

ANGELICA'S BOOK: THE POWER OF READING IN LATE RENAISSANCE FLORENCE
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Perhaps it is only fitting that an inquiry about sixteenth-century reading patterns should begin in a junk shop. What other locale so effectively exemplifies the unpredictable vagaries, curious meanderings, and even the rootedness in real objects, typical of the humanist's approach? The badly damaged book that will largely occupy me here betrayed none of its most precious contents at first sight. And along with a dozen other works liquidated for small change by a seller normally dealing in furniture, it sat on a shelf for years. In a moment of distraction, the new owner found the brief neatly penned line of text on page 144 which seemed to reveal something about women's experiences a half-millennium ago. Working out from these two crucial pieces of evidence, a book and a signature, I seek the vague outlines of a forgotten world of semi-clandestine reading and its effects on the 16th century psyche. If the definitive conclusions are few and the conjectures are many, at least, the journey will be accompanied by some of the best tales of intrigue and adultery, love and hate, devilry and piety, lies and confessions, that the sixteenth-century mind ever devised.

Stories abound in this research, and as I embark on my journey of discovery, I seem to be one of the characters in Cristoforo Armeno's folk tale, purportedly of Persian origin, first published in Venice in 1557 and later rendered into English as *The Travels and Adventures of Three Princes of Sarendip*.¹ It tells of three young men who set out in search of knowledge about the world by visiting the lands and courts of distant rulers, encountering a series of improbable adventures along the way. Horace Walpole, the English connoisseur and writer, apparently coined the term "serendipity," based on this folk tale, in a 1754 letter to the American reformist Horace Mann.² There he uses it to refer to a new discovery he made by accident regarding the coat of arms of a Venetian noble family known as the Cappello, while researching a recently purchased portrait of Bianca Cappello, concubine of a Medici grand duke, which he considered to have been painted by the late Renaissance artist Giorgio Vasari. But to develop serendipity into the serious principle of research that I want here, the first was Robert K. Merton, the Columbia University sociologist, whose study on the subject begins, conveniently enough for my purposes, by joining Horace Walpole, Horace Mann, Giorgio Vasari, Bianca Cappello and the Princes of Serendip.³ That the late Renaissance world, crucial to my theme, tangentially gave rise to the term, may just be another case of serendipity.

Serendipity of course does not mean sheer chance. In Cristoforo Armeno's work the princes are predisposed to placing their mental prowess at the service of their fellow human beings, discovering an evil counsellor in the court of a neighboring king, setting off on a mission to India to retrieve a magic mirror, and liberating that country from a horrible curse. Each adventure requires the young princes to exercise their ingenuity and savoir faire, which is richly rewarded in the end. In India, in return for the queen's hand in marriage, they are asked to solve two riddles, one of which calls for demonstrating how a man could eat an entire magazine of salt in one day. Brought before the salt magazine, the aspiring husband puts three salt crystals in his mouth, saying this would be his preferred approach—to the delight of the completely infatuated queen. The most famous story involves a lost camel, whose characteristics and manner of abduction the youths are able to divine on the basis of details such as the half-eaten grass on one side of the road (indicating a one-eyed animal) and a particular sensation experienced by the males while sniffing footprints in the dirt (indicating a female thief). Mainly on the basis of the camel episode, the fable has played an outsized role in discussions about intellectual innovation, which is the connection that interests me here.

There are many ways of gaining new knowledge; and Merton names a few of the more familiar ones. Some seem more applicable to the task at hand, some seem less. I do not envisage

much use of the so-called experimental method, where the researcher “contrives a situation in which it may be possible to make significant observations to support or discredit an existing hypothesis,”⁴ unless the situation in question is conjured up only in the mind. More to the point seems the method of retrospective prophecy, or “retroduction,” in Merton’s terminology. In this method we start with an anomalous effect, a strange phenomenon, and attempt to reason back to the most probable cause of what we observe. Whatever the method, Merton explains, a kind of orchestrated or controlled serendipity is always involved. Much actual foreknowledge of the possibilities is necessary, as well as careful preparation of the experimental setup, in order to make the seemingly fortuitous discovery that runs counter to accepted views. Likewise in this book, more than just fortune may have drawn me to the particular anomaly whose existence I wish to predict by the various causal theories. I have to be aware of what elements are important and what are not; and I must have more than a passing acquaintance with the accepted view. Serendipity has accompanied human curiosity over the centuries, as Merton shows, but it is seldom alone. I will see where it takes me.

The objects in this quasi-archaeological exercise do not easily yield up their secrets. I am required to learn their language, and by that I mean not just the vernacular of Renaissance Florence. The context which they illuminate and which in turn sheds some light on them is a late 16th century world still only barely understood in spite of the masses of documents in the Medici archive and the stacks of scholarly texts in various libraries around the world.⁵ We know rather a lot in general about this time and place; we have specific knowledge about a few people in it – usually those who left a long paper trail behind them, either because they were literary figures themselves, or because they were protagonists in the grand events about which the literary figures wrote and versified, or else because they committed crimes requiring documentation within the tribunals. But the lives of ordinary people who minded their own business without deserving extraordinary praise or blame usually do not appear on the horizon of the modern observer except by accident or by inference.

Accident and inference are chief allies in this investigation. Time is also on my side. Before becoming evidence in an inquiry, the text before me was a book lover’s dream: an important 16th century work in bad shape but still respectable, available at a bargain price, among other treasures that had been conserved within a larger object which the proprietor was interested in emptying of its contents. The book, bound in crinkled muddy- looking vellum, was missing the eight last pages and all of the first 25 pages except for a loose page 9, tucked away between others. The absence of a colophon indicating the date, which could have been on the first or last page, removed the ordinary ways of determining the starting point of my story. However, the typesetting was definitely in cursive, or italics as we say in English, the style introduced in Venice by Aldus Manutius in 1501, utilized for many early modern vernacular texts in Italian and mostly superseded by other fonts well before the eighteenth-century triumph of the typefaces invented by Giambattista Bodoni. As was the practice for 16th-century books, the pagination was by folio – i.e. in the right-hand corner of every right-hand page but not on the reverse side (so that I should refer, in the case of my loose page, to a nine recto and nine verso, not nine and ten).

I could have guessed the name of the work from the running titles at the tops of the pages (“First Night,” “Second Night,” etc.), even if I did not encounter the full I.D. halfway through the volume, where a splendid woodcut depicted three female figures seated on a balcony or terrace, engaged in spinning thread, within a frame graced by classical architecture. They are easily identifiable. The Fates or *moirai* from Greek mythology were called Clotho (the spinner of the thread of human life), Lachesis (the disposer of lots), and Atropos (the inflexible one, i.e., the inevitable). In Plato’s Republic, they sing along with the Sirens: Lachesis about the things that were, Clotho about the things that are, and Atropos about what will be. They offer a fitting complement to a book of imaginative literature that narrates the lives and experiences of mostly fictive personages, from past to present. Above the woodcut is title of the work: *Book II of the Fables and Enigmas of Giovanni Francesco Straparola from Caravaggio*. So the book could not have been acquired before

1550, when the first of many editions came out, and in fact, not before 1556, the date of the first one-volume editions of the two-part work.

The curious object before me is a (broken) book by a certain sixteenth-century writer; so my inquiry begins here. Who was Giovanni Francesco Straparola from Caravaggio, and what did he write? It has been suggested that “Straparola” was not his real name but merely a nickname, conveying the notion of “garrulous.”⁶ His geographical designation suggests that he came from the same tiny Lombard town as his much more famous fellow countryman, the painter Michelangelo da Caravaggio, who lived about a half century later. It would have been as good a place as any for enjoying the pleasant Lombard landscape, but not for seeking fame and fortune. What little is known about Straparola suggests that he spent a good deal of time in and around Venice, possibly conversing in the academies there, and certainly engaging with the thriving publishing industry – the Venetian publishing industry that in the century since Gutenberg’s invention, had acquired a temporary position of world leadership.

Born around 1480, Straparola would have been under thirty when his first known publication came out in Venice: a collection of poems called *New Work* (printed in 1508 for Georgio di Ruschoni, identified as a “Milanese”), which went through at least one other edition of seven years later, again in Venice, printed for “Alexandro di Bindoni,” (another name for Alessandro Bindoni), 1515. The work consisted of a collection of poems—sonnets and several other verse forms including the more exotic *strambotti*, often in ottava rima—covering a wide range of topics, ranging from human relations and religion to politics and travel. Just to give the flavor, I here translate a stanza from a poem which he dedicates to an Italian city, referring to the current power broker there, namely, Giacomo Secco:

Oh my Caravaggio happy land
Ser Giacomo at present is secure
And virtue is his only cynosure
With him your Lord your fortune’s well in hand.⁷

I am thus safe in affirming that the geographical diction attached to his name, “from Caravaggio,” was not merely a suffix, but a reference to his real home.

Geographical rootedness is one element of an author’s profile. There may be others. Here is a stanza from a poem concerning a far more serious subject:

O holy Virgin of celestial reign
Great Queen of ardent fire, source of light
From East to West most splendid guide in sight
Of every navigator on the main.⁸

Sincere sentiments or just perfunctory? Direct or ironic? Holy or unholy? On the surface, a religious poem of the kind so common in contemporary literature as to suggest a strong demand among readers; but in the absence of any other signs of a particularly intense religious commitment I hesitate for the moment to assign a meaning in the context of the author’s autobiography.

Side-by-side with such routine expressions of piety I find yet others regarding more profane matters, which cast the possibly religious significance of some poems in a different light. The following is dedicated to another celestial being, whether virgin or not, we do not know:

The Sun had travelled far beyond its height
When my lady spread her splendid hair
Than which Diana’s seemed less fair
And, Phoebus’s golden crown seemed far less bright.⁹

Recall one of Petrarch's sonnets (no. 125) in Lorna de' Lucchi's early 20th century translation, a classic of love literature attempting to evoke the image of the beloved. I make no pretense of offering sufficient material to make an artistic judgment between the two. With the original Italian of both authors before me, there would be no question who is the greater; but that is not the point here.

O fortunate fields through which Madonna goes,
 And you, O happy, happy flowers and sweet,
 O upland who her gentle accent knows
 And bears the dainty imprint of her feet,
 O saplings lithe and early, verdant sprays,
 O love-lorn violets pale, O forest dim
 Which beauty's sun hath pierced with his rays
 And drawn in proud floescence unto him ;
 O limpid stream that laves her lovely face,
 Her luminous eyes, and doth their radiance share,
 O primrose path, I envy you the grace
 Of tender, loyal servitude you bear !
 In you no single pebble now remains
 That is not kindled with my passionate pains.¹⁰

Even in the translation, something of the power of the original emerges. However, my purpose is not to say that, in comparison, Straparola's quiver of love-arrows is less packed, or his reservoir of metaphor less deep. I am engaged in recreating the wider cultural world of the writer of the broken book.

What can clearly be said about all these examples from Straparola is that he is drawing on the same muse—i.e., of Petrarch and subsequent masters—which would later inspire Shakespeare's sonnets. However this other sonnet by Straparola seems to add a particularly strong and novel element, one which will play a major role in later work, and in my account: namely, the vein of sensuality. I translate:

The blushing visage, forehead, nose and eyes,
 The throat so delicate to see
 And my slow demise: the breast of thee
 Seem to me all made in paradise.

The motion whence that smile doth arise
 The tresses, blonde, which always are to me
 So troubling, as when shoulders white I see
 Cleave my heart, which, suff'ring almost dies.

The subtle lips of red which cannot fade
 The tiny feet which toward me slowly stray
 In paradise by gods were surely made.

The human tongue, which 'twixt white teeth doth lay
 Thus never mortal Jove has so displayed,
 The work of his own hands, in his own way.¹¹

There is nothing here that would have scandalized either Petrarch or Shakespeare. Nor, on the other hand, is there anything like the transgressive spirit of Pietro Aretino's "Lewd Sonnets" (as the

Encyclopedia Britannica calls his “Sonetti lussuriosi”) penned in 1527 and accompanied, in publication, by Giulio Romano’s series of woodcuts, “The Positions” (“I modi”), depicting, as the title suggests, the positions taken by couples during intercourse.¹² Straparola’s most recent translator (me) is at no loss to lend a measure of fidelity to the original; there is no particular coarseness or obscenity to convey by ill-fitting modern terminology in English. There are no lines even approaching Aretino’s “Tu m’hai ‘l cazzo in la potta, e ‘l cul mi vedi,” which may or may not be perfectly rendered by “You have your prick in my pussy and you see my ass.”¹³ In Straparola’s case we are nonetheless obviously in the workshop of an artist who is experimenting with modes of expression which he may consider to have a certain power or at least appeal, due to the extended description of sense experience.

The theme of sensuality, as introduced by Straparola, in fact belonged to a venerable tradition within Renaissance ethical discourse. The positive valuation of sensual pleasure, drawing freely upon ancient sources, was supposed to stand in contrast to a medieval ideology, inspired by the Church fathers, which turned attention instead exclusively to the soul’s salvation. There is no need to evoke the enthusiasm of Walter Pater or the other Victorian rediscoverers of the sensual Renaissance to appreciate the significance of this aspect. “Who then will lend mine eyes a font of tears,” exclaimed Pope Innocent III in the last years of the twelfth century, “to lament the misery of the human condition.” Man was “formed out of earth, conceived in guilt, born to punishment.” What he does is “depraved and illicit, is shameful and improper, vain and unprofitable.”¹⁴ Instead, said the fifteenth-century humanist Pico della Mirandola, quoting Hermes Trismegistus: “What a great miracle, Asclapius, is Man.”¹⁵ Designed by the Creator as a potential for good or ill, “with freedom of choice and with honor, as though the maker and molder of thyself, thou mayest fashion thyself in whatever shape thou shalt prefer.” Added Pietro Bembo, the noted Platonist, writing some twenty years later, in 1508: “Since everything natural is good, Love, as a natural thing, is always good, nor can it ever in any way be evil.”¹⁶

More explicit statements regarding sensuality Bembo places in the mouths of the female characters in his dialogue, *The Asolani*. “But let us move on, if you wish, to the sweetness of love,” suggests Madonna Berenice, addressing her sex: “To be sure, there is great difficulty, O women, in finding words to describe what is easier felt than said.” She resorts to a genre switch. “Just as a great painter may depict the whiteness of snow convincingly, but not the coldness, since what is sensed only by touching does not appear to the eye, which is served by paintings, likewise, although I may have been able to explain a few of the the benefits of love, nonetheless the sweetnesses which that spurting fountain, far greater than the one we see before us, makes fall upon every sense, overwhelming all of them, can never be grasped by any of our speech.”¹⁷ Hard as writers might try, they would always be bested by painters in the effort to convey sensual experience—but this was no reason to stop trying.

Renaissance artworks strikingly confirm Bembo’s insight, where the abundant themes of sensuality seem inspired by the same ethical precepts of the normativity of nature and the essential goodness of creation, between the limits of law and lust. Moving beyond the age of Bembo toward the time of Straparola and the Venetian Renaissance painting of the late Titian, we note that the very paint itself is handled sensuously.¹⁸ Massive swirls of thick pigment adumbrate a nude form of extraordinary flamboyance, bedecked only with elegant but simple pearl adornments, in the Prado “Venus with Organist and Cupid,” obviously enjoying the effect she is having on the distracted organist sitting next to her with his eyes glued to her crotch. The rich deep purple velvet coverlet beneath her throws off shimmering reflections of her radiance and that of the natural light seeping into the room from the garden scene outside, as she seems to press her feet nonchalantly into his side, while appearing to turn away to take advice from Cupid whispering in her ear. What music is being made here?

To be sure, Straparola’s early poetry scarcely prepared me for the material I found in the work that now interests me and most interested his contemporaries, first printed by Comin da Trino in 1551 (or, according to the Venetian calendar, in 1550). The original title was *Le piacevoli notti di m.*

Giouanfrancesco Straparola [!] da Carauaggio. Nelle qali [!] si contengono le fauole con i loro enimmi da dieci donne, & duo giouani raccontate, cosa diletteuole, ne piu data in luce, now usually called the *Piacevoli notti*. The misspelling of the author's name on the title page apparently did nothing to diminish the appeal, and 25 more editions came out only before 1613. The work was translated into French by Jean Louveau as *Facetieuses nuits* (1560), in Spanish by Francesco Truchado as *Honesto y agradable Entretenimiento de Damas y Galanes* (1578); and in German several times in now-vanished sixteenth-century editions and then by an anonymous translator working for Ignaz Alberti, Mozart's Viennese publisher, as *Die Nächte* (1791), eventually superseded by Adelbert von Keller as, *Ärgötzliche Nächte* (1908). The editorial history in English begins with William George Waters' translation entitled *The Nights of Straparola* (1894), which subsequently appeared as *The Facetious Nights of Straparola* (1898); next, translated by Sir Richard Burton, *The Most Delectable Nights of Straparola* (1906), and in a condensed version of Waters' translation edited by Edward Robert Hughes, *The Merry Nights of Straparola* (1931). The latest, by Donald Beecher, reusing much of Waters, gives us *The Pleasant Nights* (2012), and that is what we will call them here.

Now, *The Pleasant Nights* consisted of a collection of short stories or tales or novellas on the model of Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron*; and as in the work of two hundred years before, and again in the collection by Matteo Bandello dating roughly to Straparola's own time, the tales were supposedly told successively over a certain period by a number of friends gathered, in this case, in the garden of a noble palazzo on the island of Murano in Venice. Boccaccio's novels were told over ten days in a country refuge from the Black Death then raging in Florence, forming not so much an object lesson about what to do when disaster strikes, as an effective metaphor for the birth of the Renaissance itself.¹⁹ Straparola changes days to nights (more titillating still?) and introduces real people and places. The friends who assemble in Murano at the house of the Bishop of Lodi, Ottaviano Maria Sforza, unlike the friends in the unnamed place outside Florence in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, are by no means purely symbolic figures. They include Pietro Bembo, author of the *Asolani* and much else, one of the fathers of the Venetian Renaissance and a theorist of the Italian language.

During the life of the author, *The Pleasant Nights* circulated in at least three major versions. In the first version, which came out in 1550, the stories were told over a period of five nights, with five stories per night.²⁰ The book met with such success that Straparola decided to continue the work with 47 more stories told over another seven nights – i.e., 13 nights in all, of which on nights six through 12 were told five stories per night (so, 35 stories) and on the 13th night, which must have gone on until late the following morning, another 12 novels, so 72 novels in all. Finally in 1556, shortly before he died, he produced yet another edition: a one volume combined edition of the two volumes published in 1550 and 1553, which had in turn been republished as a two volume set. Not only. The new 1556 version contained a key difference: novel three of night eight was removed, and it was replaced with two more – bringing the total number of novels in the collection up to 73.

What was in these stories that could have engaged so many readers for so long? The first impression conveyed by the subject matter is an extreme variety. Perhaps the engraving of the three Fates which graces the beginning of Part Two in my edition tells it best: these are stories about the destinies of humans, indicating perhaps lives that have been, lives that are, and lives that will be. The narration covers the usual Boccacesque themes of cuckoldry, deception, mistaken identities, jokes, along with some fresher variants including rags to riches tales, restoration of fortune tales, and tales about change due to the use of magic and the occult. There is no need here to go into the various theories about the substance of these last tales or the hypotheses regarding the relation of magic-induced change to the precariousness of fortune experienced in a commercial setting such as Venice. Suffice it to say that among those who are expert in the folktale literature this work is notable for containing early versions of tales which would later bear the more familiar names of Beauty and the Beast, Puss in Boots, the Iron Man.

Stories actually originated, so far as I can determine, largely from within the tradition of popular folk tale telling. Current scholarship is inclined to give credence to the clarification posted at the beginning of Straparola's work by his publisher, Orfeo dalla Carta, stating that the roughness of the telling ("the low and humble style of the author") was not to be attributed to an unschooled pen, but rather, to the author's faithful transmission of tales he heard recounted by others. "He did not write them as he wished, but as he heard them." To some degree, this description of Straparola's writing method can be taken both literally and figuratively. On the one hand, surely he transcribed material from oral sources; and indeed, according to one hypothesis, even the apparent overlaps between Straparola's stories and those in other novel collections must be imputed to a reliance upon the same common fund of popular lore. On the other hand, he clearly borrowed from written sources—and from one in particular.

