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Chapter 4

Imitating the Rustic and Revealing the Noble: Masculine Power and Music at the Court of Ferrara

Melanie L. Marshall

In 1541 one Alvise Castellino (nicknamed "the Venetian Furrier"), a now otherwise unknown actor, singer, and composer, dedicated his *Primo libro delle villote* (Venice: Gardano) to Ercole II d'Este, the fourth duke of Ferrara. The twenty-nine strophic dialect songs (listed in Table 4.1) depict lower-ranking men and women, situated outside the court, pursuing amorous relationships varying from a parody of courtly love to sexual liaisons. The opening song in praise of Ercole II directly addresses noble masculinities, and indeed male power is an important theme in the book: several songs involve challenges to male authority. Many of these provocations come from women, but there are also some examples of men challenging their social superiors. I have argued elsewhere that the collection's unusual number of songs in the female literary voice may have had a particular resonance at the ducal court as Ercole struggled to control the voices of the duchess, Renée de France (daughter of Louis XII and sister-in-law and second cousin of François I) and her companion, Madame de Soubise.[1] In light of these challenges and the social distance between the rank of the book's dedicatee and the status of the song characters, Castellino's song collection invites exploration of hierarchy and power, and consideration of its relationship to Ercole's status and authority as ruler. These villotte, possibly first performed at banquets in the 1530s prior to publication, may have offered Ercole the opportunity to demonstrate his pro-Imperial leanings and his ability to handle criticism.

Cinquecento court culture operated according to a social hierarchy dependent on eminence of bloodline, nobility of action, and talent for display, competition, and dissimulation. Courtiers jostled for positions in the court hierarchy and for

I should like to thank Bonnie Blackburn, Linda Carroll, Leofranc Holford-Strevens, Patricia Skinner, and Laurie Stras for their helpful comments and for assistance with translating the texts.

[1] Melanie L. Marshall, "'Farò quel che piacerà': Fictional Women in Villotte Voice Resistance," in *Sexualities, Textualities, Art and Music in Early Modern Italy*, ed. Melanie L. Marshall, Linda L. Carroll, and Katherine A. McIver (Farnham, Surrey and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), 185–205.

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Table 4.1 Contents of Alvise Castellino, *Il primo libro delle villote* (Venice: Gardano, 1541)

1. Viva viva ’l nobil Duca
2. Ben staga tutta questa bella brigà
3. Mille gentil saludi
4. Cantar voglio una bella canzzon
5. La viduella non si lamenterà
6. La rizzola la se lamenta
7. Ed una viduella
8. Già per un tempo tutto contento
9. E chi ’n’ donna se fida
10. Passando per una via
11. O tu che nel tuo leto
12. La mi fa balare
13. Chi vol sentir novella
14. Per ultima morosa
15. Ma più me vo fidare de donn’alcuna
16. E di dona in dona maridata
17. Da nuovo i’ ’sta contrata
18. Quatro cha semo do boni compagnon
19. “E do Tuogna, fate bella”
20. Sapia ch’il saper vuole
21. In un bel pra fiorito
22. Aveva una sola morose
23. E do in questa contrata
24. E di mezo d’una corrente via
25. Son vegnu chi a notte, o bruna
26. Chorì, chorì brigatta!
27. Dentro da San Bruson
28. In questa santa notte
29. Partir cha me voglio

the favor of well-placed patrons; rulers were similarly engaged on a larger stage. Artistic patronage was vital in manipulating public image, and could be used to promote the antiquity of a patron’s elite lineage and the magnificence of his or her court, as well as to broadcast the patron’s many virtues and talents. By attracting respected musicians to court, patrons could demonstrate good taste; they might also benefit from the potentially wide distribution of music prints bearing flattering dedications. Large-scale banquets and celebrations, with guests invited from other cities and states, provided excellent opportunities to display the court’s riches and by extension the nobility, wealth, and magnificence of the ruler. The guests, suitably wined and dined, were almost certain to include accounts of the festivities in letters and other reports to their home states, and to discuss particular

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spectacles abroad in person. Printed accounts of festivals, coronations, and solemn entries into cities commemorated and disseminated the events.[2] There was also an element of competition, with banquet hosts attempting to out-do others within the immediate court circle, as well as on the wider stage.

The propaganda battle need not only be fought with panegyric; works that were less than flattering, even mildly insulting, enabled a ruler to display a lively sense of humor and, more importantly, the ability to contain criticism.[3] This latter aspect was of no small significance for Ercole, whose autonomy was threatened by his difficult relationship with his wife, Renée de France. That Renée surrounded herself with a French entourage and did not speak Italian irritated Ercole, and he was particularly annoyed by the influence on her of one of her ladies-in-waiting, Madame de Soubise. Renée's autonomy was all the more galling for Ercole because custom dictated that she should be subordinate to him. Women were considered to be subservient to men of equal social rank, and Renée did not consider Ercole her equal.[4] In addition, there were financial and political considerations: François I was slow in paying the balance of Renée's marriage settlement, and Ercole felt betrayed by France following the Treaty of Cambrai (also known as the Paix des Dames, August 3, 1529) between France and Emperor Charles V.[5] After Ercole became duke in 1534, Renée's strong sympathies for the heretical Reformist teachings of Calvin became a pretext for him to assert his authority over her court and, by extension, his independence

[2] Specifically Ferrarese items include descriptions of Ercole II's accession (e.g. Angelo Pendaglia, *La solennissima creatione dello illustrissimo novo duca de Ferrara per lo illustrissimo et eccellentissimo principe et S.S. Don Hercule primo duca de Sciartres* (s.l., [1534])) and the entry into the city of Pope Paul III (*Lettera nuoua de tutte l'entrate feste giostre, comedie, [et] doni per la venuta di Papa Paulo. III. a Ferrara cosa molto bella* (Modena, 1543)).

[3] Francesco Gonzaga demonstrated exactly that ability when he "disdained to see harm" in Ottavio Rinuccini's libretto for Monteverdi's *L'Arianna*. Performed during the celebrations of Francesco and Margherita di Savoia's marriage in 1608, Rinuccini's retelling of the myth equates Francesco's father, who had his marriage to Margherita Farnese annulled, with Theseus, who left his lover Ariadne to die. See Leofranc Holford-Strevens, "'Her Eyes Became Two Spouts': Classical Antecedents of Renaissance Laments," *Early Music* 27 (1999): 379–93 at 389–90.

[4] Neither Ercole nor Renée was particularly pleased with their match. Renée had hoped for a husband of higher social status; Ercole found Renée unattractive, but felt she had other virtues to compensate. See Charmarie Webb, "Royalty and Reform: The Predicament of Renée de France, 1510–1575" (Ph.D. diss., Tufts University, 1969), 24.

[5] Ibid., 62.

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from France.[6] The pro-Imperial connotations of the villotta make it an appropriate genre for such a gesture.[7]

Castellino's concern with status and hierarchy is evident from the first page of the publication, his dedication to Ercole II. Although it was common for dedications to proclaim the unworthiness of the item being dedicated, Castellino's text focuses on the social gulf between himself and Ercole in a particularly revealing manner:

> TO THE MOST ILLUSTRIOUS LORD HERCULES DUKE OF FERRARA, HIS LORD MOST WORTHY OF RESPECT, ALVISE CASTELLINO
>
> I do not know if I should expect condemnation or praise for having published my rustic and base compositions under the great name of Your Excellency, since being such, they do not deserve to ascend to such exalted ears as yours, that I fear I must be condemned. But then, on the other hand, urged by a lively and natural inclination of mine, which I bear to the royal person and to the divine goodness and virtue of Your Excellency, I am not without hope that many should honor me, seeing that I, a man placed in humble and base conditions not through my own fault but by fate, have had the wisdom to choose the most noble and virtuous Prince of Italy for my Lord, to whom to have dedicated my works. Although they do not follow the style of Josquin and of other excellent ancient musicians (a thing which may damn me with some persons) they are, however, such that by their novelty they can, perhaps, bring not a little delight to Your Excellency; so that you, having your breast and ears full of serious and delicate harmonies, satiated with nothing but royal foodstuffs, may wish to descend to coarse and natural foods, which, from rustic flowers and fruits, I have prepared in imitation of those who, wishing to propitiate some god, offer him with the highest simplicity and with an open heart a slight and little gift, in certain hope of being watched over and protected by him. And this comes to pass by the

[6] There is a comparatively large body of literature on Protestantism in Ferrara. The first port of call for musicologists should be George Nugent's "Anti-Protestant Music for Sixteenth-Century Ferrara," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 43 (1990): 228–91 and the bibliography therein. Nugent summarizes the main events and provides a stimulating reading of several related motets. See also Charmarie Jenkins Blaisdell, "Politics and Heresy in Ferrara, 1534–1559," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 6 (1975): 67–93, and Webb, "Royalty and Reform." For Ercole at least, the enforcement of Catholic orthodoxy was not simply an issue of faith. Rather, "in the 1530s questions of politics outweighed questions of religious orthodoxy where kings and princes, including princes of the church, were concerned. And the duke used the issue of heresy quite openly to score political points." Blaisdell, "Politics and Heresy," 68.

[7] On the villotta indicating Imperial affiliation, see Linda L. Carroll, "The Peasant as Imperialist: An Unpublished Canzone in Ruzantine Style," *Italica* 70 (1993): 197–211 or "Il contadino e il filoimperialismo: Una canzone inedita in stile Ruzantiano," in *Angelo Beolco detto Ruzante*, ed. Filippo Crispo, Atti del Convegno di Studi e Programma generale 1995 (Padua: Edizioni Papergraf, 1997), 51–67.

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> kindness of that god. So, not comparing my little gift to your greatness, but measuring the sum of my affection against your infinite humanity and rare courtesy, I have had the courage to sing in new ways of your virtues, and to send those together with my other songs to your Excellency, whom I pray to be content to take them with that spirit and countenance with which I dedicate and offer the songs and myself to you.[8]

Castellino sets up a series of oppositions connected to social status. He contrasts his work to the "serious and delicate harmonies" enjoyed by the duke, and refers to Josquin des Prez, thus paying a compliment to and demonstrating his knowledge of the Este court and its history. Josquin's music is like the rich foods of a royal banquet, whereas Castellino's villotte are, in contrast, akin to coarse and natural foods. In fact, the Ferrarese courts were among the first to serve vegetables and salads as courses during banquets, and they would have been a novelty for Renée. Such foods were associated with peasants, "but the notion of the urban rich imitating the agricultural poor to create high fashion sounds all too familiar."[9] Uncontroversially, Castellino presents Ercole as divine: not only does he have divine goodness and virtue, but Castellino likens him to a propitious god.

[8] "ALLO ILLUSTRISSIMO SIGNOR HERCULE DUCA DI FERRARA SIGNOR SUO OSSERVANDISSIMO ALVISE CASTELLINO.

