangelo. As I will later illustrate, Colonna's sonnets contain textual images of female spirituality that redefine women as enduring. Several of Colonna's male acquaintances gifted her drawings which accurately envision the pro-woman tone of her poems. There is vast scholarship on the link between poetry and artistic imagery, but here I choose to focus on the cultural significance of gender in this exchange. If a woman's works were interpreted successfully by master painters, what does this mean about Colonna's role as a cultural producer? I will argue that the connection between Colonna's sonnets and several examples of painted imagery might indicate the legibility of her cultural production to a male cohort. This observation is important because the lived experiences of sixteenth-century women were often denied cultural validation. Art historian Marjorie Och's study *Vittoria Colonna: Art Patronage and Religious Reform in Sixteenth-Century Rome* (1993) demonstrates that Vittoria Colonna broke ground on using feminine language to combat a sense of "otherness" inflicted upon women.[108] Och notes that Colonna "emerged against the backdrop of a

[108]Och, Marjorie Ann. "Vittoria Colonna: Art Patronage and Religious Reform in Sixteenth-Century Rome." Order No. 9543797 *Bryn Mawr College*, 1993. Ann Arbor: ProQuest. Web. 20 Mar. 2016.

three-thousand-year history of the derogation of women rooted in the civilizations related to Western culture" and challenged representations of womanhood.[109] This suggests that Colonna challenged the marginalization of "otherness" that female intellectuals often experienced. Here, I advocate for a more nuanced reading of Colonna's literature; one that identifies her sense of agency as well as her contributions to a larger cultural narrative despite her gender. Furthermore, drawing parallels between poetry and artistic imagery visualizes the cultural legacy of Colonna's subjectivity.

In this study, it is essential to examine artworks that fall outside of the system of patronage. As I focus on a pure sense of cultural production, one which is envisioned and produced by the artist themselves, I will be examining artworks that are presented as gifts. Works that were produced as a part of non-monetary gift exchange with Colonna thereby exist outside of commodification. I suggest that artworks given as gifts thusly presents a more accurate representation of how others acknowledged Colonna's position within the realm of cultural creation. There is evidence to support a direct relationship between Colonna's text and particular works made by Michelangelo. One such image is Michelangelo's *Pietà for Vittoria Colonna* presentation drawing (1540) [Fig. 4], a form of finished pencil-and-paper artwork often gifted to male aristocrats. As I will demonstrate, this work may evidence the way Colonna's artistic peers perceived her gendered voice embedded within her texts specifically because many of her poems are understood as semi-autobiographical. Following the death of her husband, a young

[109]King, Margaret L., and Rabil, Albert Jr. "Series Editor's Notes" in "*Vittoria Colonna's Sonnets for Michelangelo",* Abigail Brundin, Trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), xii.

Colonna penned poems in mourning that would allow her writing career to blossom. These works contain consistent images which literary theorists would identify as significant to a secondary personal narrative.[110] As a pious widow, Colonna's writings tend to self-identify with spiritual women such as the lamenting Madonna.[111] Examining Michelangelo's work in this context is valuable for the way it manifests the passionate, personal tone of Colonna's writings. In this chapter, I will examine Colonna's asserted sense of subjectivity through a comparative examination of her writings and the artistic gifts exchanged with her. Considering the "care and skill with which she presented herself and her work to the sixteenth-century reading public", we may understand the extent to which Colonna's writings affected her personal image in a male-dominated society.[112] Furthermore, this conversation is pertinent because this mode of work influenced other Italian women writers for centuries to follow.[113] Ultimately, it is my objective to consider how works like Michelangelo's *Pietà for Vittoria Colonna* gives visual form to the "other voice", or Colonna's participation in cultural signification.

Michelangelo's *Pietà for Vittoria Colonna,* is a presentation drawing that was gifted to Colonna the 1540s. Though Colonna is believed to have requested this image after seeing Michelangelo's other drawings, Colonna did not formally commission the

---

[110] Iser, "The Reading Process", 50.
[111]Debby, Nirit Ben-Aryeh. "Vittoria Colonna and Titian's Pitti "Magdalene". *Woman's Art Journal,* Vol. 24, No. 1 (2003): pp. 29-33, 31.
[112]Brundin, Abigail. *Vittoria Colonna and the Spiritual Poetics of the Italian Reformation*. (Abingdon, GB: Routledge, 2016), accessed 20 April, 2016, 38.
[113] Ibid., 38. Brundin writes: "it is perhaps unsurprising that the literary model developed and embodied by Vittoria Colonna proved so enduring and continued to influence the strategies of women writers in Italy into the seventeenth century"

work.[114] The composition of the drawing takes the form of a crucifix where the Virgin mother's body emulates the cross on which Christ suffered and died. Her arms are outstretched, reaching towards the heavens. Between her legs, Christ mirrors her cruciform pose in his super-humanly perfect body. Above her head is a vertical cross beam inscribed with a quote from Dante's *Paradiso* which translates to "There they don't think of how much blood it costs". This passage implies that though Christ is bound for salvation, his bodily sacrifice leaves echoes of pain for those left on earth. This message, as well as the compositional weight on the Virgin, emphasizes her role in the lamentation. She looks searchingly to the heavens for an answer and for relief from human suffering. The Virgin seems transcendent, her arms open in a gesture that searches for spiritual acceptance. This composition and heroic tone seems to define a new role for the Virgin Mary; one where her role as a grieving mother takes equal weight to Christ's sacrifice. Michelangelo's presentation drawing reciprocates the gesture that Colonna first made in her sonnets dedicated to him. As a gift exchange, the message of this drawing takes on deeper intimacy.[115] As I will demonstrate, Michelangelo not only responds to her writings, he responds to the emotional subjectivity of Colonna's written word.

This conversation is once again informed by post-structuralist theory. Feminist post-structuralists work to deconstruct texts and uncover the gendered voices that lie underneath. This study proceeds with a belief that sixteenth-century women began to establish roots of agency through linguistic and symbolic discourse. Firstly, as Italian

---

[114] Adler, Sara M. "Vittoria Colonna: Michelangelo's Perfect Muse." *Italic*a 92 (2015): 5-32, 13. The *Pietà for Vittoria Colonna* drawing was requested following Michelangelo's *Crucifixo* presentation drawing. It portrays Christ in a similarly peaceful manner, and was made around the same time.
[115] Nagel, "Gifts for Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna", 650.

Feminist theorist Paola Bono (1997) suggests, female subjectivity is generated when a woman can "produce [her] own representations and evaluations of [herself] and the world".[116] Vittoria Colonna does exactly that as she works within Petrarchan verse which is modified by positive overtones of feminine experience.[117] One such example from Colonna's *Sonnets for Michelangelo* tells the narrative of biblical heroine Mary Magdalene's repentance:

> I seem to see a woman of passion and spirit, far from the errant crowd in her lonely dwelling/and joyous in turning away from all the things rejected by her one true lover,/and I see her halting her desires and setting her feet upon a high mountain; therefore I mirror and purify myself in her wondrous example and urge on and raise up my thoughts, following in her blessed footsteps and imitating her holy deeds.[118]

Within this sonnet, Colonna identifies Magdalene as a "wondrous example" whom she wishes to imitate. As Colonna "see[s] a woman of passion and spirit", she identifies that a woman too can possess such empowering characteristics. I will argue that in terms of interpretation, Wolfgang Iser's and Mary Jacobus's phenomenological readership helps one to situate Colonna's positive view of femininity within her own socio-cultural experience. And, the sense of compassion within Michelangelo's images might suggest that he successfully interpreted Colonna's empowering view of female spirituality.

---

[116] Bono, "Women's Biographies", 3.

[117] Adler, Sara, M. "Strong Mothers, Strong Daughters: The Representation of Female Identity in Vittoria Colonna's Rime and Carteggio". *Italica* 77 (2002): 311-330, accessed March 1, 2017. Here, Adler notes that Colonna countered the limitations posed to her gender, moreover, as a woman, clearly confident and proud of being one. She gained a broad reputation in her time, not only for qualities that were traditionally identified with males, but also - and largely so - for female qualities, qualities of difference from those attributed to men…"

[118] Colonna, Vittoria. *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe : Sonnets for Michelangelo : A Bilingual Edition.* (Chicago, US: University of Chicago Press, 2014)., pg. 77.

Michelangelo's Muse

Exploring Colonna's sense of agency as a female poet means little without an introduction to the life that enabled it. Vittoria Colonna was born in 1490 as Vittoria Marino and is likely the most famous woman intellectual of her time. She married Francesco Ferrante D'Avalos, the Marquis of Pescara at a young age as a political maneuver between her family and the Spanish throne.[119] For much of her married life, Colonna lived in the court of her aunt by marriage where she cultivated her literary interests. When Colonna was widowed in 1525, childless and wealthy, she retreated to a convent in Rome as a secular guest where her spirituality and her public image of piety flourished. Works which were written after the death of her husband often speak of spiritual redemption. In Rome, Colonna's writings extended to meditations on spirituality, citing the "female apostles" and figures like the Virgin Mary, Saint Catherine of Alexandria, and Mary Magdalene as exemplary figures. Colonna developed many friendships with humanist thinkers, including Michelangelo. Her accomplishments were immortalized in contemporary writings like Paolo Giovio's *Uomini Illustri* (1528) which also speaks to her heightened social status as a woman humanist. Giovio's text, commissioned by Colonna herself, was written in the vein of Vasari's *The Lives*. This commission further proves her efforts of self-fashioning because her wealth allowed her to access power through patronage. Effectively, Colonna purchased cultural authority of a male writer to bolster her public image. Another caveat to her success lies in the fact that

[119]Brundin, Abigail. "Colonna, Vittoria (1490-1547)", (University of Chicago Library Online: Italian Women Writers, (2005), accessed 3 May, 2015, 87-91. http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/efts/IWW/BIOS/A0011.html.

she crafted an acceptable public image with literary subversion.[120] This means that she wrote in such a way that made overt claims about her sense of piety and virtue as a widow, and underlying tones of female empowerment are masked beneath perfected Petrarchan verse. Her biography, therefore, enables her to participate within the realm of cultural production.

Colonna's sense of subjectivity within her works continues to blossom in her mid-to-late- career (c. 1538-1547). During a turning point in Colonna's oeuvre, she befriended artistic genius Michelangelo Buonarroti. Colonna's vibrant friendship with Michelangelo suggests that their artistic careers draw inspiration from one another. It was during the peak of mutual mentorship that Michelangelo gifted Colonna The *Pietà for Vittoria Colonna* drawing.[121] The way that Michelangelo's artistic gifts represent Colonna's poetic voice may result from her position as his "muse". Sara Adler emphasizes this relationship between poet and artist in her "Vittoria Colonna: Michelangelo's Perfect Muse". Adler notes that "She appears as a dazzling Neoplatonic presence, distant, elusive, immaterial, and yet larger than life. His link to the divine, she is at once overpowering and desirous of his good."[122] Her impactful, but seemingly "elusive" presence in Michelangelo's life defines her role as his muse.[123] Muses, or the personifications of artistic and intellectual inspiration, derive from classical mythology.

---

[120]Colonna, Vittoria. *Sonnets for Michelangelo*. Trans. Brundin, Abigail. (Chicago, US: University of Chicago Press, 2005), accessed April 20, 2016. In a foreword to the text, Translator Brundin writes "her great skill at manipulating and disseminating the "correct" public image would aid, rather than hinder, her literary aspirations…"

[121] Och, "Vittoria Colonna", 161.

[122]Adler, "Michelangelo's Perfect Muse", 16.

[123]Ibid., 16. Adler says "He finds her daunting, yet he recognizes that she is his only hope for salvation. By contrast, he depicts himself as frail and engulfed by the sense of his unworthiness…"

Colonna's most important impact on Michelangelo was that of a spiritual muse that awakened him to the evangelical reform movement. Adler explains that their friendship "coincides with the period when her ties with Italian reform and with its major proponents was solidifying."[124] During the Evangelical reform, intellectuals aimed to redefine the relationship between God and humanity, emphasizing the intimacy of spirituality. This evolving spiritual affiliation appears to influence all aspects of Michelangelo's and Colonna's careers.

Within their fruitful friendship, Michelangelo and Colonna often exchanged artistic gifts. Alexander Nagel speaks to the importance of gift exchange between Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna as an expression of profound respect and spiritual recognition during a transitional religious period.[125] In an article titled "Gifts for Michelangelo and Vittoria Colona", Nagel analyzes the *Pietà for Vittoria Colonna*. Nagel examines the way artists like Michelangelo and Colonna interpret the aesthetics of selfhood in an evolving religious community. The Evangelical reform emphasized selfhood as a vehicle by which to know the divine. This means that through the symbolic capacities of artwork, artist could represent their relationship to God and to one another. To emphasize the revived intimacy between individuals and the divine, Nagel references Colonna's writings on the Lamentation. He explores the shift from traditional cult-images, which maintain rhetorical distance between the writer and the object of devotion, to the new rhetorical intimacy of the Passion narrative. Nagel concludes that the

[124]Adler, Sara M. "Vittoria Colonna: Michelangelo's Perfect Muse." *Italica* 92, no. 1(2015): 5-32, accessed April 20, 2016, 13,15.
[125] Nagel, "Gifts for Michelangelo and Vittoria Colona". 647-668.