If actual literary sources for Straparola's tales are generally hard to find, the 21 tales that are entirely translated from the Latin of Girolamo Morlini's *Novellae* (Naples: Jean Pasquet de Sallo, 1520) constitute a remarkable exception.²¹ These tales in turn derive from a wide range of sources, including Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*, Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Poggio Bracciolini's *Liber facetiarum*, and accounting for the originality or non-originality of Morlini, from whom my author borrowed so liberally, would take me too far off my purpose. Worthy of remark is that Straparola took no pains to mix Morlini with the rest of his material, and this facilitates the task of comparison, as the last 20 of his stories are all from Morlini except for two. The translations appear to be fairly faithful to the original text, even when the original has evident misprints, thus producing unintentionally comical results. For instance, the printed Latin version of Novel 47 has a Genoese merchant shipping wine originating in a place designated as "ex foliscorum monte," which does not exist, and obviously should have been "ex faliscorum monte," meaning "from the Tuscan hillside." Straparola, straining to make meaning from the misprinted "e," comes up with "del monte Falisco," i.e., "from the hill of Folisco."²² The joke was on him, but most readers would miss out.

Attempting to give the real flavor of Straparola's translations would require more quotations from the original Latin version than I can provide here. I will only give one short one, from Morlini's "Novella vi," about a German and a Spaniard who met in an inn one night. The Spaniard shared the abundant meal with his servant, whereas the German ate everything himself, leaving his own servant to fume enviously by his elbow. Thus, "Mutulus Theotonicus omnia vorabat atque obliguriebat, et famuli minime reminiscebatur." Straparola's own translation of this phrase in his Thirteenth Night, Novel 3, looks like this: "Il Tedesco stavasi mutolo divorando e sgolizzando ogni cosa, senza punto ricordarsi del servo suo."²³ The translation is not bad, and indeed, perhaps "sgolizzando" is an astute rendering of "obliguriebat," both of them being relatively unusual terms in their respective languages. Lewis and Short (*A New Latin Dictionary*)²⁴ give the latter as a "very rare" form of "abligurrio," and although some versions of the Second Catilinian Oration have Cicero using the term "obliguriebant," Egidio Forcellini (*Totius latinitatis lexicon*)²⁵ and others say this is a misprint for "obligaverunt." The Latin of Morlini has not been praised for its excessive elegance; nor is he regarded as a particularly attentive emulator either of Cicero or of the Renaissance humanist par excellence, Poliziano.²⁶ On the other hand, "sgolizzare" is not in any of the Crusca vocabularies published in Florence from 1612 onward by the famous Academy in charge of establishing the Tuscan language. It appears in John Florio's 1598 *World of Words*, the first Italian-English dictionary, with a cross-reference to "Sgoleggiare, to gluttonize, to gormandize, to devour, to riot in gluttonie."²⁷ Was Florio looking at Straparola?

Perhaps what is most important is not what Straparola borrows from Morlini but what he adds to the above story, bringing in elements from his framing tale; and here I will revert to the translation by Waters, which I claim, with confirmation by Beecher, to be a reasonably accurate English rendering of the original. He begins thus, referring to the previous tale, Tale 2, of the same night:

The fable just told to us by our worthy Signora brings back to my memory a certain dispute which arose from the envy kindled between the servants of a German and of a Spaniard who chanced to meet at the same table, and although this fable of mine is very short, it may nevertheless be found entertaining and a source of pleasure to many.²⁸

Next the speaker (Pietro Bembo) embarks on the tale, uttering what I have already determined to be translated more or less word for word out of Morlini's Latin. This is followed by a return to the framing tale, including Straparola's trademark: the presentation of an enigma in the form of a poem, along with a witty or ironic interpretation. For present purposes I will be content with Waters' translation:

I dwell in such a lofty spot
 That soaring wings can reach me not
 Much help I give to feeble sight,
 Working alone by wisdom's might.
 I high exalt the soul serene.
 But never let my light be seen
 By those who claim too much of me.
 Oft am I made appear to be
 What I am not, just through the deed
 Of things that neither know nor heed.²⁹

Rather than quibbling about Waters' preference for tetrameter, often used in humorous verse, over pentameter, which is the better rendering of the original mock-heroic alexandrines, and his insistence on rhymed couplets rather than ottava rima (a-b-a-b-a-b-c-c), I want to focus on what Pietro Bembo, the fictional storyteller, is saying. He explains the enigma in the next lines, asserting that the being who "dwell(s) in such a lofty spot" is none other than personified astrology. I could add here that the attribution of such thoughts to Bembo is not entirely improbable, since the historical personage in question not only possessed astrological texts but, like many of his contemporaries, as we can judge from his work, also read them.³⁰

This literature of borrowings and reborrowings, or perhaps I should say, transmission and transformation, is the context in which Straparola's protestations of originality must be understood, in a letter appended to the second part of his work, at least in the first editions, which states:

There are many, my lovely women, either due to envy or due to hatred, who seek with menacing teeth to bite me and devour my miserable flesh, insisting that the pleasant tales written by me and collected in this and the other little volume, are not my own but were stolen criminally from this one or that one. I to tell the truth confess that the stories are not mine, and if I said otherwise, I would be lying. But I have indeed faithfully written them according to the way in which they were told to me by 10 ladies in the meeting that I discuss.³¹

For the sake of argument I will suppose that this playful reply is actually the mask of a literary poacher, accustomed to invading other people's territory and filling his bag with quarry belonging to them. In this case the wider context of my discussion would be the practices of Renaissance authorship, involving that constant borrowing and remediation which was characteristic of a culture where *imitatio* of an author was the sincerest form of praise.³² According to this interpretation, Straparola's "originality" consists in the selection of stories, the framing tale, and the manner of telling. If on the other hand the allegory of the 10 damsels and the faithful scribe actually represents a practice of extracting and transcribing an oral culture, a hypothesis suggested by Beecher and others, then Straparola's behavior makes him a pioneering ethnographer two centuries before the brothers Grimm. His originality thus consists in the very notion of rendering in the written word,

indeed rendering in typescript, what had been heard from oral sources, bringing the world of folk wisdom and folklore into the discipline of mechanical reproduction, breaking the boundaries that lay between the literate and the illiterate, between high and low.³³ And until further and more convincing evidence surfaces, concerning actual borrowings in the text, the latter so far seems the most plausible explanation.

Now, for the purposes of my own story, I want to focus on still another aspect, which has less to do with what is told than with how it is told, the style rather than the substance, and here again I find myself deep in the territory of Boccaccio.³⁴ A notable feature of Boccaccio's storytelling, and perhaps a feature that added to its irresistible attractiveness to readers over centuries, was the carefully straddled line between licit and illicit, the suggestiveness about sinful activity without actually engaging in sinfulness by telling it – i.e., lewd and polemical without blasphemy or pornography. Erotic but not pandering. Surely Boccaccio's supreme artistry lay at least partly in this. When Alibech's naked beauty inspires friar Rustico to experience "the resurrection of the flesh" in 3:10 we know exactly what is going on, just as we visualize what is happening when Rustico teaches Alibech how to spread her legs and put the devil back in hell in the service of the Lord. More particularly, "cavorted to their hearts' content" (3:4) stands in the same way as "riding bareback astride the nag of St. Benedict" (Ibid.) to signify the actions of couples in bed. Straparola is likewise capable of sensuous suggestiveness, where, in the novel about two friends who dupe each other into sharing each others' wives (6:1), he refers to "the most loving embraces that a man ever gave to a woman," and "many and many a time hereafter they took their pleasure together" letting the mind complete what the words do not.

Where suggestiveness would spoil the sense, Straparola opts for directness. In one story (6:4), significantly set in a "very famous monastery," of "the noble city of Florence," the nuns cannot manage to elect an appropriate abbess, so the local bishop intervenes, commanding the three chief candidates to demonstrate their prowess in any way they choose. The result is a riot of scatological humor that no veiled language could convey. A candidate urinates through the eye of a needle with perfect accuracy. Another farts the grains of wheat off the surface of one of a pair of dice. Another pulverizes a fishbone between the cheeks of her behind. Part of the humor, perhaps, lies in the way the scatological vein is surrounded by the customary prim expressions of the tamer stories. "The bishop, along with the rest of the nuns, gravely pondered the abilities of all three women," so the story concludes. "And finding nothing in his books to render the decision in such a case, left it unresolved." There is nothing here of the torrents of bawdy language that we find in Rabelais, with whom Straparola's name was associated by the first late sixteenth-century German translator of *Gargantua*.³⁵ He is Boccaccesque, not Rabelasian; and there is a big difference.

Another peculiarity of Boccaccio's collection was a certain strain of religious libertinism, evident in the novellas to which I have already alluded. The very first novel of the collection referred to popular credulity and the validity of Church traditions. The protagonist is a certain Ser Ciappelletto, a villain and a cheat, who manages to fool a priest into giving him absolution in order to be buried in holy ground, and who achieves sainthood after death due to certain miracles having been performed in his name. Vivid anticlericalism is evinced in such other classics as the one regarding Friar Alberto (4:2), who convinces a girl that he is the Archangel Gabriel on a mission to make love to her. In another (1:2), the Jew Abraham, on a visit to Rome, exalts the mercy of the Christian God who has not yet destroyed the city for its sins.³⁶ Straparola attempts to tread the same fine line, even though the 1550s were no longer the 1350s, and his work was made to circulate in print, not in manuscript.

The emergence of print radically challenged the conditions for the production of literature – not only by increasing the breadth of distribution, but also by bringing it far more into the public eye. The first index of forbidden books would be emitted by Pope Paul IV only in 1558, possibly when Straparola was already in the grave, if we accept the presumed death date of around 1557. But change was already in the air. The Venetian government ordered prepublication censorship on all books already in 1543. Soon after, Giovanni Della Casa, Archbishop of Benevento, published a list of

books to be considered heretical from a doctrinal standpoint, although by this time the Protestant Reformation was only one of many book-related concerns. Reading and writing would never be the same again.

Is the perception of a change in the climate of opinion and in the regulatory environment one reason why Straparola eliminates novel three from Night Eight of his original collection of the *Pleasant Nights*, in the first one-volume edition combining the original five nights with the following eight? The novel is about a priest named father Tiberio who falls in love with Savia, wife of Chechino, a woodcarver in Florence. In their first encounter, writes Straparola (in Waters' translation), "seeing that she was fair and fresh as a bud with the dew upon it, graceful and well made, and in the flower of her youth," the priest "fell so hotly in love with her that he scarce knew what he said or did, being carried away by the very sight of her beauty."³⁷ Nothing in this aspect of the story differed significantly from the Boccaccesque precedents; nor was there anything special about Savia's refusal to give in to the unwanted advances and conniving with her husband to lure the priest into a trap. The type of trap nonetheless took Boccaccio's irreligion one step further. With no hiding place ready to hand, at the arrival of Chechino the nude priest rises from the bed where Savia was supposed to join him, and spreads his arms Christ-like on a large crucifix in the room, hoping to go unnoticed among Cechino's woodworking projects. After a day standing immobile in this fashion he is about to be given over to the local nuns as a finished work by Chechino, except that the nuns object to the excessively "realistic" private part, which the carver prepares to cut off, whereupon Tiberio leaps from the cross and dashes out of town, never to be seen again. Was it a second thought about such playfulness with religious imagery that eventually led to Straparola's self-censorship?

Whatever reasons he may have had for the elimination of this novel from the final editions of his collection produced during his lifetime, Straparola would have had plenty more causes for concern by the time Paul IV's Index of 1558 finally came out. There the proscriptions fell on notable classics such as the work on monarchy by Dante and all works by Machiavelli (including not only *The Prince*, but also the novel entitled "Belfagor, the Arch-Devil," in which the devil takes a wife). Also banned were story collections like Poggio Bracciolini's *Liber facetiarum*, largely plundered by later novelists, and Boccaccio's *Decameron*. The latter was singled out for especially heinous offenses, having been, so said the compilers of the Index, "continuously printed with the most intolerable errors," i.e., errors in regard to good behavior, morals, faith, and especially, ecclesiastical decorum, and that these errors, over the centuries, had never been corrected.³⁸

If Straparola's work was not on Paul IV's Index, another work directly related to it was: namely, Girolamo Morlini's *Novellae* of 1522. Although we have no access to the specific reasons which concerned this particular condemnation, we may imagine that many of the same ones which motivated the condemnation of Boccaccio's *Decameron* were at work here. Picking around in this collection for the novels which most probably incurred blame faces us with some hard choices. What would the censors have made of the sex change in Morlini's no. 22, which becomes 13:9 in Straparola? The source was Battista Fregoso's *Factorum disctorumque memorabilium* of 1508, a work of erudition, but the intent was obviously voyeuristic rather than scientific, as when the doctor performing the operation on the inexplicable tumefaction suffered by a girl sojourning in a convent of nuns releases an "immensus priapus," (in Straparola, "a certain large member... of a kind longed for by women"), to the consternation of the nuns, only because they would have wished to keep the newly made "boy" for their own pleasure and now are forced to share the secret with all the world.³⁹ For the moment I will say nothing of no. 54 (Straparola's 13: 11), about a young man who surprises a priest with a lover in flagrante. Straparola put his own signature of lewd allusiveness to this story, so that Morlini expresses the priest's actions simply as "osculari coepit" ("he began to kiss"), whereas Straparola, speaking of the couple, says they "arrived at the most beautiful part of the reckoning but had not yet reached the completion of their masterpiece."

In spite of Straparola's own scruples about the one-volume edition of the work, if we are not over-interpreting his replacement of the story about father Tiberio on night eight by two other

possibly less scandalous stories, plenty remained to irritate certain sensitivities. He left in the story (1:5) about the bawdy priest who made love to Polissena, wife of Demetrio Bazzariotto of Venice, which features scenes like this:

“The priest, who had already been advertised of the departure of Demetrio, and cared neither for wind nor rain, was waiting for the hour of assignation. When he gave the sign the door was open to him, and as soon as he was inside, Polissena greeted him with sweet and passionate kisses; while the husband, who was concealed in the passage over the way, saw all that went on, and being no longer able to contradict his friend’s assertion, was altogether overwhelmed, and burst into tears on account of the righteous grief which possessed him.”

The usual versified enigma at the end of the story by the fictional storyteller (in this case Lauretta) in this case is based on a simple equivocation due to homonymy (the forename Ciascun for the qualifier *ciascun*) and has nothing to do with either the story or the subject matter. The enigma offered to the contemplation of the fictional listeners (and the reader) at the end of 5:5, however, could be regarded as somewhat audacious. No one could mistake the meaning, which the Waters translation conveys sufficiently well in spite of the substitution of *ottava rima* by couplets in tetrameter:

My lady seats her in a chair,
And raises then her skirt with care;
And as I know she waits for me,
I bring her what she fain would see.
Then soft I lift her dainty leg,
Whereon she cries, “Hold, hold, I beg!
It is too strait, and eke too small;
Be gentle, or you’ll ruin all.”
And so to give her smallest pain,
I try once more, and eke again. (5:5)

This enigma, pronounced by the storyteller Catraruzza, is said to have “provoked as much laughter as the Signora’s ingenious fable” about a wife who keeps a collection of all the pairs of shoes left behind by her various lovers. Almost as a challenge to would-be censors overwhelmed with the surfeit of metaphor that had grown up around the criminalization of lewdness in print, Straparola has Catraruzza insist that the subject is “tight shoes” not the closely-fitting body parts that might occur to the lascivious mind.

In some cases, the standard translation by Waters does not exactly capture the bawdiness of the original. With no other information about Waters except his evident interest in Italy and publication of various works on Italian arts and letters, I have only his turn-of-the-century dates to suggest to me that his tastes may not always have coincided with Straparola’s.⁴⁰ Here is a sample from his version of the enigma at the end of 7:2:

Nurtured in the kindly nest
Of a maiden’s glowing breast,
There I take my birth, and soon,
As reward for such a boon,
I labor hard by day, by night,
To bear her offerings rich and bright.

The original says:

Nel caldo sen di due vaghe mammelle
 D'una leggiadra nifa il viver prendo,
 Et a lei, l'opre mie pregiate, e belle,
 Per tal effetto degno merto rendo.

Which would be as much as to say, in literal terms:

In the warm bosom of two gorgeous breasts,
 Of a pretty nymph, I begin my life;
 And to her my works, most precious and most beautiful,
 I offer as a worthy recompense.

Such was the text that escaped the censors in 1558, and which delighted readers well into the seventeenth century. But Victorian standards looked to a more subtly chronicled boudoir.

Obviously, the ban on Straparola was only a matter of time. He would be an easy target, once the Council of Trent finally rolled into action, as it did in Session XXV (1563), against books of heresy, magic and witchcraft, and, most pertinently, those “that deal with, narrate or teach things lascivious or obscene.” To be sure, there were plenty of doubts about exactly what book censorship was supposed to censor, even within the Church itself, such that the commissioner of the newly created Congregation on the Index Michele Ghislieri wondered whether the road now taken might ultimately lead to the condemnation of all culture, ancient and modern.⁴¹ To no avail. Imaginative writing, the Council Fathers insisted, must be carefully scrutinized, “since not only the matter of faith but also that of morals, which are usually easily corrupted through the reading of such books, must be taken into consideration, and those who possess them are to be severely punished by the bishops.”⁴² Almost as an afterthought, they added, “Ancient books written by heathens may by reason of their elegance and quality of style be permitted, but may by no means be read to children.”

So far as I know, Straparola’s work had no champions within the Congregation on the Index; so I can only imagine that the longish wait for the eventual condemnation was due to negligence not indulgence. It apparently first attracted the attention of the Roman censors in 1574, not for placing on an Index but on a handbill or placard (28cm by 10cm) entitled “Aviso ai librai,” “Warning to Booksellers,” issued for the sake of information, a kind of watchlist.⁴³ There it was included among forty-two prohibitions evidently intended to augment the list of 1558, as an interim measure before the compilation of a more complete Index. It next appeared on various local indexes around Italy in the 1580s, and would have been placed on the Roman one in 1590, in the category of works which could circulate only if corrected (i.e. with the saucy bits taken out). Then came a reprieve, when the death of Sixtus V brought the promulgation of the new Index to a halt, and meanwhile it dropped off the list for the next index of 1596.⁴⁴ Finally in the Roman index of 1607 it received due attention, and the name of the work was accompanied by the definitive statement “completely prohibited.”

In what circumstances did my own broken copy of Straparola begin its life? When I acquired it I had no idea when or where it was printed, since it lacked a title page and therefore also a date and place, these being just the pieces of information that the printer did not bother to repeat when he placed a wonderful engraving of the Fates spinning out the lives of humans on the first page of part two. It could have belonged to any one of the 25 or so editions listed by the bibliographers as having circulated in Italy between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. For the other convenient methods of determining which edition it happened to be, I was missing some key elements. Among the portion of the bibliophile community engaged in material bibliography, the preferred technique for identifying particular editions without actually having to view a number of exemplars in a host of libraries, a highly expensive hit-and-miss operation, is the comparison of the so-called fingerprints of each. Such fingerprints can be found in the online bibliographical records of the libraries where the tradition of material bibliography is more seriously practiced. Under normal circumstances, a quick search of such records should have answered my query; but these were not normal circumstances.

The bibliographic fingerprint of a book is the string of 16 alphanumeric characters (in four groups of four) which establishes beyond a reasonable doubt the exact identity of a particular edition.⁴⁵ Thus if you have, say, two copies of a book, both labeled “Venice: Marescotti, 1565,” the signature would determine whether they belong to the same composition of characters or not. The method is meticulous but essentially simple. To formulate a fingerprint we begin by taking the first four alphanumeric characters from the end of the first recto page (not verso!) following the frontispiece. We suppose that this page is not also a frontispiece. To get the next four characters we take the bottom four at the end of the fourth recto page after the page used for the first group of four. For the third group there are two possibilities: if the pages are numbered, we take the last four characters from the recto page, folio, or column, which is correctly numbered 13; or else, if there is no such, the same for the recto page 17. If neither of these is possible, if the pages are not numbered, or if such a page was already used for groups one or two, we use the fourth recto following what was used for group 2. For the fourth group, we use the first four characters of the verso page of the page use for group 3, unless the book doesn’t have enough pages. Finally we indicate at the end of the fourth group, first of all, in parentheses, where the characters for the third group were taken from: of three if from page 13, or xiii; a seven if from page 17 or xvii, or else we put a C when the pages were hand counted either because there was no numeration or because there were not enough of them, and an S if it’s just a flysheet. Then we put the date of the publication, followed by a special suffix denoting whether in Arabic or Roman numerals. Thus if we go back to Straparola’s original *New Work (Opera nova)*, published in 1508, here is the fingerprint:

teia sosi o.ne qune (C) 1508 (A)

Suppose we take a copy of Straparola’s *Pleasant Nights* published in 1558. We compile:

sehe etuo a,to lemu (3) 1558 (A)

Which, then, is my edition? I have no title page, but why not use the fingerprint to match the characters on the other pages? There are dozens of possible candidates in the Italian union catalogue, not to mention, the catalogue of the British Library and the Gemeinsamer Bibliotheksverbund (GBV). At least in the case of the Italian union catalogue, the fingerprint for many of the editions is indicated online.