Non so se io debbia aspettar biasimo o laude di havere publicate sotto il gran nome della Excellentia vostra queste mie rusticane & basse Compositioni, Percio che essendo tali, che non meritano ascendere a cosi alte orecchie come son le sue, temo di dover esserne biasmato: Ma poi all incontro stimulato da una mia viva & natural inclinatione, ch'io porto alla regia persona & alla divina bonta & virtu della Excellentia vostra, non son fuor di speranza, che molti debbano laudarmi vedendo, che io huomo non per mia colpa: ma per fortuna posto in humile & bassa conditione habbia saputo eleggere Il piu Nobile & virtuoso Principe de Italia per mio signore: Alquale habbia consecrate le mie fatiche. Lequali se ben non sono tirrate per la via di Iosquino & delli altri eccellenti Musici antichi (cosa che appresso alcuno mi porria dannare) Sono pero tali, che per la novita loro potranno forse non poco delettare la Excellentia vostra. Si come quella, che havendo il petto & le sue orecchie piene di gravi & dilicate armonie, satia non altrimenti che di regie vivande, voglia descender a grossi & naturali cibi: Liquali io di fiori & frutti rusticani gli ho preparati ad imitatione di quelli, che vogliono acquistarsi qualche Iddio propitio: Liquali offerendogli con soma semplicitade, & con aperto core un tenue & picciol dono; sperano certo di essere da lui guardati & conservati & cio gli avviene per la benignita di quello Iddio: Cosi io non conparando il mio picciol presente alla grandezza vostra, ma misurando la somma mia affettione con la vostra infinita humanitade & rara cortesia; ho havuto ardimento cantar per modi novi le vostre virtuti, & quelle insieme con altre mie canzoni mandare alla Excellentia vostra: Laquale prego che sia contento pigliarle con quello animo & fronte, Con quali io loro; & la propria persona mia le dedico & offerisco." Castellino, *Primo libro delle villote*, 2.

[9] Mary Hollingsworth, *The Cardinal's Hat: Money, Ambitions and Housekeeping in a Renaissance Court* (London: Profile Books, 2004), 19–21 at 20–21.

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In contrast, Fate has not favored the composer with noble birth.[10] In addition to creating rustic songs, Castellino is like the petitioner who wishes to be watched over and protected by his chosen god. Yet he claims at least one masculine virtue—wisdom—and he suggests his choice of dedicatee might bring him honor.

Although Castellino opposes his own humble status to Ercole's exalted social position, in dedicating these songs to the duke of Ferrara he is asserting a shared interest in the coarse and natural. Certainly, the gift sets up the expectation of a reciprocal action by the duke, who was obliged to respond in some way.[11] Castellino's language also alludes to movement up and down the hierarchy: his music ascends to the duke's ears, while the duke descends. There is the suggestion that enjoyment of this sort of material is the common denominator between Castellino and Ercole and, by implication, all men.[12]

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[10] Castellino's acute awareness of his own humble status in comparison to Ercole's exalted social position prompted Alfred Einstein to suggest that he was a nobleman reduced to working as a buffoon in Ercole's court (Alfred Einstein, *The Italian Madrigal*, trans. Alexander H. Knappe, Roger H. Sessions, and Oliver Strunk, 3 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), 1:378–79). However, neither Castellino's supposed noble status nor his presumed position as a buffoon is evident from the dedication; moreover, he does not have a noble surname. (I am indebted to Professor Linda Carroll of Tulane University for this observation.) According to the title page Castellino was called "il Varoter Venetiano" (the Venetian Furrier), which may indicate his trade. It is not clear from the title page alone whether he was also a furrier or whether the nickname was derived from theatrical activity, as Donna Cardamone suggests (Cardamone, "Castellino, Alvise" in *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 2nd ed., ed. Ludwig Finscher, *Personenteil*, 4, cols. 400–01). An Alvixe Varoter was one of the *cantadori vecchi* of the Venetian Scuola Grande di Santa Maria della Carità; as such, he was a poor brother who received charitable assistance in return for singing at brothers' funerals. The *scuole* were reserved for Venetian *cittadini*, so if this is Alvise Castellino, he was impoverished but he was not of noble birth, nor was he one of the non-Venetian *popolani*. (On Alvixe Varoter and *scuole* see Jonathan E. Glixon, *Honoring God and the City: Music at the Venetian Confraternities, 1260–1807* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 313, n. 166 and 126. The hypothesis that Castellino and Varoter are the same is mine.)

[11] Sharon Kettering, "Patronage in Early Modern France," *French Historical Studies* 17 (1992): 839–62 at 845.

[12] I am grateful to Dr. Patricia Skinner for suggesting this in a conversation in 2004. Sara Matthews-Grieco discusses shared erotic culture in "Satyrs and Sausages: Erotic Strategies and the Print Market in Cinquecento Italy," in *Erotic Cultures of Renaissance Italy*, ed. S. Matthews-Grieco (Farnham, Surrey and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 19–60 at 37. Guido Guerzoni cautions that scholars should not overemphasize the significance of painting and print culture in the creation and dissemination of sexually explicit images. There were "autonomous repertories" of erotic production, and in fact, those in popular visual culture "prompted the more elevated artistic production." Guido A. Guerzoni, "The Erotic Fantasies of a Model Clerk: Amateur Pornography at the Beginning of the Cinquecento," in *Erotic Cultures of Renaissance Italy*, 61–88 at 68–69.

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In fact, Ercole was far from alien to the delights of rustic entertainments. Two of the Ferrarese banquets Cristoforo da Messisbugo details in his *Banchetti, composizioni di vivande e apparecchio generale* (Ferrara: Buglhat and Antonio Hucher, 1549) included dialect entertainment.[13] Ercole held a banquet on January 24, 1529 for his father Alfonso I, his aunt Isabella d'Este, his wife Renée, his brothers Ippolito II and Francesco d'Este, the French ambassador, two Venetian ambassadors, and numerous other ladies and gentlemen, who brought the guest total to 104. Ippolito's banquet at Belfiore on May 20, 1529 was for a mere fifty-four "lords, ladies, and gentlemen," including his brothers Ercole and Francesco and his sister-in-law Renée.[14] Comedic theater was performed before and during each banquet. A production of Ludovico Ariosto's *La cassaria* preceded Ercole's banquet, while actor and playwright Angelo Beolco (also known as Ruzante, after a character he often played) provided entertainment during the feast. Unfortunately, Messisbugo does not identify the *farsa* staged prior to Ippolito's banquet; Linda Carroll suggests that a full version of Beolco's *La moscheta* might have been performed on that occasion.[15]

Coming just over a month after Ercole and Renée had arrived in Ferrara, Ercole's January banquet was particularly important for the future duke and duchess. This was a new stage in their political lives: as a newly married couple one of their main duties was to continue the Este dynasty, ideally producing several male offspring and heirs. As banquet host, Ercole was giving a preview of the grandeur that might be expected under his rule. The target audience would have included not only the ambassadors and other visitors, but also Renée—they were, after all, only six months into their relationship. Ercole's banquet was held during carnival, the traditional time for wedding celebrations, partly because the Church's prohibition on sexual activity (even within marriage) came into force during Lent. Carnivalesque themes of inverted social hierarchy and the preoccupation with the sexual and excretory function of the lower bodily stratum are abundant in Ludovico Ariosto's and Ruzante's comedies and in Castellino's villotte.[16]

At Ercole's banquet Ruzante, along with five male companions and two ladies, sang songs and madrigals "in the Paduan manner" and circled the tables,

[13] Cristoforo da Messisbugo, *Banchetti, composizioni di vivande e apparecchio generale* (Ferrara: Buglhat and Antonio Hucher, 1549). For more detailed discussions of the music at these banquets see Howard Mayer Brown, "A Cook's Tour of Ferrara in 1529," *Rivista italiana di musicologia* 10 (1975): 216–41, and José Llorens, "Estudio de los instrumentos musicales que aparecen descritos en la relación de dos festines celebrados el año 1529 en la corte de Ferrara," *Anuario musical* 25 (1970): 3–26.

[14] On Ippolito's banquet see Hollingsworth, *The Cardinal's Hat*, 19–23.

[15] Linda L. Carroll, *Angelo Beolco (Il Ruzante)*, in *Twayne's World Authors Series, Italian Literature*, ed. Anthony Oldcorn (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990), 39.

[16] On typical carnival entertainments see Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

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discussing country matters in that dialect, much to everyone's delight.[17] Their conversation presumably took the form of short skits and comedy routines, perhaps drawn from their theatrical repertory. During the following course, guests were amused by buffoons "in the Venetian and Bergamasque" manners and Paduan peasants (*contadini alla pavana*).[18] Ippolito's banquet also included jesters, but on this occasion they performed during the fifth course while the five unidentified performers of *canzoni alla pavana* (perhaps including Ruzante) appeared during the twelfth course.[19] The type of banquet entertainments enjoyed by Ercole and Ippolito in the 1520s and 1530s suggests a similar context for Castellino's villotte. If the loose ordering of Castellino's collection is anything to go by, he may have opened his set with songs of welcome and introduction, and ended with songs about parting. In between, his audience was likely to enjoy what appears to have been his specialism: multi-character songs that he probably performed solo, accompanying himself on a lute or perhaps an early guitar.[20] In light of the links between "rustic things" and Ferrarese banquets (including the novel salad course), Castellino's references to banqueting, food, and "naturalness" in his dedication are tantalizing.[21]

In spite of Castellino's denigration of his own efforts in his dedication, the collection evidently held some value, for in May 1540 he went to the trouble of obtaining a printing privilege from the Venetian Senate for "certain songs composed by him."[22] First, and most obviously, this suggests the pieces were written prior to May 1540. Furthermore, since privileges were issued only for print runs of at least 400, produced on good quality paper, this might give some idea of the printing expenses involved.[23] Castellino's description of his humble

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[17] "Contendendo insieme di cose contadinesche, in quella lingua, molto piacevoli." Messisbugo, *Banchetti*, fol. 7r.

[18] "Laqual Vivanda passo con intertenimento di Buffoni alla Vinitiana, et alla Bergamasca, et Contadini alla Pavana, et andarono buffoneggiando intorno la mensa." Ibid.

[19] On the possibility of Ruzante's participation, see Carroll, *Angelo Beolco (Il Ruzante)*, 39.

[20] For more on this performing practice, see Marshall, "'Farò quel che mi piacerà.'"

[21] Of course, this is far from proof of a link between Castellino's villotte and banquet entertainments, because food metaphors are common in music dedications of the period.

[22] "MDXXXX Die XXVIIIJ. Maj… . Item ad Alvise Castellino veneto per certi canti da luj composti da novo In musica," transcribed in Richard Agee, "The Privilege and Venetian Music Printing in the Sixteenth Century" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1982), 210.

[23] Ibid., 134 and 12–13. The law regarding paper quality dates from 1537 and so would have applied to Castellino's publication. The minimum size of the print run appears to have been custom rather than law, but the implication is that the privilege was for commercially viable publications rather than vanity press. Agee further suggests that privileges indicated that the music was considered to be good quality (ibid., 144–45). See also Richard Agee, "The Venetian Privilege and Music-Printing in the Sixteenth Century," *Early Music History* 3 (1983): 1–42. Working on the basis of the printing costs of a Scotto edition of 1565 (Jane A. Bernstein, *Print Culture and Music in Sixteenth-Century Venice* (New York and

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and base status suggests that he lacked the means to pay for publication. Although the printer, Antonio Gardano, might have financed the print-run himself, it seems likely that there was another backer, most probably Ercole. Were this the case, it would seem legitimate to explore whether Ercole stood to gain anything from public association with a collection of songs that not only employ sexual metaphors of varying degrees of sophistication but also challenge the social order.