"emerging liberal conception of art... [was] a potential avenue for reform of the religious image, and a privileged model for the type of internal religious experience …"[126] In other words, the works of Colonna and Michelangelo become increasingly personal because they reflect a new type of internal religious experience. Here, I argue that this type of "internal religious experience" underlines Colonna's feminine voice in her spiritual poems. In the age of personalized salvation, Colonna's rhetoric places her experience as a woman writer within her religious narratives. Perhaps it is the same "internal religious experience" which Michelangelo represents in *Pietà for Vittoria Colonna*.

More importantly, Michelangelo's depiction of *Pietà for Vittoria Colonna* appears to be founded on the metaphorical rhetoric which Michelangelo elsewhere employs in his depictions of spiritually enlightened women. It seems that Michelangelo's enlightened female figures stem from Michelangelo's biographical connection to Marsilio Ficino's Neoplatonic scholarship. He is believed to have attended Ficino's Florentine Academy of Neoplatonism where he would have been exposed to all of Ficino's translations of Plato's *Dialogues* among other works of literature and philosophy.[127] Ficino's tie to the Medici, one of Michelangelo's greatest patrons, traces back to 1438 where Ficino's 1438 lectures inspired Cosimo de' Medici to fund the founding of the Academia. In his iconography, Michelangelo connects such Neoplatonic principles in his depiction of the *Cumean Sibyl* [Fig. 5] and *St. Catherine of Alexandria* [Fig. 6] from the Sistine Chapel. These women stand as allegories for humans that have attained spiritual enlightenment through their

[126]Ibid., 666.
[127] Robb, Nesca A. *Neoplatonism of the Italian Renaissance*. (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1968), 241.

wisdom. Their masculinized bodies signify strength, while their breasts refer to their feminine capabilities to nourish others with their wisdom. Furthermore, these representations speak to the wisdom of women; something that goes almost undone in an era where man stood in for all of humanity. Michelangelo steps beyond the medieval Virgin as the seat of wisdom to assert her role as a strong spiritual intercessor. As Yael Even notes, these figures are not just heroines, they are heroes; and heroes denote influence, power, and agency.[128] As a figure of similar weight and power, it seems reasonable that Michelangelo's Pietà for Colonna takes on similar meaning. We might consider how Michelangelo reads Colonna's texts to assert the might of the figure. Formal design as a descriptor for spiritual strength furthers the idea that Colonna's female subjectivity is legible to Michelangelo.[129]

Michelangelo uses similar iconographic modes in his earlier works representing the Virgin Mary. In 1504, Michelangelo painted the *Doni Madonna* [Fig. 7], also referred to as the *Doni Tondo*, for his friend and Florentine citizen, Angelo Doni.[130] In her essay "The Doni Madonna by Michelangelo: An Iconographic Study", Mirella Levi D'Ancona focuses her attention on the peculiar representation of the Virgin, a figure who is heavenly and earthly. She is shown depicted as seated on the ground with the Christ child being pulled out of her muscular arm. D'Ancona's reading of this iconography promotes

---

[128]Even, Yael. "Heroine as Hero in Michelangelo's Art." *Woman's Art Journal* 11 1 (1990): 29-33. Even introduces this idea: "Michelangelo does not minimize the femininity of all the female protagonists in his art… Indeed, the tendency to desexualize images of triumphant women is rooted in a long and well-known tradition which can be traced to Michelangelo's predecessors".

[129]Adler, "Michelangelo's Perfect Muse", 13. Adler simply states "another possibility is that Michelangelo also intended to honor Colonna herself as an august spiritual figure"

[130]D'Ancona, Mirella Levi. "The Doni Madonna by Michelangelo: An Iconographic Study." *The Art* Bulletin 50, (1968): 43-50. accessed October 25, 2015, 43.

the humanity and earthliness of the Madonna figures. In historical depictions, the Madonna was symbolic of the seat of Wisdom since she acted as a vessel for the earthly deliverance of Christ. Here, Mary's body further acts as an intermediary between the corporality of Christ and the heavenly spiritual realm. She is in touch with the earth below and the Christ child above. D'Ancona suggests that these depictions of the body sufficiently prove Ficino's influence on Michelangelo's allegorical painting due to the dual sense of corporeality and spiritual transcendence embodied by the Madonna figure. In the *Pietà for Vittoria Colonna,* the same role is given to the Madonna figure. The Madonna's head, the house of her intellect, emerges at the top of the pyramidal composition. The Christ figure's musculature emphasizes his human incarnation, and his placement between his mother's legs suggests that she bears him into the heavenly realm after death. Effectively, Michelangelo's representation of the Madonna in the *Pietà for Colonna* representation has precedent in Michelangelo's body of work. This provides grounds for the reading of Neoplatonic metaphor within the *Pietà for Colonna*.

Colonna's feminine vocabulary also expresses Neoplatonic sentiments. Her reference to Neoplatonism describes both spiritual ascent and her longing to identify with important female role models like the Madonna. Elements of life-writing here connect the *Pietà for Vittoria Colonna* to her own biographical loss of her husband. To describe how Colonna translates Neoplatonism into semi-autobiographical prose, Brundin notes that, "the poet frequently expresses in earlier sonnets the desire to transcend the physical

altogether, to escape the 'prison' of her human form and the insufferable weight of this earthly life,".[131] One such example reads:

> My son and master/ if your first and true mother abides in prison, yet still her wisdom is not stolen from her, nor is her noble spirit defeated, nor are the many virtues take from her unconquered companions. To me, who seem to move about unburdened and free and to keep my heart confined and buried in a small plot/ I pray you turn your eyes from time to time so that your second mother does not perish. /You walk upon the open spacious fields of heaven, and no shadow or rock can now dellay or obstruct your swift progress. I, burdened by my years, am frozen here; therefore, you who are aflame with divine fire, pray humbly on my behalf for help from our common father.[132]

Here, Colonna asks Christ to "pray humbly for help from our common father" for her salvation and looks to ascend into the "spacious fields of heaven". Even the narrator's plea for a platonic ascent is gendered within the female experience of motherhood. Here, Colonna's narrator confers upon herself the role of a "second mother" to Christ. The underlying rhetoric expresses a desire for alignment with Christ's "true mother", a woman of wisdom and virtue. Colonna both articulates the desire for salvation and qualifies herself as worthy. As a woman, Colonna's poetic voice asserts that the female subject can attain a life "unburdened and free" through spiritual wisdom. This is an image, I argue, that Michelangelo visualizes in his *Pietà for Vittoria Colonna*.

It is this eye for metaphor which allows readers to find the parallels between Colonna's subjective voice and the *Pietà for Vittoria Colonna*. As we know, the *Pietà for Colonna* relies on the medieval "Seat of Wisdom" trope to demonstrate that "her

---

[131]Brundin, Abigail. *Vittoria Colonna and the Spiritual Poetics of the Italian Reformation.* (Abingdon, GB: Routledge, 2016), accessed 20 April, 2016, 83.
[132]Colonna, Vittoria. *Sonnets for Michelangelo. Trans. Brundin, Abigail*. (Chicago, US: University of Chicago Press, 2005), accessed April 20, 2016, 99.

wisdom is not stolen from her" despite her anguish. Her grandeur asserts her role as a spiritual medium. Even though the inscription above the Madonna reads "There they don't think of how much blood it costs", Colonna assures us that her noble spirit is undefeated. We know this because of the way Michelangelo portrays a patient, peaceful Madonna. The power of the Virgin's weighty arms seems to represent a call to action rather than despair. This important role is supported by the composition of the image, which directs the eye from the repoussoir of Christ's foot upwards towards the Madonna's face. This observation contrasts with Michelangelo's *Pietà* from St. Peter's Basilica (c. 1498) [Fig 8]. In the *St. Peter's Pietà*, the Virgin's gaze is cast downward in mourning and implies greater passivity. Colonna's image alludes to the impending salvation which will allow Christ to "turn an eye" towards the narrator in her own earthly tribulations. The different modes of representing the same scene inspire different emotional reactions. The difference between his 1498 *Pietà* and the *Pietà for Colonna* indicates that Michelangelo appropriately interprets Colonna's voice. In turn, the image that responds to Colonna's voice supports a Madonna with a greater sense of agency.

Lastly, the art historical reading of Colonna's poetic subjectivity is enhanced by the counterpoint of Michelangelo's own poetry. Michelangelo, aside from his prolific career as a painter and sculptor, also penned prose of his own. The scholarship which examines Colonna's poetic oeuvre often compares her works to Michelangelo's poetry because of their mutual mentorship. However, a differentiation between Colonna's and Michelangelo's writings may further link the *Pietà for Colonna* to Colonna's female voice. In practice, their writings are oppositional. Una Roman D'Elia argues in her article

"Drawing Christ's Blood: Michelangelo, Vittoria Colonna, and the Aesthetics of Reform*", to emphasize how each of their writings relate to the Pietà drawing.[133] First, D'Elia cites Colonna's depiction of the Passion:

> When our thought turns to itself/and then the mind rises above itself
> So that, made strong by another power/it sees the Lord above on the harsh Cross,
> It rises to such ardor that it not only believes/ itself to be his dear limb, but even feels/the thorns, the nail, the flail, and in part/his burning flame/ but only by means of living faith…[134]

Here, I agree with D'Elia; Colonna's Christ does not suffer. Colonna, instead, stresses Christ's faith which enables his salvation. She does not emphasize his human suffering.[135] This, D'Elia suggests, contrasts greatly with Michelangelo's prose which details the bodily anguish of the lamenting Christ.:

> It no more grieved and vexed the chosen spirits/than made them glad, that you,
> Not they, had suffered/death, and had thus reopened with your blood/
> Glad that you had redeemed him from the first/sin of his wretched lot,
> Whom you had made/grieved when they heard your torment, sore and hard, /
> Becoming on the cross servant of servants…[136]

Michelangelo's prose, emphasizing "torment" and "suffering" paints a much more fateful image and acknowledges redemption, only after he describes Christ's "sore and hard" death on the cross. It seems evident, then, that Michelangelo's *Pietà for Colonna* does not depict the same Christ that had suffered a bloody episode.

Though the comparison of these differing poetic modes is useful for dispelling any connections of the Pietà to Michelangelo's own poetry, it also raises questions about

---

[133] D'Elia, Una Roman. "Drawing Christ's blood: Michelangelo, Vittoria Colonna, and the aesthetics of reform*." Renaissance Quarterly no. 1: 90 (2006): 40 , accessed March 28, 2017.
[134] Ibid., 110. Here, D'Elia quotes Colonna's *Rime,* from Alan Bullock's 1982 translation.
[135] Ibid., 110.
[136] Ibid., 111. Here, D'Elia quotes *Michelangelo's Complete Poems*, transl. by Creighton Gilbert in 1980.

the mood of the work. D'Elia's questions the seeming ambivalence towards the Passion and Lamentation and points to the contradictory mood between Michelangelo's typically dramatic depictions of human suffering and the Pietà drawing. She describes Michelangelo's *Pietà for Colonna* as "tearless". Moreover, D'Elia disagrees with Nagel's argument in his article "Gifts for Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna". We must recall that Nagel's writing emphasizes the subjectivity of religious experiences and personal salvation, an assertion that allows him to underscore a transcendental, Neoplatonic interpretation of the *Pietà* image. Nagel notes "the combination of death and life in the figure was a means of alluding to the mysterious efficacy of the divine nature within the dead body, and thus of the redemptive power inherent in the sacrifice."[137] I agree with Nagel's Neoplatonic reading of the *Pietà for Colonna*, especially as it relates to Colonna's own writings. The remaining life within the body of the Christ figure emphasizes the redemptive qualities of the image. Furthermore, Colonna's female voice emphasizes salvation through "living faith" within the sacrifice. In the *Pietà for Vittoria Colonna*, Michelangelo may interpret Colonna's poetic voice rather than asserting his own.

Historian Sara M. Adler further contrasts D'Elia's view where she emphasizes the triumphant Madonna within the image. Adler determines that "this powerful divinity recalls Colonna's own prose titled *Pianto della Marchesa di Pescara sopra la Passione di Cristo*, a work in which Colonna depicts the grieving Holy Mother who, like

[137] Nagel, "Gifts for Michelangelo", 655.

Michelangelo's, is a heroic and forceful figure".[138] Adler's research is important because it stresses the consistent depiction of a heroic female figure within Colonna's body of work *and* within Michelangelo's *Pietà for Vittoria Colonna*. The recurrence of female images furthers the strength of Colonna's pro-woman undercurrent and this same imagery is presented in the collection of sonnets that Colonna gifted to Michelangelo:

> Holy Mother, when you saw the living light gradually draining from the eyes of your sweet crucified son and in its place a great fire of love leap up on every side, I believe that your spirit went to the place of his spirit and tried to recover what was dearest in him within your own heart… The shield of faith in you withstood the mortal blow, and every elected soul nurtures its hope in your favor.[139]

Here, the Holy Mother's "shield of faith" offers a form of maternal protection against agonizing loss. Colonna's description of the Madonna's sprit which "went to the place of his spirit and tried to recover" invokes the image of the Madonna's up-stretched arms within the *Pietà* drawing. Still, we are reminded of the "mortal blow" that the Madonna faced because Michelangelo includes the text from Dante's *Paradiso* that emphasizes her earthly loss.