Here my problems begin. Although the first four characters of the fingerprint are to be drawn from the first recto page following the frontispiece, unfortunately my pages start at page 25, except for a loose page 9. Therefore I am also out of luck for the second group of four characters, which should be for folios later than the first, as well as for the third group of characters, which is either from page 13 or page 17, and the fourth group, which shortly follows this. What to do? The only solution is to take my information to the library – virtual or real – and compare whatever editions I can lay my hands on. And after a long search through a good part of the 25 editions before 1600 available online and *in situ* I get a hit. Mine is identical in every respect to the Farri edition of Venice 1570 conserved in the Palatini collection at the Biblioteca Nazionale in Florence. This in itself is an important finding, linking my story once again to the theme of publication and danger.

Clearly, my 1570 edition would have been no more or less subject to inquisitorial curiosity than any of the other editions of the work, but its printer, Domenico Farri, was a well-known rule breaker. In 1567 he dared to print a counterfeit edition of the *Catechism* of the Council of Trent, the rights to which had been conceded by Rome to another Venetian printer, Paolo Manuzio. He even decorated the title page of the counterfeit with the distinctive anchor emblem of the Manuzio printing house (rendered famous by the humanist printer Aldus Manutius). Paolo complained and the Venetian Senate intervened to prevent diffusion of the work.⁴⁶ Again in 1571 he was called before the Holy Office for collaborating with others on a clandestine edition of the *Office of the Blessed Virgin*, the exclusive printing rights for which had been granted to the Venetian printer

Bernardino Torresani. Finally in 1590 he was accused of printing without the necessary permissions an edition of the *Examen ordinandorum*, containing “whatever pertains to the institution of the Christian Religion, briefly digested” with writings by various authors collected by a Carmelite priest named Nicolò Bonfigli (called Aurifico). If his infractions seemed to involve mainly religious and not secular material, perhaps the priorities of the Inquisition and Index are worth bearing in mind, which were far more energetically directed to such material than to any other.

So not only do I have an identity for the printer and the edition. I now have the earliest possible date for the acquisition of the book: in 1570 or sometime after that. And by whom? Here the plot gets a little thicker. Once again, owners of books often place their names on the book cover: there is none here. Or else the gift giver may sign the copy on the first pages: “to Roberto with best wishes from Tommaso.” But there are no first pages. However, astonishingly, in the middle of the book, precisely on the verso of page 144, at the end of the fourth night of the first five nights which made up part one of the work, there is an acknowledgment of ownership, to wit: “this book belongs to Angelica Baldachini.” I now know two things. I know who owned the book and I know the owner was a woman.

Obviously I have not exhausted the topic of Straparola and his book, that is, my book. However, I do sense that I have reached a denouement. The time has come to turn my attention fully to this second fundamental piece of evidence in my story. The signing of a piece of property by its former owner to indicate the connection between her and it, to make a claim on another part of reality making it hers, encompassing within her reality the extraneous element of a book, raises a fresh set of questions. First of all, who was Angelica Baldachini? Why did she have this book? Indeed, what did this book mean to her?

I shall begin with the first of these questions—not because it is the hardest but because so much regarding the others depends upon this. From the outset I am faced with a series of problems. Apart from her name on this book, no clue so far has surfaced connecting the person to her writing. And after all what is in a name? Shakespeare said, not much, and mused upon the arbitrariness of nomenclature in respect to the things named. The space of the action in *Romeo and Juliet* left no room for deep reflection about the reality or irreality of specific categories, apart from the objects in them, an argument which bothered philosophers from Plato to Aristotle and beyond. Far from being purely arbitrary, names are highly significant markers of biological origins, family derivation, social rank, religious affiliation, gender, culture. But before any of these meanings is attached to the name, there are the letters themselves, which form syllables pronounceable by the community capable of understanding what is written, or even merely hearing what is uttered. These utterances themselves have a history and maybe rooted in the place.

Angelica at first, before correcting, signs herself “Angellica” with two “l”s – a slightly uncommon spelling, but typical of the relative freedom within certain norms, to make single into double consonants, or double into single, which we encounter in many Florentine documents. A certain “Angellica” was buried in Santa Maria Novella in 1589, daughter (wife?) of a “Jacopo manovale,” a laborer.⁴⁷ However spelt, the frequency of the name is hard to determine. The alphabetical listing of given names in the Florentine catasto of 1427, including males and females holding property in early 15th century Florence, yields Agnoletta, Alamanna, Albiera, Albizzina, Aldighiera, Alessandra, Ambrosina, Andreola, Angela, with a leap from here down to the name Antonia.⁴⁸ No Angelica. However, the name occurs from time to time in the baptismal registers conserved in the Florence cathedral archives, which begin in 1461. Just in that year, in fact, I find an “Angelica di Marco di Antonio,” i.e., daughter of Antonio’s son Marco, baptized on 20 April 1461.⁴⁹ Another name in the earliest records, “Fiammetta,” occurs with greater frequency, perhaps an allusion to the character in Boccaccio’s *Visione amorosa* (*Amorous Fiammetta*). For literary allusions, the fifteenth century is too early for the name “Angelica”: there will be more chances later on.

By the mid-1500s, baptismal records, more and more attuned to the hardening status lines in Florentine society, begin to include occupational data as well as names and dates. I thus find “Angelica di Stefano di Domenico, tessitore,” evidently a weaver’s daughter, baptized on 21 September 1544, “Angelica di Battista di Matteo, fornaio,” a baker’s daughter baptized on 16 March the following year, “Angelica di Leonardo di Battista, ortolano,” daughter of a greengrocer baptized on 19 August 1545, “Angelica di Cristoforo di Pasquale mugnaio,” the daughter of a miller baptized on 8 December,⁵⁰ and “Angelica di Marco di Pietro scultore,” daughter of a sculptor baptized on 15 November, 1554.⁵¹ Occasionally there is a surname, as: “Angelica di Paulo di Michele Ferruzzi,” baptized on 27 January 1567, or “Angelica di Noferi di Francesco Dazi,” baptized on 31 Jan 1567.⁵² A common diction appears to be “Angelica, degli Innocenti,” referring to a girl child left on the anonymous foundling wheel at the hospital of the Innocenti, under Filippo Brunelleschi’s elegant loggia across the piazza from the church of Santa Maria Novella, such as we find having been baptized on 22 January 1543 (along with a certain “Agnese” from the same place), on 24 March, 5 October and 9 December 1544, on 31 October, 1546, on 23 December 1547 (along with a certain Albina) and again on 19 February 1548, and so on.⁵³ In these cases, no doubt, the name applied by the nuns of the hospital (not by the parents), would refer to the hope that the “angelical” aspect might augur future blessings for the child in spite of such inauspicious beginnings.

Those whose baptism is not recorded in a particular place may yet have died there. The records of the Florentine magistracy, the *Grascia*, in charge of burials, are eloquent regarding who, when and where. The same chancery practices operating in the baptismal lists also work here: Individuals are identified by their fathers’ and, in the case of women, by their husbands’ names, followed by the relevant trade, if there is one. After 1600, surnames become common even among the trades, although certain individuals, especially in the fine arts, have a dignity all their own. “Agnola,” for instance, was listed as the wife of “Jacopo Ligozzi, pittore.”⁵⁴ Known to the scholarship as “Angela di Francesco Baldassini da Como,” she apparently outlived by one year the famous biological and zoological illustrator to whom she had been married for 55 years, and was buried in the church of San Marco, next to the Casino di San Marco where Jacopo always had his shop, rather than in the town of Verona, where they started out their marriage and where she lived for several years alone with the children before heading down to meet him.

Not all observations are relevant, however much I would like them to be. Could Angelica Baldachini be the same as Angelica Baldaccini who died in November 1644 in the parish of San Lorenzo? The dates could possibly coincide, even considering that Angelica may have been in her maturity already by 1600. Perhaps indeed, “Giovanni Torcitore,” i.e., “Giovanni the Throwster,” a man specialized in twisting silk for spinning, was married to the Angelica who read my book. Surely a person married to a laborer in the silk trade could have asserted his surname as her own with the same confidence as might a person born to a man bearing that surname. And if Angelica could write her forename with such latitude that she occasionally multiplied the letters “l”, perhaps she could write her acquired surname with a variation exchanging a “c” for an “h”. If this is so, “Angelica (Angellica) Baldaccini/Baldachini” could be an example contrary to the accepted view that that practically denies access to books, to reading and to writing, at the lower ranks of the manual arts, except to the male half of humanity, and especially, access to books about sexual pleasure. The temptation is strong to suspend my search and declare a winner, to assert that the lost author of my book inscription has now been found. I decide to resist.

Those involved in the choice of a name, usually a child’s birth parents and their wider families (except in the special cases just mentioned), may be inspired by many things. Was there something “angelic” about Angelica? Angelic in aspect, as a female baby-child might be, or angelic in potentiality, in character, in future prospects, or all of these combined: such may have been the concept. Other influences may include family tradition, significant places or times, holy or respected persons, or indeed literary figures. After the 1490s, there is a possible literary allusion of equal significance to “Fiammetta,” with the publication of Boiardo’s *Orlando innamorato*, and again after the 1530s, with Ariosto’s *Orlando furioso*, in both of which a character called “Angelica” is the

female protagonist. In Ariosto's poem, she is a pagan princess, the daughter of the king of Cathay, and she becomes the love-object of sacred warriors among both pagans and Christians. The independent-minded Angelica eventually chances upon the wounded Saracen warrior Medoro and runs off with him, driving the secretly inamored Orlando to madness. She is a trophy worth the best efforts of the greatest males of her generation: was this the goal her parents set for the owner of my book?

Or was the literary allusion to Orlando, setting aside the name-use for foundlings, a subtle class marking? Social scientists have associated certain names with certain destinies in modern times, correlating for instance "Alexandra," "Lauren," and "Katharine," with high income and higher education, compared to other names, such as "Amber," "Heather," and "Kayla," correlated with the opposite.⁵⁵ So far, evidence suggests that the name "Angelica," like the names Alessandra, Artemisia and Antonia, was deeply rooted in every social stratum of Florence. Fashions may change and yesterday's high-end names may work their way down the social ladder from time to time, reappearing generations later. What the status of the "Angelica" name was at the specific time in which the name was given to "my" Angelica, I simply cannot judge. However, I am inclined to think that name-fashions then were far more anchored in history and memory than they are today, when fortunes and families are made and broken in the blink of an eye.

Perhaps she was a replacement for someone else, a "remade" child. A study of family lineages in 15th century Florence revealed that nearly 75% of given names within a sampling of 266 children were obviously passed down within the family. And considering the well-established predominance of males among those responsible for determining children's names, we may be somewhat surprised to find that the chosen names, for both male and female children, were drawn just as frequently from the female line as from the male one. There was discussion at home, evidently, about the issue. Female children, moreover, in one third of the cases, three times more often than their male counterparts, received the same name as an earlier sibling, since deceased, suggesting a sort of compensatory mechanism to offset the presence of high infant mortality rates. Did Angelica have a sister, similarly named? Was she the surrogate for a lost child, a symbol of her parents' present sadness and future hopes? Bearing the name of a predecessor would have inscribed her more definitely within the wider community of the extended family.⁵⁶ In the study of 15th century names, over a quarter could not be attributed to origins within the family. Was the same true a hundred years later, and was Angelica's one of these?

Surnames, too, were laden with significance, but of a different kind. By Angelica's time, they no longer possessed a literal meaning connected with the word or words that made them up. "Di Pietro" no longer necessarily meant "of Peter," as a sort of patronymic or as a sign signifying some relation of dependence to another individual such as a servant to a master. "Medici" no longer meant "of the healer," if it ever did mean that, as one popular tradition attests was the distant origin of the name, due to a particularly resourceful ancestor.⁵⁷ Likewise "Baldachini" (or its variant, Baldacchini) no longer meant "originating from 'Baldaccha,'" which the seventeenth-century Tuscan genealogist Eugenio Gamurrini, reporting this tradition, identifies as "a city in Judea," in fact, the Tuscan form for "Baghdad." The medieval re-invention of surnames (apparently an Etruscan novelty) had been a boon especially where the stock of given names was being exhausted. Epithets and descriptives—"Spadaro" (sword maker) "Calzolaio" (shoemaker) "Fabbri" (iron mongers)—hardened into permanent designations. To a degree, the succession of patronymics could satisfy the necessity to designate which holder of a particularly common name might be meant, so that Giovanni di Giovanni di Donato would not be confused with Giovanni di Giovanni di Francesco; although we assume such awkward dictions would more likely be used in writing than in speech. Women too could be referred to the paterfamilias, as "Giovanna di Domenico." Even after family names became rooted in history and tradition, epithets and designations reappeared from time to time where endogamy restricted variety, such that the Venetian family Pisani "dal banco" who controlled a family bank, could be distinguished from the Pisani "moretta" who descended from a certain "Almoretto." Much later in nearby Chioggia, avoiding the possible confusion due to a surfeit

of family groups bearing surnames like Scarpa, Tiozzo and Boscolo, there evolved the so-called nicknames, distinguishing, for reasons mostly forgotten, a Boscolo “Pecchie” (bees) line from a Boscolo “Capon” (rooster).

The real Angelica, for all I know, exists in no other book, either as an owner or as a writer. Nor can I easily proceed from the surname to the name. No “Baldachini” exists among the office-holding families in Florence from the sixteenth through the eighteenth century. And among the property-holders listed in the tax rolls there is no entry for this name until 1654, when we find “Pier Cammillo di Filippo Baldacchini, di Cortona,” being assessed for two scudi in the Red Lion district, comprising the parishes of San Pancrazio, San Paolino and Santa Maria degli Ughi, within the Santa Maria Novella quarter in Florence.⁵⁸ If we suppose she belonged to a family which left some traces somewhere, such a lacuna would be at least be partially explainable by the indication that the family came instead from Cortona, a city acquired for a sum of money by the Florentine Republic in 1411 that eventually became a major stronghold of the Tuscan grand dukedom. According to the nineteenth-century genealogist Giovanni Battista di Crollanza, the family migrated around Italy, with an important branch eventually settling in Naples, where they were designated by the more elaborate diction, “Baldachini-Gargano.”⁵⁹ How the family came to be associated with the Red Lion district is anyone’s guess.⁶⁰ He gives the arms as sable per pale three wavy lines dexter azure and sinister a bar azure. Angelica’s?

There were Baldachini personages who made their mark on history before and after her. I do not know if she was the child of one of these, or even the distant relative. Apart from the family’s intermarriage with the Casali, lords of Cortona, in the fourteenth century, and the various ancestors who held office in the rotating administrative bodies of the city, the the annals of Tuscan historical record-keeping (in spite of glaring documentary deficiencies decried by Gamurrini) refer to Filippo Baldachini (or Baldacchini), jurist and poet of the turn of the fifteenth century, who held various positions under popes Clement VII and Leo X, culminating in the governorship of the city of Perugia.⁶¹ His publications included *Fortuna*, 1522, described by Giammaria Mazzucchelli the literary historian as being “of amorous argument, including verse and prose, like Sannazaro’s *Arcadia*,” dedicated to his brother Pier Maria. He also wrote a work called *Prothocinio*, whose title promises “the state of love, prayers of love, suspicion of love, quarrels of love, hope of love, inconstancy in love, insults in love, newly written,” including sonnets, songs and various other poems.⁶² Was Philip indeed, as Gamurrini suggests, the founder of the only line of the family which survived to the end of the seventeenth century? According to this interpretation, he would have married relatively late in life just to avoid the imminent extinction of his line; and then he embarked upon a purely secular career representing the city of Cortona vis a vis the Tuscan government. Regarding the identity of this new wife, as well as that of the other women in the family tree, the records are silent.

In any case, evidently Angelica, or more particularly, her father, was no Louis-François Pinagot, the lowly clog-maker discovered and, so to speak, brought back to life by Alain Corbin in a curious exercise of historical recovery called *The Life of an Unknown*.⁶³ In the highly stratified society of her time, I cannot be sure exactly how many degrees separated her from the shoe-maker, the butcher, the baker, the wool-carder. In Florence the merchants of the Wool guild held a paradoxical position of pre-eminence due to the thirteenth-century origins of textile manufacturing, and along with the other major guildsmen, including the judges and notaries, the dyers, the bankers, the silk merchants, physicians and furriers, played a key role in government in periods supposedly characterized by oligarchy.⁶⁴ As the money accumulated many members left the arts and manufactures per se and went into finance, amassing, notably in the Medici case, colossal fortunes. Florentine social stratification was literally written in stone, on the walls of the guildsmen’s sanctuary at Orsanmichele, where the costly bronze statuary by eminent artists reminded citizens about the major guilds’ power and wealth. However, Angelica belonged to a family whose origins lay in feudal landholding not in manufacturing, that made its mark both in Florence and outside, whose status in Florence would have been recognized but not functional, more like visiting dignitaries or prelates

than local partisans, permitting them to circulate among the elite and participate, but only by invitation, in city and state officialdom.

The most concrete evidence I have about Angelica is the writing itself. But I do not despair. From a single signature, a single line, I will gather what I can. First and foremost, I know she was a writer, not just a reader. Her knowledge of letters was not merely passive. And when she writes, she does more than simply sign her name. She joins an idea to it; indeed she incorporates her name-saying into a complete sentence. She is in full possession therefore of what François Furet refers to as a powerful instrument of change.⁶⁵ Reading may change us; writing has the capacity to change others. Her education has thus gone one step beyond that of many of her sex. For hundreds of years, according to work on the history of literacy, women were taught by church and family only the bare essentials for ensuring good behavior and religious devotion, so they learned reading unaccompanied by writing.⁶⁶ Reading served to channel the mind along the paths of piety; recommended texts were the breviary and the lives of saints. Writing was a useless appurtenance. Angelica informs us by her writing that she possesses a special distinction.

How did she learn to write? As Michel de Certeau reminds us, reading and writing are not learned in the same way; nor does one necessarily follow from the other.⁶⁷ Reading the meaning in texts and simply deciphering texts, he adds, are different acts, usually learned in infancy; but the deciphering does not necessarily produce the reading. A wider cultural context is necessary. Nor does the deciphering or re-ciphering produce the writing, except at the most elementary level. There may also be writing without reading. Allow me to make a personal digression. A Syrian launderer I knew in Cambridge Massachusetts in the 1990s could not read, but he could write, after his own fashion. He could sign his name and write the names of his customers by sounding out the letters. When they came into his shop he could match the name he heard on their lips to the name he saw on the laundry slip. But he could not read a newspaper or form words on a page that could be assembled into a sentence. Semi-literacy stands in a peculiar space of daily practice necessary for performing in a particular job, without the potential for the application of specific skills to other possible jobs, should ever the need arise. Clearly Angelica is far from semi-literate. How she used this instrument, apart from transforming a book into her book, and communicating this knowledge to the world, is anyone's guess.

