

Introduction

The Other Voice

Arguably the “most famous woman of Italy” in her time,¹ Vittoria Colonna (1490?–1547) was one of the most important female voices to be heard in the Italian Renaissance, and the first to win wide renown, in her own day and ever since. Born into an aristocratic Roman family of immense power and wealth, Colonna lived in a rarefied world of learning and culture unimaginable to most women (or men) in the period. After becoming a widow in 1525, she took up her pen to write. Thirteen years later, she became the first woman ever to see a book of her own poems published in Italy. Colonna wrote both secular and religious poetry as well as several religious works in prose. Her collection of spiritual sonnets, which survived in a manuscript she prepared for her friend Michelangelo Buonarroti, appeared in a 2005 volume in the *Other Voice* series.² The present volume offers for the first time in English a complete translation of Colonna’s 1538 *Rime*, the landmark book that opened the door for hundreds of other women in the period to bring their writing to print.

Publishing Vittoria Colonna: The 1538 Rime

In 1538, a small printing house in Parma published a book that would change the course of Italian literary history. Entitled *Rime de la divina Vittoria Colonna, marchesa di Pescara* (*Poems of the divine Vittoria Colonna, Marchioness of Pescara*), this small, inconspicuous volume was the first book of poems by an Italian woman ever to appear in print.³ Before this time, women’s poetry, including that of Vittoria Colonna (1490?–1547),⁴ had been included in anthologies or in appendices to books written by men, but no woman had ever seen a single-author volume of her own printed during her lifetime. As the first editor of Colonna’s *Rime*, Filippo Pirogallo (active from 1533 until his death in 1555) could never

1. In his groundbreaking *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, for example, the nineteenth-century Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt writes: “The most famous woman of Italy, Vittoria Colonna [. . .], the friend of Castiglione and Michelangelo, enjoyed the reputation of a saint.” See the translation by Samuel G. C. Middlemore, ed. Peter Murray (London–New York: Penguin, 1990), 245.

2. Vittoria Colonna, *Sonnets for Michelangelo: A Bilingual Edition*, trans. and ed. Abigail Brundin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

3. Vittoria Colonna, *Rime de la divina Vittoria Colonna, marchesa di Pescara*, ed. Filippo Pirogallo (Parma: Antonio Viotti, 1538).

4. The majority of scholars recognize Colonna’s birthyear as 1490, first proposed by Giambattista Rota in his edition of her *Rime* (Bergamo: Lancilotti, 1760). Domenico Tordi argues for 1492 in his “Luogo ed anno della nascita di Vittoria Colonna,” *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 19 (1892): 1–21.

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have anticipated, his book became a landmark publication.⁵ In its wake, women in Italy began to publish their works in record numbers. By the end of the sixteenth century, roughly two hundred Italian women had their own writings published. This can be usefully compared to numbers in other European countries: thirty women had been published over the course of the sixteenth century in France, and seventeen in England.⁶ Pirogallo had unwittingly started a revolution.

The publication of Colonna's *Rime* was not the first time a woman's writing had ever appeared in print: religious works of St. Catherine of Siena (1347?–1380)⁷ and St. Catherine of Bologna (1413–1463) had been published as early as 1475; these were followed by a number of spiritual orations and mystery plays by Cassandra Fedele (1465?–1558), Antonia Pulci (1452?–1501)⁸ and Angela da Foligno (1248?–1309).⁹ In 1500, the edition of Catherine of Siena's letters by the famous Venetian printer Aldus Manutius (1452?–1515) even bore the distinction of being the first use of italic typeface. But these religious publications existed in an entirely different sphere from Colonna's poems, which marked the inclusion of women into a new but growing industry as public and legitimized writers. This legitimacy, endorsed by editors, publishers, commentators and fellow poets, came with new exposure in the greater public: the revolutionary promise of print itself gave writers a potential readership that was inconceivable in the world of even the most productive medieval scriptoria.

Beyond the obvious personal benefits of literary celebrity, the social and political opportunities to a writer in print were significant, and a woman considered worthy of the investment of publication fundamentally challenged the

5. For Pirogallo's dates, see Simone Albonico, *Il ruginoso stile: Poeti e poesia in volgare a Milano nella prima metà del Cinquecento* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1990), 288; and Tatiana Crivelli, "The Print Tradition of Vittoria Colonna's 'Rime,'" in Abigail Brundin, Tatiana Crivelli, and Maria Sapegno, eds., *A Companion to Vittoria Colonna* (Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2016), 69–139, at 77.