Abigail Brundin emphasizes this observation where she remarks that "Mary's authority in interceding with Christ on behalf of humankind is increased exponentially by the author, so that she appears rather to have the controlling hand."[140] Adler's and Brundin's perspectives clarify the ambiguity that surrounds the text-image relationship. Colonna's poetic image also appears to influence Michelangelo's visualization of the

---

[138]Adler, "Michelangelo's Perfect Muse", 13. She says: "Rather surprisingly, however, Mary's authority in interceding with Christ on behalf of humankind is increased exponentially by the author...."
[139]Colonna, "Sonnets for Michelangelo", 43. Though this particular poem was written several years after Michelangelo's *Pietà* was made, it demonstrates some of the imagery she uses in writing
[140]Ibid., 26.

scene. Like Adler and Brundin, I agree that Colonna and Michelangelo do not express ambivalence towards Christ's suffering, but rather they emphasize Mary's role in his salvation. Michelangelo may be responding to Colonna's works as he emphasizes the Madonna's role as the one who bears the burden of loss. Colonna's own female voice enables her to identify with the role of the Madonna, especially because this narrative strikes a chord with her own sense of loss. Colonna's widowhood at a young age likely produced similar feelings of grief and as the strength of these female characters' surfaces, so does Colonna's pro-woman authorial intention.

Though some scholars question the dichotomous tone of Colonna's poems depicting the lamenting Virgin, there are examples which depict the Virgin Mother as a powerful spiritual intermediary. Colonna's oeuvre dictates that her own voice is nearly inseparable from those of her narrators. As feminist literary theorists suggest, these biographical undercurrents form a literary gestalt. As an intimate friend and reader, Michelangelo may have read these undertones which he translated into an image of an architectural and anchoring female savior. The poems that grant Mary a sense of agency draw strong parallels to Michelangelo's drawn image and the Neoplatonic metaphors contained in Mary's size and gesture support this claim. Michelangelo's interpretation of Colonna's narratively imposed feminine subjectivity may suggest that Colonna's participation in cultural production was understood by male readers.

Vittoria Colonna's Voice Verbalizes Proto-Feminist Principles

What do these considerations express about Colonna's own agency as an influential writer? It seems possible that Michelangelo's use of metaphor and Neoplatonism in the *Pietà for Vittoria Colonna* acts to visualize Colonna's achievements. The common threads in these narratives suggest intentional and calculated reading of a female poetic voice. Through the *Pietà for Vittoria Colonna*, Michelangelo responds to a period of reform where one's personal relationship to God was the key to salvation. Michelangelo's image appropriately identifies the Madonna figure as a spiritual intercessor, the one who bears the earthly burden of Christ's death. Colonna, too, emphasizes the Madonna's strength throughout her oeuvre. Colonna's writings identify female figures as her guides through controlled images of female spirituality.[141] Her role as an important cultural producer impacted the lives of those around her; she was an inspiration to Michelangelo. In this sense, Colonna's own life and writings helps her identify with the Madonna in the *Pietà* who seeks redemption. Colonna's voice made clear statements about female spirituality, and Michelangelo's hand illustrated those sentiments. I suggest that the relationship between art and poetry demonstrates the strength of Colonna's self-fashioning: her contributions to a larger cultural scene are not merely heard, they were celebrated by artistic geniuses.

Unlike other historical female artists, Vittoria Colonna has been consistently celebrated. Colonna's historiography does not have the same gaps as those of women painters. Historians and literary historians are in general agreement that Colonna was one

[141]Brundin, *Spiritual Poetics*, 84.

of the most significant woman intellectuals of her time.[142] Why would one woman, who lived several decades before other famous female portraitists, experience better status in a collective historical memory? One possible reason lies in her membership within the noble class through marriage to the Marquis of Pescara, and her source of independent wealth from her powerful Roman lineage. These privileges allowed her to move within elite circles, and her voice was widely and clearly heard. Other possibilities lie in the nobility of Colonna's chosen artistic medium, or her own power as a patron of other arts.

One cannot ignore factors of Colonna's continuous success such as the esteemed medium of poetry. Within humanist circles, the art of poetry was considered more noble than physical labors like painting and sculpting. Recall from Chapter One Sally Quin's discussion of the "*Paragone* Discourse". Here, Quin asserts that "physical strength, ungainly movements and less dignified demeanor of the sculptor diminished any claims for the nobility of the art."[143] This means that poetry, as an exercise of the mind, did not require any degree of physical exertion that would contribute to an unfeminine figure. Even women writers praised poetry as one of the highest forms of art. In Moderata Fonte's *Il Merito* one scene depicts a discussion about which form of art is the most esteemed. One character notes that poets and painters have all the same control of the image, but use only words to indicate the world around them: "…skilled poets, with their variety of words the beautiful designs that imagined and conceived in their minds…"[144]

---

[142] Cox, Virginia. *A Short History of the Italian Renaissance : Contemporary Visual Culture and Contested Narratives in the Middle East*. (London, GB: I.B.Tauris, 2015), accessed March 1, 2017, 186.
[143] Quin, "Describing the Female Sculptor", 142.
[144] Fonte, "The Worth of Women", 225. The quote reads:" the poet has much in common with the painter, for just as painters, with their brushes, all manner of forms and colors, using fullness and hollows, lines,

Colonna's chosen medium gives her lasting privilege amongst humanist critics because she maintains the status of nobility through her art.

The power of her works, as well as her role as a patron may account for her comparatively rich historiography. One such example is an unfinished work by Paolo Giovio titled *Notable Men and Women of Our Time* which Colonna commissioned in 1527. Though this document is rich for the way it interacts with other writings on the defense of women, I am primarily interested here in how it speaks to Colonna's continued social reception. In an article titled "Female Virtue and the Embodiment of Beauty: Vittoria Colonna in Paolo Giovio's Notable Men and Women", Kenneth Gouwens explores the implications of this commission. Giovio's text takes the form of a fabricated dialogue in three volumes. Within the narrative of the dialogue, the two primary male speakers weakly attempt to correct historical (meaning classical) attitudes about women. The third volume in the unfinished work has a section dedicated to more than one hundred honorable women, and takes shape to resemble other writings on the merits and defense of women. Gouwens indicates that the overarching tone of this dialogue is no more successful in depicting the subjectivity of women than its predecessors such as *The Book of the Courtier*.[145] While the defense of women is largely unsuccessful, Gouwens emphasizes that Colonna's own section glorifies her: "[Giovio's] encomium of Colonna also shows with precision and prescience the intellectual, personal,

---

indentation, and relief, so skilled poets, with their out with all variety of words the beautiful designs that imagined and conceived in their minds."

[145] Gouwens, Kenneth. "Female Virtue and the Embodiment of Beauty: Vittoria Colonna in Paolo Giovio's Notable Men and Women." *Renaissance Quarterly* 68, no. 1 (2015): 33-97, accessed March 2, 2017, 38. http://site.ebrary.com.ezproxy.drew.edu/lib/drew/reader.action?docID=2004651&ppg=317

and spiritual qualities that would enable her to become so influential in promoting cultural change." [146] This positive reception of her persona was also largely self-fashioned as Gouwens also notes that Giovio's dialogue openly declares Colonna as his patron.[147] Therefore, Colonna's success is bolstered by the power of patronage as she had the economic power to commission artworks and writings from her peers.

In this chapter, I have argued that Colonna's writings began to challenge the linguistic traditions that define female realities. Through the artistic meaning of Colonna's personal pronouns and literary landscapes, we may understand her cultural significance as an assertion of her feminine voice in a male-dominated cultural realm. Colonna's sonnets heroize female biblical figures to claim legitimacy and subjectivity for women's spiritual experiences. Within her works, Colonna conveys a strong sense of female subjectivity as she describes herself as an active participant in her personal salvation. As a cultural producer who works to redefine conceptions of femininity, I have argued that the gestalt of Colonna's symbols was also legible to the male artists who "visualize" her writings. Colonna's pro-women rhetoric is given visual from by artists like Michelangelo who depict women as spiritually empowered.

A comparison between Michelangelo's and Colonna's interpretation of the Virgin's lamentation posit analogous views of female spirituality. Both emphasize female suffering and loss, as well as the Madonna's role as a spiritual intercessor. Therefore, much of Colonna's lasting success relies on her ability to weave elements of female

---

[146] Ibid., 34.
[147] Ibid., 34. Gouwens explains that Giovio assumes that narrator of the dialogue and Colonna welcomes him in as a guest in her home during as refuge during the 1527 Sack of Rome by Emperor Charles V.

empowerment, piety, and gender-specific spirituality into her poems. Her own words as a cultural producer both bolstered her own selfhood in a world of Man's cultural and religious rebirth. The Italian Renaissance might not paint a complete image of women's symbolic control through language and art, but the case of Vittoria Colonna promotes the notion that women are multi-dimensional in their relationship to the divine. Her works, as a reflection of her own subjectivity, react against the polemical representations of spiritual femininity. Colonna speaks to both women's capacity for spiritual strength, and their presentation of emotional acuity through cultural production.

Chapter 3

The Hermeneutics of Portraiture: The Case of Sofonisba Anguissola

In the previous chapter, I examined Vittoria Colonna's assertion of a poetic selfhood through images of strong female spirituality. As feminist theories suggest, a woman's articulation of her selfhood helps to enact socio-symbolic change.[148] As women use the tools of cultural signification, through language and pictorial images, they make their own contributions in the larger cultural arena which are read and understood by others. This seems to be true of Colonna's case. Colonna's words have proclaimed her position of spiritual agency through her alignment with the narratives of female biblical figures like the Madonna. More importantly, as a cultural producer, her articulation of female subjectivity was legible to master artists that successfully visualized her words in drawings and paintings. Michelangelo depicts scenes of female spirituality that appropriately represent Colonna's pro-woman beliefs about repentance and salvation. I move forward to argue that sixteenth-century women painters used similar symbolic tools to communicate their subjectivity. I will now examine the case of sixteenth-century portraitist Sofonisba Anguissola (b. 1532) whose self-fashioning through self-portraiture begins to define an alternative vision of women artists.[149]

---

[148] Bono, "Women's Biographies and Autobiographies", 3. Bono says that to "[activate] female subjectivity in order to produce a socio-symbolic change… where it can produce its own representations and evaluations of itself and the world."

[149] Woods-Marsden, Joanna. *Renaissance Self-Portraiture: The Visual Construction of Identity and the Social Status of the Artist*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 13. Woods-Marsden coins the term self-fashioning here as she refers to one's ability to shape their public persona through the "truth" of verisimilitude.

Similar to Colonna's verbal self-hood, Anguissola uses the visual language of self-portraiture to boldly insert herself into a larger cultural narrative. In a period where women leave little material culture of their own behind, self-portraits are a rich treasure-trove worthy of further study. The symbolic elements within self-portraits allow viewers to experience both the personal narratives of individual artists and universalizing narratives about the female experience.[150] For example, Sofonisba Anguissola experiments with secularized self-representation to communicate her status as a woman humanist, which means that she was educated in the liberal and visual arts. More importantly, her portraits provide insight into her success as one of the first professional and successful women painters. As a woman who painted on commission, Anguissola's self-portraits were often used to advertise her artistic skills to potential patrons. In the portraits from her early professional career, such as *Self-Portrait at the Clavichord* (1561) [Fig. 9], *Self Portrait* (1554) [Fig.10] and *Self Portrait Painting* [Fig. 11] Anguissola represents herself with a sense of selfhood typically reserved for portraits of men. She depicts herself seated in the center of each image, poised to demonstrate musical or artistic talents. The flattened, neutral background within each image emphasizes Anguissola as the sole focus of the image. Observing the compositional emphasis of her own figure in her collection of portraits, I will explain how certain symbols which Anguissola employs relate to her socio-cultural context. Conducting a close reading of the symbols within Anguissola's portraits, which range from objects like

[150] Universalizing female experience here means the broader experience of Italian Renaissance women of privilege.

clavichords to overt stylistic references to master paintings by male artists, expands the definition of sixteenth-century femininity. Aside from her inclusion of symbols which indicate aspects of her female experience, Anguissola developed a sophisticated artistic style which demonstrates her mastery of her medium. Women artists, like Sofonisba Anguissola, achieve the status of a cultural producer through bold artistic decisions that place them on equal footing with their male counterparts.[151]

Female artists of the sixteenth-century were few due to circumstance, primarily social, economic, and educational limitations that were placed on women. According to historian Margaret King, it was uncommon for women of any status to work professionally (outside of a domestic sphere) for a sustainable income.[152] Women from this time were seldom financially independent or homeowners as demonstrated by fourteenth-century census reports which show that women taxpayers made up about four percent of the total population.[153] Most women painters like, Sofonisba Anguissola, were born of privilege where women's economic dependency on men was implicit. Though economic dependency limits the agency of women in a public sphere, wealthy families could improve the domestic lives of their daughters through humanist education. As discussed previously, figures like Baldassare Castiglione's in *Book of the Courtier* began to normalize humanist education for women as he afforded them equal characteristics as

---

[151] Here, I chose to focus solely on Sofonisba Anguissola. There were other women artists, like Lavinia Fontana who painted several decades after Sofonisba. Sofonisba seems to be the earliest successful professional woman painter, and many followed her.

[152] King, *Women of the Renaissance*, 24-5. King explains that women were domestic workers, especially during the early Renaissance. But, as a capitalist system developed out of a class of international merchants, women's traditional labors were increasingly devalued.