There is more in this line of text than meets the eye. Surely writing is a gesture of the mind as well as of the hand; and there are ways of understanding how to interpret the one in the light of the other. Good calligraphy was always regarded as a chief professional qualification, and in Angelica's own time, Angelo Ingegneri, in a work on *The Good Secretary*, advised readers, "this skill is so important that there have been some, who, picking up the pen by chance one or two times and forming three or four letters in a good hand, were able to introduce themselves into the office and eventually went from being ordinary servants or even chamber valets (unrecognized by their masters) to being head Secretaries beyond their greatest expectations."⁶⁸ The chief criteria for good handwriting? That it should be legibile "with the least effort."⁶⁹

What kind of handwriting did she have? She used none of the elaborate descenders or pronounced ascenders typical of the mercantile scripts included in Giovanni Antonio Tagliente's *The True Art of Excellent Writing* published in Venice in 1530.⁷⁰ And why should she? The style was typical of ledger books precisely because of its distinctiveness and resistance to the casual imitator. Nor did she use the florid "imperial" or seal-type initials typical of important documents and memorials. The "natural Florentine letter" in Tagliente featured a basically vertical slant, pointed descenders, slightly longer than the more looping ascenders. Hers was not like this. Instead, her writing resembled the one denominated "chancery or notarial letter," with its soft slant, and waist line more or less halfway from the base line to the ascender line. Chancery scripts had already gained wide currency, and were "commonly used in missive letters," noted one advocate, "because more delightful to read and available to all."⁷¹ With her own variations, this is what she used.

There is a strong temptation to take the analysis one step further. Modern graphology claims to ascertain the subtleties of human personality on the basis of the typical ways in which a given

subject forms her letters on the page. Granted, it is no longer widely used as a tool for judging aptness in an employment, and has even been definitively banned from the workplace in France, in the UK, and elsewhere. Whatever credibility it still commands has been attributed to the so-called Fourer effect, a psychological phenomenon produced by the power of suggestion. According to this view, which applies to other pseudosciences like astrology as well, subjects believe in it because of an intuitive sense that its tenets, however discredited, somehow correspond to actual daily experience. Lab tests show statistically significant numbers of people attributing accuracy to any personality analyses presented to them as being tailored to themselves based on evidence, which in fact are simply general descriptions applying to anyone. Even if modern graphology could be modified to apply to historic scripts, I risk simply confirming what I want to believe about Angelica.

Caution is in order; not rejection. Skeptical though I may be about modern graphology, many late Renaissance people believed some such science could exist. They were fascinated by notions about character: its origin, its nature, its effects, its prediction on the basis of signs. When they wrote, just as when they taught how to write, they could clearly not ban such thoughts from their minds. According to the prevailing substantialism inherited from the Ancient world, character was supposed to be impressed from birth and derived in part from the outstanding humor (sanguine, phlegmatic, bilious, atrabilious), and quality (hot, cold, wet, dry), sometimes in relation to specific astrological configurations. The Neapolitan philosopher Giovanni Battista Della Porta thought he could read a person's character in their physiognomical traits. From this kind of thinking to characteriology based on writing, was a very small step. Then as now, just as individuals might have been inclined to think of themselves in terms of a particular celestial sign, they might have been inclined to think of themselves as being of a particular kind of script, to the extent that such a sign, and such a script, might become a form of auto-definition, so the the real effect of a particular orientation came from within, not from without.

The first classics of graphology come exactly from this period. A certain Camillo Baldi, in the early seventeenth century, claimed to derive "much knowledge about the customs and quality of the writer" from "a missive letter," just by looking at the "words, the phrases, the style and the concept," as well as the "character"—i.e., the calligraphy,⁷² because "whoever writes a letter impresses into it the image of his soul."⁷³ There can be no doubt, he goes on, that "different people write differently," and individuals tend always to write more or less in the same way, unless they are trying to disguise their hand. Who would be surprised, if someone with an evidently "lazy" hand (pigro), forming characters "with a sort of stomping of the pen," turned out to be lazy also in life? He goes on to speculate, "it is also reasonable," that such a person "was dull in intellect, and that he should be observed to be of careless judgment" such that "he might promise much and accomplish little." Probably, he mused, they would be a drinker. Indeed, without much further elaborating upon the particularities of a "lazy" hand, he was able to discern a melancholy humor denoting "instability."

Is there something in Angelica's script which indicates such traits? Certainly, the most exaggerated features of "lazy" writing are not there. I do not find characters which are "unequal, with uneven lines"; nor do I see the strokes "running all together." If I did, at least according to Baldi, I would have to conclude the writer was "unstable," "choleric," and "apt to seek out [her] caprices." Young people, he added, often write this way because they are unpracticed. When adults do so, this is a clear sign of a malformed personality deeply rooted in their being. But this, at least according to strokes I see, was not Angelica's case. "If the characters are rapid and the letters are some of them large and others small, and this is seen not to be from a defect of the pen [itself]," Baldi elaborates, "probably one may conclude that [the writer] is uneven in other actions, and the same unevenness will appear in the voice as one sees in the writing." Again, not Angelica's case. Nor do I find that "the characters are very small," indicating either advanced age, bad vision, or poverty of spirit. Nor again, do I find them "ugly, twisted but intelligible, badly formed, hasty," of which Baldi quips: such are the clothes, so is the man.

On the other hand, in one of Baldi's writing styles I find some agreement with my observation of Angelica's. This style is characterized by "a rapid, even, and well-formed character, demonstrating a delight in writing." Certainly Angelica's characters are even and well-formed, and they may even demonstrate a delight in writing, although one might hesitate to attribute a particular velocity to their formation. Perhaps I am thus excused from accepting Baldi's conclusion regarding such a writing type, namely, that it denotes a person "who knows little and is worth little." He elaborates: "They are like painters, who the better they are, the less are they prudent," so absorbed are they in the minutiae of their art. Such persons tend to be "cold or avaricious or extravagant or immoderate," and normally, they are young. She may have been young, but her characters appear to have been formed with care.

Retrospective or historical graphology was relatively slow to develop, and may be said to date basically from Cesare Lombroso, the nineteenth-century criminologist, whose pioneering treatise attempted to distinguish normal from abnormal on the basis of writing. With a striking complement of facsimiles including signatures and other writings by authors ranging from the ancient world to his own time, he claimed to place graphology on a scientific footing analogous to the other developing social sciences: psychology, sociology, anthropology. "It is known that many of the unconscious movements of our muscles and flesh, measured and calibrated with the instruments of Mosso and Marey," he said, indicating the Ergograph invented by Angelo Mosso and the Tambour Sphygmograph of Etienne-Jules Marey, "have been able to give us an idea of real emotive states of the mind and even the conditions of the intelligence and the attention span." Speech acts were no longer a mystery, he went on: "We now know that some of our neuro-pathological conditions can be studied by accurate and graphical observation: for instance in respect to velocity, voice, pronunciation." Who indeed would deny that "a slow and heavy pace" in speaking "denotes a cretin?"⁷⁴ Now was the time, he said, to develop such insights and apply them to calligraphy.

The results were not long in coming. Could they apply to Angelica's time? The calligraphic feature of "the position called *iuxta*, i.e., isolation of each character, is the indication of an intuitive mind and is often found in poets, novelists, music Masters, and other artists such as Ariosto, Chateaubriand, Victor Hugo and Verdi."⁷⁵ By contrast, "writers who attach all their characters one to another are of reflective mind, reason well, and easily predict the final consequences of their acts and others'. This feature is evident in writing by the Cardinal Mazarin, Prince Bismarck, the chemist Leibig and the historian Curtius." Angelica seems to fall between these two styles, as we see below. Attached letters are connected by a dash:

qu-e-sto l-ibro si è di l-ang-el-l-ica Ba-ld-ac-hini

Would this signify that the characteriological determination would also have to fall somewhere between, say, Ariosto and Cardinal Mazarin?

Female writing is almost entirely absent from Lombroso's analysis except in the part reserved for extreme pathologies. The limit case of course is the criminal, and without other evidence I would hesitate to place Angelica here. "Homicidal women resemble homicidal males in their style of calligraphy," explains Lombroso; "and in general they all tend towards the virile form." Yet the "virile form" is also "common among honest women who are energetic."⁷⁶ Even though Lombroso fails to explain in any great detail exactly what this virile form consists, I can see that the decisive characters of Angelica are certainly "energetic." Was she thus an "energetic" type of person? According to Lombroso, the overlap between a certain kind of female person and a certain kind of male was particularly evident at the point of greatness. "In women of genius—Catherine II, George Sand, Madama Adam, Adelaide Cairolì, Maintenon, Elisabeth [Queen of England], Charlotte Corday, the virile writing is characteristic, so that distinguishing theirs as female writing would not be easy."⁷⁷ We have already seen that Angelica's writing resembles a type which Baldo illustrated with no designation as to gender but which he obviously intended to refer to the male. It may be tempting, but hazardous, to identify her on this basis with, say, the assassin of Marat.

A chief difficulty of retrospective graphology, of course, is the need to separate characteristics determined by the individual from characteristics which more properly belong to a particular epoch. The bent-over ascenders in Angelica's l's and d's, pointing to the right, were not her own: they belonged to some kinds of sixteenth-century writing. Consider the characters in Giovanni Antonio Tagliente's example on his folio A1r. All the ascenders have the same bent-over ending at the top, pointing to the right. The same perhaps went for the curly protrusion over her upper-case B in "Baldachini," although in this instance I might wish to take the characteristic in context, noting her preference for lower-case, even in the name "angelica," so that perhaps the B in "Baldachini" is an attempt to make an upper-case of a lower-case, conserving the long ascender and bent-over feature characteristic of the latter.

For Lombroso, the letter "i" was invested with particular significance due to the way in which time, space and personality, in this letter, were involved in a subtle medley. The two elements played against each other in a creative tension: stem against dot, dot against stem. A weak dot indicated weakness, timidity, lack of effort.⁷⁸ A round and accentuated dot: firmness, decisiveness. Large and spot-like? A passionate and sensual nature. Placing was a key. If well after the letter, disorderliness and carelessness were insinuated. If far away from the letter, then canceled and moved, we have a tendency to goodness and self-control. Missing the dot entirely, denotes disattention and negligence. Regularly placed exactly over the stem of the "i" instead denotes love of order. And here we distinctly find Angelica. The dot over the "i" in "libro" is squarely and distinctly placed. The dot over the "i" in "si" is slightly high, with respect to the waist line, but still directly over the stem. The dot over "di" is sensibly and squarely placed; and the same goes for the calligraphy of this letter in the names "angelica" and "Baldachini."

Her writing evidences a certain upward sweep, with the baseline inclined some five degrees relative to the edge of the page. I turn again to Lombroso. Subjects not writing on lined paper, which may constrain their movements, express their general emotional state by the overall slant of their script, he suggests. He advises caution in drawing conclusions. "Our organism sometimes reacts in a similar way for different feelings," he notes. Consider "the joy which causes tears, the pain which produces an spasmodic laugh, etc." Thus the same movement of the hand could signify contrasting states of mind. "A descending hand signifies sadness but also exhaustion, effort, weakness."⁷⁹ A rising line of writing, on the other hand, could be referred to "ardor, but also ambition, and necessarily, activity." However, the meaning could be different in different subjects. What implied ambition in a superior sort of person instead implied "fatuousness" in "a vulgar man." Also the intensity of the slant is significant in Lombroso's analysis. To keep Angelica's in perspective, her five-degree slant is nothing like the thirty-two degree slant of Lombroso's example no. 12, indicating "presumptuousness accompanied by egotism."⁸⁰ An aspect which seems to have escaped Lombroso, is whether such states of mind are temporary or fixed. I can imagine an optimistic Angelica today might be pessimistic tomorrow. I would need to see more writing, and even then I am sure that I would not be certain of having achieved more clarity.

I set aside Lombroso and turn to aspects more urgently in need of explanation. What to make of the apparent cancellation of a letter, namely the first of a double "l" in "angelica"? Either spelling was possible, in the context of the Florentine habitual carelessness in distributing single and double consonants. Even in Venice, a selection of popular novels was issued in 1682 where the double consonant occurs in the name of the Ariosto character.⁸¹ If her choice indicates a particular relation to writing, there is nothing else in her other strokes that prepares us for this. If a cancellation denotes a person relatively unschooled in writing, the same hesitation is by no means evident elsewhere. If it indicates old age, again, there is no other symptom of shakiness or feebleness. Perhaps on the other hand, in the light of our other speculations, this *pentimento* denotes a certain insecurity or self-consciousness. We can imagine the case where at the moment of signing an important document, a person experiences a mental fugue, and suddenly feels strange about completing a habitual action. Perhaps signing the book was such a moment for Angelica.

I observe another form of *pentimento* in the placing of the accent before the “e” in the simple present of the verb “to be,” and also after, at the level of the cap line. Perhaps in this case one of the placings is an accident of the pen rather than the mind; but we are reminded that the use of accents was by no means uniform. In Baldinucci, writing slightly later, where there are accents at all (which is not always) we find only grave accents, and somewhat pronounced ones at that. Livia Vernazza, the concubine of Giovanni de’ Medici, used no accents. The accent here, whatever was intended to be the final placing, is similar to the dot over the ninth letter of the alphabet. Maybe the author was unsure whether to place a grave or an acute accent. In any case, I perceive a certain insistence on getting things right.

Floating in the space above the ascender line is a nearly-horizontal stroke executed from right to left. A mix of odd spelling and a throwback to the standard earlier abbreviation for a double “n”? The distance from this stroke and the “n” in question should not negate this hypothesis. It is the same as between the “e” of the verb “to be” and the mark that we have interpreted to be an attempted accent over that letter. In both cases, the stroke is slightly moved to the right of where it belongs. If Angelica was able to misspell her name with a double “l” perhaps she was also capable of giving it an extra “n.” In the history of Florentine writing the gratuitous doubling of “n” was not unknown.

What I can conclude unequivocally from the writing, on the basis of a comparison with thousands of other hands from the sixteenth through the seventeenth century, examined over a lifetime of dealing with such sources, is that it belongs to a person roughly contemporary with the printing of the book: i.e., some time not long after 1570. The irregular (perhaps, uncertain) use of double consonants, as well as the minuscule “a” in the forename, and the attaching of the article to the first letter in the forename seem typical of the period. Even granting the possible operation of personal choice in the detaching or joining of letters, we cannot ignore a slight hint of the emerging seventeenth-century trend to a more fluid “cursive” kind of writing, which historians of calligraphy associate with the Baroque or possibly even with an advancing influence of French chancery scripts.⁸²

If the time seems right, so does the place. The give-away is the recourse to a seemingly reflexive form of the verb “to be” to indicate possession. In the Tuscan dialect, then as now, the particle “si” can be an impersonal pronoun, as in the diction, “noi si va,” in place of “noi andiamo.” Somewhat rarer was the use of the reflexive “essere”; but a manuscript of Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, now in the Vatican Library, contains the inscription, “Questo libro si è di me Antonio di Bartolommeo... MCCCCXXIII.”⁸³ A fifteenth-century manuscript in the Laurentian Library containing works by Petrarch includes the inscription: “Questo libro si è di Fruosino di Lodovicho di Ciecie da Pragnio.”⁸⁴ The Tuscan manuscripts, dating to somewhat earlier, of the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*, begin “Questo libro si è di San Brandano,” indicating ownership of the contents rather than the container.⁸⁵ Finally, a fifteenth-century codex of works by Frate Guido da Pisa in the Biblioteca Nazionale in Florence among the Palatine manuscripts, contains the following imperative: “Questo libro si è di ser piero d’orsino cera [iuo]li; chi lo truoua lo renda.”—“This book belongs to ser piero d’orsino ceraoli, whoever finds it must return it.”⁸⁶ There was nothing particularly outlandish about Angelica’s usage—as long as we situate it in a Tuscan context. Where did she get the idea? The literary diction could not have come from common speech; she must have seen it written on some manuscript or book at home or at a neighbor’s.

I am of course not only interested in what the writing looks like as an indicator of time and place. I am also concerned with where it is in the book. Why did she sign inside and not outside? Libraries in modern times give highly utilitarian instructions about the marking of books. Apart from the typical library stamp on the title page and occasionally on the page edges for unequivocal identification, there may be a stamp on page 29 inside, simply in order to claim the book in case the title page gets lost, while facilitating easy location of the stamp for cancellation in case of a change of ownership. Was Angelica doing the same thing? I.e., did she lose the title page and re-sign for

identification purposes on p. 144v? Or did she receive this copy already mutilated and stake her claim where she could?

Was this simply the first wide blank space in her volume?

Perhaps more to the point, was there something particularly compelling about the fifth story of night four, told by the fictional storyteller Leonora, which prompted her intervention? The story concerns a simpleton called Flaminio who (so says the short description) goes in search of death and instead finds life. To the many people he encounters along the route, he demands, "Can you tell me perhaps what is this thing called death?" Supposing this was "her" story, it surely would have given her much food for thought. The question regards not only every Christian, but every human, as the many myths concerning death in every culture bear witness. Perhaps she too contemplated the paradox of death, of the land "whence no traveler returns," of the ultimate experience, which no art or science can reproduce, explain, or describe, the one experience which is canceled in the making, and which has puzzled every society since the dawn of humanity and the origins of memory. The story places the enigma of death most eloquently in the mouth of a hermit, who utters: "this is a most terrible and fearful being, and is called by wise men the last end of all our sufferings, a misery to the happy, happiness to the miserable, the end and limit of all worldly things. It divides friend from friend. It parts father from sons and son from father, mother from daughter and daughter from mother. It cuts the bond of marriage. And finally it separates the soul from the body causing the body to lose all its powers and to grow so putrid and evil that all men flee it and abandon it as an abominable thing." As so often in Straparola the story ends magically. By no other means could Flaminio gain the revelation to which humans may not be privy (barring the actual incidence of post-death experiences). The device is ingenious. He finally encounters an old hag carrying a sword and club along with a bag of medicines and ointments which, so she says, represent life, although obviously only in the limited sense of the pathetic attempts to beautify the ugly, to ease the pain, to slow the decline. No sooner does he ask her his usual question about death, than she chops off his head. Next she glues the head back on again, at first backwards, giving Flaminio an unexpected and raucously bawdy view of his own naked behind, meant also to signify perhaps that death gives a different perspective on life. Did Angelica long for this?

I wonder whether Angelica was drawn to this story because of the recent death of a father, a mother, a husband, a child. Was she in mourning, and did the reading of this tale help bear her up? Or was she tempted by the story to imagine her own death, even in a humorous light? So far in my speculations I have supposed a young Angelica. What if she was old? Maybe she savored this particular tale because she feared death, or felt herself to be near death. The fear of death of course belongs to all ages. Christians are told, lead a good life now, because death may come unexpectedly. Death and the threat of death are ambiguous terms, according to this interpretation. The story of human salvation begins with the death that brings life through Christ's Resurrection. On the one hand, death is the goal of the believer, because after death there will be new life. Salvation removes the bite of death, because in death the soul leaves the body and begins the journey to Paradise. On the other hand, just as there can be preparation for the good death, by ensuring the presence of the clergy for extreme unction, there can also be preparation for the good death by making peace with the self with regard to transgressions during life. The better preparation for death would be by transgressing less—i.e., by a good life. "The peace of the just man's death is greater or less according to the perfection of his soul," said St. Catherine of Siena.⁸⁷ The character in Straparola's novel looked back upon himself in death, and the sight was not a pretty one.

Were these thoughts on Angelica's mind when she decided to "sign" this rather than some other story in her book? In a brilliant exercise of cinematic imagination, Ingmar Bergman, in "The Seventh Seal," set in the mid-fourteenth century, pretends to record an encounter between personified Death, costumed in suitably dismal raiment, and a crusader returned from the wars. Unlike Flaminio's encounter in Straparola's story, this one is not deliberate, at least not on the part

of the human. The soldier by no means goes out looking for death, although perhaps he knows, even if death does not remind him, that death has somehow been in his midst.

Knight: Who are you?
 Death: I am Death.
 Knight: Have you come for me?
 Death: I have been walking by your side for a long time.
 Knight: That I know.
 Death: Are you prepared?
 Knight: My body is frightened, but I am not.
 Death: Well, there is no shame in that.

Soldiers perhaps feel the presence more than others, but the cinematic metaphor is not about soldiering *per se*, so much as about living: the battle-weary soldier is the life-weary surrogate for every man.