Although designated by music theorists as *cose basse* (low things) due to their rustic and at times sexually frank content, the villotta and other so-called light genres played an essential role in the culture of the highest echelons of Cinquecento society for, as a musical counterpart (and perhaps accompaniment) to masquerade, *cose basse* might have enabled the fashioning of nobility through the fashioning of the rustic other.[24] In assuming a disguise that is in some way opposed to an aspect of an individual's identity, skilled courtiers could reveal an innate element of their own identity. A youth might dress up as an old man yet wear loose clothing in order to show his agility or "a knight dresses up as a country shepherd, but rides a beautiful horse and wears handsome and appropriate costume."[25] Moreover, a prince, disguised as a lower-ranking character, can achieve "an even higher stature, by striving to surpass others by prowess [*virtù*] and not by authority" and show "that it is not being a prince that accounts for his worth."[26] The (male) courtier's true status is still visible beneath the rustic mask.

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 79) I estimate Castellino's edition to have cost about 300 lire. The cost of a privilege was only about 1 percent of the overall cost for an edition (Agee, "The Privilege and Venetian Music Printing," 143). Mary S. Lewis notes that Castellino's collection is printed on one type of paper throughout. This is unusual for Gardano's publications, and suggests that "the composer, the patron or the printer specified, or supplied, the type of paper for that edition" (Lewis, "The Printed Music Book in Context: Observations on Some Sixteenth-Century Editions," *Notes*, 2nd ser. 46 (1990): 899–918 at 913).

[24] "It is not surprising that in these times music is not valued, for it has been applied to low-class items [*cose basse*] such as ballets, Napolitane, villotte, and other silly things" (Nicola Vicentino, *Ancient Music Adapted to Modern Practice*, trans. Maria Rika Maniates (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 266); "non è da marauigliarsi, s'à questi tempi la Musica non è in pretio; perche è stata applicata à cose basse, come sono a Balli, a Napolitane, & a Villotte, & altre cose ridiculose" (Nicola Vicentino, *L'antica musica ridotta alla moderna prattica* (Rome: Antonio Barré, 1555), fol. 84^{v} (bk. 4, ch. 26)). In the mid-sixteenth century Vicentino was in the service of Ercole's brother, Cardinal Ippolito d'Este II.

[25] Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier* (hereafter *The Courtier*), trans. George Bull, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin Books, 1976), 119: "un cavaliero in forma di pastor selvatico o altro tale abito, ma con perfetto cavallo, e leggiadramente acconcio secondo quella intenzione." Book 2, ch. 11 of Castiglione, *Il libro del cortegiano* (1528) in *Opere di Baldassare Castiglione, Giovanni della Casa, Benvenuto Cellini*, ed. Carlo Cordié, La letteratura italiana: Storia e testi, 5–261 (Milan: Riccardo Ricciardi Editore, 1960), 105–06.

[26] Castiglione, *The Courtier*, 119. "un'altra maggior grandezza, che è il voler avanzar gli altri non d'autorità ma di virtù e mostrar che 'l valor suo non è accresciuto dallo esser principe." Book 2, ch. 11 of Castiglione, *Il cortegiano*, 106.

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When constructing a rustic identity a courtier simultaneously constructs a noble identity, since performing rusticity reveals both what he is not and what he is. While enabling a demonstration of the courtly skill of *sprezzatura*, the courtier performs identity and demonstrates his "own protean versatility, the capacity of his 'enlarged self' … to contain any and all attributes, to master all social roles, including that of the base or vulgar."[27] Constructing and even performing rusticity does not compromise noble status; on the contrary, it allows the demonstration of an innate courtliness: successful imitation of the rustic reveals the nobility of the performer. By extension, in supporting Ruzante's rustic comedy and Castellino's rustic songs, Ercole was demonstrating his inalienable princeliness—not only could he "descend to the coarse and natural" without compromising his princely identity, but in fact through that descent he could strengthen it.

There is circumstantial evidence to show that Ercole enjoyed depictions of himself that were at variance with one or more elements of his status. Dosso Dossi's *Allegory of Hercules* (see Figure 4.1), also known as *La stregoneria*, dates from the early 1540s and was probably commissioned by Ercole.[28] In stark contrast to other representations of the demigod, Dosso's Hercules is an old man mocked by those around him for his lack of virility. The young man standing near Hercules holds a distaff, which serves both as a reference to the time Hercules spent as a female slave and perhaps in its phallic shape as a reminder of his legendary member, presumably suffering from old age just as much as the rest of his body; significantly, the magpie in the foreground has lost its tail.[29] According to Mauro Lucco, "if anyone in the duke's entourage had sponsored such a painting, it would

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[27] Natasha Korda, "Mistaken Identities: Castiglio(ne)'s Practical Joke," in *Desire in the Renaissance: Psychoanalysis and Literature*, ed. Regina Schwartz and Valeria Finucci (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 41.

[28] Peter Humfrey and Mauro Lucco, *Dosso Dossi: Court Painter in Renaissance Ferrara*, ed. Andrea Bayer (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998), 222. On the painting, see 218–24. Linda Carroll posits identities for the other figures in the painting. See Carroll, "'Fools of the Dukes of Ferrara': Dosso, Ruzante, and Changing Este Alliances," *Modern Language Notes* 118 (2003): 72).

[29] *Coda* (tail) as a phallic euphemism was almost certainly familiar to Ferrarese audiences. Ariosto employed it in the second prologue to his second version of his comic play *La Lena* (The Procuress). Describing the newly added scenes as a tail, the *prologista* declares "*Lena* is like all other women who want to feel a tail behind them and who despise—as if they were peasants, baseborn, or ignoble—those who don't want one, or, to put it better, those who cannot have one, for no one, either rich or poor, who can put one on refuses to do so. In short, *Lena* now has a tail and she'll come out in public once more to show it to you." While women will praise it, young men will like it "for she knows that tails are not displeasing to them; they rather like them and accept them as fashionable and becoming to noble persons." Ariosto, *La Lena*, in *The Comedies of Ariosto*, ed. Edmond M. Beame and Leonard G. Sbrocchi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 161–62. See also Donna Cardamone, "Unmasking Salacious Subtexts in Lasso's Neapolitan Dialect Songs," Ch. 3 in this volume, pp. 59–81.

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Figure 4.1 Dosso Dossi, *Allegory of Hercules* or *La stregoneria*, ca. 1540–42. Oil on canvas, 57½ × 56⅞ in. (146 × 144.5 cm). By permission of The Art Archive / Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence / Gianni Dagli Orti

have been damaging to the dignity of the ruler; but coming from Ercole himself, it becomes a brilliant and witty gesture."[30] Among the evidence Lucco presents for this conclusion is a paragraph from *De ridiculis* (1550) by Vincenzo de' Maggi, sometime tutor to Ercole's eldest son:

> The first thing that should attract our attention is the fact that pretended ugliness of the soul is ugly only on the surface, while in reality and in its substance it points to the beauty of the soul. In fact, only he who knows, knows also how to ably pretend his ignorance… . Thus the false ugliness of the soul is not in conflict either with knowledge or with the true beauty of the soul. From this we are justified in saying that those who are excellent in this respect are elegant and clever.[31]

[30] Humfrey and Lucco, *Dosso Dossi*, 221.

[31] Ibid., 221. Lucco's source is Enrico Musacchio and Sandro Cordeschi, *Il riso nelle poetiche rinascimentali*, Universale il portolano 21 (Bologna: Cappelli, 1985), 52–53.

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Maggi's conclusion seems startlingly similar to the discussions on masquerade of *Il cortegiano*: surface appearance does not obscure innate identity. Dossi's picture shows Ercole's ability to enjoy a joke at his own expense; by commissioning such a painting, he demonstrated his ability to contain questioning of his masculine authority.

Castellino's *Viva, viva il nobil Duca* has a number of correspondences to Dosso Dossi's *Allegory of Hercules*. It directly addresses Ercole, and might have been suitable for banquet performance, possibly as the initial song in a set.[32] Alfred Einstein has already drawn attention to the text in his brief discussion of Castellino: "to be sure, the hymn of praise in honor of Duke Ercole which opens Castellino's print … can only be called 'novel' as a departure from the rich musical homage in the form of madrigals and motets to which the Duke was accustomed."[33] Einstein's comment was perhaps prompted by Castellino's simple musical style (he terms it "primitive") rather than the content of text, but the text is also unusual if compared to standard encomiastic madrigals and motets.[34] Rather than unambiguous praise of Ercole's princely virtues, Castellino's references to Ercole's faith might be considered an example of blame-by-praise irony, for Ercole had a complicated relationship with the Pope and the orthodox Catholic faith.[35]

Viva viva 'l nobil Duca	Long live the noble Duke
Di Ferrar' Hercule degno.	Of Ferrara, the worthy Ercole.
Viva quel che passa 'l segno	Long live he who surpasses the mark

[32] The fourth book of Stefano Guazzo's conduct manual *La ciuil conuersatione* (Brescia: Tomaso Bozzola and Vincenzo Sabbio, 1574) contains an encomiastic song sung under similar circumstances. Six lords and four ladies have a banquet in Casale at which a musician with a harp arrives "and after he had with the sweete sound of it, invited them all to suddaine silence, and all of them disposed to bend their willing eares to his Musicke, he came to the Lord Vespasian, and with making a low curtesie, to the tune of his Harpe did sing these verses following." The musician sings a sixteen-verse celebration of Lord Vespasian's noble masculine virtues; Vespasian modestly declines the praise and prompts a light-hearted discussion of its appropriateness. (Stefano Guazzo, *The Civile Conversation of M. Steeven Guazzo* (London: Constable and Co. Ltd., 1925), 156. For the song and its discussion see pp. 156–60.)

[33] Einstein goes on to note that the stylistic elements of this "primitive, homophonic frottola" would not have been out of place in 1495. Einstein, *Italian Madrigal*, 1:379–80.

[34] Straightforward praise of Ercole can be found in Cipriano de Rore's motet *Labore primus Hercules*, which compares Ercole II with his mythical predecessor, the demigod Hercules. See Cipriano de Rore, *Opera omnia*, ed. Bernhard Meier, Corpus mensurabilis musicae 14 (American Institute of Musicology, 1966), 6:53–56 and below, n. 46.

[35] I am grateful to Professor Linda Carroll of Tulane University for this suggestion (pers. comm., August 28, 2003). A collection of one hundred stories, the *Ecatommiti* by Ferrarese humanist Giambattista Giraldi Cinzio, contains examples of this form of irony. See Salvatore di Maria, "Blame-by-praise Irony in the *Ecatommiti* of Giraldi Cinzio," *Quaderni d'Italianistica* 6 (1985): 178–92.

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Di ciascu*n* che fama aduca.	Set by any whom fame may cite.
Viva viva 'l nobil duca	Long live the noble Duke
Di Ferrar' Hercule degno.	Of Ferrara, the worthy Ercole.
Viva viva il nobil duca	*Long live the noble Duke*
Di Ferrar' Hercule degno.	*Of Ferrara, the worthy Ercole.*
Viva quel che di Ferrara	Long live he who of Ferrara
Tien il nobel septro in mano.	Holds the noble sceptre in hand.
In Italia Città Rara.	A rare city in Italy.
Dio in sua gratia il tenghi e sano,	God keep him in his grace and healthy,
Confalon d'ogni christiano,	Commander of every Christian,
E sua fama ogn'hor riluca.	And let his fame shine at all times.
Viva viva …	*Long live …*
Viva quel ch'Italia honora	Long live he whom Italy honors
De virtu, fortezza e ingegno.	For virtue, strength and power of mind.
De virtuosi padre anchora.	From virtuous ancestors too.
Dio il conservi nel bel regno	God keep him in his good reign
E dapoi lo faci degno.	And afterwards make him worthy.
Su nel ciel e a fe il conduca.	And may he lead him to heaven and to faith.
Viva viva 'l nobil duca	*Long live the noble Duke*
Di Ferrar' Hercule Estense.	*Of Ferrara Ercole d'Este.*

The Duke's faith is central; he is a "commander of every Christian." However, God is asked to "lead him to heaven and to faith," implying that Ercole has not always upheld religious orthodoxy. Indeed, even before the arrival of Renée de France, Ferrara had a history of tolerating criticism of the established Church, and it seems that Ercole stomached heresy until it was politically expedient to move against it. The activities of Renée and her court certainly provided him with ample opportunity to demonstrate his status as a defender of the faith.[36] In 1536, Ercole responded swiftly to a public act of heresy by one of his chapel singers—a dramatic event that I discuss further below—and the following year his physician, Piero Angelo Marizolli de Stellata, dedicated his *Zodiacus vitae* to Ercole; it contained heretical passages.