[153] Ibid., 19. This figure comes from late 14th century English censuses, and does not reflect specific Italian circumstances.

noblemen, including education, witty conversation, and artistic endeavors.[154] Humanist education was revolutionary for women because it emphasized the use of Latin which allowed women access to the arts and philosophies of their Classical forefathers.[155] Women artists like Sofonisba Anguissola, who was born into a Cremonese family of provincial nobility in approximately 1535, benefited from this form of education.[156] Her father Amilcare Anguissola was progressive in that he provided each of his five daughters an above-average humanist education and thus hoped to guarantee their success in a courtly life.[157] From the very beginning, a woman's artistic success was dependent on the fortune of her birth and the attitudes of the men that surrounded her.

Sofonisba and her sisters were educated not only in reading and writing, but also in the arts, studying under local painter Bernardino Campi in their youth. Seeing promise in her talent, Sofonisba's father took efforts to create further opportunities for her. He corresponded with Michelangelo while he was living in Rome and solicited drawings that Sofonisba could copy and color as practice. [158] After this initial exchange, art historian Charles de Tolnay suggested that Michelangelo generously continued to correspond with Sofonisba to directly offering her advice and even praising her artistic growth.[159] In a

---

[154] Sutherland-Harris and Nochlin, *Women Artists: 1550-1950*, 24.
[155] Ibid., 24. They note that "Some proof of the influence that Castiglione's ideas had on the women who became painters can be found not only in their family origins but also and more significantly in the ways they were presented to the world by themselves and their biographers."
[156] The exact date of her birth is unknown, but other primary documents citing the creation of certain portraits place her birthdate between 1532 and 1535.
[157]Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance Self-Portraiture*, 193. It is also believed that Amilcare Anguissola trained his daughters in painting as a way to make additional income. This complicates Sofonisba's sense of motivation; was she internally motivated to become a court painter, or was it the wish of her father?
[158] Sutherland Harris and Nochlin, *Women Artists 1550-1950*, 106.
[159]De Tolnay, Charles. "Sofonisba Anguissola and Her Relations with Michelangelo". The Walters Art Museum. *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* Vol. 4, (1941): 114-119. The letters found in the archives at Archivio Buonarroti of Florence contain unedited letters from Amilcare Anguissola to Michelangelo.

letter written by Amilcare to Michelangelo he implores the artist's further direction for his daughter: "I beg of you that since, by your innate courtesy and goodness, you deigned by your advice in the past to introduce her (to art), that you will condescend sometime in the future to guide her again".[160] With her father acting as her agent, Sofonisba was invited to paint at the Spanish court, a position that Amilcare solicited by sending a self-portrait of Sofonisba to the court as a demonstration piece. With this position, she was granted an annual stipend, was showered with gifts, and even provided a dowry upon her marriage to Sicilian nobleman Fabrizio de Moncada.[161]

Anguissola's notoriety has been described by Sutherland-Harris and Nochlin as "the first Italian woman to become an international celebrity as an artist and the first for whom a substantial body of works is known."[162] Because of her multi-national European success, Sofonisba's portraits were more than expressions of identity, they also advertised her artistic skill to potential patrons. This is true of the early portraits that identify Sofonisba as both the artist and the sitter, and these images even contain text describing her name and status as a "*Virgo*", or unmarried woman of virtue. Therefore, as Joanna Woods-Marsden suggests in her book titled *Renaissance Self-Portraiture: The Visual Construction of Identity and the Social Status of the Artist.*, "the self-portraiture of

---

The further association of the Sofonisba and Michelangelo appears in a letter from Michelangelo's friend Tomaso Cavalieri written to Cosimo de'Medici, January 20, 1562. Even beyond these exchanges, de Tolnay traces stylistic similarities between some of Sofonisba's and Michelangelo's work. One such example is her *Portrait of a Young Nobleman*. De Tolnay explains that the composition in the style of the Brescia School, the dog represented after the manner of Durer trace these influences.

[160] Ibid., 117.

[161] Sutherland-Harris and Nochlin, *Women Artists: 1550-1950*, 28. Upon Moncada's death, she moved to Palermo where she remarried a Genoese nobleman, Orazio Lomellini.

[162] Ibid., 106.

Anguissola's early career, which were conceived and designed to present the artist to court society as an attractive, high-class, talented young woman, had a precise function".[163] Therefore, Sofonisba's talent as a portraitist and educated woman sustained her success in a male-dominated cultural realm because men who admired Sofonisba's portraits would become patrons of her artistic talents.

During the Spanish Court period of her career, Sofonisba Anguissola painted more than twenty similar self-portraits, which describes repetitive self-fashioning that was only matched by Durer and Rembrandt. [164] This points not only to her prolific career as a portraitist, but also a desire to represent herself. As a constant in her body of work, self-representation allows Anguissola to demonstrate the progression of her skill through the reinterpretation of the same subject matter. Furthermore, her repetitive self-portraiture likely speaks about her desire to be seen within the artistic community.

Sofonisba Anguissola's *Self-Portrait at the Clavichord* (1561) [Fig. 9] characterizes the sense of self-assertion that she displays in her larger oeuvre. This image dates from the time when Anguissola was a resident artist in the Spanish royal court. The artist herself is depicted as a woman of many creative abilities. Moreover, the overall composition and symbolic elements emphasizes her own youth and beauty. A half-length portrait, Sofonisba is seated in front of a clavichord at the center of the composition. Her arms are extended to touch the keys, as she is poised to play and demonstrate her skills to the viewer. The neutral background leaves viewers with no sense of the interior space

[163] Woods-Marsden, Joanna. *Renaissance Self-Portraiture*, 193.
[164] Ibid., 107-8.

which she occupies and serves to emphasize Anguissola's action as the primary focus. However, she is not alone in this scene as she is accompanied by a figure who stands to her right and recedes into the shadow. This figure is believed to be Anguissola's maidservant, and her presence in the portrait may imply that she accompanied Anguissola to Spain.[165] The figure also seems to be added to the composition as an afterthought, which is suggested by the maidservant's hovering presence and flatness within the space. I believe that rather than a double portrait, Anguissola employs the figure as a prop. The maidservant is notably older than the artist, which showcases her abilities as a portraitist. Her dress is somber and modest, it does not embellish her figure nor detract from her action of musical performance. Her eyes are expressive in their crystal blue clarity, and they characterize her unique identity.

Anguissola's *Self-Portrait at the Clavichord* is significant because it demonstrates all of the ways that Anguissola chose to be remembered including her youth, beauty, and her multiplicity of creative talents. While the specific circumstance behind its creation is unknown, there is evidence to suggest that nearly all Sofonisba's self-portraits were given as gifts to prominent figures or family members. This suggests that most of Sofonisba's portraits were works created outside of commission. In *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, Vasari details Sofonisba's gifting practices. One such example is noted in a section of Volume Three which is dedicated to Lombard artists. Vasari says that "At Piacenza the archdeacon's house contains two fine portraits, one a

[165] Sutherland-Harris and Nochlin, *Women Artists: 1550-1950,* 107-8.

portrait of the archdeacon and the other of Anguissola herself."[166] In their exhibition catalog from *Women Artists from 1550-1950,* Anne Sutherland-Harris and Linda Nochlin suggest that Sofonisba sent later versions of her self-portrait at the clavichord to her father due to the inscriptions of dedication.[167]

Evaluating the Poetics of Anguissola's Self-Representation

Within this discussion of hermeneutics in portraiture, it is essential to make a note about the genre. Portraiture exists as a category of painting for a nearly singular purpose of immortalizing the sitter. Despite the important task of commemorating the accomplishments and wealth of patrons, historical art critics generally rank portraiture as a less-sophisticated art form.[168] I hope to briefly emphasize the genre of portraiture as a whole in order to add nuance to the understanding of Anguissola's portraiture. I look to art historian Fredrika Jacobs as she relates Neoplatonism to the importance of Portraiture. In her article, "Woman's Capacity to Create", Jacobs traces artistic genius to Aristotelian ideals that place artistic imagination above artistic observation of the natural world. This relates women's biological reproduction as lesser than men's intellectual production.[169] Because of the Aristotelian view, sixteenth-century art critics like Vasari and Giovanbattista Armenini thusly value certain qualities of artistic creation over others.

---

[166] Vasari, *The Lives*, Vol. 3, 319,
[167] Sutherland-Harris and Nochlin, *Women Artists: 1550-1950* , 108. They speak of the Althrop portrait, whose "inscription tells us that she painted [the] portrait for her father; he should have been pleased with this as proof of her continued progress" in Spain. Sutherland-Harris and Nochlin note that the inscription itself is very poorly preserved and reads as an emendation of "ami" to suggest "amilcaris is mine".
[168] Armenini, Giovanbattista. De' veri precetti dellapittura. (Ravenna: 1587)
[169] Jacobs, "Woman's Capacity to Create", 79-80.

One such examples is *Disegno,* or design of an image. One who can master *disegno,* uses his imaginative mind to create something outside of the natural world.[170]

Giovanbattista Armenini, a sixteenth-century art historian and art critic in the vein of Vasari, further considers *disegno* incompatible with portraiture. These sentiment surface in Armenini's 1587 treatise on painting, *De veri precetti della pittura* where he writes that "even an artist of mediocre talent (mediocre *ingegno*) can master this art [portraiture] as long as he is experienced in colors." [171] The rhetorical undertone here proposes that one does not need to be talented to paint portraits. Armenini goes so far as to say design is incompatible with portraiture, "…we have seen more than once that the more accomplished an artist is in *disegno,* the less they have known how to make portraits"[172] In fact, Armenini suggests an inverse relationship between masterful artists and their ability to paint successful portraits. I argue that women portraitists are placed in a double-bind due to Vasari's and Armenini's hierarchies within art criticism. Should women artists paint successful portraits, their art lacks *disegno*. Should they paint with *disegno,* they are creating tension between Aristotelian definitions of intellectual and biological creation. Even within the genre which at times considered "mediocre", Sofonisba's self-portraits are anything but "mediocre". Despite Armenini's assessment of the genre of portraiture, other art critics like Vasari note Sofonisba's mastery of the field. This is evidenced where Vasari explains that Anguissola "has done more in design and

---

[170] Sorabella, Jean. "Venetian Color and Florentine Design." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2002), accessed 5 April, 2017. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/vefl/hd_vefl.htm

[171] Armenini, Giovanbattista. *De' veri precetti dellapittura.* 3, 11, 190, (cited Jacobs's "Woman's Capacity to Create")

[172] Jacobs, "Woman's Capacity to Create", 88.

more gracefully than any other lady of our day, for not only has she designed, colored, and drawn from life, she has produced rare and beautiful paintings of her own."[173] Therefore, there is apparent tension between the perception of portraiture and Anguissola's success within the genre.

This discussion of the symbolic dimensions of Anguissola's portraiture is informed by art historian Jodi Cranston's *The Poetics of Portraiture in the Italian Renaissance* as well as Joanna Woods-Marsden's contributions to the interpretation of Sofonisba's self-portraiture in *Renaissance Self-Portraiture: The Visual Construction of Identity and the Social Status of the Artist*. In her research, one of Cranston's primary objectives in the study of fifteenth-and sixteenth-century portraiture is to define the relationship between the image and the viewer. Similar to Iser's phenomenology of reading, Cranston claims that the portrait-viewer relationship is one of interdependency that challenges viewers to actively engage. [174] For Cranston, this portrait-viewer connection is central because a "portrait generates its meaning by pointing beyond itself and involving itself (the image), the portrayed, the viewer, and the complexity of their interactions within such a gesture." [175] In this complexity of interaction it falls upon the viewer to interpret any meaning beyond the physical description. In other words, portraits must not be taken at face value, but actively interpreted for their subtler poetic significance. This is true because portraiture contains secondary symbols which communicate meaning beyond line and form; they "offer a figuration of how to voice

[173] Vasari, *The Lives*, Vol. 2 Pg. 328.
[174] Cranston, *The Poetics of Portraiture*, 1.
[175] Ibid., 2.

ideas—the process of signifying and both the ideas themselves…."[176] Effectively, the symbolism within portraiture develops its own language. In my discussion of Sofonisba Anguissola, the notion that her portraits contain a signifying "language" underlines the subtle details that give rise to female subjectivity in her images. How does Sofonisba's pose and clothing speak to her status as a woman painter in a male-dominated arts scene? Where Cranston writes exclusively on male artists, Joanna Woods Marsden explores more generously Anguissola's self-fashioning through symbolism.[177] Together, Cranston and Woods-Marsden suggest that the symbols created by (women) painters are deeply meaningful; poetic capacities for women's self-portraits engage in self-fashioning that disrupts notions of passive female figures.

Beyond the interactive aspect of viewership, Cranston develops further criteria for reading the symbols of portraiture. She observes the nuanced ways that subjectivity develops from signifying imagery, one of the most important ways being portraiture's mirror of "self and identity".[178] As a mirror of self and identity, portraits not only reflect the physical likeness of the sitter. Instead, composed compositions build a social and personal context which inform viewers[179]. For example, Anguissola's *Self-Portrait at the Clavichord* represents her likeness, but the details of her clothing, and instrument, speak to her virtues and musical talents. Though this initially appears to be a simplistic methodology, the image of "self and identity" within women's self-portraiture is compounded. Within Anguissola's larger oeuvre, I will discuss the many ways that she

---

[176] Ibid., 146.
[177] Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance Self-Portraiture*, 191-195.
[178] Cranston, *The Poetics of Portraiture*, 1.
[179] Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance Self-Portraiture*, 191.

employs symbols to indicate her identity as a woman painter. With Cranston's and Woods-Marsden's research as foundational knowledge on the poetics of portraiture, Anguissola's self-representation as a female cultural producer becomes clear. I will adopt a few of Cranston's categories for this analysis, which include the trope of the self-aware sitter, the alignment of the sitter within a greater narrative, and the phenomenology of painting.[180] In effect, Anguissola's self-fashioning reveals control of cultural production; her own self-image tells her own story.