6. See Virginia Cox, ed., *Lyric Poetry by Women of the Italian Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 2.

7. Unless otherwise noted, all birth and death dates for Italian figures are from the *Dizionario biografico degli italiani [DBI]*, ed. Alberto Maria Ghisalberti (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1960–), online at <<http://www.treccani.it/biografie>>; or, when not available there, *Enciclopedia italiana di scienze, lettere ed arti*, ed. Giovanni Gentile and Calogero Tumminelli (Rome: Istituto Giovanni Treccani, 1929–1939). Dates for English figures are from the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, new ed., 60 vols. (Oxford–New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); and others are from *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online* (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, online resource continually updated, <<https://www.britannica.com/>>).

8. For Pulci's dates see James Wyatt Cook, "Antonia Pulci and Her Plays," in Antonia Pulci, *Florentine Drama for Convent and Festival: Seven Sacred Plays*, ed. James Wyatt Cook and Barbara Collier Cook, trans. James Wyatt Cook (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 3–46, at 11–19.

9. For a list of all publications by women in Italy, see Appendix A in Virginia Cox, *Women's Writing in Italy, 1400–1650* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 235–45.

misogynistic norms of early modern Europe. Although women in Italy enjoyed a relatively high literacy rate for Europe of the time—the figure has been estimated at around 12% in urban centers¹⁰—their education was rare and largely dependent on the accidents of their family circumstances (girls with brothers at home, for example, had greater opportunities to share in their brothers' instruction). Italian society did not offer any intellectual opportunities for women, whose talents tended to go unnoticed and unrewarded. Pirogallo's 1538 *Rime* thus signaled to an entire industry that a woman's artistic capacities—especially, as will be discussed shortly, a noblewoman of Colonna's status—were worthy of serious attention.

However revolutionary a figure Colonna became in Italian literary history, she did not herself pursue or endorse the publication of her verse. In 1537, the poet and humanist Benedetto Varchi (1503–1565) described to Colonna's friend and fellow poet Francesco Maria Molza (1489–1544) a conversation he and Colonna had recently had, in which he urged her to publish her sonnets; she supposedly responded by declaring she wanted them to be left alone.¹¹ When Pirogallo and his printer Antonio Viotti (active between 1508–1544) published the *Rime* in 1538, they did so without her consent.¹² This kind of pirating, which Pirogallo openly admits to in his dedicatory letter, was an absolutely ordinary occurrence in the early sixteenth century. There was nothing comparable to our modern idea of copyright, and authors had no legal authority over the publication or distribution of their own works. In 1545, the city of Venice, which was the center of the publishing industry, issued a decree declaring that books could no longer be published without permission of the author. But in 1538—and in the small city of Parma, a good distance from Venice—Pirogallo was free to do as he pleased.

In the sharing of works without the author's consent, the early world of print reproduced some of the practices of manuscript circulation that were still very active in the sixteenth century. For despite the advent of print—the first press was brought across the Alps into Italy in 1464—late fifteenth and early sixteenth-century authors continued to share handwritten copies of their works, which were then often recopied and sent off to others, resulting in manuscript copies circulating far beyond the author's control. One of the most famous descriptions of the frustrations that often arose with loss of control over a manuscript comes

10. For figures on literacy among early modern Italian women, see Paul F. Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Literacy and Learning, 1300–1600* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 46. Grendler's statistics are specifically for Venetian literacy, but his book also discusses Florentine examples of girls' instruction, and offers the best overview of education and literacy in this period.

11. See Varchi's November 1537 letter to Molza in Varchi, *Lettere, 1535–1565*, ed. Vanni Bramanti (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2008), 61.

12. On the activity of Antonio Viotti, see Giovanni Drei, "I Viotti stampatori e librai Parmigiani nei secoli XVI–XVII," *La bibliofilia* 27, nos. 6–7 (1925): 218–43.

in the dedicatory letter to the *Book of the Courtier* by Baldassare Castiglione (1478–1529). Here Castiglione accuses Colonna herself of sharing his text with acquaintances far beyond his immediate circle:

[B]eing informed from Italy that signora Vittoria Colonna, Marchioness of Pescara, to whom I had already given a copy of the book, had, contrary to her promise, caused a large part of it to be transcribed, I could not but feel a certain annoyance, fearing the considerable mischief that can arise in such cases. Nevertheless, I trusted that the wisdom and prudence of that lady (whose virtue I have always held in veneration as something divine) would avail to prevent any wrong from befalling me for having obeyed her commands. In the end I learned that part of the book was in Naples, in the hands of many persons; and, as men are always avid of new things, it appeared that certain of these persons were trying to have it printed. Wherefore, alarmed at this danger, I decided to revise at once such small part of the book as time would permit, with the intention of publishing it, thinking it better to let it be seen even slightly corrected by my own hand than much mutilated by the hands of others.¹³

Colonna, who was directly related to the figures portrayed in the *Book of the Courtier*—her uncle was Duke Guidobaldo da Montefeltro (1472–1508), and the ducal palace in Urbino her mother’s childhood home—is blamed for the publication of what would become one of the greatest literary successes in all of Europe.¹⁴