In addition to the ambiguous religious references, the text of *Viva viva il nobil Duca* acknowledges several essential qualities for a nobleman and a good male ruler. Italy honors the Duke for "virtue, strength, and power of mind" (*virtù, fortezza e ingegno*). *Fortezza* and *ingegno* are qualities of courtly *virtù*. Indeed, *fortezza* is one of the cardinal virtues and implies spiritual, mental, and physical strength. It might also relate to Ercole's understanding of patience—a virtue of which he was in need when handling the issue of heresy at Renée's court in the

[36] On heresy and the Ferrarese court see Nugent, "Anti-Protestant Music," esp. 240; Blaisdell, "Politics and Heresy," 72, and P. R. Horne, *The Tragedies of Giambattista Cinthio Giraldi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 7–8 and 11–12.

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1530s and again in the 1550s—as derived from "strength of soul."[37] Virtue is (along with decency) one of the central concerns of *Il cortegiano*, for courtiers, for gentlewomen of the palace, and for the prince.[38] When the prince couples abundant virtue with steadfast faith, he might be able to achieve the status of a demigod:

> [A ruler] will be very just, continent, temperate, strong and wise, full of liberality, munificence, religion, and clemency; in short, he will earn glory and favour among men and God, through whose grace he will acquire that heroic virtue that will raise him above human limitations, and be capable of being regarded as a demigod rather than a mortal man.[39]

The demigod status of the ruler and the physical and mental strength implied in *fortezza* relate to another of Ercole's self-representations. Like his grandfather, Ercole I, Ercole II enjoyed portrayals of himself as Hercules, the Greek demigod forced to prove his strength, courage, and cunning in a dozen trials.[40] Such depictions of Ercole II appeared in tapestries, statuary, music, and literature as well as painting.[41] Ercole established a tapestry workshop at Ferrara in 1536. Nicolas Karcher and his Flemish colleagues created tapestries to designs by Giulio Romano, the Dossi brothers, and Girolamo da Carpi, among them *The Labors of Hercules*. The motif made an early appearance at Ercole's banquet in January 1529.

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[37] Bayer, "Dosso's Public," in *Dosso Dossi*, ed. Humfrey and Lucco, 50.

[38] Although the prince should have an innate disposition to virtue courtesy of his noble birth and lineage, the courtier's aim is to encourage the prince's virtue, and thus foster good governance. The relationship between courtier and prince is the central concern of the fourth book of *Il cortegiano*.

[39] *The Courtier*, 299. "Sarà giustissimo, continentissimo, temperatissimo, fortissimo e sapientissimo, pien di liberalità, magnificenzia, religione e clemenzia; in somma sarà gloriosissimo e carissimo agli omini ed a Dio, per la cui grazia acquisterà quella virtù eroica, che lo farà eccedere i termini della umanità, e dir si potrà più presto semideo che omo mortale." Book 4, ch. 22 of *Il cortegiano*, 308.

[40] Ercole II is known to have been fond of sports. See Angelo Solerti, "La vita ferrarese nella prima metà del secolo decimosesto descritta da Agostino Mosti," *Atti e memorie della R. Deputazione di Storia Patria per le provincie di Romagna*, 3rd ser., 10 (1892): 174 and Mauro Lucco, "*Allegory of Hercules*, also called *Stregoneria (Witchcraft)*," in *Dosso Dossi*, 218.

[41] Jacopo Sansovino's statue of Hercules was commissioned in 1550. It initially stood at the Porta Ercolea of Modena, but Ercole later had it moved to the main square of Brescello, a garrison border town, where the statue served as a reminder of Ercole's power both to the town inhabitants and, more importantly, any potential invaders. For Rore's motet comparing Hercules and Ercole see n. 34 above. Giovanni Battista Giraldi Cinzio, Ercole's secretary, wrote a twenty-six-canto poem entitled *Dell'Hercole* (Modena: Gadaldini, 1557) that included flattering references to the Este lineage and the current royal household. On tapestries, see §3 of Thomas Tuohy et al., "Ferrara," *Grove Art Online, Oxford Art Online*, http://www.oxfordartonline.com (accessed April 23, 2014) and on Sansovino's Hercules see §10 of Helen Geddes et al., "Este (i)," ibid.

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Small models of the previously mentioned Herculean labors (the Bull, the Lion, and the Hydra), each two and a half palms high, were fashioned from sugar and decorated with gold. Their complexions were painted so skillfully they appeared to be alive.[42] Twenty-five were placed on the banqueting tables: Hercules defeating the Lion for courses 1–5, the Hydra for courses 6–8, and the Bull for the final courses.

Arguably, elements of the musical setting of Castellino's *Viva viva il nobil Duca* also mock Ercole. Throughout his twenty-nine songs, Castellino makes use of a harmonic pattern common in Italian dance music: III–♭VII–i–(IV)–V–i.[43] Depending on whether a complete (perfect) or incomplete (imperfect) cadence is required, the progression can be used in its entirety or terminated at chord V. Measures 5–8 and 25–28 of *Viva viva il nobil duca* show Castellino's typical use of the pattern (see Example 4.1).

The end of the song is highly unusual. The expected pattern stops before the final V–i cadence, ending instead with ♭VII–i (mm. 31–32). As a result, the piece does not end with a conventional musical cadence: the cantus and bassus converge on the final but they each approach it with a whole step. This truncation of the dance pattern is unlikely to have been due to genuine musical ignorance on Castellino's part, as this is the only non-standard cadence in the book. It might have been an oversight that an accompanying instrumentalist could easily remedy by inserting the two missing chords. Yet it seems improbable that the pattern could have been left incomplete by accident. This piece is the first in the book and is dedicated to an important nobleman; such a high-profile position would

[42] "Dopoi si portarono sopra la tavola figure grandi di Zuccharo 25 lequali significavano le forze d'Hercole, quando vinse il Leone, le cui grandezza era piu di due palmi e mezo per ciascheduna, dorate, et dipinte colle carnagioni che parevano vive"; Messisbugo, *Banchetti*, fol. 4ᵛ. "The idea for such statuettes might have come from the famous table-statue of Hercules by the great sculptor Lysippus that had allegedly been owned by Alexander the Great, Hannibal, and Sulla before in the late first century AD coming into the hands of one Novius Vindex, whose display of it earned it (and him) poems of praise by Statius (*Silvae* 4. 6) and Martial (Epigrams 9. 43 and 44). Giraldi would have known, and anyone else there with a decent education" (Leofranc Holford-Strevens, pers. comm., July 31, 2005).

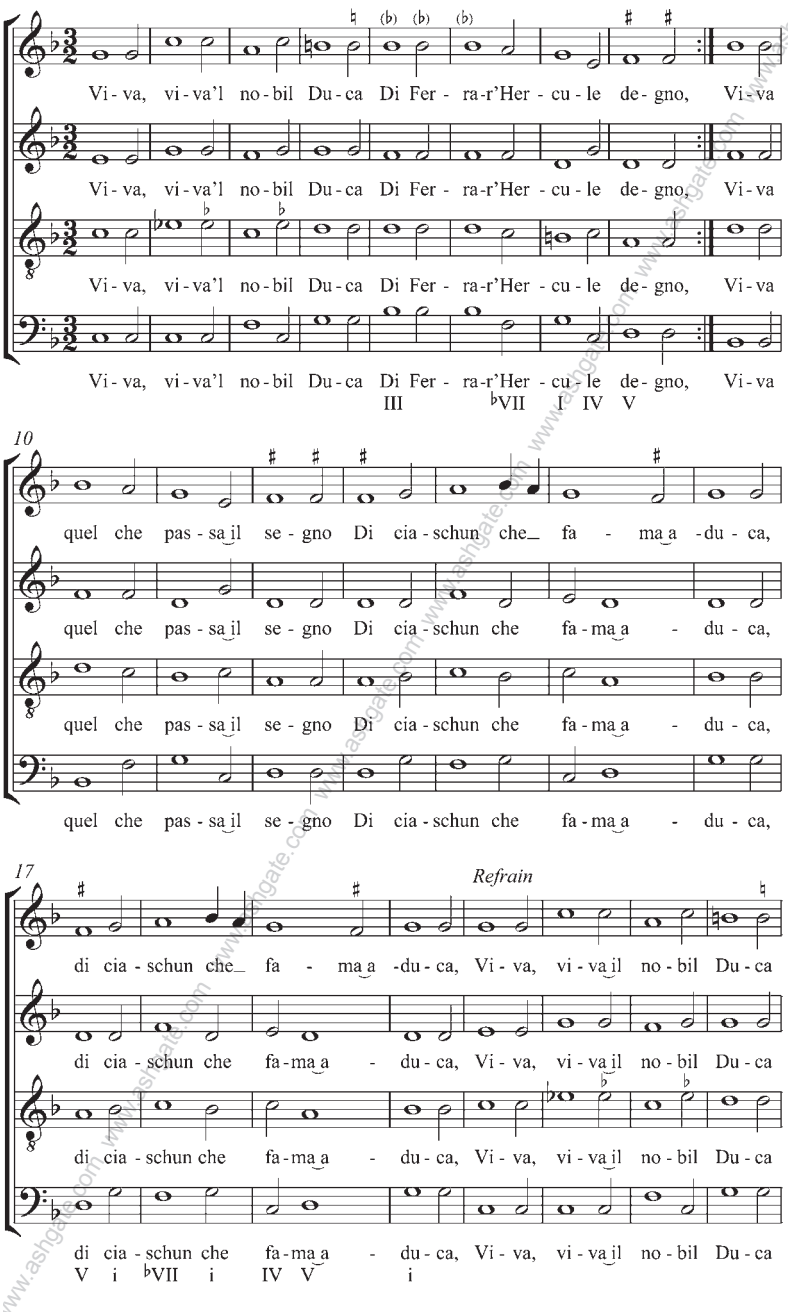
[43] The progression forms the final phrase of harmonic and melodic patterns that later became known as the *romanesca*, the *passamezzo antico*, and the *folia*. In his work on Italian dance music, Richard Hudson terms these progressions Schemes III, VII, and V, respectively in acknowledgment of the fact that "each scheme appears also in other forms, and, in addition, the *folia* consistently matches Scheme V only in the late Baroque era." Richard Hudson, "The Ripresa, the Ritornello, and the Passacaglia," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 24 (1971): 364–94 at 365. See also Hudson's other articles: "The Concept of Mode in Italian Guitar Music during the First Half of the Seventeenth Century," *Acta Musicologica* 42 (1970): 163–83; "The Folia, Fedele, and Falsobordone," *Musical Quarterly* 58 (1972): 398–411; "The Folia Melodies," *Acta Musicologica* 45 (1973): 98–119; and "Further Remarks on the Passacaglia and Ciaccona," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 23 (1970): 302–94.