In working to highlight Anguissola's role as a cultural producer, I first move to distinguish her self-portraiture from other sixteenth-century portraits. A comparison between traditional female portraiture and Sofonisba's self-portraiture will highlight different illustrations of femininity. In this comparison, I am dually informed by the allegorical implementation of the female body and traditional profile portraiture of prominent female figures. Cranston's discussion of poetics informs the use of women's bodies as metaphorical tools. Rooted in dialogues of feminine beauty, and the traditions of courtly love, these images employ the female body as a personification of an ideal.[181] First, I will consider the allegorical representation of the female body, which falls outside of portraiture in the idealized view of women matches their fictional status. Sandro Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (c. 1480) [Fig 1] is a central example. A woman born of the sea, the Venus is superhumanly beautiful and the embodiment of Love. Her golden hair flows as she stands on a half-shell, she glows with divinity. Her body is painted as

---

[180] Cranston, *The Poetics of Portraiture*, 48-56, 69,98.
[181] Ibid. 47. There is much research on this topic, for further readings, consult: Bayer, Andrea. "Art and Love in Renaissance Italy". The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

idealized, and though she preserves her modesty, she also emphasizes her womanly attributes. I maintain that this defining artistic treatment (idealism) of the female figure works against the notion of female subjectivity. Though there is no argument which claims the Venus to be a historical female figure, Botticelli's representation helps to canonize woman-as-allegory. These images depict not individuals, but women as symbols for the larger cultural phenomenon of femininity that still pervades the art historical master narrative.

Even within the genre of portraiture, female sitters sometimes feel remote and impersonal. [182] Cranston notes that female sitters in the fifteenth century are generally depicted as detached, depicted in profile well after it ceased to be fashionable for men. I illustrate this case through such well-known examples as Piero della Francesa's dual *Portraits of Federico da Montefeltro and His Wife Battista Sforza* (c.1465) [Fig. 11]. The image depicts the Duke of Urbino and his wife in profile set against a landscape backdrop that emphasizes their domain. There is an allegorical image on the reverse of the diptych which shows the duke wearing the armor of Victory and the duchess pulled by unicorns which are emblematic of her chastity. The portraits and allegorical image are meant to be read together, which emphasizes the interaction between allegory and portraiture. [183]On the side which depicts the likeness of the sitters, the duke's hooked nose and blemishes indicate his identity rather than idealization at the hand of the artist. Sforza, on the other hand, is less distinctive in her facial features. Rather than portraying Sforza as a subject,

---

[182] Cranston, *The Poetics of Portraiture*, 47.
[183] "The Bridal Portrait, Virtue and Beauty, Leonardo's Gierva de Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women". *National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C*. NGA.gov: (2001-2002), accessed 5 April, 2017. https://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/2001/virtuebeauty/bridal.shtm

she can be read as emphasizing the Duke's wealth through her lavish ornamentation. The emphasis in this portrait rests on Sforza's ornamentation. Arguably, this detracts the viewer's attention from markers of her personality and instead highlights the wealth of her husband.[184] Therefore, even though this portrait is meant to memorialize Sforza, we remember her primarily as a symbol for her husband's accomplishments.

Beginning with the characteristics which do *not* define her identity within her portraits is helpful in highlighting Anguissola's success as a cultural producer. Even in a basic compositional sense, Anguissola's *Self-Portrait at the Clavichord* differs drastically from della Francesco and Botticelli's images. Sofonisba's and Botticelli's images are separated by nearly half a century and this indicates major changes within stylistic conventions. For example, Sofonisba's half-length portrait firstly de-emphasizes her figure. The eye is directed by the repoussoir of the clavichord and follows the curve of Anguissola's arms, which are poised to play. Then the eye rests on her face as she turns to look at the viewer. She presents herself set within a shallow interior space with no hint at the world outside the image which directs the viewer's focus towards the action contained within the painting itself. Anguissola's sense of intended musical performance accentuates her dynamism as she does not sit passively to be viewed. This comparison of female figures distinguishes her body of self-portraits. Anguissola's image does not function to promote someone else's wealth, nor do they allegorize herself as an

[184] The Bridal Portrait", *nationalgallery.gov* , "As the family's status depended on projecting a public image of financial success, the amount spent on the bride's clothes could represent a significant share of her family's worth. The groom responded with a counter-dowry of equally lavish clothing and jewelry."

embodiment of ideal Beauty and Love. What Sofonisba does accomplish, however, is the expression of self-hood as the primary and fully engaged subject of the scene.

The first way we might read Anguissola's participation within an important visual culture is through her intentional alignment with other male artists. Anguissola portrays herself in a way that parallels those of renowned male humanists through her image *Self-Portrait* (1554) [Fig. 10] which is in located in the collection of Vienna's Kunsthistorisches Museum. This image was painted in a group of self-portraits that are believed to serve the purpose of advertising the young artist's talent to potentional patrons because "…her father, Amilcare, an impoverished nobleman, seems to have been her business manager, sending her self-portraits to influential men in hope of preferment…"[185] Anguissola depicts herself at the center of a half-length portrait in a three-quarters pose as she turns to engage the viewer. Her expression is intense, with large eyes whose gaze is dually penetrative and elusive. Anguissola hold a small book in her left hand which she presents splayed open to the viewer revealing the text on the page "*Sofonisba Anguissola, Virgo, Seipfam Fecit 1554*" (Sofonisba Anguissola, Virgin, Made this in 1554). Although she is clothed in black, a color reserved for mourning or noble intellectuals, Anguissola depicts herself not in mourning but with a distinctive scholarly

[185] King, Catherine. "Looking a Sight: Sixteenth-Century Portraits of Woman Artists". *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* , 58. (1995), 381-406., 386."The most substantial group of self-portraits made to advertise the youthful talent of a female painter was that produced by the Cremonese painter Sofonisba Anguissola. Her father, Amilcare, an impoverished nobleman, seems to have been her business manager, sending her self-portraits to influential men in hope of preferment…"

tone.[186] This also explains her use of Latin in the small book that identifies her as the painter.

The striking aspect of this image is its compositional similarity to Raphael's *Portrait of Baldassare Castiglione* (1515) [Fig.13]. Anguissola's composition is painted in a nearly identical half-length and three-quarter seated pose similar to Raphael's image. The sitters occupy similar amounts of space within the frame and are set against a neutral background which emphasizes both the flesh and physicality of the sitters. Even the striking, penetrating stare of their blue eyes are parallel. Mindful of the act of self-fashioning, Sofonisba's alignment with this style of portraiture allows her to make the same claims of education and sophistication about herself. As a woman of a humanist education and cultivated talents, it is most likely that Anguissola would have been familiar with Castiglione's texts and may have appropriated a similar self-fashioning for herself. The juxtaposition of these images begins to demonstrate that Sofonisba participates within cultural production by aligning herself within the larger narrative as her compositional gestalt politely nods to Castiglione. Perhaps in creating this image, Anguissola too aligns herself with Raphael, a talented and highly-sought portrait painter.

Anguissola's inclusion of identifying text within the small book she holds in her *Self-Portrait* from 1554 doubles the impact of her composition as well as falls within the larger convetion of epigraphs in sixteenth-century portraiture.[187] Epigraphs are brief

---

[186] Castiglione, *Book of the Courtier*, "I am also pleased when clothes tend to be sober rather than foppish; so it seems to me that the most agreeable color is black..."

[187] Cranston, *The Poetics of Portraiture*, 9, 12. Cranston cites such examples as Giorgione's *La Vecchia* (c. 1507) and *Titian's Allegory of Prudence* (c. 1570) as both containing texts which reflexively refer to the figure in the image.

textual inscriptions which allow the artist to express sentiments that the image alone cannot. In Cranston's definition, this sort of text implies the function of an interlocutor. To explain this phenomenon, Cranston draws from Alberti's *On Painting* (1435). Alberti's text reads "I like to think there to be someone in the 'historia' who tells the spectators what is going on…beckons them with his hand to look…". [188] This means that within the larger composition, there is usually something that informs the viewer of what meaning to glean form the image. Alberti even insinuates that the inclusion of a secondary figure can serve this function as they motion who or what to notice.[189] Cranston describes Alberti's interlocutor as a way to bridge the world inside the portrait with the viewer outside portrait.[190] In a world where all subjectivity was male, Anguissola's *Self-Portrait* (1554) asserts her own sense of selfhood and informs viewers whom they are viewing through the intentionally legible book that she holds. This sense of awareness of the viewer defines the rhetoric of self-presentation. Anguissola's own arm draws the eye towards her self-referential text. She subtly claims that this image was made of her own talent and volition, and this overtly indicates a message of self-fashioning.

Within Anguissola's body of work, I draw from Woods-Marsden's study of Anguissola to reason that the representation of her own gaze is also symbolic of her self-

---

[188] Alberti, Leon Battista. *On Painting* (1435) Translated with introd. and notes by John R. Spencer. (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1966), 42.

[189] Ibid., 42. This is true where he says "someone" who tells spectators what to look at, in Sofonisba's case she is the figure that tells viewers *what to notice.*

[190]*Cranston, The* Poetics of Portraiture, 52., "Alberti's invention of the interlocutor for painting, although in large part derived from the orator's responsibility to deliver and participate in his address, parallels the direct dialogue between narrator and reader of texts in the Renaissance."

fashioning. As Woods-Marsden suggests "symbolized, among other things, reflection upon, and consideration of, one's identity, which was also one of the ostensible functions of a self-portrait."[191] In such works as Anguissola's *Self-Portrait* from 1554, Woods-Marsden's sense of the mirror comes alive as Anguissola's gaze is so direct as to warrant the experience of being looked through. Viewers have a sense that she is not exchanging their glances but seeing herself as through a mirror. The peculiar situation of Anguissola's gaze aligns with the greater convention of the unseen mirror within portraiture. In a practical sense, mirrors aid self-portraitists to capture their own likeness. As one paints by studying their own reflection in a mirror, the image they create is in accordance with the reflection. The position of the viewer, then, occupies the metaphorical space of the would-be mirror. The gaze that develops from this practice is simultaneously penetrative and evasive. To describe the relationship of the mirror to subjectivity, Cranston explains that portraits allow the artist to "…question the reflexive relationship central to making an image of oneself and manipulate the expected correspondence between image and mirror reflection to suggest the portrait type is a metaphor for the self." [192]

Some artists, like Parmigianino in his *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* (c. 1524) [Fig. 14], explicitly manipulate this trope. In more ways than one, Parmigianino's image looks like a convex mirrored reflection. In his round-format portrait, he playfully distorts his own image to reflect the shape of the mirror. Through this experimentation,

[191] Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance Self-Portraiture*, 201.
[192]Cranston, *Poetics of Portraiture*, 126

Parmigianino also pokes fun at the notion that self-portraits merely copy a mirrored reflection.[193] In a sense, viewership of Parmigianino's and Sofonisba's works becomes two-fold; the painter is also a viewer because she must be self-aware enough to represent their own figure and the artist's own gaze occurs simultaneously with the viewer beholding the image. The unseen mirror convention is implemented in Anguissola's self-reflexive gaze, one that is direct yet not wholly engaging the eye of the beholder. [194]This illusion to a mirror defeats the potential for objectification because the viewer bears witness to the painter experiencing her own image. As a symbol of Anguissola's own subjectivity, she depicts her self-awareness through the mirrored gaze.

Another convention which artists employ to represent their subjectivity and creative identity is a sense of artistic performativity. In her research on portraiture, Cranston observes the frequency with which artists portray themselves as painting in their self-portraits. A painter who shows themselves in the act of painting is a metaphor for the action that they performed to complete the image and thus embodies the experience of creation.[195] Cranston frames this observation as "The Myth of Tracing", which describes Pliny's Classical myth of a man tracing his shadow as the performative birth of art. Pliny's myth recalls Plato's Allegory of the Cave. The Allegory of the Cave describes the ways in which Man distinguished the natural world from the intangible realm of ideas which we only know through thought. The Allegory of the Cave gives context to the act

---

[193] Ibid., 143.
[194] Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. (New York : Penguin,1978). Berger writes on the idea of the male gaze, which he describes as ""Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at" Here, I argue that Sofonisba does not engage the male gaze, he returns her own gaze as through a mirror.
[195] Cranston, *Poetics of Portraiture*, 105.

of creating, as an artist translates ideas into physical images on the canvas.[196] The myth of tracing is important in Renaissance art theory as both Ghiberti, and later Vasari, reference it to distinguish between shadow, its trace, and the creator himself.[197]

Anguissola, too, engages in this convention as she paints herself in the act of painting. One such example of this is Anguissola *Self-Portrait Painting* (1556) [Fig. 15]. Here Anguissola portrays herself in the act of painting a Madonna and Child image and thus she both references her identity and her creative hand. Anguissola depicts herself in a half-length portrait which is rendered in three-quarters view. She turns her body slightly to face the easel to the left of the composition and depicts herself with the tools of her trade, holding a paintbrush that just touches the canvas-in-progress. This also alludes to a sense of feminine tenderness through the in-progress tableau as the Madonna gently embraces the Christ Child. Showing herself in the act of painting enables the phenomenology of reading because viewers witness the painting and also experience proof of Anguissola's artistic talent. She expresses her authorship through the performance of creation, and further characterizes her abilities to paint genres containing *disegno*. In a period when women's work was believed to lack the ability of *disegno* among other traits, the performance of creation is a direct action against this claim.