As with Castiglione, Colonna’s declared hostility to print deserves some scrutiny: the role of the resistant author was hardly unusual, and although Italians did not operate under the same “stigma of print” that plagued English aristocratic writers, there were certainly social advantages to staging one’s opposition

13. See Castiglione’s dedication in *Il libro del Cortegiano*, ed. Amedeo Quondam (Rome: Bulzoni, 2016), 1:11: “avisato che la signora Vittoria dalla Colonna, marchesa di Pescara, alla quale io già feci copia del libro, contra la promessa sua ne havea fatto trascrivere una gran parte, non potei non sentirne qualche fastidio, dubitandomi di molti inconvenienti che in simili casi possono occorrere. Nientedimeno mi confidai che l’ingegno e prudentia di quella Signora (la virtù della quale io sempre ho tenuto in veneratione come cosa divina) bastasse a rimediare che pregiudicio alcuno non mi venisse dall’haver obedito a’ suoi comandamenti. In ultimo, seppi che quella parte del libro si ritrovava in Napoli in mano di molti e, come sono gli homini sempre cupidi di novità, pareva che quelli tali tentassero di farla imprimere. Ond’io, spaventato da questo pericolo, diterminai di riveder subito nel libro quel poco che mi comportava il tempo, con intentione di publicarlo; estimando men male lasciarlo veder poco castigato per mia mano che molto lacerato per man d’altri.” The translation is Charles Singleton’s; see *The Book of the Courtier*, ed. Daniel Javitch (New York: Norton, 2002), 3.

14. For Colonna’s relationship to Castiglione and his writing, see Ramie Targoff, *Renaissance Woman: The Life of Vittoria Colonna* (New York: Farrar, Strauss Giroux, 2018), 92–100.

to publication. When we consider Colonna's attitude toward the 1538 *Rime*, it is worth reflecting on whether the first volume of poetry published by a woman could have ever been openly embraced by its author—whether a woman, that is, living in a world so dominated by men, could have comfortably announced her literary ambition to appear in print. Colonna's resistance may have allowed her, then, to cultivate a reputation as a poet within elite literary circles while maintaining the politically useful persona of a private noblewoman. For although she showed no enthusiasm for printing the poems, she pursued their circulation in manuscript quite openly in the decade preceding the Parma publication. At least nine surviving manuscripts with substantial collections (ranging from 30 to 148 poems) have survived from her lifetime, and likely more have been lost.¹⁵ There are also several dozen manuscripts with smaller groups of poems, sometimes included with works by other poets.¹⁶ Although it is not clear how many of these manuscripts Colonna created or disseminated herself, we know of a few instances in which she sent poems to influential friends with the hope that they would either pass them on to other well-connected readers or respond to her poems themselves. There are also two surviving manuscripts with significant collections of her sonnets that Colonna gave as gifts: the first, to Queen Marguerite de Navarre (1492–1549), and the second to Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564). Colonna was not, therefore, indifferent to her poetic reputation: on the contrary, as Abigail Brundin has persuasively argued, she was consistently strategic about cultivating her literary persona.¹⁷

Colonna's reputation as a poet likewise began years before her appearance in print. She is the only contemporaneous woman celebrated in the famous list of sixteenth-century figures praised in the thirty-seventh canto of the *Orlando furioso* by Ludovico Ariosto (1474–1533), published in its final form in 1532.¹⁸ There Ariosto remarks that “no woman will have cause for umbrage if I pass over the rest to praise this one alone,” and compliments Colonna's rare talent to “draw from the grave and immortalize whomsoever she speaks or writes about.”¹⁹ Also in 1532, her contemporary Veronica Gambarà (1485–1550) wrote a sonnet

15. See Abigail Brundin's helpful synopsis of these manuscripts, “Vittoria Colonna in Manuscript,” in Brundin, Crivelli and Sapegno, *A Companion to Vittoria Colonna*, 39–68, at 47n26.

16. See Brundin, “Vittoria Colonna in Manuscript,” 46–48.

17. See Brundin in her edition of Colonna's *Sonnets for Michelangelo*, 2–5; and Brundin, “Vittoria Colonna in Manuscript.”

18. For a consideration of Colonna's reputation among her contemporaries, see Virginia Cox, “Women Writers and the Canon in Sixteenth-Century Italy: The Case of Vittoria Colonna,” in Pamela J. Benson and Victoria Kirkham, eds., *Strong Voices, Weak History: Early Women Writers and Canons in England, France, and Italy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 14–31.