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Example 4.1 Alvise Castellino, *Viva viva il nobil Duca* (*Primo libro delle villote*, 1541, p. 3)

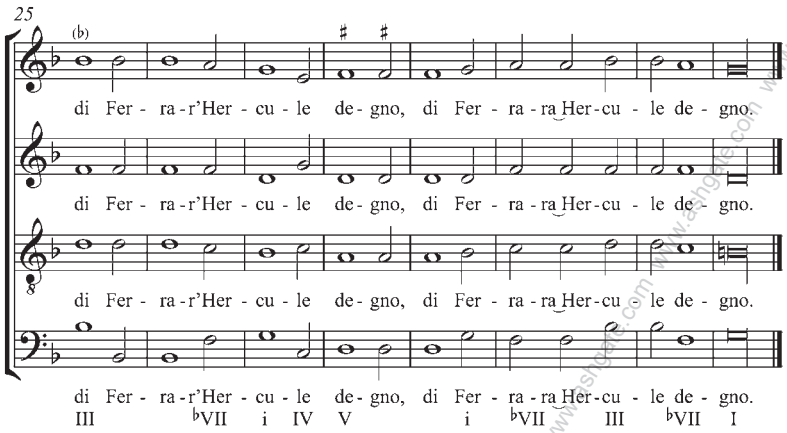


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Example 4.1 *concluded*



seem to require a demonstration of accomplishment. It might have been a cloak of musical ignorance, the effect of which is to highlight the social distance between the "high" Duke (or, perhaps, *maestro* Josquin) and the humble Castellino, who thus presents himself as a bumbling incompetent even in his area of expertise. However, as Wayne Booth remarks, "if a speaker betrays ignorance or foolishness that is 'simply incredible,' the odds are comparatively high that the author, in contrast, knows what he is doing."[44] It is possible that the omission connects with the text's blame-by-praise irony by undercutting the status of the praise element. High praise from an apparent incompetent is not as flattering as high praise from someone who is also praiseworthy.

The curious musical stress in the setting of "Hercule" might be understood as a further example of mockery. The correct metrical stress is on the first syllable, "Her," but the music consistently accents the middle syllable, "cu," hinting at a hidden indecency.[45] Although in measures 30–31 the emphasis is achieved by means of a hemiola, elsewhere "cu" appears on the accented beat and is longer than the other syllables (a semibreve rather than a minim). Other musical settings of "Hercule" written for Ercole II d'Este place the emphasis on the correct syllable.[46] Assuming Ercole helped to fund publication, this song is a kind of

[44] Wayne Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 57, cited in Maria, "Blame-by-praise Irony," 187.

[45] *Cule* sounds very much like *culo,* Italian slang for anus.

[46] The famous *soggetto cavato* of Josquin's *Missa Hercules Dux Ferrariae* honoring Ercole I gives equal weight to each syllable. Three works by Cipriano de Rore in honor of Ercole II place the emphasis on the first and third syllables of Hercules rather than on the middle syllable. The *soggetto cavato* for Rore's five-voice *Missa Hercules* (Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Mus. Ms. 9) sets the text "Vivat foelix Hercules secundus dux

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musical counterpart to Dosso Dossi's *Allegory of Hercules*: a less than flattering representation with which the Duke can demonstrate his wit and his ability to accept and contain criticism.

Critique or commentary upon court life and court entertainments of the type illustrated by Castellino's *Viva viva il nobil Duca* was a function common to jesters and extempore singers. In his *De musica et poetica* (1513), Raffaele Brandolini discusses his art of extempore singing in Latin to lira accompaniment at banquets. Brandolini is chiefly concerned with banquets for high prelates—such as Ippolito II was to become—and his singing is in learned Latin rather than in a low-status dialect, but there are points of contact between his descriptions of his activities and Castellino's villotte. Doubtless he would have been insulted by my comparison, since in this text he defends himself against the advice

> not to employ the lyre and Latin meters at the banquets of high prelates, [since they] are things fit only for buffoons, parasites, and men of no intelligence or judgment, those, in fact, whom the poet of Aquino [Juvenal] calls abominable beggars, who beg for sustenance and cultivation of the body with the pandering of words.[47]

Brandolini's main distinction from buffoons seems to be that he uses Cicero, Virgil, and Horace as models for his comment. Indeed, his account might be indicative of the technique of the man who sang divinely "al modo d'Horpheo" to a lira during the fifth course of Ippolito's banquet held in Belfiore on May 20, 1529.[48]

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ferrariae quartus" while the cantus firmus sung by the altus secundus in Rore's seven-voice mass *Praeter rerum seriem* is "Hercules secundus dux ferrariae quartus vivit et vivat." Finally, Rore's *Labore primus Hercules* compares Ercole II with his mythical predecessor, the demigod Hercules, and as in the masses, the first and third syllables are emphasized over the middle syllable. For Josquin's and Rore's *soggetti* and the cantus firmus see Alvin Johnson, "The Masses of Cipriano de Rore," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 6 (1953): 231 (Exx. 2 and 3), 33 (Ex. 4), 36 (Ex. 7). All the works are published in Cipriano de Rore, *Opera omnia*, ed. Bernhard Meier, Corpus mensurabilis musicae 14 (American Institute of Musicology, 1966); see 7:32–54 and 7:55–90 for the masses and 6:53–56 for the motet. The *soggetto cavato* of Jachet of Mantua's *Missa Hercules Dux Ferrariae* (probably composed ca. 1536 but not published until 1540) emphasizes the first and second syllables of Hercules. Philip Jackson notes that the first five notes of the *soggetto* (those setting "Hercules vivet"), when expressed in solmization syllables, do not correspond to the text in the expected manner; he suggests that the mass was originally intended to honor another dignitary, perhaps Charles V (Philip T. Jackson, "Two Descendants of Josquin's 'Hercules' Mass," *Music & Letters*, 59 (1978): 194; the *soggetto* is Ex. 2 on the same page). The unusual accents in Jachet's mass might therefore not be a calculated insult but an unavoidable pitfall of its recycling for a new dedicatee.

47 Raffaele Brandolini, *On Music and Poetry (De Musica et Poetica, 1513)*, trans. Ann E. Moyer, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 232 (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2001), 11.

48 Messisbugo, *Banchetti*, fol. 3^{r}.

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Brandolini shows a clear role for improvised song at banquets. Choosing his subject matter "from circumstances and occasions, from persons, from places and times. I have sung of things of the past, the present, or the future, according to the will of those who charged me with the task," Brandolini might sing of the "intimate and amusing … amusing when I upbraided in jest a quiet person for his silence or a talker for his chatter or a drowsy person for his nodding."[49] He might praise as well as blame, but he does so with "such moderation in both regards so that I can at times expose an unknown blemish in a person I praise, and sometimes praise a recognized quality in a person whom I censure."[50] At "the ordinary banquets of companions and friends … one must pour out witticisms and quips, and respond in alternate verses to those who challenge one to recite."[51] At "illustrious banquets of both friends and sovereigns" he might be asked "to repeat in verse a history that had been read, or to explain a problem proposed on a certain subject, a task I carried out many times at the banquets of cardinals."[52]

Brandolini's license to criticize is akin to that of the court buffoons who were favored entertainers at banquets. Indeed, Ariosto claims that jesters were "more welcome [at court] than the virtuous and good."[53] Beatrice Otto's cross-cultural study of the jester contains many examples of buffoons criticizing the ruler using humor. At times their criticism provoked a positive change to an unjust action, but too direct a barb could cost a jester his or her life.[54] Castellino's villotte might have

[49] Brandolini, *On Music and Poetry*, 89.

[50] Ibid., 105.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid. and 107. Brandolini's art and Castellino's villotte might be considered two ends of a banquet-song continuum, with the Latin songs being the "high" end due to the language employed, while Castellino's dialect songs occupy the low end.

[53] "Più grati assai che 'l virtuoso e 'l buono." Beatrice K. Otto, *Fools Are Everywhere: The Court Jester around the World* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 75.

[54] See ibid., ch. 3, "In risu veritas, or Many a True Word Spoken in Jest," 97–131, and ch. 4, "Overstepping the Mark: The Limits of the License," 132–54. Fools were valued at court precisely because they told the truth. They had "a right to present indirect and even forthright mockery of universal human foibles and more precisely critical advice, sharp edges softened with colorful and witty wrapping that prevents the jester from being relegated to the general ranks of court entertainers" (101–02). Otto's examples of jesters whose wit resulted in capital punishment are generally drawn from outside Europe. However, cleric-jester Fra Serafino lost several fingers on one hand during a beating that followed his public mockery of cardinals, the Madonna, and the Pope at a banquet in Rome on April 10, 1507 (137–38). Public scorn of high-placed officials could result in assassination. Bette Talvacchia posits that Pietro Aretino's insulting pasquinades on Gian Matteo Giberti, Clement VII's datary, perhaps prompted by their "battle" over the imprisonment of Marc'Antonio Raimondi (for printing *I modi*), was the main reason behind the attempted assassination of Aretino in 1525. See Talvacchia, *Taking Positions: On the Erotic in Renaissance Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 17–18.

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performed a similar function to Brandolini's extempore singing and to the art of the buffoon as a commentary on court life by a privileged outsider.

In contrast to *Viva viva il nobil Duca*, *La mi fa balare* does not directly address Ercole but, in its depiction of an unruly woman who has the better of her partner, it could be read as a reference to Ercole's relationship with Renée de France.[55]

La mi fa balare,	She makes me dance,
Balar cha la mi fa contra mia voglia.	She makes me dance against my wishes,
Colei ch'ogni mia spoglia	She who has all my goods
Apreso se.	In her own possession.
La mi fa balare,	She makes me dance,
Balar cha la mi fa contra mia voglia.	She makes me dance against my wishes.
La mi fa mutare,	She makes me change,
Mutar cha la mi fa del mio pensiero.	She makes me change my thoughts.
Colei cha dir'il vero,	She, to tell the truth,
È 'l mio bene.	Is my beloved.
La mi fa mutare,	She makes me change
Mutar cha la mi fa del mio pensiero.	She makes me change my thoughts.
La mi fa restare,	She makes me hold back,
Restar cha la mi fa del mio volere.	She makes me hold back from my will.
Cholei che ogni potere	She who has taken all power
A tolto a me.	Away from me.
La mi fa restare,	She makes me hold back,
Restar cha la mi fa del mio volere.	She makes me hold back from my will.

The woman has total control over her partner: she makes him dance, she makes him change his mind, she makes him hold back from his will, and she has taken all power from him. Clearly, the male speaker has lost autonomy and authority.

As with many dialect songs, *La mi fa balare* is open to a sexual interpretation in the light of Jean Toscan's exhaustive research on double entendre.[56] This woman

[55] Of course, the theme of the unruly woman dominating the man is common in Cinquecento literature, dialect song, and comedic theatre. For a now classic examination of this subversion, see Natalie Zemon Davis, "Women on Top: Symbolic Sexual Inversion and Political Disorder in Early Modern Europe," in *The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society*, ed. Barbara A. Babcock (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), 147–90.