The three self-portraits examined to this point have all contained direct self-referential elements that contribute overtly to the subjectivity of sixteenth-century women artists. Now, I look to stress the sense of subjectivity through works that are non-

[196] Ibid., 104-6.
[197] Ibid., 105

autographic, or works which subtly claim the subjectivity of the artist that made them. The following works I will discuss are self-portraits, but their rhetorical meaning operates more quietly than self-referential texts and mirrored gazes. In non-autographic portraits, there is a distinctive lack of signal from the artist which indicates that they are both the sitter and the painter. There are no texts which claim the identity of the sitter, and the composition is often a representation of the self-portraitist from a third-person point of view. Cranston coins the "I-Thou" mode that complicates the message of self-fashioning through a meta-discourse.[198] One such example that creates this subject-reader exchange is is Titian's *Self-portrait* (c. 1565) [Fig. 16]. Titian paints in a nearly profile view allows the artists renders himself as though he were painted by another. The paintbrush in his right hand is the only marker of his profession. This work falls outside tropes of self-referential texts and the mirrored gaze. If viewers do not know that Titian himself painted this image, it would be easy to mistake if for the work of another. Here, Cranston notes it is unusual for an artist to paint portraits that are "subtle enough for the viewer to overlook the picture as a self-portrait, where the visual disowning of the sitter's identity with the maker has the effect of announcing the self-portrait by another hand." [199] In this sense, non-autographic works serve to obscure the relationship between sitter and maker, even when the sitter and maker are one.[200] The effect of this mode of self-portraiture appears to claim legitimacy for oneself in a third-person voice. To justify one's own experiences from a third-person narrative perspective legitimizes it in a public arena for

[198] Ibid., 98-102.
[199] Ibid., 98.
[200] Ibid., 104. Cranston says "Titian, by representing himself as if another had represented him in the process of representing himself, figures the multiplication inherent in the personal pronoun 'I'."

representation of one's own image as though perceived by another implies that self-perception matches that of the viewer.

Sofonisba Anguissola engages in the same "I-Thou" in her painting *Bernardino Campi painting Sofonisba Anguissola* (c. 1550) [Fig. 17].[201] Sofonisba paints a double portrait, both of herself and her teacher. The lifelikeness of Campi's figure is even higher than the self-portrait element, which may be a subtle way to suggest that her skill surpasses that of her instructor. Still, the gaze is directed at the viewer and slightly playful. The narrative quite literally implies that the image is made by another hand. Does Sofonisba refer to Campi's own authorial voice to claim the legitimacy, or does this playful double portrait assert the strength of her own paintership? The most obvious reading is that Anguissola shows herself as a product of Campi's instruction, and thus, his masterpiece. However, as her own skills surpass those of her instructor, we might consider alternative interpretations of Anguissola's self-fashioning.

Mary Garrard writes to further explore this perplexing subject-object relationship as she juxtaposes this image with Sofonisba's straight-forward portraiture like the *Self-Portrait* from 1554. Garrard comments on the self-effacing and humorous qualities of the work but she also highlights how it asserts a gendered voice. As Sofonisba renders herself as both the object and subject of this double portrait, she emphasizes the masculine authority of her teacher. At the same time, Sofonisba subverts the notion because she is the one doing all of the representing. Garrard draws from feminist theorists

[201] This image of by Sofonisba is believed to predate Titan's non-autographic self-portrait. Perhaps this furthers the idea of her ingenuity.

Luce Irigaray and Mary Jacobus to say "a woman artist mimics or acts out the roles of femininity, in order to expose, subversively, the thing that she mimics… women have access only to masculine linguistic (or, we can add, pictorial) structures…."[202] Garrard further suggests that women adopt these patterns of representation to criticize them in a public venue. Mindful of Garrard's argument, I maintain that Anguissola adopts predominantly masculinized vocabulary to assert her validity as a female painter, she simultaneously uses this language to depict herself as a masterpiece. Anguissola's attempt at self-fashioning a public image is clever and looks to comment on the subject-object position of the female body in portraiture.

Ultimately, this discussion suggests that Anguissola's selective hermeneutics, like the presence of an unseen mirror or the inclusion of self-referential text, align with the stylistic conventions of even the most celebrated artistic geniuses. This may suggest that her authorship is comparable to that of her male counterparts. Raphael, Titian, and Anguissola each employ skillful and subtle symbols of subjectivity within their portraits. The difference in her self-portraits, however, is the insistence upon a feminine subjectivity. As a woman who aligns herself more with male humanists than allegorized femininity, Anguissola treats her own image as inherently valuable. This is likely an intentional professional move on Anguissola's part. Indeed, her subjectivity in these early works (from the late 1550s and early 1560s) were followed by a large array of important

[202] Garrard, Mary D. "Here's Looking at Me: Sofonisba Anguissola and the Problem of the Woman Artist." *Renaissance Quarterly* 47 (1994):556-622, accessed April 10, 2017, 560-61.

commissions.[203] She engages in self-representation to communicate with those who behold the image; the same message of selfhood that was desirable to potential patrons. Jodi Cranston's and Woods-Marsden's criteria for evaluating successful portraiture allows an analysis of Sofonisba's subjectivity. Beyond communicating professionalism, Anguissola's portraits express the value of her experience as a woman through self-referential tropes, engagement with the viewer, and performative images that situate her as woman artist in a male-dominated realm. Even within a small sampling of her early works, these images contradict mainstream depictions of the femininity within the Renaissance canon. Anguissola does not allow her image to allegorize her femininity. Her self-portraits work to prove that sixteenth-century women should be remembered as intellectuals, artists, and musicians through subtle symbols. Why, then, does Anguissola not secure better representation in the dominant art historical narrative? The answer may lie in the rhetoric of her historiography.

Holes in the Historiography: "A rhetoric of praise and blame"[204]

After a discussion of the successes of female subjectivity in self-portraiture, I move on to consider why these representations of selfhood are conventionally undervalued. While Chapter One of this discussion established a general historiographic attitude towards Renaissance women artists, this section narrows its scope to discuss Sofonisba Anguissola as a case study. Revisiting the rhetoric of art criticism

---

[203] Sutherland-Harris and Nochlin, *Women Artists 1550-1950*. 108-9, . They imply that Sofonisba's Spanish Court period produces important commissions. Vasari also provides evidence of this where he references the Pope Pius IV's commission of a portrait of the Spanish Queen. (Vasari, Vol. 4 pg 319)

[204] Jacobs, "Woman's Capacity", 83

demonstrates how art historical memory devalues Anguissola's accomplishments. This section will primarily focus on the attitude of Giorgio Vasari towards Anguissola in *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*.[205] I chose Vasari's comments on Anguissola because he discusses both her biography and her artworks within the scope of *The Lives*. Vasari's *The Lives* is crucial to a discussion of subjectivity and sense of self-fashioning in portraiture because it contextualizes the way these works were received by contemporaries according to Vasari's understanding. Vasari's text emphasizes chronological organization, but Sofonisba is mentioned in three of his four volumes.[206] Though Vasari is credited with establishing the chronological progression of the Italian Renaissance that is still employed today, Sofonisba's case does not align with his larger oeuvre. Anguissola's praises are never presented as singular, which may suggest that her success as a woman artist was still unworthy of her own biography.

Anguissola appears in Volume Two of Vasari's *The Lives* for the first time within Properzia de Rossi's Chapter. Properzia de Rossi is referred to as Madonna de Rossi, the *Sculptress* of Bologna. The only woman artist to be commemorated in a chapter of her own.[207] Anguissola is granted the last paragraph of Properzia's section, as a fellow woman artist and daughter of a reputable Bolognese family. Vasari notes:

> Sofonisba of Cremona, daughter of M/ Amilcaro Anguissola, has done more in design and more gracefully than any other lady of our day, or not only has she

[205] Here, I will mainly discuss Vasari. Though, I do acknowledge that there were other contemporary male art critics contributing to the discussion.
[206] Vasari mentions Sofonisba Anguissola in Volume 2 (p 328), Volume 3 (p.325) and Volume 4 (p. 319)
[207] Vasari, *The Lives*, Vol. 2, 328. This touches upon the point made in chapter one of my thesis, and the attitude and rhetoric, of "praise and blame" that Jacobs illustrates fits well with the way Vasari speaks of Sofonisba Anguissola and her sisters.

> designed, coloured and drawn from life, and copied the works of others excellently, but she has produced rare and beautiful paintings from her own. [208]

Vasari takes a moment here to also compliment her ability to masterfully copy the works of others as well as her ability to design her own compositions. Here, Vasari further explains her biography, which includes her time spent in Spain and speaks to the lifelike qualities of her works. He concludes by saying that "I have put this in my book of designs, in memory of her ability". [209] The inclusion of Sofonisba here seems tangential and almost a disservice to Properzia. Instead of praising Properzia's unusual case as a woman sculptor, Vasari fills the page with praise for another.[210] Their lives, artworks, and even materials of choice are incomparable. Properzia was a stone sculptor who worked in bas relief while Sofonisba painted portraits. Perhaps Vasari simply groups all women artists together, furthering their inequitable treatment with male artists.

The second time that Vasari mentions Anguissola occurs in Volume Three, in a section that discusses the accomplishments of Lombard artists. Here, Vasari discusses the success of Sofonisba's teacher Giulio Campi (half-brother to Bernardino Campi who also instructed her) and notes that Sofonisba is the pupil who has done him the most honor through her accomplishments.[211] Vasari mentions a further discovery of her works since the time that he has published on her in Volume Two. He discusses what would perhaps

---

[208] Ibid., vol 2, page 328. This statement continues "for not only has she designed, coloured and drawn from life, and copied the works of others excellently, but she has produced rare and beautiful paintings from her own."
[209] Ibid. vol 2, page 328.
[210] Quin, "Describing the Female Sculptor", 134-149. Though one potential reason for this is the *Paragone* Discourse, which emphasizes sculpting as a rudimentary art that distorts the feminine qualities of a woman's body.
[211] Vasari, *The Lives*, Vol. 3, pg. 319. Vasari says "But the one who did him the most honor was Sofonisba"

become her most famous painting *Portrait of the artist's sisters playing chess* (1555) [Fig. 18]. The image depicts three Anguissola sisters and a maidservant seated at a table playing chess. Lucia returns the gaze of the viewer, but the other sisters are playfully engaged in the scene. Beyond portraying characteristic likeness of the sitters, Anguissola captures a strong sense of humor. One of her younger sisters is shown laughing, while the other sister seems to hold a hand up in protest of an unfair move. In a half-length composition, Anguissola's framing allows viewers to occupy a closer space in relation to the subjects. The figures are set against an idyllic landscape which helps draw the eye into the space. This well-executed quadruple portrait portrays three sisters and a maidservant with incredible liveliness and demonstrates her ability to depict a narrative scene that Vasari describes as "appear[ing] alive and lacking only speech".[212] Vasari expands here upon Sofonisba's talent in this biography as he notes that Pope Pius IV so admired her work that he requested that she paint him a portrait of the queen of Spain. Vasari quotes a letter from the pope himself which describes praise of the work he received.[213] While Vasari accentuates Sofonisba's success, he does so as to reflect on her teacher. Perhaps Anguissola would have experienced a greater sense of subjectivity had her works been praised apart from the male authority of her painting instructor.

The third and final time that Anguissola appears is embedded in the final sentences of the biography dedicated to artist Taddeo Zuccero in Volume Four. Although

---

[212] Ibid., Vol. 3, page 319

[213]Ibid., Vol. 3, page 320. This note from Pope Pius IV reads: "We have received the portrait of out dear daughter the Queen of Spain, which you have sent. It has given the utmost satisfaction both for the person represented…and because it is well and diligently executed by your hand. We thank you and assure you that we shall treasure it among our choicest possessions, and commend your marvelous talent which is the least among your numerous qualities…"

Vasari's words are ones of praise, it reads as an afterthought because Anguissola is only proximally related to Zuccero in that they shared patrons like Pope Julius II. Vasari is discussing the painting collection of a cardinal and he explains "The same wardrobe contains a fine portrait of Signora Sofonisba Anguissola by herself, presented by her to Julius II... the cardinal treasures it greatly. This is the end of the Life of Taddeo Zuccero the painter."[214] Anguissola's name appears arguably out of context, though Vasari's words are ones of praise. Despite the fact that Taddeo Zuccero's biography ends with a discussion of Sofonisba's artwork, there is no suggestion of a personal relationship between the two artists.

Vasari's attitude also defines how the gender of the artists impacts her inclusion in the larger art historical narrative. Fredrika Jacobs argument in *Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa* accentuates Sofonisba's role in a world where professional painters were almost all men. One way that Jacobs accentuates Sofonisba's place in this milieu is by citing Vasari and arguing how he often referred to women artists as successful.[215] One such example comes from the opening sentences of the biography dedicated to Properzia de' Rossi: "It is remarkable that women have always succeed and become famous in all the exercises to which they have devoted themselves…." [216] Despite what Vasari identifies as success, there is also a gendered rhetoric to his assessments. Instead, "the excellence of a woman depends on whether she can rise above the condition of her sex and act (or paint) like a man."[217] In a sense, Vasari's rhetoric implies that artistic talent

[214] Ibid., Vol 4, Pg. 108,
[215] Jacobs, *Virtuosa*, 157.
[216] Vasari, *The Lives*, Vol. 3, 325.
[217] Jacobs, *Virtuosa*. 159

alone does not guarantee that a woman should become successful, she must also paint like a man. In her research, Jacobs's identifies this double-bind in Vasari's writings as the rhetoric of praise and blame. Jacob's aforementioned "rhetoric of praise and blame" takes on new meaning in this context for women are praised for their successes but blamed for the fact that they do not paint like men. Therefore, women must surpass the supposed limitations of womanhood, including virtue, to act and paint like a man.