Flaminio's adventure likewise is not only about death. It is about a journey, perhaps similar to the topos in medieval literature, essentially an allegory or at least a metaphor for the journey of life itself. He embarks on a journey toward death. Although a definite source for this story has still not been identified, we are clearly in the presence, so Donald Beecher reminds us, of a traditional folk story type – the “search for death,” to which the “Pardoner's Tale” in Chaucer also belongs. At the same time, Flaminio exists in a larger archetypal universe that has to do with the very nature of literature and storytelling. His life has sense because it possesses a narrative direction beginning with a question and ending with an answer. Odysseus seeks his home. The characters in the Arthurian Legend seek the Holy Grail. Sixteenth-century seekers after natural knowledge modeled their research procedure metaphorically on the concept of a hunt, a *venatio*.⁸⁸ My inquiry in this research is inspired by the insight that the narrative of the journey is nearly as important as the results obtained, because the new juxtapositions of elements occasioned by chance encounters along the way constitute new knowledge in themselves. Flaminio like me is motivated by curiosity.

Not all searches are fruitful; not all questions are good ones. Flaminio's quest may not exactly be well-conceived, but he will only know this at the end. About this, Straparola is explicit in setting out the story: “there are many men who go searching for things with care and diligence. But some things, once they're found, they wish they had never set eyes on, fleeing from them as fast as the devil from holy water. This was the case for Flaminio.” That Flaminio happened to be “a young man somewhat wanting in wit and more eccentric than steady and prudent,” fixes the story within yet another tale type, namely, of the “boy without fear,” or the fool who rushes in where angels fear to tread, who engages in enterprises where instinct should say stop. Did Angelica's “ownership” of this tale stand to signify her reflection on the human condition? In reading it did she come to realize that the greatest enterprises sometimes stem from ignoring the dangers in favor of pursuing the elusive quarry to the ends of the earth, although we often see only in hindsight the folly of our endeavors?

But perhaps the lesson of story five on night four is another, more connected with the first personage Flaminio interrogates on his journey to find out about death – namely the cobbler. Flaminio asks, why do you keep laboring at making shoes, when you have already made so many? The cobbler replies that he must keep on laboring and selling in order to accumulate the wherewithal to survive when he can work no more. This episode in the larger story appears to be about judicious accumulation, or indeed, home economics. Save for a rainy day. Make hay while the sun shines. Judicious accumulation is immune from the condemnation of another kind of accumulation aimed at getting for getting's sake: i.e. amoral acquisitiveness, the constant search for material comforts, against which the preachers railed from 16th-century pulpits, and which sumptuary laws were designed to curb. Likewise of course in this story there is a soupçon regarding

vanity. When the Flaminio continues on his journey and encounters a tailor, whose shop is filled with all manner of garments, he asks:

“What are you going to do with all this store of fair and sumptuous raiment, and all the noble garments I see here? Do they all belong to you?” Then the master tailor made answer, “Certain of them are my own, some belong to the merchants, some to the gentlefolk, and some to various people who have dealings with me.” “But what use can they find forso many,” asked Flaminio. “They wear them in the different seasons of the year,” the tailor answered, and showing them all to Flaminio, he went on, “These they wear in the summer and these in the winter, and these others in the seasons which come between, clothing themselves sometimes in one fashion and sometimes in another.” “And in the end what do they do?” asked Flaminio. The tailor answered, “They go on in this course until the day of their death.”

Was Angelica an inveterate clothes addict, a fashion plate, a woman à la mode? Did she normally have to acquire all the clothes she saw, and did she see this reminder of the vanity of all things, this memento mori, as a tale specially made for her?

Whatever may have been her inclination to this story or to this place in the book, the choice to claim Straparola's *Pleasant Nights* as “her own book,” already reveals some important features of the emerging profile of this book-owning personage. Straparola, as I have already said, was an adventurous author – by which I mean an author, like Giovanni Boccaccio before him, who wrote about the manners and mores of his own society, often in the medium of attractive, ironic, and sometimes explicit, narratives of transgression, pushing this last aspect slightly further, in fact, than the earlier author. By the time Angelica would have acquired the book, books like it were already under scrutiny by the Inquisition and the Congregation on the Index. Homes were being searched; booksellers and librarians were constantly in trouble. By associating herself with this book Angelica not only claimed its content as “her own” but also its context: the context of the forbidden, of transgression, of danger—if only in the privacy of her boudoir.

How many other women owned a copy of this book? Female readership of imaginative literature was by Angelica's time already a stereotype. Straparola, no doubt influenced by a convention of the genre, writing to “You gracious and friendly women,” claimed to have published his work “only to please you.” There is no outright pandering to a female audience here, unlike in Agnolo Firenzuola's “Epistle . . . in praise of women,” introducing the *Ragionamenti* (Florence: 1548), another typical collection of novels. And whatever misogyny Straparola may have shared with Boccaccio is never explicit. He does not make his chief characters say anything similar to what Boccaccio has a character say in the opening appeal to the *Decameron*, that “man is the head of woman, and . . . without a man to guide us it rarely happens that any enterprise of ours is brought to a worthy conclusion.”⁸⁹ Nor does he mention anywhere, as Boccaccio did, that wives are a distraction from letters because of their vanity, intrusiveness and antipathy to study. Indeed, says Boccaccio, “what can one say about their hatred for books, when they see anyone opening up one?”⁹⁰ Nor do we find such accusations levelled at women in Straparola, as we do expressed by Boccaccio speaking of Eve in his *On Famous Women*. I tend to think that when he formulates the ideal company of storytellers in his book's framing tale to include a majority of women, he does so not just because his great predecessor did so in the the *Decameron*, but because he would have found a female audience somehow congenial.

Rummaging for clues among women's possessions in the period has so far not yielded any definitive results about women's reading. Probate inventories would be the usual places to go for attaching owners' names to their books in early modern times; and for the cities of Florence and Venice they have been studied in some detail. Unfortunately few such inventories actually refer to possessions belonging to women; and of these, only a tiny number mention books. In Venice, a city of books, of booksellers, and arguably, of readers, a study of 600 probate inventories from between 1560 and 1600, many of them referring to books, turned up only three women's lists where books were mentioned.⁹¹ A similar study in Treviso regarding the second half of the sixteenth century turned up a larger number of women's lists, amounting to some 12 percent of the total. In this last

sample, prominent titles included various offices of the Blessed Virgin, a *Libro dei Santi Padri*, a *Fiori Preciosi raccolti da tutte le opere spirituali*, and a Charlemagne romance entitled *L'Innamoramento di Carlo Magno*.⁹² Work on Florentine probate inventories shows the same patterns. Typical books owned by women include the predictable assortment of religious titles, a *Trionfo della Croce*, a *Leggendario* [?], a *Vangeli di Quaresima*. Secular titles included Dante, Petrarch, etc.⁹³ I cannot help thinking that such inventories give no particularly accurate picture of book possession, not least because any books possessed by females which would have been included in inventories made up for males, are impossible to detect.

The book historian's search for the slightest definite traces of women's engagement with books has encountered some anomalies of interest mainly in a negative sense, for the caution they inspire regarding any excessive reliance on book lists for the history of reading. A Florentine woman named "monna Lessandra," evidently the daughter or even possibly the wife of Manetto Fei, to whom her name is attached by the possessive "di" between her name and his on folios 572r-573r in file number 2655 of the *Magistrato ai Pupilli* or Probate court, is shown to have left behind her a tiny hoard of 14 esoteric titles, mostly in Latin, on topics ranging from astronomy to astrology, from cosmography to geography.⁹⁴ Two single religious titles stand out from the rest: a Bible and a *Trionfo della Croce*. I am almost inclined to view the collection as being divided between the deceased and someone else who may have died before, perhaps a husband, or even the father. Two texts seem to evince the interests of a sailor or ship owner: a work on "the astrolabe," and a "manuscript concerning navigation," perhaps an onboard diary; but this is all I can say about Manetto Fei. About monna Lessandra I am still not sure.

Connecting collections to interests is no easier when the owner is better known. Consider the case of Cosimo I, the Tuscan grand duke when Angelica would have been a child. He owned over 1300 books, including many that had been dedicated to and/or given to him by the authors, and others acquired en bloc from the estate of Giovanni Mazzuoli (called lo Stradino) or from members of his own family.⁹⁵ How many of these were actually acquired by and for women is certainly an open question. Also, there is no way of knowing how many of these he actually read, except by finding traces in his correspondence; and contemporary testimonies do not regard him as having been a particularly learned man. Individuals who possessed much fewer books might have been more likely to read them. Yet his books served not only his own needs but those of a court circle including his master of public works Giorgio Vasari and his physician Baccio Baldini. Not necessarily in the case of Cosimo, but in general, books serve many other purposes besides reading: as decorative objects, professional qualifications, status symbols, reminders of the giver (living or dead), and even, in the case of holy books, as talismans against evil or protections for the home. I will not pursue the theme of mutilation, or more precisely, the perennial recycling of images from books that goes on to this day, and which the disappearance of the original bindings and much else has rendered virtually untraceable. In the case of Angelica's book the frontispiece is gone, but the accompanying deficit of thirty or more other pages argues against deliberate destruction.

Inquisition records occasionally mention books, especially scandalous ones, although most of the Florentine Inquisition records were lost in the depredations of the Napoleonic era, except presumably for copies of those cases that were remanded to Rome, and which the current work over the last twenty years following the opening of the Roman Inquisition archives to scholars has yet to identify.⁹⁶ The relatively better known and more complete records for sixteenth-century Venice may shed some light on the question. There, a certain poor spinner named Lunarda possessed a copy of Calvin's *The Catechism of the Church of Geneva* explicating a radical anti-Roman ecclesiology accompanied by an equally unorthodox theology. A certain Aquilina admitted to possessing, apart from relatively innocuous texts such as Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* and Francesco il Cieco di Ferrara's *Mambriano*, also Benedetto da Mantova's *Beneficio di Cristo*, an underground classic of Italian crypto-pelagianism, thought by Leopold von Ranke to have been lost, but rediscovered in a unique copy at St. Johns College, Cambridge, in the mid-nineteenth century.⁹⁷ In spite of their protestations to the contrary, couched in terms calculated to flatter the prejudices of

their accusers, these women probably read the dangerous books found in their possession. But I have no way of knowing whether Arcangela was among them. [add Barbierato]

The next best thing to those relatively rare explicit testimonies to reading which we may find in letters, diaries, or journals, is the evidence found in the books themselves. Annotations within books may be of two types: indications on the book that the book belonged to so and so, and indications among the pages that so-and-so read certain passages, because they underlined or commented upon them—i.e., marginalia.⁹⁸ My volume by Straparola was owned, Angelica tells us, by herself. She never tells us that she read it. However by signing within rather than without, on the middle page rather than on the title page, on a typeset page halfway through the book, rather than on the page identifying what the book is, she engages not only with the materiality of the book but with the material in the book. Hers is a reader's signature as much as an owner's signature – indeed the signature of an owner who wishes to be known also as a reader, and more particularly, as a reader of this book.

So far I have been assuming Angelica was the first owner of her book. I must confess that I have no good reason to do so. Only because I find the hypothesis somehow repulsive, I will not entertain the possibility that she is no real owner at all, but an interloper, vandalizing the property of someone else, for malice or for fun. On the other hand I quite willingly accept that she too, like so many, could have received the book as a gift. We would expect the missing first pages to have contained some testimony to the giving, although the signing on the middle pages then would seem rather strange. I leave the question open, also because, gift or no gift, none of my conclusions so far is affected. If she acquired the book second-hand, after it had been in circulation for some time, that is another matter. Once again, I am missing what could be the crucial record on the cover or frontispiece telling who the previous owners were. But in such a case the chronology with which I have so far been working might have to be drastically advanced. In my own defense I can only lay claim to a sense that her calligraphy roughly corresponds to the prevailing style (give or take the necessary variations) at the time of publication.

If the item was a gift, then was it from a female or a male well-wisher? In either case, supposing the giver knew the contents, there could be interesting insinuations. A gift may be part of a courtship, indeed part of a seduction. Was Angelica an innocent, whom some older adult attempted to lead down the path of pleasure, never to return? Here the bland vellum cover, masking the salacious contents, could help to make way past unsuspecting parents or guardians. A book revelling in adulterous titillation may have diverse implications depending on the marital status of the giver and receiver. Was she a married woman, whose husband or lover sought to stoke the flames of love? Supposing the husband was the giver, and supposing he himself had read the book, or knew of its contents, then the gift may have been intended to enter into the uxorial games of role playing and irony. Supposing the lover as giver, perhaps she was party, in real life, to the same kinds of love-games and ruses adumbrated in her book. Her decision to claim it on the inside rather than the outside might thus have a kind of conspiratorial significance. Perhaps the book, with its naughty secret, the secret of her claim to its contents, stood in her home as a clandestine reminder about a love-embassy and a betrayal.⁹⁹

If not as a gift, she may well have acquired the book by purchase. Many were the ways. A compact decimo-sexto measuring 11cm x 16cm bound or 10cm x 15cm unbound as it probably would have been sold, it is small enough to have been bought in the most casual of circumstances, not necessarily in one of the bookseller's shops in Florence (her presumed abode), located for the most part in the quarter of Santa Croce, between via Ghibellina, piazza San Firenze and via Condotta.¹⁰⁰ She may have seen it on a streetside stall or among the wares being hawked by a so-called chapman or travelling salesman moving through the streets and squares with a load of the most portable printed genres, from novels to news, from battle prints to images of the Grand Turk. Did a shout of "novelle, historie" echo through the urban canyons of Florence within her earshot? The aural experience of early modern bookbuying has been buried with its makers, although we know something about market sounds musically evoked in Adriano Banchieri's "Il Zabaione

Musicale," originating in Venice. Ladies of a certain rank may have strolled the streets of Florence when such calls could be heard, or alternatively, they might hear about the availability of such wares from their ladies in waiting, nurses, cooks, or other employees, or indeed, male friends or others more likely to be roaming about town, in order to be able to acquire them.

However she may have gotten the book, and for whatever reason, the acquisition gave Angelica the route to a world far from home. The experience of literature was in her grasp, all she had to do was read it. Yet I still do not know what kind of reader she was. Roland Barthes distinguished between three types of reading which (synthesizing his argument very much) I will call fetishistic, impassioned, and initiatory.¹⁰¹ In the first type the reader is seduced by the words themselves and their various combinations. In the second, the reader is emotionally engaged by the inner force of the combinations of words, and text and experience become one. In the final type reading enkindles the desire to write. Setting aside for the moment the first two types and focusing on the last, did Angelica have ambitions to create writings that others might read, for pleasure or instruction? Was she inspired by the writings of others to become a writer herself? No samples of her writing have survived except for the one I have. If she picked up the pen in a creative mood, would she have been an erudite like Olympia Fulvia Morata, author of verses and epigrams in Latin and Greek, or a literary critic like Laura Terracina, writer of a commentary on Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*,¹⁰² or a writer of madrigals like Maddalena Casulana,¹⁰³ or indeed, a Paola Antonia Negri, author of a book of spiritual letters?¹⁰⁴

Over a half century before Angelica's time Niccolò Machiavelli thought about reading, and he set his ideas down in a famous letter to Francesco Vettori. Writing in semi-exile from the city of Florence after the fall of the republic and the return of the Medici, he conveyed the experience by a metaphor:

On the coming of evening, I return to my house and enter my study; and at the door I take off the day's clothing, covered with mud and dust, and put on garments regal and courtly; and reclothed appropriately, I enter the ancient courts of ancient men, where, received by them with affection, I feed on that food which only is mine and which I was born for, where I am not ashamed to speak with them and to ask them the reason for their actions; and they in their kindness answer me; and for four hours of time I do not feel boredom, I forget every trouble, I do not dread poverty, I am not frightened by death; entirely I give myself over to them.¹⁰⁵

In this account he, like the ancient Greeks and Romans whom he admired, takes orality as the form of human interchange par excellence. Writing is nothing other than the means of enabling conversation across space and time. Reading is therefore a meeting of one's mind with that of another, a comparing and contrasting of ideas, often a debate. It can thus be a dramatic exercise, with the reader juxtaposed against the writer as well as against the characters in the book. Machiavelli's view stands in stark contrast to some views stemming from ancient Greece, which according to current scholarship understood reading as an essentially passive act, whereby readers empower writers by lending them their minds and voices for the expression of ideas.¹⁰⁶

The pleasures of imaginative writing, outlined also in Machiavelli's account, are more personal. Typical fare might include "either Dante or Petrarch, or one of the lesser poets, such as Tibullus, Ovid, and the like." He takes these with him on excursions to "the spring" and "the aviary," which may have more significance from the standpoint of his own creative processes than the mere designation of particular locations within his property.¹⁰⁷ Such readings inspire introspection and the remembrance of past experience. Of the authors and their works, he says "I read of their tender passions and their loves, remember mine, enjoy myself a while in that sort of dreaming." Such dreaming occurs within the same context as other diversions, such as a card game and arguing with the neighbors, all of which, we might imagine, have a serious purpose in respect to mental repose and exercise, in the fruitful combination of use and pleasure that the Renaissance ideal enshrined.

In an age so intensely concerned with the transmission and transformation of learning, obviously much thought was devoted to the retention of ideas.¹⁰⁸ Machiavelli, in the letter just quoted, placed the issue in perspective: "And because Dante says it does not produce knowledge

when we hear but do not remember, I have noted everything” that he heard in his fictive conversations with writers “which has profited me, and I have composed a little work On Princedoms.” Machiavelli’s hilariously self-effacing account of *The Prince* should not distract from his apparent awareness of the art of note-taking. Pedagogues of a slightly earlier age, such as Gasparino Barzizza and Guarino da Verona, accompanied their lists of important authors with instructions on this skill, and by Angelica’s time, still other scholars devoted much attention to the ways and means of gathering content from books, although, admittedly, the note taking aspect was still in the background, compared to much later work on the subject.

Did she handle her reading reverently, like the pre-modern readers mentioned by Roger Chartier and Rolf Engelsing?¹⁰⁹ Did she speed through the frivolous book in the midst of other more important readings? Did she keep it around and dip in and out as the urge occurred? Already in the fourteenth century, Petrarch had given a particularly acute account of speed-reading, in the famous letter to Boccaccio where he reports his first impressions on having read a manuscript of the *Decameron*. “Your book, written in our mother tongue and published, I presume, during your early years,” he writes, “has fallen into my hands, I know not whence or how.”¹¹⁰ Now comes the confession: “If I told you that I had read it, I should deceive you. It is a very big volume, written in prose and for the multitude. I have been, moreover, occupied with more serious business.” He goes on in more detail: “My hasty perusal afforded me much pleasure.” The slight misgivings should come as no surprise, considering the later history of the work. “If the humour is a little too free at times, this may be excused in view of the age at which you wrote, the style and language which you employ, and the frivolity of the subjects, and of the persons who are likely to read such tales.” On the whole, he approved, while leaving the final word suspended: “Along with much that was light and amusing, I discovered some serious and edifying things as well, but I can pass no definite judgment upon them, since I have not examined the work thoroughly.” How did Petrarch read, when in a hurry? He explains: “As usual, when one looks hastily through a book, I read somewhat more carefully at the beginning and at the end.” Eventually, of course, Petrarch pays to Boccaccio the ultimate tribute, by selecting the story of Griselda from the collection and translating it into Latin. He thus exemplified hasty reading, moderate reading and the most careful and sympathetic reading a reader can do.

By signing her book in the middle, closer to the beginning than to the end, on folio 144 of 353 in all, she revealed herself as one not prone to perusing just prefaces and conclusions; so to speak, eating the frosting and leaving the rest of the cake. Some recent work has considered that novel-reading may have been partly responsible, at least in an English context, for introducing readers to the habit of reading straight through a text, borne away by vitality of a story. According to this view, some time between the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, segmented reading gave way to sequential reading.¹¹¹ Hunting and pecking around a text, grabbing this or that morsel of information, of insight, was replaced at least in some quarters by the leisurely enjoyment of a whole book. And no doubt, in order for there to be habitual page-turning on the part of readers, there had to be the invention of the writing that was a “page-turner.” Where to place such a development along the time-line of literature however may be open to question. Novels are always compiled of individual episodes; just as collections like those by Boccaccio, Bandello and Straparola, are compiled of separate novels, with the more rapid rotations of single action contained within the greater revolutions of the story about how the stories are told. Straparola intended his stories to be read through, perhaps on successive days, and like the novelists before him, organized his material in order to bring readers in to the telling of all the tales. In Arcangela’s case, at least so far as we can surmise from the evidence of her intervention, he appears to have had his way.