[56] Jean Toscan, *Le Carnaval du langage: Le lexique érotique de Burchiello à Marino, XVe–XVIIe siècles* (Lille: Presse de l'Université de Lille, 1981). Toscan's work is one of the sources for the *Dizionario storico del lessico erotico italiano*, ed. Valter Boggione and Giovanni Casalegno (Milan: Tascabili degli Editori Associati, 1996). Subsequent references to these sources are abbreviated as Toscan and DSLE, respectively, followed by the appropriate page reference. There are some problems with Toscan's interpretations, notably his privileging anal intercourse over other forms of sexual contact even where those

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apparently has a voracious sexual appetite. In the first verse she demands vaginal coitus (*la mi fa balare*), she makes the male speaker have an erection in the second verse (*mutar cha la mi fa del mio pensiero*), and in the third verse she does not permit her partner to climax when he wishes (*restar cha la mi fa del mio volere*).[57] The woman is portrayed as a thief who has taken her partner's goods and his power. While that could be a reference to the allegedly common practice of courtesans purloining their companions' purses, it might better be understood as an allusion to Ercole's grievances with Renée over her extravagant household, for which he blamed Madame de Soubise, and the fact that France was always late paying her allowance.[58] He felt he was being robbed.[59] Female control and subsequent removal and possession of masculine power evoke fears of the woman-on-top position (second only to sodomy in sinfulness). The song succinctly and humorously demonstrates the dangers of male sexual overindulgence and female desire.[60]

These dangers arise from the Cinquecento understanding of intercourse in relation to humoral theory and the concept of a single biological sex. Female sexual desire was understood to stem from the woman's natural need for her opposite—the woman, being cold and wet, seeks "unition" with the man (hot and dry) in order to raise her status in the natural order.[61] Sexual intercourse and the state of female

alternate readings are more obvious. This queer reading strategy usefully provides multiple interpretive layers; I suggest all remain in play. Further, his description of adjectives such as "dolce" as suggesting anal intercourse seems to be stretching the point at times. In general, however, Toscan's argument for the erotic lexicon is persuasive. The villotte repertory of the mid-Cinquecento certainly seems to have much in common with the corpus Toscan examined, yet I have erred on the side of caution with regard to adjectives and supplied these interpretations only where there are supporting metaphors.

57 *Balare*: to have vaginal intercourse (DSLE 161; Toscan 1054); *pensiero*: male sexual organ (DSLE 332). *Potere* suggests sperm.

58 Webb, "Royalty and Reform," 44, 62–63, 69–71 explains the financial situation. On Alfonso I d'Este's loan to François I as part of the deal that protected Estense territory from invasion and united Ferrara and France in the persons of Ercole and Renée, see Andrea del Borgo to the Emperor, November 28, 1527: Pascual de Gayangos, ed., "Spain: November 1527, 21–30," in *Calendar of State Papers, Spain, Volume 3, Part 2: 1527–1529*, British History Online, http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=87553 (accessed April 30, 2014). In 1535, Renée complained that Ercole had not issued her with a duchess's customary exemption from customs and taxes (Webb, "Royalty and Reform," 69–71); it is possible Ercole felt this was necessary to reclaim some of the funds owed by France. Finally, it was common knowledge that Renée's household was extravagant (ibid., 70–71).

59 Ibid., 73–74 and particularly nn. 30 and 31 on those pages.

60 On the consequences of this, see Thomas N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 190.

61 This discussion is taken from Annibale Romei's *Discorsi* (Venice: Francesco Ziletto, 1585) in John Kepers's English translation as *The Courtiers Academie* (London, 1598), The English Experience. Its Record in Early Printed Books Published in Facsimile, 129 (New York: Da Capo Press, 1969), 62. Romei was a Ferrarese courtier during the time of Alfonso II and his *Discorsi* were set in Ferrara, with Ferrarese courtiers as interlocutors.

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sexual arousal are potential sources of anxiety for the early modern gentleman. The gentleman debases himself in "unition," an act that might lead to emasculation. The sexually aroused woman is also unstable since in order to be capable of sexual intercourse (and the orgasm essential for conception) she must be warmed from her natural state—in other words, she moves closer to the masculine humors.[62]

According to the theory of a single biological sex, the warmed-up female has the potential to turn into a man.[63] Women and men are positioned at opposite ends of a continuum of biological sex. They have essentially the same sexual organs, but men's organs are on the outside of their bodies and women's on the inside. A woman's internal penis (her vagina) might easily become an external penis under the right conditions. Too much physical exercise is one stimulus to such spontaneous sex changes because it succeeds in warming the woman up from her normal cold and wet state and brings her closer to the hot and dry masculine humors. Sexual intercourse was therefore a dangerous activity since it might emasculate the man and correspondingly "masculinize" the woman.

The relationship of this couple is not at all clear: they could be a courtesan or prostitute and client, or husband and wife, possibly of low social status. Interlocutors in Annibale Romei's courtly discourses set in Ferrara in the later sixteenth century attribute an inability to control sexual desire to women in general and to men whose desire is aroused by a non-noble, while Angelo Beolco alludes to sexual power reversals as being typical of country ways in several of his prologues.[64] Regardless of the marital relationship of the dancing couple in *La mi fa balare*, the intemperate sexual unions they enjoy have led to an inversion of power and thus challenge male authority.

In *Il cortegiano* and *Orlando furioso*, similarly destabilizing women who do not conform to social norms are either banished from civil society (for example,

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For another musicological application of sixteenth-century sexual theories see Laura Macy, "Speaking of Sex: Metaphor and Performance in the Italian Madrigal," *Journal of Musicology* 14 (1996): 1–34, esp. 2–4.

[62] Until 1563/64, when the Tridentine reforms on marriage were adopted, the only justification for sexual intercourse under sixteenth-century canon law was procreation. Any intercourse—even within marriage—that did not have the aim of producing offspring was fornication and therefore sinful. See James A. Brundage, "Let Me Count the Ways: Canonists and Theologians Contemplate Coital Positions," *Journal of Medieval History* 10, no. 2 (1984): 81–93. Marriage serves to contain the threat to male authority of the sexually aroused female.

[63] The first three chapters of Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990) give a full explanation of the single-sex model. Laqueur provides a short summary on p. 4.

[64] Romei, *The Courtiers Academie*, 37 (male desire), 62 (female desire). Of the early prologues to *La moscheta* Linda Carroll observes: "though Ruzante promises to teach men how to be strong and women how to stay in their place, women in his countryside are on top of both city men and their husbands." Carroll, *Angelo Beolco (Il Ruzante)*, 42. The prologue is laced generously with sexual humor; see ibid., 40.

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through exile or death) or they return to more socially acceptable behavior and are contained within society.[65] In contrast, the relationship in *La mi fa balare* is not restored to an unthreatening "normality" or to a state consistent with the ideals of courtly behavior manuals and courtly chivalric epic; in this the woman bears a greater resemblance to Betia of Beolco's *La moscheta*, who finds an unconventional solution to her dissatisfaction with her husband: a *ménage à trois*.[66] In *La mi fa balare* the only boundaries enforced are those of the song. It is a jaunty, strophic song with a great deal of repetition. The first three notes of the tenor melody set the solmization syllables "la mi fa" to the appropriate notes.[67] The melody strains between duple and triple meter, being held in duple meter by the accompanying voices. Traditionally, triple meter was considered to be perfect and duple imperfect. The terminology invites comparison to the sixteenth-century vision of men as perfect and women as imperfect. It might not be coincidence that the piece ends in the imperfect meter—feminine imperfection wins (see Example 4.2).

In addition to directly threatening masculine authority, women might also be a vehicle for one man to challenge another's authority. In essence, this was Renée's fate after François I signed the Cambrai treaty and Ercole became duke: Ercole attempted to control Renée in order to kick back at François. An attack on the supreme feminine virtue of chastity was a direct attack on male honor since the woman's husband or father was evidently incapable of controlling access to his family. In Castellino's *In un bel pra fiorito*, male sovereignty is challenged in two ways: a city man threatens a rural man's paternal honor and later is faced with prosecution before a higher authority:

In u*n* bel pra fiorito,	In a pretty meadow full of flowers,
Me sco*n*trai nel mia amore.	I met my lover.
Cha la volssi basare,	I wanted to kiss her,
Da po me ne pentì.	But soon I repented.
La bella me pregava,	The pretty girl asked me
Cha la lasase stare.	To let her be.
"Per mi amore de mia madre,	"For love of my mother,
Partete via dellì!"	Go away from here!"

[65] Valeria Finucci, *The Lady Vanishes: Subjectivity and Representation in Castiglione and Ariosto* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), 16.

[66] Ruzante (= Angelo Beolco), *Posh Talk (La Moscheta)*, trans. Ronnie Ferguson, in *Three Renaissance Comedies: Ariosto's Lena, Ruzante's Posh Talk, Aretino's Talanta*, ed. Christopher Cairns, Studies in Italian Theatre and Commedia dell'Arte (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1991), 100–01.

[67] Leofranc Holford-Strevens's contribution to this volume (Ch. 2) discusses this practice in further detail.

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E mi pur drio nandava,	And I kept on
Per far el fatto me,	Doing what I wanted to do,
E la me repregava,	And she asked me again
Che retornase in drie.	To turn back.
Tanto cha la brazì,	So that, when I embraced her,
Per volerla basare,	Because I wanted to kiss her,
La se mese a cridare,	She cried out loud
Che 'l padre la sentì.	And her father heard her.
Quando che 'l padre vite,	When I saw her father,
De fatto via muzè,	At once I fled.
E lu me vene adrie,	And he came up behind me
Per imparar la cha.	To find out where I live.
A pè l'usso el ma zonse.	He caught up with me near the door.
Tosto el me cognosè.	He immediately cited me.
Davanti al podestè	Before the podestà
Doman me ne vuo andar.	I want to get out of here tomorrow.
A le una gran vergogna,	Father: "For our daughters it is a great shame
Cha le non possa andare	That they can't walk
Per i pra a solazare,	In the meadows
Le nostre figiole.	To amuse themselves."
"A ge provederon	F: "We'll look after them
A le santi de quatro."	By the saints of the four gospels."
"Tasi su vechio mato!	Young Man: "Shut up you old fool!
Che fostu scortegò."	May you be skinned alive."
"Domande la perdona,	F: "Ask her to forgive,
La bella te la darò."	I shall give you the lovely girl."
"Questo mai non faro	YM: "This I will never do
Perché son zitadin."	Since I am a city man."
"Cha si vu più di gli altri	F: "For on you more than the others
Cha ve vegna la sita.	May tribulation come.
Ge ne fato vendetta	I shall wreak vengeance
Se me vegni in le man."	If you fall into my hands."
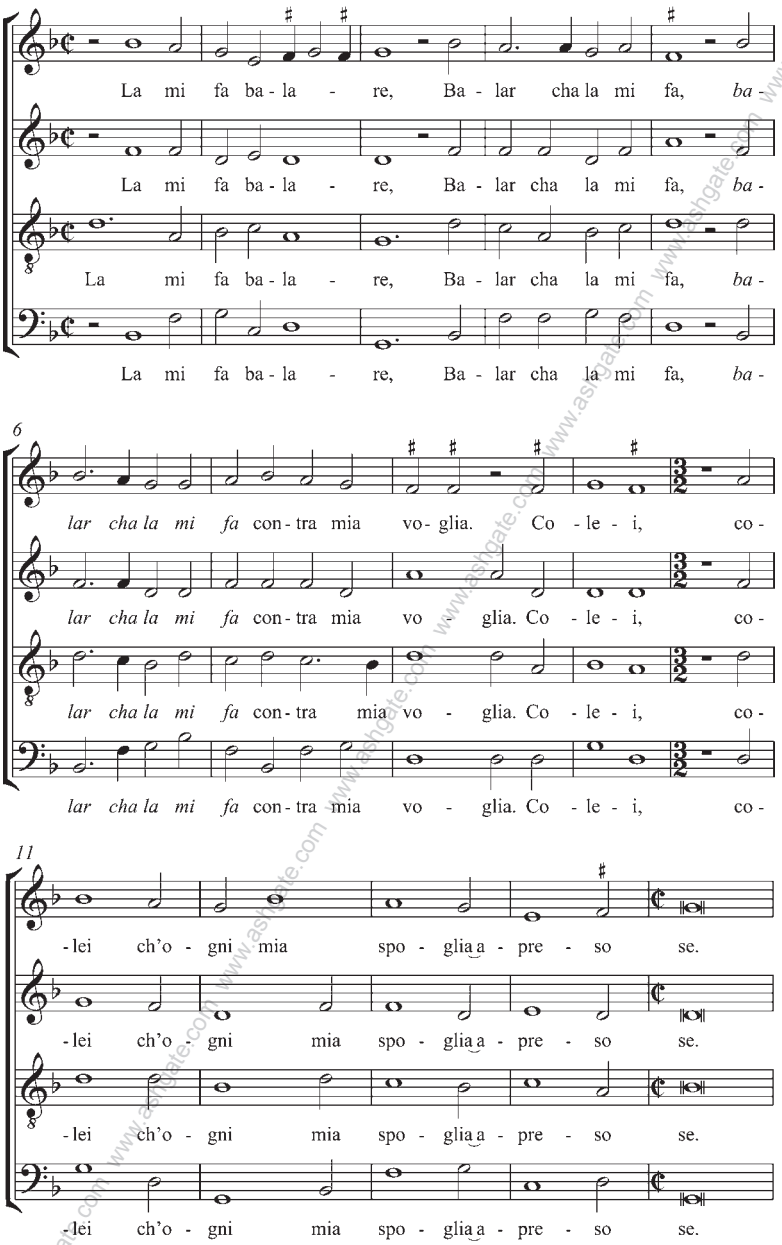
There is more to this encounter than a simple kiss. The flowers in the meadow and the rural setting in general contribute to a sexually charged atmosphere. In literature and in song, standards of conduct expected of young men in court or in a city are