My illustration of Fredrika H. Jacob's women's (pro)creativity in Chapter One is worthy of further consideration in this instance. Aligning with the attitudes towards female biology of the era, Vasari does not separate the role of Woman and the role of Mother in his rhetoric of *The Lives*. Does Vasari acknowledge the subjectivity Anguissola worked to convey or does he view women's primary creativity as procreativity? Vasari's gendered ideation of art as a (pro)creative process further complicates the historiography of artists like Sofonisba Anguissola. While Vasari comments on the skill of the artist, Jacobs notes the problematic nature of his comments as she says Vasari "suggests a connection between woman's biological capacity to "make living men" and her artistic ability to reproduce man's likeness."[218] Vasari comments on the way women can create flesh (as mothers), so some subjects are natural to them. Vasari seems to criticize women metaphorically painting flesh when they can do so physically, but this attitude is unsurprising considering the cultural context. Even thinkers like Castiglione take for granted the equal intelligence of courtly women, they still view

[218] Jacobs, "Woman's Capacity", 78. Vasari's translated statement reads: "If women know so well how to make living men, what marvel is it that those who wish are also so well able to make them in painting".

their biological processes as an essential tenant of female identity.[219] Vasari is keen to observe Anguissola's talents but he must mention her primary role with regard to her gender. This also begs the question of Vasari's choice to represent women in the first place. His gendered comments towards woman's creative biological capacity hint at deeply-bedded roots of philosophical male supremacy.

It would be incorrect to conclude women artists garnered no praise during or shortly after their lifetimes. But, it is notable that the works of Anguissola are celebrated with caution based on the normalized women's behavior of the sixteenth-century. Revisiting the rhetorical implications of art critics like Vasari provides further context for the place of women in the art historical timeline. Sofonisba Anguissola's portraiture contains similar qualities as male portraits but her works are celebrated with unequal language. Vasari's sporadic references to Sofonisba Anguissola's life and the ongoing rhetoric of praise and blame serve to bury her underneath more important male talents. The discussion of her works within the chapter of another female artist (whose works are wholly dissimilar) serves neither woman artist well. As Vasari discusses Anguissola in Properzia de Rossi's biography, he minimizes the skill of the master sculptor. Vasari is incorrect to compare Sofonisba's and Properzia's works for they contain dissimilar content; Vasari refers to Properzia's church commissions but Sofonisba's portraits. These historiographic holes prove that women artists are far from becoming household names like Michelangelo and Raphael.

[219] Which is rooted in commonly shared Aristotelian modes of thinking.

Ultimately, this critical lens for examining the works of female portraiture demonstrates the strengths of women as cultural producers. At a surface level, Sofonisba Anguissola takes command of established artistic conventions and creates new meaning. The new meaning that develops from her oeuvre is one of female subjectivity; she depicts her talent, her intellect, and her unique position as a professional woman painter. Even if Sofonisba aligns with the conventions of male portraiture, her images successfully subvert sixteenth-century representations of the female figure. Sofonisba employs subtle symbols like the mirrored gaze, or overt ones in the performativity of painting which communicate the degree of her departure from images like Botticelli's *Birth of Venus.* At times, Anguissola acknowledges master painters and Raphael through compositional similarities. This is the case her *Self-Portrait from 1554,* which bears a striking resemblance to Raphael's portrait of Baldassare Castiglione. Other works like *Bernardino Campi painting Sofonisba Anguissola* intentionally subvert the relationship between subject and object, actively commenting on the trope of feminine representation. Such representations are subversive because they insert a feminine perspective into a nearly exclusively masculine mode of representation. Not only does Sofonisba work within these modes of representation, Vasari notes that she "has done more in design and more gracefully than any other lady of our day, not only has she designed…she has produced rare and beautiful paintings of her own." [220]

Even though the artist's declaration is overt, the impact of her statements is incomplete without the viewer to observe. Anguissola takes the viewer into account,

[220] Vasari, *The Lives,* vol 2, 328

guiding his eyes towards the symbols which declare her personhood. The research of art historians Fredrika H. Jacobs, Jodi Cranston, and Joanna Woods-Marsden have laid the groundwork for this analysis of Anguissola's painted subjectivity. Combined, these art historical contributions establish a foundation which helps one to read deeper into Sofonisba's images and identify the elements that make her a valuable cultural producer. Within literature and the visual arts, female authorship tells a potent biographical narrative. Current art historical methods tell us that women's artworks are inherently different from those of master painters yet the true difference is the rhetoric of art criticism surrounding these artists. When womanhood was regarded as a socio-biological condition, women artists employed visual symbols to break barriers. Sofonisba Anguissola's self-representation and assertion of a female narrative show women that we do, in fact, need the Renaissance.

Conclusion

Why "Women Need the Renaissance": Learning from Visions of Female Subjectivity [221]

This project has examined the ways in which sixteenth-century women artists resisted otherness through self-fashioning through the arts. As cultural producers, women communicated symbolic meaning through literature and artwork, and readers situate the symbols within a woman's larger socio-cultural framework. Historians and art historians have expanded the discourse on the lives of sixteenth-century women and understood how a patriarchal society impacted women's creative freedoms. Twentieth-and twenty-first century scholars stand in opposition to the historiographic treatment of women artist as they question the gendered rhetoric of art criticism. Revisiting the cases of Vittoria Colonna and Sofonisba Anguissola, may grant new perspective on representations of femininity for modern readers. Drawing connections between Colonna's poetry and Michelangelo's presentation drawing allows us to read the cultural exchange that existed between two creative geniuses; it makes visible the cultural interpretation of Colonna's female subjectivity. Anguissola's success as a self-portraitist is the purest form of self-fashioning as her self-images allowed her to access both artistic professionalism and cultural opportunity. The role of the viewer is central in these instances, for the cultural significance of these images can only be enacted by the viewer who connects images to broader social contexts. The distance of several hundred years allows modern viewers to reflect upon women lived experiences through the artistic narratives they left behind. In a

[221] Wiesner-Hanks, "Do Women Need the Renaissance?", 539-557.

world where material culture was produced, defined, and preserved by men these artworks stand out as rare and beautiful.

Even more importantly, this project touches upon art as a complex communicative and educational tool. As art historians continue to expand the discourse of women's art history, it is essential to consider the modern educational potential of women's cultural production. In his book *The Philosophy of Art*, Stephen Davies considers philosophical perspectives on the value of art, noting that Classical philosophers like Plato considered art to be a false image of the natural world. [222] Other scholars debate whether art is intrinsically valuable as an object of beauty, or extrinsically valuable an object of education.[223] Without elaborating on the rich theoretical fabric that defines artistic taste, the purpose for evaluating art, and the notion of pleasure in viewership, I have explored the extrinsic value in the works of sixteenth-century women artists.[224] I argue that women's artworks are successful because they interact with their historical and cultural contexts. Davies refers to philosopher of art R. G. Collingwood when he explains that:

> …art should not be thought of as a product or artifact but as an act or process of expression through which the artist clarifies her inchoate emotions and state of mind. As such it is a source of self-knowledge, and not only for the artist because, through the work's communication, the community produces a similar process and thereby comes to a new understanding of itself.[225]

This means that art is a performative process which visualizes an artist's innermost values through the act of creation. It also means that art is valuable for the way it

---

[222] Davies, *Philosophy*, 199.
[223] Ibid., 199.
[224] For further readings on these topics, consult Davies, *Philosophy of Art*, Chapter 8.
[225] Ibid., 213, R.G. Collingwood as discussed in Davies.

translates self-knowledge and personal experiences for the benefit of a broader community. Though Collingwood's claim may not appropriately describe twentieth-century artistic abstractions, it may accurately reflect art within the classical tradition. Such traditional art, like Anguissola's self-portraiture, envisions female subjectivity against a monolithic, masculine cultural backdrop.

As scholars continue to advance the cause of Renaissance women's art history, it becomes clear that research must accentuate the way symbolic meaning relates to women artist's personal experiences. In the argument of art's extrinsic value, we should emphasize the interpretation of biographical connections to women's works. This is pertinent as Davies suggests that "audiences can learn from the artwork attitudes held by its creator, or more widely within the society in which it was generated, because they are betrayed in the artwork."[226] In the scope of my argument, Davies's observation highlights to readers that women's self-representation can be subversive or "betraying" of society: Sixteenth-century women who presented themselves as the subjects of their works convey the message of women's agency. Observing the artist's attitude towards society vis-a-vis an artwork also emphasizes the role of gender in a larger society as she consciously interacts with a larger genre. Feminist philosophers often accentuate gendered readings of artworks to better interpret symbolic meaning; one such way is to take on an imaginative emotional profile and assume the perspective of the intended male

[226] Ibid., 218.

viewer.[227] As we empathize with a woman artist's social and cultural position, we begin to read her artistic messages in a new light.

Beyond this project's application in research methodology, I hope to inform broader viewership through the visibility of women artists in public institutions. Why would a museum-goer care to see portraits of women *by* women in the galleries of the Metropolitan Museum of Art? In a simple sense, foregrounding representations of women promotes cultural conversations surrounding women's subjectivity. Female subjectivity within art communicates yet does not overwrite the history of gender oppression; it makes viewers aware of the complexities of women's experiences. And, as Davies suggests, "…through art we might better [see] signs of stress or emotion in others, empathize more deeply with them, absorb more effectively their points of view, and be more sensitive and sympathetic to their feelings…"[228] Viewing the works of women artists can increase collective sensitivity to the nuances of women's lived experiences. This extends beyond Renaissance women artists to prove that representation matters even today as female subjectivity is threatened by toxic political rhetoric. Art's communicative abilities ultimately increases our sense of compassion for the circumstances of others. Within the scope of the art historical canon, this research informs alternative narratives that valorize the accomplishments of a historically underrepresented group. Moreover, the inclusion of marginalized groups of artists, beyond sixteenth-century western women artists, can support the continued dynamism of the art historical field.

---

[227] Ibid., 218.
[228] Ibid., 214.

Bibliography

Adkins, Lisa, and Beverley Skeggs. Feminism after Bourdieu. (Malden, MA : Blackwell Pub., 2004).

Adler, Sara M. "Vittoria Colonna: Michelangelo's Perfect Muse." *Italica* 92 (2015): 5-32.

Adler, Sara, M. “Strong Mothers, Strong Daughters: The Representation of Female Identity in Vittoria Colonna's Rime and Carteggio”. *Italica* 77 (2002): 311-330, accessed March 1, 2017.

Alberti, Leon Battista. *On Painting (1435) Translated with introd. and notes by John R. Spencer*. (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1966).

Armenini, Giovanbattista. *De' veri precetti dellapittura*. (Ravenna: 1587)

Barolsky, Paul. 2011. “The Ultimate Paradox of Vasari’s ‘Lives’”. *Notes in the History of* Art 31, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2011), 10-13.

Bayer, Andrea. “Art and Love in Renaissance Italy”. *The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

Berger, John. Ways of Seeing. (New York : Penguin,1978).

Bohn, Babette, and Saslow, James M.. Ed. *Blackwell Companions to Art History: A Companion to Renaissance and Baroque Art. (*Hoboken, US: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), accessed April 10, 2017.

Bono, Paola. 1997. "Women’s Biographies and autobiographies: A Political Project in the Making” *Resources For Feminist Research* 25, (America: History & Life, EBSCOhost) 38-45, accessed February 15, 2017.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature.* (New York: Columbia of University Press, 1993).

Brundin, Abigail. “Colonna, Vittoria (1490-1547)”, (University of Chicago Library Online: Italian Women Writers, (2005), accessed 3 May, 2015. http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/efts/IWW/BIOS/A0011.html.

Brundin, Abigail. *Vittoria Colonna and the Spiritual Poetics of the Italian Reformation*. (Abingdon, GB: Routledge, 2016), accessed 20 April, 2016.

Buller, Jeffrey L. "Baldassare Castiglione." (Salem: Salem Press Biographical Encyclopedia, 2016), accessed October 29, 2016.

Burckhardt, Jacob. *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy.* (Kitchener, CA: Batoche Books, 2010), accessed January 10, 2017.

Castiglione, Baldassare. The Book of the Courtier Trans. Sir Thomas Hoby. Ernesyt Rhys, Ed. (New York: E.P.Dutton &CO. Inc., 1928).

Colonna, Vittoria. *Rime spirituali*, Edizioni La Biblioteca Digitale.

Colonna, Vittoria. *Sonnets for Michelangelo. Trans. Brundin, Abigail*. (Chicago, US: University of Chicago Press, 2005), accessed April 20, 2016.

Cox, Virginia. "The Female Voice in Italian Renaissance Dialogue." *MLN* 53 (Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press: 2013), accessed March 1, 2017.

Cox, Virginia. *A Short History of the Italian Renaissance : Contemporary Visual Culture and Contested Narratives in the Middle East*. (London, GB: I.B.Tauris, 2015), accessed March 1, 2017.