What was going through her mind? Reading obviously involves timeless aspects as well as timely ones, aspects subject to change as well as those that are hard-wired into the human brain. Some of her gestures in respect to her book would have been the same as mine. She would have combined the sensory effect of sight with the interpretative capacities of her brain, in ways that that should be accessible by comparison and analogy. If historians have so far shown little interest in the

neuroscience of reading, possibly because the approach is still so young, the disinterest has not necessarily been reciprocal. A recent text on the topic delves into, if not the history, at least the archaeology of reading, with chapters on “Prehistoric precursors of writing ; From counting to writing ; The limits of pictography ; The alphabet: a great leap forward,” referring frequently to Shakespeare and Descartes, and beginning with a line from Quevedo, to the effect that “I listen to the dead with my eyes.” The eye is a poor scanner, this work shows. Retinal precision, while variable across the species and subject to ageing, is generally low. Only the central part of the retina, known as the fovea, is sensitive enough to make out letters, and in order to bring text into its focus the eye tends to shoot this way and that along short paths called saccades.¹¹² And yet the pattern recognition habits we are able to acquire deploy the scanning capabilities to an extraordinary extent. Only by a curious fluke of evolution could a brain made for reading have come about at all; and only by another series of improbable cultural developments could societies have found out what a powerful instrument this was. Angelica the reader was the highest product of a socio-physiological development of world-changing import. Yet the more I understand her brain, the less I seem to understand her reading.

Clearly, the psychomotor modalities of reading may impinge on meaning and comprehension in a number of ways. Text read aloud adds a dramatic component that may be absent from silent reading, and for a long time was the method of delivery par excellence in the most intensely literate societies. Silent reading, already known in ancient Greece, is supposed to have come back into Western culture in the fourth century AD with Saint Ambrose, whose activities (Henri-Jean Martin points out) were described by a curious Saint Augustine peering into the master’s study.¹¹³ Walter Ong reminds us that Ambrose himself was of at least two minds: on the one hand, he utilized the visuality of script, on the other hand, he proclaimed the authoritativeness of the spoken word (“Sight is often deceived; hearing serves as a guarantee”).¹¹⁴ In Renaissance high culture, both traditions, the written and the oral, were cultivated deliberately, and whether silent or not depended on the circumstances. The Renaissance academies only formalized an already widely diffused practice when they subjected the delivery of oral performances for learning and entertainment to playful rules. Notoriously, court representatives abroad were termed “orators” and not “diplomats,” and oratorical skills from Quintilian were regarded as just as important for success in state officialdom as were letter-writing skills from Cicero. At the grand ducal court, dispatches were read aloud—some, such as those sent by Don Giovanni de’ Medici, also for their entertainment value; and meals were accompanied by learned performances in which script may or may not have played a role. Galileo Galilei’s mastery of this medium was reputedly a key to his advancement.

Perhaps the strange liminal situation of literary expression, between oral and written, in late Renaissance culture, explains to some degree the reason why drama and the theater received no special treatment by Church and state authorities responsible for regulating the arts. The only moment of intervention was when the printed publication was to take place. Far from banning the theater per se, as Plato had done from his Republic, contemporaries sought to press its powers into service. The Jesuits, for instance, made it one of the principles of their education program.¹¹⁵ Not that the special powers of the spoken word to move hearts and minds were any less widely recognized in Angelica’s time than at any other. Anyone could see that plays read with the parts assigned to speakers are experienced differently from silently read scripts. However, literary expression was regarded as more dangerous. When Paolo Sarpi remarked in the first third of the seventeenth century that “through these words come opinions into the world, which cause partialities, seditions and finally warres,” he was referring not to the theater or the oral sphere, but to “The matter of Books.” These bore “words, it is true, but such as in consequence draw after them Hosts of armed men.”¹¹⁶ Later on, with the textual turn that some historians date to the early eighteenth century, the suppression of plays begins to go along a different path from the suppression of books.¹¹⁷ By the end of the eighteenth century, mass mobilization was what forged

nations, and the public stage seemed like the place where sedition might most likely start. With the invention of mass politics, control of the theater and control of public assemblies went hand in hand.

I still do not know whether, as a rule, Angelica read aloud or silently, and in the latter case, whether she moved her lips or not. Vermeer, among the Dutch painters of the mid-seventeenth century, was perhaps the most fascinated with private women's reading; although the reading is invariably of letters. His very pregnant "Woman in Blue," (Rijksmuseum) is reading a letter, possibly from a husband or lover, with lips open, as though forming them to the words she sees. The same goes for the Dresden "Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window," although in the latter painting the lips could be parted in an attitude of dismay or even nonchalance. J. M. Nash notices that within the tense grasp of the girl's hands the letter is crumpled, as though read repeatedly, and the gesture is one of concentration.¹¹⁸ Angelica's book now shows serious signs of use, perhaps partly by the owner during the course of intense reading. Movement of the mouth in reading is no more a sign of ignorance than the intense handling of a book may be. When not a symptom of semi-literacy, the accompaniment of silent reading by movement of the mouth may indicate a token to the notion of orality affirmed by Ambrose, that reality is in what is said, not what is seen.

One path to understanding how Angelica may have read or appreciated Straparola's book begins with the author's own expectations. Apart from the proem addressed to the ladies in part two (later moved to the beginning of the work, where it would have been situated among the missing pages of my edition), I can refer once again to the framing tale. Vaguely obscene, subtly suggestive, playfully erotic, the stories were read and obviously enjoyed in mixed company, by the group of 14 guests plus the two hosts in the Palazzo on Murano. Storytelling was not the only amusement. There was also (so tells Straparola) dancing, music, and song. But the verbal play seemed to be predominant in this voluble crowd; just as in the group described decades before by Castiglione in *The Courtier*, set in Mantua. And since the reactions of the group to the stories recounted by each teller form part of Straparola's narrative, let me see what they have to say. And what strikes most forcibly is the emotional response he attributes to the listeners at the Palazzo and, we may guess, expected from his real audience. For instance: "the story told by Lauretta moved them several times to tears." When they heard about the villain dying (Teodoro) or being chased away (Posturmio), and the hero (Saladino) saved from the gallows, "they were pleased indeed, and gave thanks to God."¹¹⁹ Story two of the first night, told by Alteria, again again "pleases everyone," and a discussion ensues. As the subject is the adventures of the famous thief Cassandrino, one of the listeners comments that Alteria must be a thief herself, to have so well understood her character; whereas Bembo notes gallantly that, thief she is, but only a stealer of hearts. After the fourth tale of night one, regarding incest, listeners remain "no less pitying than astonished." More detailed is the response to tale five, after which "everyone with one voice commended the virtue and forbearance of the humiliated Dimitrio, especially as he had before him the priest who was the cause of all his shame." At the same time, they remarked about the priest's terror at being discovered, so dramatically and embarrassingly, barefoot and with only a shirt on, in the house of Dimitrio. Here again the discussion ensues and there are "various reasonings," which evidently stray from the subject at hand, some of the hostess is impelled to call the group once again to order.¹²⁰ A novel about the harsh revenge by a scholar on three women who tricked him, one of the few tales told by a male member of the group, elicits some indignation: to severe, see the hostess and the other women – "displeasing and dishonest." The scenario of the framing tale repeats the stereotype of a gender difference in what is allowed to be told or heard, in real life honored more in words than indeed.¹²¹ More detailed is the reaction to nights two story four, where the main character is exposed to ridicule. "The honest woman began to laugh at the foolishness of Carlo, who, picking to embrace his beloved Theodosia, embraces and sweep the kisses pots and pans instead. What we can gather from Straparola's presentation is a supposition that the stories are think pieces, as it were: tales in which virtues and vices are placed in various situations in order to reason out what values are in play.

Testimonies about storytelling as a past time in the Renaissance are too numerous and too detailed to have been mere literary conveniences invented by authors for framing their tales. Conversation per se, of course, occurred in many settings, among many kinds of people. What distinguished elite conversation from its popular counterpart was, we may suppose, a certain formality, and attention to social levels and social conventions respecting rank. These aspects received expression not only in the dialogue form inherited from classical antiquity and transported to the salons of noble palazzi by the likes of Castiglione. Civil conversation was itself the object of a treatise by Stefano Guazzo published in 1574, presumably, just in the years when Angelica would have been reading her stories. According to Guazzo, conversation was not a chance exchange of views, but an art to be cultivated. There were "good conversations" distinguished by efforts to "teach, question, confer, negotiate, counsel, Judge, and express the affections of our soul, whereby men come to love one another and to associate with one another."¹²² and conversations were characterized by backbiting, scandalmongering, gossip.¹²³ Norms ought to be observed (so he went on) in verbal intercourse between the old and the young, the noble and the non-noble, princes and private persons, the learned and the ignorant, citizens and foreigners, religious and lay people, men and women, and among people conversing within the same family. And in the last book of his treatise he gave an example of civil conversation occurring among the usual group of wellborn guests at the house of signora Caterina Sacca dal Ponte in the city of Casale. Although they do not actually tell stories of the sort we find in Straparola, they certainly use short narratives to illustrate this or that principle which they wish to discuss in their various arguments – as when Cavaliere Bottazzo refers, as an example of astuteness, to a young woman whose husband implored her never to allow herself to be kissed by another, and, remaining ever faithful to that principle, allowed herself nonetheless to be pleased by a lover in every part of her anatomy other than her mouth.

Scipione Bargagli, on the other hand, referred explicitly to storytelling as a "pleasant" parlor game, among others such as "the schoolmaster" and "the music of the devil," which he contrasted with "serious" games like "favors asked between spouses," and "epitaphs." In the game of "novels," which consists of nothing other than the narrating of stories, "one must allow for the narration to be drawn out to some length." To be sure, the procedure of narration he explained in Game 100 was slightly different from the one suggested in the framing tales in Straparola's or anyone else's novel collections. After drawing lots on who would do the narrating, the narrator would assign to each member of the company a name corresponding to one of the elements in the story, which, upon hearing this mentioned, they were supposed to stand up and acknowledge. "If the story is to be the one about the innkeeper's daughter, with that amusing switch of beds, to one [member of the audience] he would give the name of the innkeeper, to another of the innkeeper's wife, to another the name of the cradle, another the bed, and so on."¹²⁴ Game 130 also required the telling of tales, but in a slightly different context. The game was called "how to reacquire the favor of the beloved," and the tales told were to have this as the theme. The more magical or fabulous plots he considered to be "less fine," and therefore best left for telling by "simple girls."¹²⁵

Would Angelica have been engaged in such parlor games, and would her reading of Straparola's work have been somehow associated with this practice? Surely if this was a book to be shared in a company of storytellers, she would have named it on the front, also to ensure that it was not confused with other copies of the same book that may have been circulating among the audience. Indeed, if the book was to be exposed at all to the gaze of persons from outside the precincts of her private spaces, her books and her things, I can imagine the placing of some slight mark on the binding, at least to indicate which book it was: and yet no such mark remains. Instead, the book was bound, presumably as soon as it left the print shop, in bland vellum covers, with no other indications or distractions than those presented by the vellum itself, which in its newness would not even have presented the streaking and occasional blotchiness that we see now. True, books at the time were still few enough in circulation that the vocal designation of "Angelica's book" might have been enough to distinguish the volume in any kind of company. But the placing of the signature in the middle rather than the beginning of the book seems to gesture instead to a private

reading, a private enjoyment, a book belonging to her intimacy rather than to her public persona, whatever that may have been. We may therefore take her appreciation of the work, at least in part, to have been a private appreciation: an individual rapprochement with the subject matter, the personages and the actions of the tales, which she may have discussed with others in a formal setting, but which may also and perhaps mainly, have had a personal dimension.

Unlike the fictive company in Straparola's framing tale, the real personage Angelica is associated with no written reaction to the read material. The only path to her impressions is by way of the text itself. Such an approach is perhaps less outrageous than it appears. Modern reader-response criticism, a 1960s trend whose fashion waxes and wanes, viewed reading experience as a joint meaning-making exercise between a text and a reader. In one version, texts are seen to suggest a horizon of possible readings on the basis of who the reader/interlocutor might be, also taking into account the chronological context of the writing and reading. "The structure of the text sets off a sequence of mental images which lead to the text translating itself into the reader's consciousness. The actual content of these mental images will be colored by the reader's existing stock of experience, which acts as a referential background against which the unfamiliar can be conceived and processed."¹²⁶ Wolfgang Iser goes on: "It is generally recognized that literary texts take on their reality by being read, and this in turn means that texts must already contain certain conditions of actualization that will allow their meaning to be assembled in the responsive mind of the recipient."¹²⁷ He stops short of closely reading the text to derive a profile of the implied reader; but that does not necessarily stop me from attempting this. "The concept of the implied reader is therefore a textual structure anticipating the presence of a recipient without necessarily defining him: this concept pretty structures the role to be assumed by each recipient, and this holds true even when texts deliberately appear to ignore the possible recipient or actively exclude him. Thus the concept of the implied reader designates a network of response inviting structures, which impelled the reader to grasp the text." I won't propose any such elaborate procedure here; nor do I pretend to immerse myself entirely into my subject's mind. However, I find that Straparola's text gives unmistakable clues about what Arcangela might have found there.

If ever she thought of the wider world around her, the book furnished a lesson in geography. Beyond "the fair city of Florence" (9: 6) was to be found "Pisa, one of the noblest cities in Tuscany," (12:2) and further abroad, "Bologna, the chief city of Lombardy, the parent of learning, and a place furnished with everything needful for its high and flourishing estate" (3:2). Famous places were offset by less famous ones, such as "Corneto, a village near Rome, situated in the Patrimony of St. Peter," (8:2) and still further afield, "In the Ligurian Sea... an island called Capraia" (3:1). The remoteness of some was itself a matter of jest. "Above the domain of Piove di Sacco, which is, I need hardly tell you, a territory of Padua, seeing this must be well known to you all, is situated a village called Salmazza" (5:4). Next among the places singled out for brief description came "Verona, noble and ancient city," (11:6) and in the opposite direction, "Naples, a city which is justly celebrated and famous, one abounding in lovely women of virtuous carriage and rich in all good things that the mind can think of" (7:4). The "famous and ancient city of Genoa" (6:1) paled by comparison with its rival Venice, giving the writer an opportunity to salute the domain of his framing tale while rendering due homage to the city of his patrons and publishers. Venice "in abundance of fair women," Angelica would have discovered, "outdoes any other in the world" (8:3). Moreover, "Her walls are the sea and her roof the sky, and though the earth produces nought, there is no scarcity of anything that life in a great city demands" (1:5). To complete her education regarding the uniqueness of "The noble city of Venice" and its particular place among the ideal polities, it is "famed for the integrity of its magistracies, for the justice of its laws, and as being the resort of men from every nation of the world, is seated on the bosom of the Adriatic Sea, and is named the Queen of Cities, the refuge of the unhappy, the asylum of the oppressed."

Beyond Italy were the vague outlines of even more exotic horizons: Spain (9:1), Portugal (4:4), Athens, "the most ancient city of Greece" (4:2). In Tunis, "a stately city on the coast of Africa," there reigned, not long ago, "a famous and powerful king named Dalfreno" (3:2). As the geographical

panorama grows wider, the details fade off into the mythical. Was it entirely by chance that the Pig-King in 2:2 was born in “Anglia” and not, for instance, “France”? The western islands of Europe were noted by many contemporaries as being nearly as strange as the shores of the New World. Sebastian Münster, a German geographer writing around the same time as Straparola, while conceding the beauty of the English women, called them “inhuman and inexpressive”¹²⁸; and although the males’ angel-like faces (Angeli) had given rise to the name of the place (Anglia), in battle they preferred total destruction of the enemy to the gentler custom of pillage. There were “three languages in England, the first and principal one . . . shared by the English and the Scots, who are slightly more civilized than the others.”¹²⁹ Matteo Bandello, Straparola’s rival novelist, singled out King Henry VIII for special invective: “because of a particular appetite of his, he has become very terrible and cruel, and has spilt a great quantity of human blood, having heads chopped off of this one and that one every day, and largely annihilating the nobility of the whole island. He has also had two of his wives decapitated in a very short time.”¹³⁰ Surely this was not the “Pig King” of Anglia (although the original of the story has not yet been identified), but contemporaries’ minds may spontaneously have recurred to such images when they read Straparola, in spite of the Venetian ambassador Daniele Barbaro’s more enthusiastic, but not immediately publicized, reports to the Senate regarding the latter-day softening of English customs.¹³¹

She would have read the stars in Straparola’s text not as bodies existing in space so much as meaningful signs and symbols accompanying and informing the unfolding of life on earth. When she read “Phoebus had already plunged his golden wheels into the salt waves of the Indian ocean, his rays no longer gave light to the world, his horned sister now ruled the universe with her mild beams, and the sparkling stars had spread their fires thickly over the sky,” the focus would have been not on astronomy but on time and narrative.¹³² The whole planetary system is brought to earth in a clever simile:

Through a flowery garden gay,
A red and a white rose run away;
Unwearied ever along they fare,
And sparkle bright beyond compare.
There stands in the midst an oak-tree tall,
From which twelve branches spring and tall ;
And every branch from out its store
Give acorns four, and gives no more. (11:1)¹³³

In this enigma, presented after (but not in relation to) the story of Costantino and his cat, a version of what has come to be known as “Puss ‘n Boots,” the flowers in the garden are taken to mean the stars in the sky. The red and white rose speeding along are, respectively, the sun and the moon, making their revolution around the earth every 24 hours. But the lesson is less about illustrating an Aristo-Ptolemaic cosmos than about suggesting that things in the macrocosm are related to those in the microcosm. The oak tree, explains the text, “is the year, having twelve branches to typify the twelve months” from each of which spring four weeks (acorns). Depending on how careful a reader she was, she would have noticed that the weeks and days will not suffice to fill out the year, and therefore they represent not the twelve months and respective weeks but the twelve signs of the zodiac, among which the red and white rose, sun and moon, will have to pass. Deeper meanings may have eluded her, such as the reference to the four humors or four qualities by way of the four excrescences out of each branch. She was, we imagine, no specialist.

One very obvious reading of Straparola would have been as a kind of guide to worldly wisdom, an overview of the human condition with instructions about behavior. Some of the speeches seem to have been drawn directly from contemporary manuals on amorous gallantry. Consider this speech in 2: 2, by a young scholar to his lady:

Ah! Signora, how great is your beauty; surely it transcends any that has yet met my eye; surely the lady does not live who could ensnare my heart as you have ensnared it. If only I might hope you would give me back the like, I should be the happiest man in the world ; hut it you should prove cruel, you will soon see me lying dead at your feet, and know yourself as the cause of my bane. Seeing that I love you so entirely—and indeed I could do no other thing—you ought to take me for your servant, disposing both of my person and of the little I can call mine as if they were your own. Higher favour from heaven I could not obtain than to find myself subject to such a mistress, who has taken me in the snare of love as if I had been a bird. (2:2)¹³⁴

Now consider a sample letter in Girolamo Parabosco's manual entitled *Amorous letters*:

My Valorous Signora, because naturally anyone attempts to do whatever he can against death, I am forced, after great suffering, to reveal my ardor to Your Ladyship, which bit by bit consumes me, as one can observe by many signs. Nor has this occurred to me by chance or without great hope of being succored by Your Ladyship, who may advise me, since you are something divine and not human, as can be judged by your graces, your virtues and your beauties, such that you cannot fail to imitate God's habits in all things, who not only listens to our anxious prayers, but constantly in every way commands us to pray to Him, saying that He has no other desire than to aid anyone in need of His grace.¹³⁵

Admittedly, the subject matter of Parabosco's fictive entreaty is slightly different, but the sentiment and the structured appeal obey the same syntactic and strategic canons.

Readers reading Straparola and comparing notes about their readings in the light of their actual experiences no doubt had some fun with the presumptuousness as well as the ingenuousness of the young scholar in II,2, and if they knew enough about the literary context would have enjoyed the spoof on the letter-writing tradition. On another occasion the scholar pipes up:

Of a truth, most gracious Signora, there is no need for me to waste words in setting forth how deep and ardent is the love I have for you, and ever shall have, so long as this soul of mine inhabits and rules my unworthy frame. And I would hold myself blest indeed if I could possess you as the lady of my heart and my peculiar mistress. Therefore, loving you as I do, and being wholly; yours, as you may easily understand, I beg you will deign to take me for your most humble servant, seeing that my life and everything I have to live for depends on you and on no other.