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Example 4.2 Castellino, *La mi fa balare* (*Primo libro delle villote*, 1541, p. 14)



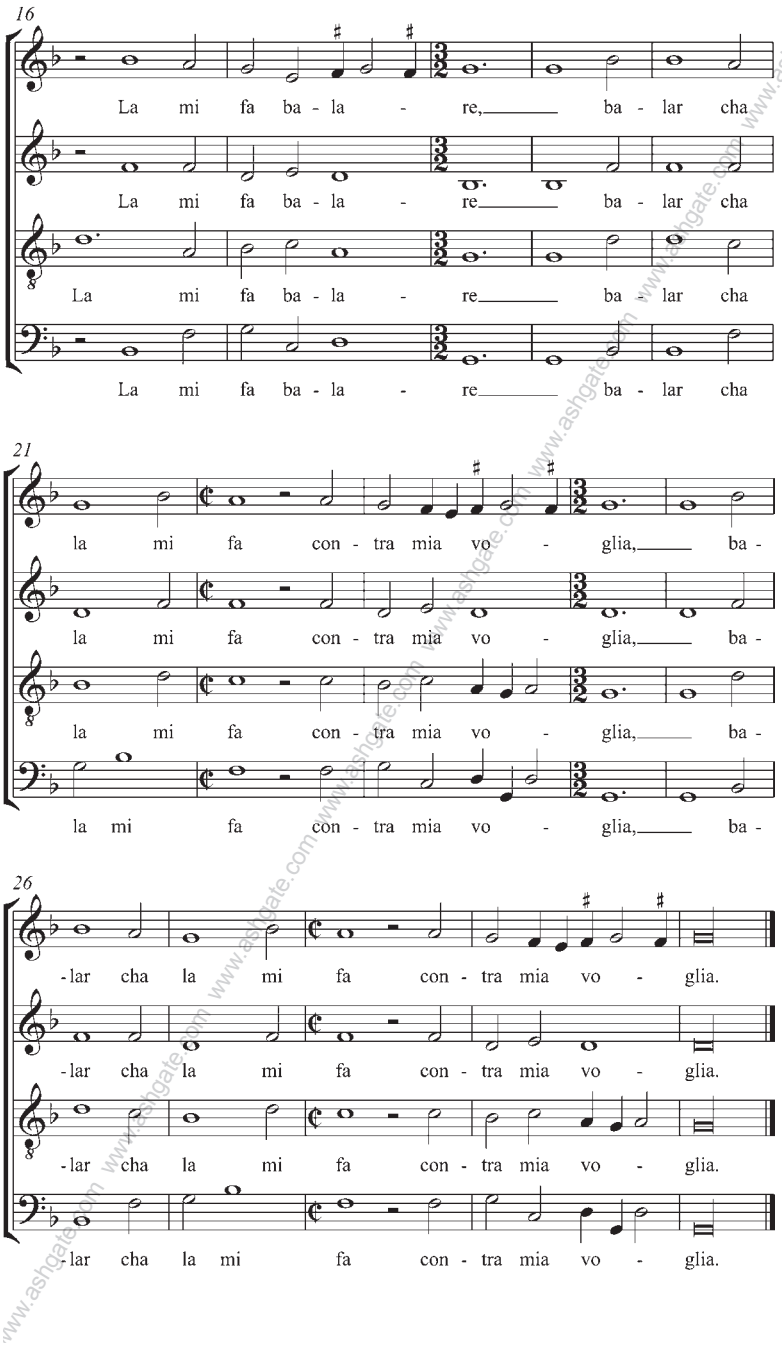
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Example 4.2 *concluded*



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not necessarily applicable in the countryside.[68] The verb *basare* (to kiss) stands in for sexual intercourse, while the father's use of *solazare* also implies willing sexual exploration.[69] However, the girl's cries indicate that this is rape. In this case, the attack may have involved anal sex since the girl's plea for the *cittadino* to "turn back" could have been (deliberately?) misinterpreted as a request for anal sex in order to protect her virginity.[70] To a certain extent this text reflects the real danger for many rural women who might easily become targets of sexual assault. Low-status women had greater risk of attack than high-status women; they also had less likelihood of successful prosecution, especially if their attacker was a nobleman.[71] In this case, the girl and her father might have some success: magistrates sought evidence of the victim's resistance, such as crying out. If an unmarried woman was raped, as in this song, her bodily condition no longer aligned with her social identity. To reconcile the two, a magistrate might seek the consent of her guardian to marry the woman to her attacker. The father in this song apparently would agree to that, although the young man is not keen. As an alternative, the magistrate could order the attacker to provide a generous dowry for the young woman's marriage to someone else, or so that the woman could become a nun.[72]

In courtly literature, sexual assaults on women are mercifully few and far between, but in *Il cortegiano* and *Orlando furioso*, the threatened women commit suicide: a decent woman would prefer to die than to live without her honor. Valeria Finucci is right in saying that in courtly literature "class differences have no bearing [on the importance of female chastity]," yet in *Il cortegiano* and *Orlando furioso* class does seem to have a bearing on whether a woman's chastity

[68] On the significance of texts regarding court men's sexual aggression outside the court see Jeanice Brooks, *Courtly Song in Late Sixteenth-Century France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 367.

[69] For the sexual meaning of *basare* see Toscan, 1103–04, while on *solazare* see DSLE, 152–53.

[70] This is not unique in rape texts. In the rape dialogue sonnet "Sta sù, non mi far male, sta sù," the source text for Domenico Ferabosco's madrigal of the same title, the attacker anally rapes the girl in response to her cry, "Oh, don't take my honor" (Deh, non mi tor l'onor!). Laurie Stras, "*Le nonne della ninfa*: Feminine Voices and Modal Rhetoric in the Generations before Monteverdi," in *Gender, Sexuality, and Early Music*, ed. Todd M. Borgerding (New York: Routledge, 2002), 138–39.

[71] On prosecuting rape in the sixteenth century see Elizabeth S. Cohen, "No Longer Virgins: Self-Presentation by Young Women in Late Renaissance Rome," in *Refiguring Woman: Perspectives on Gender and the Italian Renaissance*, ed. Marilyn Migiel and Juliana Schiesari (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 169–91 and Guido Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros: Sex Crime and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 89–108.

[72] Cohen, "No Longer Virgins," 176.

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is actually violated and her virtue lost.[73] The only rape carried out in these two books is that of a country girl who subsequently drowns herself.[74] The higher-class women manage to avoid attack, albeit through engineering their own deaths.[75] All the women die, but only the lower-class woman dies with compromised virtue.

Castellino's text is at odds with the idealized female responses in *Il cortegiano* and *Orlando furioso* since the victim fails to kill herself for shame. In fact, the woman is not the main concern of the text. Rather, the violated daughter becomes the pretext for a display of masculine competition between the virile young city man and the older, paternal peasant, almost making the text a parody of the chivalric joust in defense of a woman's reputation.[76] The attack is an attempt to assert established power dynamics. In this sense, it has much in common with Italian texts such as Lorenzo Venier's *Zaffetta*, in which the (fictional) gang-rape of Angela Zaffetta is a means to restore social hierarchies following the topsy-turvy of Carnival and to put Zaffetta back in her place.[77] There are also strong similarities between *In un bel pra fiorito* and the French *pastourelle* tradition, in which a sexual assault of a country girl symbolizes a noblemen's total domination of his lands and the people on them as opposed to his comparative powerlessness at court. However, in Castellino's song, the end is not social concord and stability. Rather, the young city man cannot assert his authority over the peasant father. The father attempts to assault the young man, coming close to sodomizing him, although he does not cross the threshold, and cites the city man before the podestà.[78] He also expresses a hope for natural justice when he wishes that the young man suffer from the burning pain of *la sita* (slang for gonorrhoea). The song does not reveal the outcome of that appeal; the social tension is unresolved.

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[73] Finucci, *The Lady Vanishes*, 66.

[74] Castiglione, *The Courtier*, 250–51; Book 3, ch. 47 of Castiglione, *Il cortegiano*, 255–56.

[75] In Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*, rather than lose her chastity to Rodomonte, Isabella tricks him into beheading her (Canto 29:1–30; Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, trans. Guido Waldman, Oxford World Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 351–54). Finucci notes that "Ariosto reserves the highest praise and the longest eulogy for Isabella." Finucci, *The Lady Vanishes*, 171.

[76] "The principal loci for such competition in the sixteenth century are battle and its simulacra (tourneys, etc.) and women's bodies, which function in various ways as sites of exchange between men." Jeanice Brooks (pers. comm., August 5, 2003).

[77] I am grateful to Rebecca Anne Wright of New York University for sharing with me her unpublished paper, "The Erotics of Rape: Lorenzo Venier's Trentuno della Zaffetta" (2003). Wright presented an earlier version of the paper entitled "The Erotics of Rape: Masculinity, Violence and Social Order in Lorenzo Venier's *Trentuno della Zaffetta*" at the Society for Renaissance Studies Conference in Bristol, September 12–14, 2003. Daniella Rossi suggests that the account was fictional, but its publication and circulation would have had the same disciplinary effect on Zaffetta: "Controlling Courtesans: Lorenzo Venier's *Trentuno della Zaffetta and Venetian Sexual Politics*," in *Sex Acts in Early Modern Italy*, ed. Allison Levy (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2010).

[78] For *casa* and *uscio* as anus, see DSLE, 553 and 555.