Cranston, Jodi. *The Poetics of Portraiture in the Italian Renaissance*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

D'Ancona, Mirella Levi. "The Doni Madonna by Michelangelo: An Iconographic Study." *The Art Bulletin* 50, (1968): 43-50. accessed October 25, 2015.

Davies, Bronwyn. "The Concept of Agency: A Feminist Post Structural Analysis", *The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice* 30. (1991): 42-53, accessed April 3, 2017.

Davies, Stephen. *The Philosophy of Art*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).

D'Elia, Una Roman. "Drawing Christ's blood: Michelangelo, Vittoria Colonna, and the aesthetics of reform*." *Renaissance Quarterly* no. 1: 90 (2006): 40 , accessed March 28, 2017.

Debby, Nirit Ben-Aryeh. "Vittoria Colonna and Titian's Pitti "Magdalene". *Woman's Art Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (2003): pp. 29-33.

Even, Yael. "Heroine as Hero in Michelangelo's Art." *Woman's Art Journal* 11 1 (1990): 29-33.

Finucci, Valeria. *The Lady Vanishes: Subjectivity and Representation in Castiglione and Ariosto.* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1992).

Fonte, Moderata (Modesta Pozzo). *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe : "The Worth of Women : Wherein Is Clearly Revealed Their Nobility and Their Superiority to Men"*. (Chicago, US: University of Chicago Press, 2007), accessed December 11, 2016. http://site.ebrary.com.ezproxy.drew.edu/lib/drew/detail.action?docID=10210005

Francis, Kimberly A., "Her-Storiography: Pierre Bourdieu, Cultural Capital, and Changing the Narrative Paradigm." *Women And Music: A Journal Of Gender And Culture* (2015): 169, accessed April 10, 2017.

Franklin, Mary. B*occaccio's Heroines: Power and Virtue in Renaissance Society* (Vermont: Ashgate Publishing, 2006).

Garrard, Mary D. "Here's Looking at Me: Sofonisba Anguissola and the Problem of the Woman Artist." *Renaissance Quarterly* 47 (1994):556-622, accessed April 10, 2017.

Gouwens, Kenneth. 2015. "Female Virtue and the Embodiment of Beauty: Vittoria Colonna in Paolo Giovio's Notable Men and Women." *Renaissance Quarterly* 68, no. 1: 33-97, accessed March 2, 2017. http://site.ebrary.com.ezproxy.drew.edu/lib/drew/reader.action?docID=2004651&ppg=317

Iser, Wolfgang. "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach." *New Literary History* 3, no. 2 (1972): 279-99. doi:10.2307/468316.

Jacobs, Fredrika H. "Woman's Capacity to Create: The Unusual Case of Sofonisba Anguissola." *Renaissance Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (1994): 74-101.

Jacobs, Fredrika H. *Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa: Women Artists and the Language of Art History and Criticism*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Jacobus, Mary. "Reading Woman (Reading)". *Reading Woman: Essays in Feminist Criticism.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986): 3-24.

Kelly, Joan. “Did Women Have a Renaissance?” *Women, History, and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly*. (Chicago:The University of Chicago Press, 1977), 19-50.

King, Catherine. “Looking a Sight: Sixteenth-Century Portraits of Woman Artists”. *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* , 58. (1995), 381-406.

King, Margaret L., and Rabil, Albert Jr. “Series Editor’s Notes” in “Vittoria Colonna’s Sonnets for Michelangelo”, Abigail Brundin, Trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), xii.

King, Margaret. *Women of the Renaissance*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

Lavin, I. "Divine Grace and the Remedy of the Imperfect. Michelangelo's Signature on the St Peter's Pietà." *Artibus Et Historiae* (2013), 277, accessed April 3, 2017.

Miller, Julia I. “Religion, Politics, and Art in Late Medieval and Renaissance Italy”, *Blackwell Companions to Art History: A Companion to Renaissance and Baroque Art*. (Hoboken, US: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), accessed 3 April, 2017.

Nagel, Alexander. “Gifts for Michelangelo and Vittoria Colona”. *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 79, No. 4 (1997): 947-668, accessed Feb. 27, 2016.

Och, Marjorie Ann. "Vittoria Colonna: Art Patronage and Religious Reform in Sixteenth-Century Rome." Order No. 9543797 *Bryn Mawr College*, 1993. Ann Arbor: ProQuest. Web. 20 Mar. 2016.

Quin, Sally. "Describing the Female Sculptor in Early Modern Italy: An Analysis of the vita of Properzia de' Rossi in Giorgio Vasari's Lives." *Gender & History* 24, no. 1 (April 2012): 134-149, accessed March 20, 2017.

Ragg, Laura M. *The Women Artists of Bologna*. (London: Methuen & Co, 1907).

Reiss, Sheryl E. “A Taxonomy of Art Patronage in Renaissance Italy”. Blackwell Companions to Art History : A Companion to Renaissance and Baroque Art. Bohn, Babette, and Saslow, James M., Ed. (Hoboken, US: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

Robb, Nesca A. *Neoplatonism of the Italian Renaissance*. (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1968).

Schwartz, Therese. "Catarina Vigri and Properzia de Rossi." *Women's Studies* 6, no. 1 (1978): 13.

Sohm, Philip. "Gendered Style in Italian Art Criticism from Michelangelo to Malvasia." *Renaissance Quarterly* 48 4 (1995):759-808.

Sorabella, Jean. “Venetian Color and Florentine Design.” *In Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2002), accessed 5 April, 2017. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/vefl/hd_vefl.htm

Sutherland-Harris, Anne. and Nochlin, Linda. *Women Artists 1550-1950*. Los Angeles County Museum of Art. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977).

Tebben, Maryann.. "A Transgressive 'Female' Space: Moderata Fonte's Il merito delle donne." *Nemla Italian Studies* 25-26, 200: 45-61, accessed January 13, 2017.

“The Bridal Portrait, Virtue and Beauty, Leonardo’s Gierva de Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women”. *National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C*. NGA.gov: (2001-2002), accessed 5 April, 2017. https://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/2001/virtuebeauty/bridal.shtm

Tierny, Helen. “Consciousness Raising”. *Women’s Studies Encyclopedia*. (Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc, 2001), accessed February 15, 2017. http://gem.greenwood.com/wse/wseDisplay.jsp?id=id144&ss=consciousness-raising

Tinagli, Paola. *Women in Italian Renaissance Art.: Gender, Representation, Identity.* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997).

Tolnay, Charles de. “Sofonisba Anguissola and Her Relations with Michelangelo”. The Walters Art Museum. *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* Vol. 4, (1941): 114-119.

Una, Roman D. "Drawing Christ's Blood: Michelangelo, Vittoria Colonna, and the Aesthetics of Reform*." *Renaissance Quarterly* 59.1 (2006): 90-129., accessed 1 Mar. 2016.

Vasari, Giorgio. *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects (1568)*. Translated by A.B.Hinds. (London: J. M. Dent & Co. Ltd., 1900).

Wallace, William E. “The Artist as Genius”. *Blackwell Companions to Art History: A Companion to Renaissance and Baroque Art*, Bohn, Babette, and Saslow, James M., Ed. (Hoboken, US: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

Wiesner-Hanks, Merry E. “Do Women Need the Renaissance?” *Gender & History*, Vol.20 No.3 (2008): 539–557.

Willard, Thomas."The Book of the Courtier: Analysis of Major Characters." *Salem Press Encyclopedia Of Literature Research Starters*, accessed October 19, 2016.

Woods-Marsden, Joanna. *Renaissance Self-Portraiture: The Visual Construction of Identity and the Social Status of the Artist*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

Woods-Marsden, Joanna. "'Ritratto al Naturale': Questions of Realism and Idealism in Early Renaissance Portraits." *Art Journal* 46, no. 3 (1987): 209-211

Woods-Marsden, Joanna. “The Meaning of the European Painted Portrait, 1400-1650”. *Blackwell Companions to Art History : A Companion to Renaissance and Baroque Art.* Bohn, Babette, and Saslow, James M., Ed. (Hoboken, US: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

Fig 1 Sandro Botticelli, Primavera, C. 1480.

Fig 2 Piero dela Francesa, *Portrait* of *Federico d Montefeltro*, 1472

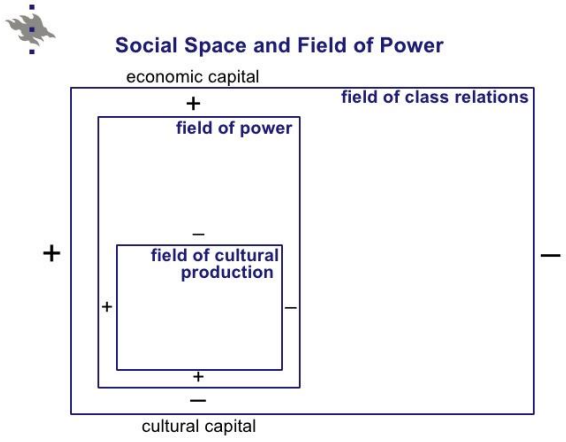

Fig 3 Pierre Bourdieu, Fields of Power, 1993

Fig 4 Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Pietà for Vittoria Colonna*, c. 1540. Black Chalk on Cardboard.

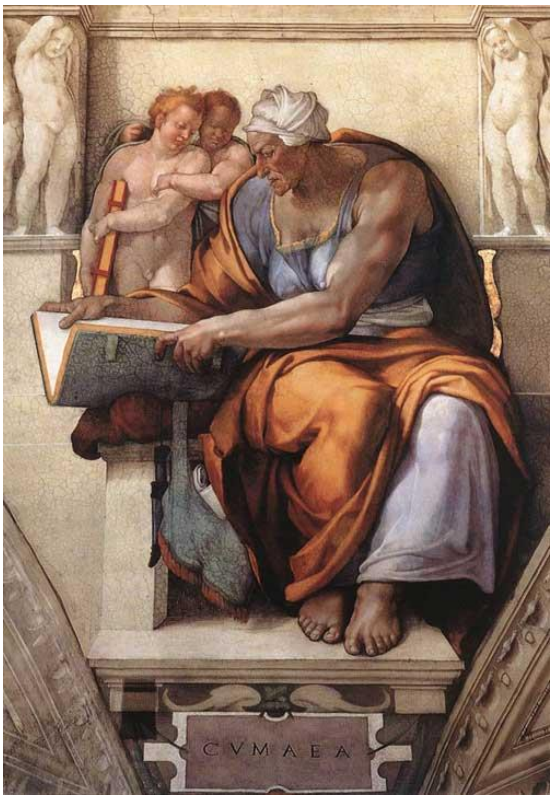

Fig 5 Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Cumean Sibyl*, 1508-1512

Fig 6 Michelangelo Buonarroti, *St. Catherine of Alexandria*, 1538-1542

Fig 7 Michelangelo Buonarroti, Doni Tondo, c.1504

Fig 8 Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Pietà*, c. 1499

Fig 9 Sofonisba Anguissola, Self-Portrait at the Clavichord, 1561

Fig 10 Anguissola, Self-portrait, 1554

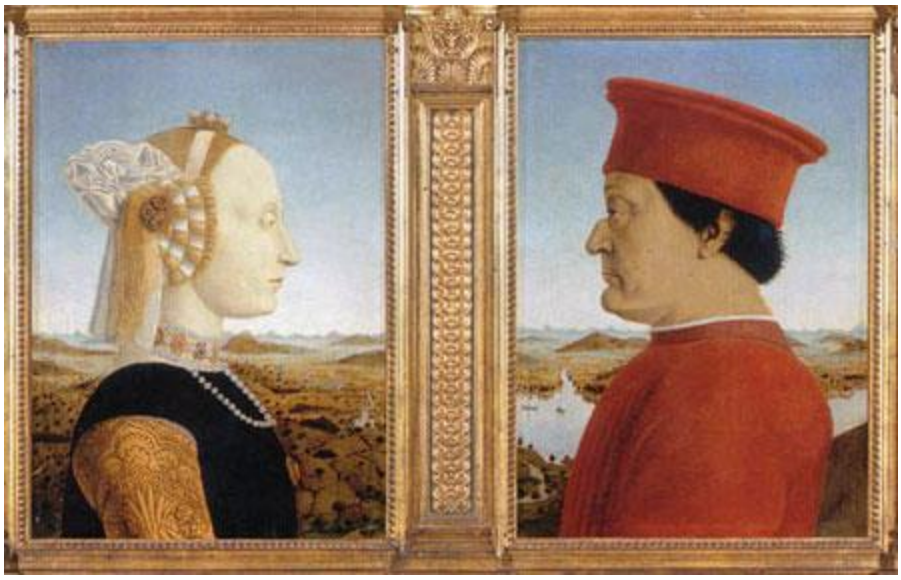

Fig 11 Piero dela Francesa, *Diptych of Federico da Montefeltro and Battista Sforza*, 1472

Fig 12 Piero dela Francesa, *Reverse Diptych of Federico da Montefeltro and Battista Sforza*, 1472

Fig 13 Raphael, *Portrait of Baldassare Castiglione*, C. 1515

Fig 14 Parmigianino, *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*, C. 1524

Fig 15 Anguissola, *Self-Portrait at the Easel*, 1556.

Fig 16 Titian, *Self-Portrait*, 1556

Fig 17 Anguissola *Bernardino Campi Painting Sofonisba Anguissola*, c. late 1550s.

Fig 18 Anguissola*, A Portrait of the Artist's Sisters Playing Chess*, c. 1555