That the two speeches in II, 2 were addressed to two different ladies who later meet and play a rude trick on the hypocritical scholar simply underlines the theme regarding truth and deceit, the fictions of the pose, the limits of rhetoric, that should have been part of the general education of any young female as well as male, in a society where courtesy was highly formalized.

The attentive reader, which I am assuming Angelica was, could have learned not only about family and gender roles, but about spaces for maneuver along the boundaries set by law and custom. Reminders about the severity of medieval justice abound. When the eleven-year-old Princess Luciana in 1:1 is found pregnant due to a magic charm, King Luciano orders an inquisition to discover and punish the father and thinks credibly to have her killed at once. But when she and the supposed perpetrator are thrown to the fishes, she is magically saved and devises a bold stratagem for rebuking the King. Good women in these stories ordinarily obey their husbands without question, Angelica would read; but when Genobbia, wife of Raimondo in 4:4, obediently decked herself out in her finest raiment for high mass on successive days at the cathedral as part of some plot he was hatching, she did so only "because his command fell in well with her desires" to look around for a better mate.¹³⁶ Her husband would soon discover that those who mistreated or ignored their wives could expect them to be borne off by rivals. Nor in general did women passively submit to austerities imposed by male-dominated home economics. The Devil in 2: 4, masquerading as a husband, complains about his earthly wife's spendthriftiness, commenting "I'd rather be in the dark abysses of hell than where she lives."¹³⁷ She complains, "my clothes are all in the old style, and

no longer like those the others wear."¹³⁸ Her wish, of course, is to be compensated by things where other satisfactions have been so scarce.

But maybe the main message would have been about the education of the senses, the training of the sentiments, even the freedom to feel. Perhaps Angelica too, like the personages in the stories, knew "how great is the power of love, and how sharp are the arrows he is wont to shoot into our corruptible flesh" (1:4).¹³⁹ And perhaps her eyes feasted greedily on accounts such as the one in 3:5, where Isotta, "without saying another word . . . tucked up her sleeves as far as her elbows, thus laying bare her fair, wanton, well-rounded arms, which shone out as white as snow, and set to work with a will to help Travaglino to make his cheese, letting him now and again get a peep at her swelling bosom, where he might also see her breasts, which seemed as round and firm as two fair globes. And, besides this, she artfully brought her own rosy cheek mighty close to Travaglino's face, so that occasionally one touched the other."¹⁴⁰ What would come next, she may have wondered, eagerly waiting for the fair or foul conclusion to such amorous transports. And yet, she would have noted the profound distress in 2:5 that could accompany any sentimental yearnings: "Love rarely accords a happy issue to the enterprises it inflames us to undertake."¹⁴¹ Indeed, "there would be in all the world no condition more sweet, more delightful, or more happy than the service of love, were it not for that bitter fruit which springs from sudden jealousy, the foe which drives away gentle Cupid, the betrayer of kindly ladies, the foe who day and night tries to compass their death" (4:2).¹⁴² Perhaps she, too, would have concluded, with the princess Meldina (2:1), that "There are three wise sayings, gracious lady, which I remember to have heard. The first is that it is folly to waste time in searching for that which cannot be found. The second is that we should believe nothing we may hear, except those things which bear the marks of sense and reason. The third is that, when once you have got possession of some rare and precious treasure, prize it well and keep a firm hold upon it."¹⁴³

One final question about Angelica remains, regarding the possible effect her reading may have had on her behavior, her thinking, her experience, her life. In pondering it I am brought back to the trials of culture in an age of censorship. Perhaps at no other time before or since, has imaginative literature been thought to affect people's minds so profoundly. True, one of the most moving accounts of reading in all of literature we find already in Dante, writing nearly three hundred years earlier, who dramatized the irresistible allure of the chivalric romances in his account of Paolo and Francesca, as told by the latter:

One day we read for pastime how in thrall
Lord Lancelot lay to love, who loved the Queen;
We were alone—we thought no harm at all.

As we read on, our eyes met now and then,
And to our cheeks the changing color started
But just one moment overcame us—when,

We read of the smile, desired of lips long-thwarted,
Such a smile, by such a lover kissed away,
He that may never more from me be parted.

*(Inferno 3: 127-135)*¹⁴⁴

We may justly say that Dante, through Francesca, has described the seductive power of reading that Roland Barthes theorized not only by reference to the "fetishistic" thrill of the vowels and plosives in our mouths, but also the "image of delectation" concocted by the gradual discovery of what, also for reasons of prudence, is hidden from us. In the event, of course, Francesca and Paolo rejoin one another not in an earthly paradise but in the second circle of hell, inhabited by the lustful. Such possibilities terrified moralists and theologians during the time when Angelica was reading, and attempts were made to stem the promiscuous production and diffusion of literature that threatened to corrupt the young and encourage defection from the right ways of Christianity. Angelica too may

have been terrified; but I assume, she did not desist, at least, not from the reading. After the first crisis of the Counter Reformation, and possibly after Angelica had left the scene, the theme of reading, mind, and body comes back in Cervantes, whose hero's head is so impregnated with the fanciful love literature of his youth that he imagines himself to be living in the world of his books. Life and literature are bizarrely intertwined in the attempt he makes to craft a correspondence between the read and the real. Perhaps Angelica longed for the love of her life to appear in the form of a gallant suitor who would take her away to an enchanted world where they might live in perpetual delight, but was wise enough to know and accept the difference between the possible and the impossible, the reality and the dream.

In modern Western societies books are mostly no longer viewed as dangerous, or at least, not in the same way. Censorship has by no means disappeared, as indeed, a Censorship of Publications Board still exists in the country where I write. Tales of books being removed from library shelves or from high school syllabi are largely met with derision, although this does not prevent judges, school boards and interest groups from invoking their powers of control. The discussion over controls on the distribution of content has shifted to such themes as the prevention of online property theft and the child-proofing of home computers. The Aristotelian rallying-cry of the Renaissance about the "natural desire of humankind to know," reflected and refracted in the modern discussion about open information, open access, open data, is subjected to legal, political and moral conditions to prevent infringement on other freedoms or simply to remind about the structure of authority in the technocratic state.

Has the Internet killed the book? Much of the research for this study was carried out using online sources. Certainly the modern publishing industry is still learning to adjust to fundamental changes in marketing, availability and readership. As I contemplate my broken book I wonder what significance it might have in its present context, as an object on the shelves of a 21st century scholar or in a seminar on book history. Apart from the story it tells regarding sixteenth-century literature and life, it also tells a story about the history of communications technology that ends here and now. I acknowledge that material objects which have survived from the past to the present have done so due to very particular circumstances. My book has passed through many hands, but not so many as to go missing without a trace. It was obviously abused, but not so much as to annihilate it as happened to so many other books that existed in its time but are no more. I wonder whether any modern book would be robust enough to last 443 years. Even accounting for the improvements in wood pulp paper manufacturing after the disastrous late nineteenth-century experiments with high-alum content sizings that are eating away at the paper of many books in our libraries even as I write, I wonder whether the paper of many of the recent volumes on my shelves will stand up as well as the rag-paper pages of my copy of *Straparola*. Its binding is gone, but the vellum covers still protect it, unlike dozens of paperback trade books I have which at some stage cracked down the middle and now stand as two half-books. Tough as it is, dented, battle-worn, so to speak, perhaps battle-weary, it maintains its dignity and yet it bespeaks stress, it evidences decay, it reminds me of the frailty of all books. My broken book to me means something more than the words and signs inside it: it means the crisis and ultimate evanescence of a form of knowledge distribution that has been with us since the advent of printing and which one day, perhaps not far off, will be replaced. I will keep it for as long as I can; but after that, who knows?

I realize that I have left many stones in this inquiry still unturned. But it is time to bring together at least some of the disparate themes. I began with Robert K. Merton's insight about accidental discovery, and I made a case for knowledge accumulation along an itinerary whose (not entirely) unexpected twists and turns appeared in view only as new insights suggested new questions. Merton argues that knowledge in the "humanities" is "less systematic" than in the sciences – not that it is more prone to serendipity, but that somehow research and results are less rigidly structured. Philosophers of science have disagreed about just how "structured" scientific knowledge actually is. Herbert Butterfield, for instance, considered the hypothetico-deductive model of structured research to be the greatest of all human accomplishments, bar none.¹⁴⁵

Nonetheless, statements claiming that “the world is orderly, and can be explained by a small number of natural laws”¹⁴⁶ (Edward O. Wilson) do not necessarily stand in contradiction to the notion that “science is an anarchic enterprise”¹⁴⁷ (Paul Feyerabend). Science as a well-organized body of knowledge may be the product and object of a widely diverse set of practices, not all of which (so Richard P. Feynman noted in his Nobel address) form part of the rhetoric of the standard scientific paper. Setting aside the yet unfulfilled dream of a unified approach to all inquiry, just how “unstructured” is humanities knowledge? Merton reverted to a simile suggested by Derek Price. The progressive accumulation in natural science was like knitting, or maybe more like spinning, joining each previous thread in the fabric up with the next in a more or less vast orderly scheme. Humanities knowledge by contrast was more like a random network, with the bits only loosely connected one to another.¹⁴⁸ Admittedly, the concept Merton sought to explain, of new science forever chasing out the old, while literary and historiographical classics are still well-used, does not perfectly suit the illustration. Sometimes in the humanities the disputes themselves, regarding classifications, definitions, methods, approaches, going back and forward in time, drawing from the authors of classic works of criticism or attempting to stand on their shoulders to see some other part of the landscape (“on the shoulders of giants,” repeated Merton, citing Isaac Newton), are part and parcel of the knowledge that the humanities disciplines sustain. Perhaps in a sense, the humanities were transdisciplinary from start, by the need to justify their knowledge-claims to one to another in the struggle for survival. The same urge to self-explanation suggests a form of exposition where the processes of discovery and analysis, the work behind the scenes, the mode of research as well as the research made, belong as much to the results as do any definitive conclusions.

Years later I returned to the junk shop where I made the unexpected discovery that gave rise to this research. I retraced my steps along Piazza dei Ciompi to the exact spot only to find an unfamiliar storefront. There was no assortment of curious items visible through the window, pieces of furniture, vases, hat stands. The previous business had been replaced by another, dealing in fine paintings. Neighbors informed that the shopkeeper I had known had sold out and would not be returning to this or any other kind of shop. A portion of the material instruments on which my inquiry depended was now gone, leaving only my memories and conclusions. No other seekers would be allowed to travel exactly the same route as I had. There would be other junk shops and other finds, perhaps other kindly figures well disposed to indulge the collector’s peculiar taste. But by definition, a serendipitous event is a one off; it cannot be reproduced in a laboratory or anywhere else. Like the events recounted in any history, it occurs only once and then it is gone. And if we don’t catch it when it comes our way, we may get another chance – but it won’t ever be the same.

¹ *Peregrinaggio di tre giovani figliuoli del re di Serendippo* (Venice: Michele Tramezzino, 1557); English version, *The Travels and Adventures of Three Princes of Sarendip, translated from the Persian into French, and from thence done into English* (London: for Will. Chetwode 1722).

² Letter to Mann, 28 January 1754, in *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, ed. W. S. Lewis (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1937–1983), vol. 20, pp. 407–411.

³ Robert K Merton and Elinor Barber, *The Travels and Adventures of Serendipity. A Study in Sociological Semantics and the Sociology of Science* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), Chap. 1.

⁴ Merton and Barber, *The Travels and Adventures*, p. 18. I compared this to Albert Einstein's account in his article about induction and deduction in physics: "Induction and Deduction in Physics," *The Collected Papers of Albert Einstein*, Translation Volume 7 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 108-9, from Berliner Tageblatt, 25 December 1919, p. [1] of 4. Beiblatt. 25 December 1919

⁵ Forty years ago "Forgotten Centuries" aptly summed up the state of research on the late sixteenth through eighteenth centuries of Florentine history (Eric Cochrane, *Florence in the Forgotten Centuries, 1527-1800; a History of Florence and the Florentines in the Age of the Grand Dukes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973). No longer. Already in 1990 I accounted for the considerable amount that had been done in "Revisiting the Forgotten Centuries: Recent Work on Early Modern Tuscany: Historiographical Essay," *European History Quarterly* 20 (1990): 519-550. Since then, the bibliography has continued to grow, and for a relatively recent appraisal, I consulted R. Burr Litchfield, *Florence Ducal Capital, 1530-1630* (New York: ACLS Humanities E-Book, 2008).

⁶ An introduction to what is known about Straparola is Ruth B. Bottigheimer, *Fairy Godfather: Straparola, Venice, and the Fairy Tale Tradition* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002). In addition, see the introduction by Donald Beecher to the modern edition of *The Pleasant Nights*, 2 vols. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), Volume 1.

⁷ I translate from the original text reported in B. Bottigheimer, *Fairy Godfather*, p. 135.

⁸ I translate from the text in Giuseppe Rua, *Tra antiche fiabe e novelle. I. Le "Piacevoli notti" di messer Gian Francesco Straparola* (Roma: E. Loescher, 1898), p. 139.

⁹ Giuseppe Rua, *Tra antiche fiabe*, p. 137, my translation.

¹⁰ *An Anthology of Italian Poems 13th-19th Century selected and translated by Lorna de' Lucchi* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1922), p. 85.

¹¹ Giuseppe Rua, *Tra antiche fiabe*, p. 137, my translation.

¹² Concerning this work I examined the useful study by Bette Talvacchia, *Taking Positions: On the Erotic in Renaissance Culture* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999).

¹³ The translation is from Talvacchia, *Taking Positions*, p. 211.

¹⁴ *On the Misery of the Human Condition. De miseria humane conditionis*, Donald R. Howard, ed., translated by Margaret Mary Dietz (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), p. 6.

¹⁵ *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, eds. Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller; John Herman Randall, Jr.; et al (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1956), p. 223.

¹⁶ Pietro Bembo, *Prose della volgar lingua, Gli Asolani, Rime*, ed. Carlo Dionisotti, I classici italiani TEA (Milan: Tascabili Editori Associati, 1989), *Asolani*, bk. 2, chap. 21: "Perciò che ogni cosa naturale è buona, Amore, come quello che natural cosa è, buono eziandio è sempre, né può reo essere in alcuna maniera giamai."

¹⁷ *Ibid.*: "Ma passiamo, se vi piace, alla dolcezza d'Amore. Quantunque, o donne, grandissimo incarico è questo per certo, a volere con parole assequire la dimostrazione di quella cosa che, quale sia e quanta, si sente più agevolmente che non si dice. Perciò che sì come il dipintore bene potrà come che sia la bianchezza dipignere delle nevi, ma la freddezza non mai, sì come cosa il giudizio della quale, al tatto solamente concesso, sotto l'occhio non viene, a cui servono le pitture, similmente ho io testé quanto sia il giovamento d'Amore dimostrarvi pure in qualche parte potuto, ma le dolcezze che cadono in ogni senso e, come sorgevole fontana assai più ancora che questa nostra non è, sopraabondano in tutti loro, non possono nell'orecchio solo, per molto che noi ne parliamo, in alcuna guisa capere."

¹⁸ I took account of the introduction by Sylvia Ferino-contribv to *Late Titian and the Sensuality of Painting*, ed. Sylvia Ferino-Pagden (Venice : Marsilio, 2008), pp. 15-28, as well as the chapter by Fernando Checa, "Titian'[s Mythological Inventions and Poesie," pp. 187-93.

¹⁹ Boccaccio's framing tale has been the object of intense study and controversy; for a basic introduction I looked to Thomas J. Stillinger, in Elissa Weaver, ed., *The Decameron First Day in Perspective: Volume One of the Lecturae Boccaccii*(Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), pp. 29-58. Also, Lucia Marino, *The Decameron "Cornice": Allusion, Allegory, and Iconology* (Ravenna: Longo, 1979); Luigi Surdich, *La cornice di amore: studi sul Boccaccio* (ETS Editrice, 1987),

²⁰ For what follows I rely on the Introduction to Giuseppe Rua's edition, *Le piacevoli notti*, vol. 1 (Bologna : Romagnoli-Dall'Acqua, 1899).

²¹ Concerning this whole matter, apart from the studies mentioned below, I drew from Marziano Guglielminetti, *La cornice e il furto : studi sulla novella del '500* (Milan: Zanichelli, 1984), especially pp. 79-99.

²² The equivocation is mentioned in Gianni Villani, "Da Morlini a Straparola: Problemi di Traduzione e Problemi del Testo," *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 159 (1982): 70.

²³ Giuseppe Rua's edition, *Le piacevoli notti*, vol. 2 (1908), p. 254.

²⁴ Charlton Thomas Lewis and Charles Short, *A New Latin Dictionary* (New York: Harper's, 1882), p. 1236

²⁵ Egidio Forcellini, *Totius latinitatis lexicon*, Volume 4 (Prato: Aldiniano, 1848), p. 343.

²⁶ I referred to the entry by Franco Pignatti in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani - Volume 77* (2012).

²⁷ John Florio, *A Worlde of Wordes*, ed. Hermann W. Haller (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), s.v.

²⁸ Beecher, ed., *The Pleasant Nights*, vol. 2, p. 559.

²⁹ Beecher, ed., *The Pleasant Nights*, vol. 2, p. 570.

³⁰ Massimo Danzi, *La biblioteca del Cardinal Pietro Bembo* (Geneva: Droz, 2005) p. 108.

³¹ Beecher, ed., *The Pleasant Nights*, vol. 2, p. 3.

³² Concerning the practices of authorship I found useful the overview by G. W. Pigman III, "Versions of Imitation in the Renaissance," *Renaissance Quarterly* 33 (Spring, 1980): 1-32; more recently, on Renaissance authorship in general, I consulted Hall Bjørnstad, ed. *Borrowed Feathers: Plagiarism and the Limits of Imitation in Early Modern Europe* (Oslo: Oslo Academic Press, 2008).

³³ Beecher, ed., *The Pleasant Nights*, vol. 1, pp. 38-64, exploring the sometimes intense controversy regarding these issues, including, on the side of the originality of the "fairy tale" genre in S. , Ruth Bottigheimer's book, *Fairy Godfather*, and on the side of the popular and folk origins of S.'s tales, Jack Zipes, *The Irresistible Fairy Tale : the Cultural and Social History of a Genre* (Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, 2012), esp. pp. 157-74; Jan Ziolkowski, "Straparola and the Fairy Tale: Between Literary and Oral Traditions," *Journal of American Folklore* 123 (2010):377-397; Francisco Vaz da Silva. 2010. The Invention of Fairy Tales," *Journal of American Folklore* 123 (2010): 398-425; Dan Ben-Amos "Straparola: The Revolution That Was Not," *Journal of American Folklore* 123 (2010): 426-446. Ruth Bottigheimer responds in "Fairy Godfather, Fairy-Tale History, and Fairy-Tale Scholarship: A Response to Dan Ben-Amos, Jan M. Ziolkowski, and Francisco Vaz da Silva," *Journal of American Folklore* 123 (2010).

³⁴ Not without helpful guides: Vittore Branca, *Boccaccio medievale e nuovi studi sul Decameron* (Florence, Sansoni, 1981); *Lessico critico decameroniano*, ed. R. Bragantini and P. M. Forni (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1995); E.Menetti *Il Decameron fantastico* (Bologna: Clueb, 1994); Giorgio Padoan, *Il Boccaccio, le Muse, il Parnaso e l'Arno* (Florence: Olschki, 1978); Pier Massimo Forni, *Adventures in Speech : Rhetoric and Narration in Boccaccio's Decameron* (Philadelphia : University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996).

³⁵ Johann Fischarts, *Geschichtklitterung (Gargantua)*, ed. A. Alsleben (Halle: Niemeyer, 1891), p. 6.

³⁶ On this theme, I consulted the essays by Frantšek Graus, Albrecht Classen and Sylvana Seidel Menchi in Peter A. Dykema and Heiko Augustinus Oberman, eds., *Anticlericalism In Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Leyden: Brill, 1993).

³⁷ *The Nights of Straparola*, tr. W. G. Waters (London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1894), 2: 155.