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Castellino's story-telling abilities must have shone in this song. The music (see Example 4.3) draws on the dance-song pattern familiar from *Viva, viva il nobil Duca*, only this time Castellino follows convention for the cadences. The tenor melody is simple. It rises up the diapente, moving from D to C and back before descending to the final at the end of the stanza. There is no musical characterization of the different speakers in the song. All the color and interest comes from the way the entertainer performs the story.

La mi fa balare and *In un bel pra fiorito*, then, contrast in various ways with the idealized worlds presented in courtly literature, and both depict unresolved challenges to the social hierarchy. These would appear to fit in with the general topsy-turvy atmosphere of Carnival, in which social hierarchies were temporarily inverted. However, carnivalesque ribaldry and inversions also occurred outside Carnival's temporal boundaries, in the witty critique of the court jester, for example. It is, perhaps, a privilege of those in power to enjoy carnivalesque types of humor throughout the year.

In the Cinquecento, a patron was not necessarily acting from altruistic motives in sponsoring a cultural product. Ercole's proven patronage of Ruzante and his probable financial support for Castellino's villotte might have been an attempt to demonstrate his own masculine authority in the face of perceived threats from his wife. The well-documented Protestant sympathies of the duchess of Ferrara, Renée de France, and her court had become increasingly public during the 1530s. In 1536, there were several incidents that threatened Ercole's political sovereignty: Renée may have secretly sheltered Calvin for several weeks—a secret so well covered that to this day it cannot be conclusively proved. And, in a much more public controversy, during the Good Friday service, Jehannet, a chapel singer whom Ercole hired at the behest of Renée, refused to venerate the cross and walked out of the church.[79] Ercole worked with the local inquisitor to have Jehannet arrested, and had a number of suspected heretics in Renée's household investigated; one was her secretary. Ercole had recently returned from a trip to Rome and Naples, where he had met with Pope Paul III and Charles V, and he attempted to use the investigation of heresy among the French retinue in Ferrara to reinforce his new relationships. Ercole wanted to demonstrate his new loyalties, and take action against the perceived threat to his authority: the heretical acts allowed him to flex his muscles against the French. He had already arranged for the recall of Madame de Soubise, who he felt was interfering in his relationship with Renée by actively stopping Renée from supporting and obeying him.[80] In light of this, the female challenge to male power depicted in *La mi fa balare* might have had particular significance for Ercole. A male-centered view of the situation might interpret Ercole as being at the mercy of his wife. Rather than dictating

[79] There is a detailed examination of the incident and the diplomatic fallout in Webb, "Royalty and Reform," 92–115.

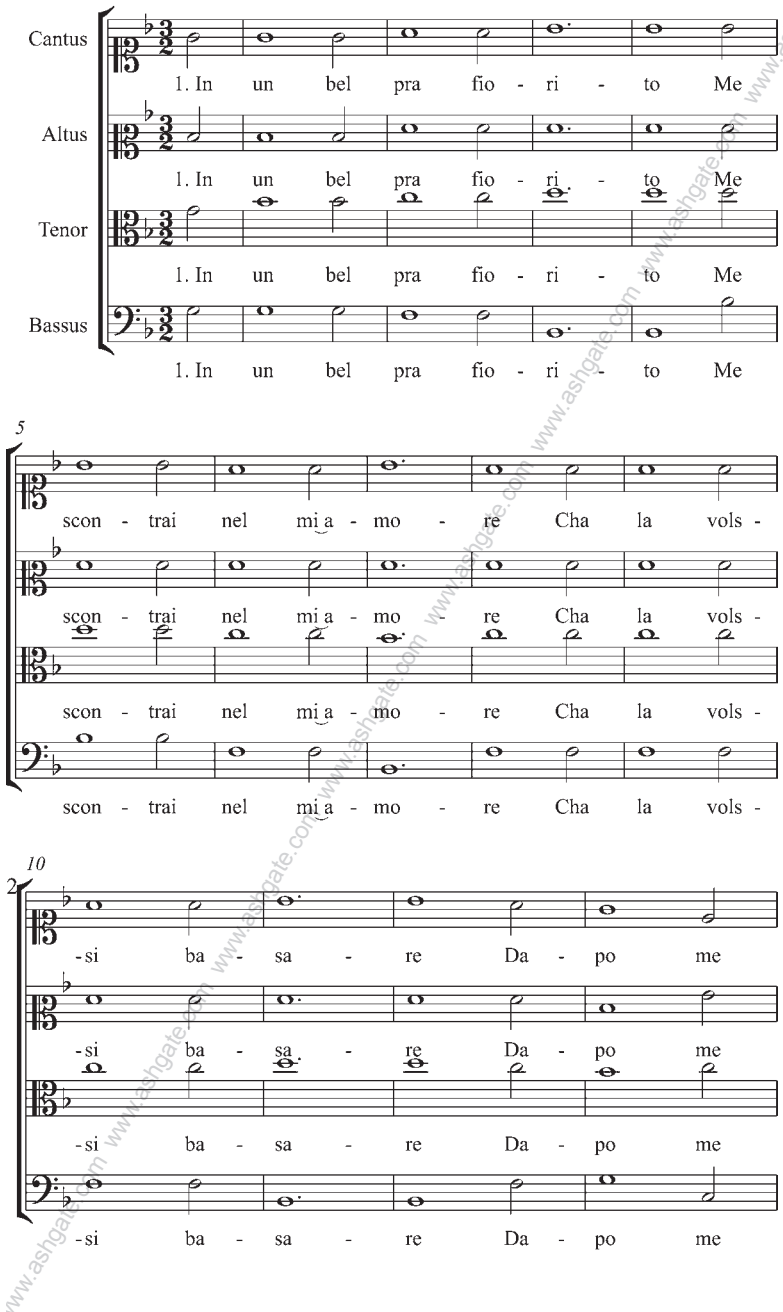
[80] Ibid., 144.

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Example 4.3 Castellino, *In un bel pra fiorito* (*Primo libro delle villote*, 1541, p. 23)
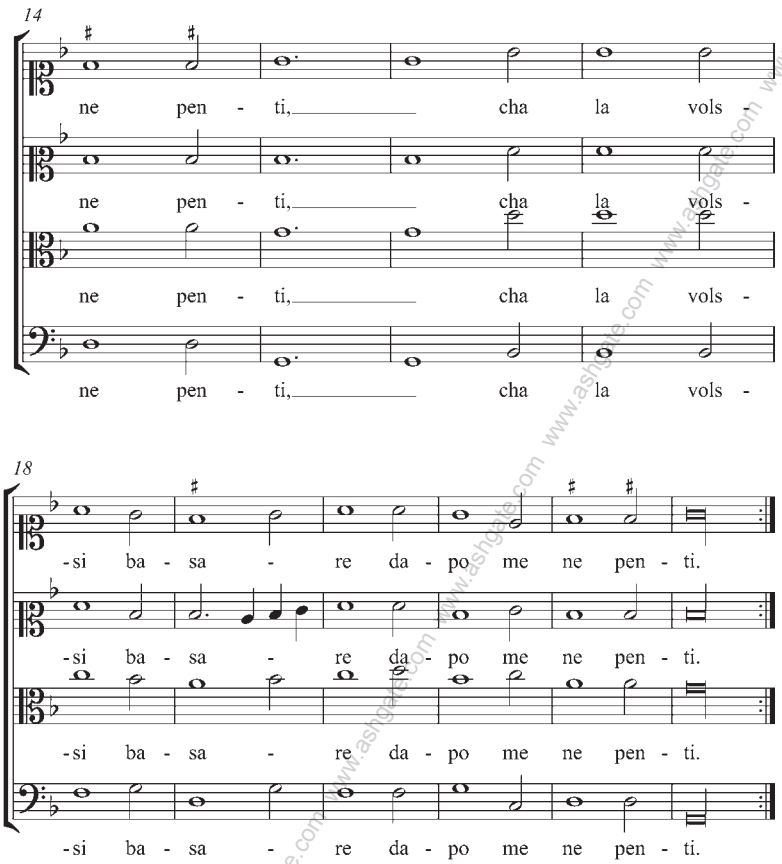


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Example 4.3 *concluded*



policy, all he could do was respond to the controversies engendered by his wife and her court. That said, Renée felt vulnerable after losing her confidante, and in essence she was a pawn in the power struggles between France, the Empire, Ferrara, and Rome.[81] Like the daughter in *In un bel pra fiorito*, Renée and the French heretics she sheltered became a pretext for displays of masculine power and authority. She did her best to mobilize French support for her position. Like the young city man, ultimately Ercole did not have the sovereignty he expected to have over Renée or her household. François I had already shown that Estense interests were a low priority when he signed a treaty with the emperor that contradicted agreements with Ferrara made just months before at the time of Renée and Ercole's marriage. He defended Renée and her court, and ultimately gained the upper hand. France wanted the prisoners released into French custody,

[81] See Blaisdell, "Politics and Heresy."

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while Ercole asserted his right to prosecute heresy in conjunction with the local Inquisition. Both sides lobbied Paul III, who, rather than confirming Ercole's jurisdiction, declared that the Frenchmen should be prosecuted in papal Bologna. About two months into the affair, Ercole realized he had no choice but to release the prisoners in order to avoid ceding power to Rome. He chose to hand the prisoners to the French ambassador to Venice, where they were promptly released. Ercole only acted against French heretics when he thought it was in his political interests to do so. The attempt to demonstrate his sovereignty backfired. Ercole's association with Castellino's ironic rustic songs, then, could have been part of an attempt to publicly demonstrate his ability to contain threats to his authority.

If Castellino's songs were performed during Ferrarese banquets in the late 1530s, perhaps around 1536 when Ercole stood to gain from demonstrating Francophobia and a pro-Imperial stance, then they would probably have had a mixed-sex audience. Ideally, courtly women should "observe a certain difficult mean … and take care not to stray beyond certain fixed limits" in their behavior. The appropriate courtly response to wanton talk in company was not to leave the room but to listen "with a slight blush of shame."[82] By subjecting his wife and other court ladies to sexual innuendo, Ercole might have been requiring them to be politely embarrassed in a social situation. This in itself is a demonstration of male power. Ercole could have been akin to the reprobate jokers condemned by Bernardo in *Il cortegiano* who show "no respect for the presence of ladies, and who are constantly searching for witticisms and quips merely for the pleasure of making them blush for shame."[83] However, Ercole, the duke of Ferrara, was unlikely to be driven out of polite society for such behavior.

The challenges to masculine power contained in Castellino's book, and the particular barbs directed at Ercole, had a multiplicity of meanings for the ducal court. Assuming Ercole enjoyed the songs at his court and sponsored the publication, then he had a hand in this construction of the low and rustic. By sponsoring Castellino's imitation of rustic flowers and fruits, Ercole constructed his own identity as masculine ruler. He also demonstrated his power by authorizing the use of sexual innuendo in polite company and in the presence of women. Finally, the duke's patronage served to sanction and contain the threats to masculine authority in the songs. By taking a benevolent attitude toward criticism, he showed himself impervious to such threats and displayed the extent of his own masculine authority.

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[82] Castiglione, *The Courtier*, 212.

[83] Ibid., 175. "E però questi tali, che voglion mostrar di esser faceti con poca reverenzia di Dio, meritano esser cacciati dal consorzio d'ogno gentilhomo. Né meno quelli che son osceni e sporchi nel parlare, e che in presenzia di donne non hanno rispetto alcuno, e pare che non piglino altro piacer che di farle arrossire di vergogna, e sopra di questo vanno cercando motti ed arguzie." Book 2, ch. 68, Castiglione, *Il cortegiano*, 170.

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