³⁸ Index Auctorum et Librorum (Rome: Ex Officina Saluiana, 1559): "Boccatij Decades, seu Nouellæ centum. quæ hactenus cum in- tollerabilibus erroribus ipressæ sunt, & quæ in posterm cum eisdem erroribus imprimentur."

³⁹ Rua, ed., *Le piacevoli notti*, 2: 273.

⁴⁰ An example of his other work: *Italian sculptors* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1911).

⁴¹ Adriano Prosperi, "Censurare le favole. Il protoromanzo e l'Europa cattolica," *Il romanzo*, ed. Franco Moretti, vol. I: *La cultura del romanzo* (Turin: Einaudi, 2001), pp. 71-106, esp. 73.

⁴² Henry Joseph Schroeder, ed., *Canons and decrees of the Council of Trent* (St. Louis, Mo., London: B. Herder Book Co., 1941), p. 275.

- ⁴³ Jesus Martinez de Bujanda, Claude Sutto, et al, *Index de Rome, 1590, 1593, 1596: avec étude des index de Parme, 1580 - de Munich, 1582 et de Rome, 1590* (Quebec : Centre D'etudes de la Renaissance, 1994), pp. 39-40
- ⁴⁴ Concerning the indexes I follow Gigliola Fragnito, *Proibito capire : la Chiesa e il volgare nella prima età moderna* (Bologna : Il mulino, 2005), chap. 1.
- ⁴⁵ For what follows, *Fingerprints = Empreintes = Impronte* (Institut de Recherche et d'Histoire des Textes in association with the National Library of Scotland: 1984).
- ⁴⁶ Entry "Farri, Domenico" by Mario Infelise, *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* .
- ⁴⁷ Florence, Archivio di Stato, Magistrato della Grascia, reg. 193, Mar 27 1589.
- ⁴⁸ http://www.stg.brown.edu/projects/catasto/newsearch/first_names.html
- ⁴⁹ Florence, Santa Maria del Fiore, Archivio dell'Opera, reg. 2, fol. 14r.
- ⁵⁰ Florence, Santa Maria del Fiore, Archivio dell'Opera, reg. 230, fols. 2v, 3r-v.
- ⁵¹ Florence, Santa Maria del Fiore, Archivio dell'Opera, reg. 230, fol. 14r.
- ⁵² Florence, Santa Maria del Fiore, Archivio dell'Opera, reg. 232, fol. 15v.
- ⁵³ Florence, Santa Maria del Fiore, Archivio dell'Opera, reg. 230, fols. 1r, 2r-v, 4r, 5v, 6r.
- ⁵⁴ *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* 65 (2005), entry by Luca Bortolotti.
- ⁵⁵ Steven D Levitt and Stephen J Dubner, *Freakonomics : A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), pp. 201-4
- ⁵⁶ Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, "Le Nom 'refait'," *L'Homme* 20 n°4 (1980): 77-104.
- ⁵⁷ I draw here upon Francesco Zazzera, *Della nobiltà dell'Italia parte prima* (Naples: Gargano & Nucci, 1615), pp. 200-201. Concerning what follows, I am especially indebted to Bruno Migliorini, *Dal nome proprio al nome comune* (Florence: Olschki, 1968, repr. of 1927 ed.), Part 1.
- ⁵⁸ Florence, Archivio di Stato, Decima granducale, reg. 3620, fol. 399v: "Pier Cammillo di Filippo Baldacchini, di Cortona, di nuovo messo a gravezza per la città per grazia di S. A. S. d. adi 30 maggio 1654 (scudi) 2 imposteli sopra la Testa no. 36."
- ⁵⁹ Eugenio Gamurrini, *Istoria genealogica delle famiglie nobili Toscane et Umbre*, vol. 2 (Florence: Onofri, 1671), pp. 263-7.
- ⁶⁰ The first notice I had of this association was in Florence, Archivio di Stato, Ceramelli Papiani fascicle 283.
- ⁶¹ Giammaria Mazzuchelli, *Gli scrittori d'Italia*, vol. 2 pt. 3 (Brescia: Bossini, 1758), p. 93.
- ⁶² *Prothocinio, nel quale si contiene stato d'amore, prieghi d'amore, sospetto d'amore....* (Perugia: Francesco Cartolaio, 1525).
- ⁶³ Alain Corbin, *The Life of an Unknown : the Rediscovered World of a Clog Maker in Nineteenth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), translated by Arthur Goldhammer from the original, - : *sur les traces d'un inconnu, 1798-1876* (Paris: Flammarion, 1998).
- ⁶⁴ John M. Najemy, *Corporatism and Consensus in Florentine Electoral Politics, 1280-1400* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982).
- ⁶⁵ François Furet, Jacques Ozouf, *Reading and Writing: Literacy in France from Calvin to Jules Ferry* (Cambridge University Press, 1982).
- ⁶⁶ I was inspired here by certain remarks by Jack Goody in *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 8-10, 15-17.
- ⁶⁷ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), chap. 12.
- ⁶⁸ *Del buon segretario* (Rome: Faciotto, 1594), bk. 2, chap. 1, p. 35.
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, bk. 1 chap 9, p. 30.
- ⁷⁰ *La vera arte de lo eccellente scrivere de diverse varie sorti de lettere* (Venice: per Giouanniantonio & i fratelli da Sabbio, 1530), mentioned in Paul Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy. Literacy and Learning 1300-1600* (Baltimore: Hopkins, 1989), p. 325; I also consulted Anne Jacobson Schutte, "Teaching Adults to Read in Sixteenth-Century Venice: Giovanni Antonio Tagliente's Libro Maistrevole," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 17, No. 1 (Spring, 1986): 3-16.
- ⁷¹ Grendler, p. 327, quoting Domenico Manzoni, "Dell'alfabeto doppio come deve esser fatto et ordinato," appended to his *Libro mercantile ordinato col suo giornale e alfabeto* (Venice: Comin da Trino, 1564)
- ⁷² Camillo Baldi, *Trattato come de una lettera missiva si conoscano la natura e qualita dello scrittore* (Milan: Bidelli, 1625). I am referring to chapter 5, p. 16.
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*, chap. 1, p. 5.
- ⁷⁴ Cesare Lombroso, *Grafologia* (Milano: U. Hoepli, 1895), p. 11.
- ⁷⁵ Lombroso, *Grafologia*, p. 176.
- ⁷⁶ Lombroso, *Grafologia*, p. 196

⁷⁷ Lombroso, *Grafologia*, p. 177

⁷⁸ Lombroso, *Grafologia*, p. 43.

⁷⁹ Lombroso, *Grafologia*, p. 30

⁸⁰ Lombroso, *Grafologia*, p. 74

⁸¹ ; Bartolommeo Dionigi; Girolamo Brusoni; Theodoro Thesseri, *Selva di varia lettione* (Venetia : Prodocimo, 1682), third part, p. 67.

⁸² Francesco Ascoli, *Dalla cancelleresca all'inglese. L'avventura della calligrafia in Italia dal Cinquecento ad oggi* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2012), chap. 1.

⁸³ Rhiannon Daniels, *Boccaccio and the Book: Production and Reading in Italy 1340 – 1520* (London : Legenda, 2009), p. 89.

⁸⁴ Consider Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, ms. Laurenziano XCl. inf. 2 :56: Mcccclxvi // Questo libro si è di Fruosino di Lodovicho di Ciecie da Pragnio / et di sua mano et scritto del mese di febbraio et di marzo 1466 / e tratta di tutte le chanzone et sonetti e ballate e madriale / del famosissimo poeta messer Franciescho Petrarcha poeta / fiorentino et choxi anchora ci è scritto tutta la vita sua / e detto libro si chiama et è titolato Canzoniere di messer Franciescho. I found this noted in Paola Vecchi Galli, "Onomastica petrarchesca. Per *Il canzoniere*," *Italique* 8 (2005): 27-44, parag. 26.

⁸⁵ This expression is in *La navigazione di San Brandano*, ed. Maria Antonietta Grignani and Carla Sanfilippo (Milan: Bompiani: 1975)

⁸⁶ Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, *I Codici Palatini della R. Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze*, Vol. II (Florence-Rome: Tipografia dei Fratelli Bencini, 1890), p. 16.

⁸⁷ St. Catherine of Siena, *The Dialogue of the Serafic Virgin Catherine of Siena*, tr. Algar Thorold (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1907), 3:30, *A Treatise of Prayer: Of the difference between the death of a just man and that of a sinner, and first of the death of the just man.*

⁸⁸ William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature : Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), chap. 8.

⁸⁹ *Decameron*, tr. George Henry McWilliam (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), Proem, parags. 9-11.

⁹⁰ G. L. Passerini, ed., *Le vite di Dante scritte da Giovanni e Filippo Villani, da Giovanni Boccaccio, Leonardo Aretino e Giannozzo Manetti* (Florence: Sansoni, 1917), p. 24.

⁹¹ I. Palumbo-Fossati, "Livres et lecteurs dans la Venise du xvie siècle," *Revue française d'histoire du livre* n°49 (1985): 482-513. Concerning this whole issue I drew much from Xenia von Tippelskirch, *Sotto controllo: Letture femminili in Italia nella prima età moderna* (Rome: Viella, 2011) especially chap. 2.

⁹² Laura Minel, *Libri e lettori a Treviso (1550-1630)*, tesi di laurea, Università degli Studi di Venezia, 1997, relatore Mario Infelise.

⁹³ Von Tippelskirch, *Sotto controllo*, p. 47, exhumes this data from Christian Bec, *Les livres des Florentins : 1413-1608* (Florence: L.S. Olschki, 1984), Appendix. In addition, I learned from Leandro Perini "Libri e lettori nella Toscana del Cinquecento," in *Firenze e la Toscana dei Medici nell'Europa del Cinquecento* (Florence: Olschki, 1983), I: 109-31.

⁹⁴ The document is extracted in Bec, *Les livres des florentins*, p. 246.

⁹⁵ Leandro Perini, "Contributo alla ricostruzione della biblioteca privata dei granduchi di Toscana nel XVI secolo," *Studi di storia medievale e moderna per Ernesto Sestan* (Firenze : Leo S. Olschki, 1980), pp. 571-668. The library list is in Florence, Archivio di Stato, Guardaroba medicea, 28.

⁹⁶ G. Henningsten and John Tedeschi, *The Inquisition in Early Modern Europe* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois Univ. Press, 1986), p. 131: "If the Roman Holy Office was a victim of Napoleonic looting, other important provincial Inquisitions, in Florence, Milan, or Palermo, were victims of Jacobin riots or suppression of the religious establishments which housed them. The consequence was the large-scale destruction or disappearance of their records." I also consulted Modesto Rastrelli, *Fatti attinenti all'Inquisizione e sua istoria generale e particolare di Toscana* (Florence: Anton Giuseppe Pagani, 1782).

⁹⁷ These episodes are noted in Von Tippelskirch, *Sotto controllo*, pp. 106-109; concerning the Beneficio di Cristo I was particularly informed by Adriano Prosperi and Carlo Ginzburg, *Giochi di pazienza : un seminario sul Beneficio di Cristo* (Turin: G. Einaudi, 1975); while keeping in mind Philip McNair, "Benedetto da Mantova, Marcantonio Flaminio, and the "Beneficio di Cristo": A Developing Twentieth-Century Debate Reviewed," *The Modern Language Review* 82, No. 3 (1987): 614-624.

⁹⁸ Among the many studies on marginalia I was particularly illuminated by Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton, "'Studied for Action': How Gabriel Harvey Read his Livy," *Past and Present* no. 129 (Nov. 1990): 31-78.

⁹⁹ Concerning the role of books in seduction I was informed by Von Tippelskirch, *Sotto controllo*, ch. 6.

¹⁰⁰ My information here derives from R. Burr Litchfield, *Florence, Ducal Capital, 1530-1630* (ACLS Humanities E-Book, 2008), p. 230.

¹⁰¹ Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, tr. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 40-1.

¹⁰² *Discorso sopra tutti li primi canti d'Orlando Furioso* (Venice: Giolito, 1549-50). Concerning this and the following examples I was prompted by Axel Erdmann, *My Gracious Silence: Women in the Mirror of Sixteenth-Century Printing in Western Europe* (Lucerne: Gilhofer and Ranschburg, 1999), pp. 206-223.

¹⁰³ In *Primo libro de diversi eccellent.mi autori a quattro voci, intitolato Il Desiderio* (Venice: Scotto, 1566).

¹⁰⁴ *Lettere spirituali. Vita della medesima raccolta da Gio. Battista Fontana de' Conti* (Rome: Aedibus Populi Romani, 1576).

¹⁰⁵ *The Letters of Machiavelli: A Selection of His Letters* ed. and tr. Allan H. Gilbert (Capricorn Books, 1961), p. 142.

¹⁰⁶ Jesper Svenbro, *Phrasikleia: An Anthropology of Reading in Ancient Greece*, tr. Janet Lloyd (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), chaps. 1-3.

¹⁰⁷ I find the episode analyzed from a different perspective by Sebastian De Grazia in *Machiavelli in Hell* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), chap. 10.

¹⁰⁸ I consulted the *Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, ed. Jill Kraye (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), where I found the chapters by Anthony Grafton and Michael D. Reeve particularly relevant; concerning retention, I have been inspired by Ann Blair, *Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information Before the Modern Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), especially chap. 1.

¹⁰⁹ Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 224; also, Rolf Engelsing, *Der Bürger als Leser. Lesergeschichte in Deutschland, 1500-1800* (Stuttgart, 1974); and D. Hall, "Introduction: The Uses of Literacy in New England, 1600-1850," in W. Joyce et al., eds., *Printing and Society in Early Modern America* (Worcester: 1983), pp. 1-47.

¹¹⁰ *Seniles xvii: 3*, translated in H. Robinson and E.H. Rolfe, *Petrarch: The First Modern Scholar and Man of Letters* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1909), p. 191.

¹¹¹ Robert Darnton takes Kevin Sharpe to task on this aspect, in *A Case for Books: Past, Present, Future* (New York, NY: PublicAffairs, 2009), chap. 10. Sharpe's conclusions were in *Reading Revolutions: The Politics of Reading in Early Modern England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

¹¹² Stanislas Dehaene, *Reading in the Brain: The New Science of How We Read* (New York: Penguin, 2010), chap. 1.

¹¹³ Henri-Jean Martin, *The History and Power of Writing*, tr. Lydia Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 68; in addition, I consulted Paul Saenger, *Space Between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), chap. 1 and here and below, I used Elspeth Jajdelska, *Silent Reading and the Birth of the Narrator* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), pp. 3-20.

¹¹⁴ *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Routledge, 1982), p. 119.

¹¹⁵ Carlo Di Stefano, *La censura teatrale in Italia: 1600-1962* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1964), chap. 1

¹¹⁶ *The History of the Inquisition*, tr. Robert Gentilis (London: J. Okes, 1639), p. 106-7. On this and other aspects concerning Sarpi I follow Mario Infelise, *I libri proibiti da Gutenberg all'Encyclopédie* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2007); as well as Idem, "L'immagine dell'Inquisizione tra Sarpi e libertinismo," *Studia Borromica* 23 (2009): 313-326.

¹¹⁷ Di Stefano, *Censura teatrale*, chaps 2 and 3; as well as Anne Etienne, et al., *Theatre Censorship: From Walpole to Wilson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

¹¹⁸ J. M. Nash, "To finde the Mindes construction in the Face," *Vermeer Studies*, ed. Ivan Gaskell and Michiel Jonker (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 61

¹¹⁹ Rua, ed., *Le piacevoli notti*, I, pp. 22-23

¹²⁰ Rua, ed., *Le piacevoli notti*, I, p. 67

¹²¹ Rua, ed., *Le piacevoli notti*, I, p. 94.

¹²² Stefano Guazzo, *La civil conversatione: divisa en quattro libri* (Brescia: Tomaso Bozzola, 1574), p. 13r

¹²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 28v and ff.

¹²⁴ Scipione Bargagli, *Dialogo de' giuochi che nelle vegghie sanesi si usano di fare* (Venice: 1574), pp. 139-40

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, page misumbered 274 in this edition.

¹²⁶ Wolfgang Iser *The Act of Reading: a Theory of Aesthetic Response* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 38

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 34

¹²⁸ Sebastian Muenster, *Cosmographie universelle* (Basel, Henri Petri, 1556), p. 53

¹²⁹ Muenster, *Cosmographie*, p. 52

¹³⁰ Matteo Bandello, *La terza parte de le Novelle del Bandello* (Lucca: Busdrago, 1554), Novella LIX: "Morte miserabile di dui amanti, essendo lor vietato di sposarsi da Enrico ottavo re d'Inghilterra." "Devete sapere che questo, che oggidí è re de l'isola de l'Inghilterra ed Enrico ottavo si noma, per qualche suo appetito è divenuto molto terribile e crudele ed ha sparso grandissimo sangue umano, facendo ogni dí mozzar il capo a questi e a quelli, e per la maggior parte annullando la nobiltá di tutta l'isola. Ha anco fatto decapitare due de le sue mogli in poco spazio di tempo."

¹³¹ La Relazione d'Inghilterra di Daniel Barbaro ambasciatore ordinario (1551), in Luigi Firpo, ed., *Relazioni di Ambasciatori Veneti al Senato. Tratte dalle migliori edizioni disponibili e ordinate cronologicamente*, vol. I (Turin: Bottega d'Erasmus, 1965), pp. 237-286.

¹³² Waters, tr., *The Nights of Straparola*, vol. I, p. 57.

¹³³ Waters, tr., *The Nights of Straparola*, vol. II, p. 213.

¹³⁴ Waters, tr., *The Nights of Straparola*, vol. I: 66.

¹³⁵ *Lettere amoroze di M. Girolamo Parabosco* (Venice: appresso Gabriel Giolito de Ferrari, 1545), fol. 4r.

¹³⁶ Waters, tr., *The Nights of Straparola*, vol. 1, p. 200.

¹³⁷ Rua, ed., *Le piacevoli notti*, I, p. 113.

¹³⁸ Rua, ed., *Le piacevoli notti*, I, p. 108.

¹³⁹ Waters, tr., *The Nights of Straparola*, vol. 1, p. 35.

¹⁴⁰ Waters, tr., *The Nights of Straparola*, vol. 1, p. 156.

¹⁴¹ Waters, tr., *The Nights of Straparola*, vol. 1, p. 91.

¹⁴² Waters, tr., *The Nights of Straparola*, vol. 1, p. 179.

¹⁴³ Waters, tr., *The Nights of Straparola*, vol. 1, p. 62

¹⁴⁴ Dorothy Sayers translation (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), pp. 100-101. Concerning the subject, John Freccero, "The Portrait of Francesca. Inferno V," *Modern Language Notes* 124 no. 5 (2009): S7-S38.

¹⁴⁵ Herbert Butterfield, *The Origins of Modern Science* (London: Bell, 1949), p. viii.

¹⁴⁶ Edward O. Wilson, *Consilience. The Unity of Knowledge* (NY: Vintage Books, 1999), p. 5.

¹⁴⁷ Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method* (London: Verso, 1988), p. 9.

¹⁴⁸ Robert K. Merton, *On Social Structure and Science*, ed. Piotr Sztompka (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 24

Through the lens of a history of material culture mediated by an object, *Angelica's Book and the World of Reading in Late Renaissance Italy* investigates aspects of women's lives, culture, ideas and the history of the book in early modern Italy. Inside a badly damaged copy of Straparola's 16th-century work, *Piacevoli Notti*, acquired in a Florentine antique shop in 2010, an i Through the lens of a history of material culture mediated by an object, *Angelica's Book and the World of Reading in Late Renaissance Italy* investigates aspects of women's lives, culture, ideas and ...Â Focusing as much on the possible owner as upon the thing owned, *Angelica's Book* examines the genesis of the *Piacevoli Notti* and its many editions, including the one in question. The second late Renaissance poetic tendency was in reaction to the sometimes-flamboyant lushness of the Spenserians and to the sometimes-tortuous verbal gymnastics of the metaphysical poets. Best represented by the accomplished poetry of Ben Jonson and his school, it reveals a classically pure and restrained style that had strong influence on late figures such as Robert Herrick and the other Cavalier poets and gave the direction for the poetic development of the succeeding neoclassical period. The last great poet of the English Renaissance was the Puritan writer John Milton, who, having at his