19. See Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso*, trans. Guido Waldman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 37.16.

praising Colonna as the “unique glory of our age,” and proposed that “[o]ur sex should erect a sacred and noble temple to you, as one they were raised to Pallas and Phoebus” (the gods of wisdom and poetry, respectively).²⁰ Gambara, herself a member of the Italian aristocracy, wrote this poem as part of an exchange of sonnets between the two women; Colonna responded by claiming that Gambara herself had earned “immortal fame.” Similar exchanges between Colonna and Molza, Pietro Bembo (1470–1547), and Antonio Tebaldeo (1463–1537) respectively suggest that any notion of Colonna’s indifference to her poetic reputation is misguided.²¹ At the same time, having a reputation and being a published poet were by no means one and the same goal. Colonna was not shy about pursuing a certain kind of recognition within elite literary circles, but she wanted to manage her poems’ circulation much more carefully than outright publication would have allowed.

It is also the case that a few of Colonna’s individual poems had appeared in print before 1538, although these poems were published in a manner that drew far less attention to her name than Pirogallo’s edition. Her first published poem was a sonnet included in the appendix to Bembo’s 1535 *Rime*; this poem formed part of an exchange with Bembo in which Colonna expressed her regret that Bembo had not written any commemorative poems about her husband, Ferdinando “Ferrante” Francesco I d’Avalos, Marquis of Pescara (born 1489; hereafter referred to as d’Avalos) following his death in 1525. Bembo replied by praising Colonna’s gifts as a poet: “Crown her temples with that beloved plant you once loved in human form,” he writes, addressing the god Apollo, “since she soars above your most elegant poets with her lofty, refined verse.”²² The year after Colonna was published in Bembo’s *Rime*, a collection of poems published in Naples designed to celebrate *vocabuli toschi*, or Tuscan diction, included three of Colonna’s poems in the appendix: the earliest of her surviving poems, a verse epistle written to d’Avalos after he had been taken captive at the Battle of Ravenna in 1512; a sonnet also in his memory; and another sonnet to her friend the writer and historian Paolo Giovio (1486–1552).²³

20. For both the Italian text and the English translation, see Virginia Cox, *Lyric Poetry*, 273–74.

21. On Colonna’s exchange with Tebaldeo, see Alan Bullock, “Vittoria Colonna e i lirici minori del Cinquecento: Quattro secoli di attribuzioni contraddittorie,” *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 157 (1980): 383–402, at 387–89.

22. Colonna’s poem is number 71 in this volume; for Bembo’s poem in both Italian and English, see Cox, *Lyric Poetry*, 268–69.

23. See Fabricio Luna, ed., *Vocabulario di cinquemila vocabuli toschi non meno oscuri che necessari* (Naples: Giovanni Sultzbach, 1536), GG1r–GG2v. For details of this Neapolitan volume, see Crivelli, “Print Tradition,” 70–71. The first of the sonnets included in the appendix appears as poem 17 in this volume; the second, to Giovio, does not appear in the 1538 *Rime*. For Giovio’s dates, see Paolo Giovio, *Notable Men and Women of Our Time*, trans. and ed. Kenneth Gouwens (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), xi–xii.

It was in direct opposition to both Colonna's manuscript circulation and her almost invisible appearance in the appendices of Bembo's volume and the Naples anthology that Pirogallo decided to publish the 1538 *Rime*. Pirogallo did not know Colonna personally and had no direct contact with her before publishing the work. In his dedicatory letter to "the most learned Alessandro Vercelli" (possibly the same Alessandro who prepared a Neapolitan manuscript of Colonna's works but otherwise an unknown gentleman who also seems not to have known her personally)²⁴ he explains that he has himself collected Colonna's sonnets "over a long period of time"—he presumably received the poems second- or third-hand from mutual acquaintances—and refers to the fact that Vercelli had urged him to share Colonna's poems with him. Indeed, Pirogallo declares that so many "young men" have been asking him for Colonna's poems that he can no longer hold off publishing them: the public has grown too large, he claims, and "the effort of writing them out" (making individual handwritten copies) too burdensome. Therefore, he concludes, "I have been so bold as to put them into print, even if it goes against the wishes of so grand a lady, considering it less of an error to displease one lady (however rare and great) than to deny so many men what they want."

We do not know what Colonna thought of the 1538 *Rime*: she left no record of her impressions. The only comment of hers that has survived is reported by Bembo, who wrote to Colonna's secretary Carlo Gualteruzzi (1500–1577) on November 8, 1538 to say that Colonna had "sweetly written to me, not only not regretting [the publication] but also saying that she deserved it for worrying about vain things."²⁵ The "vain things" (*vane cose*) are not specified, but Colonna was most likely referring to the poems themselves. If this interpretation is correct, it corresponds to her having already distanced herself from the poems within the Parma volume. The content of these poems will be discussed shortly in greater depth, but in the broadest sense these were poems of mourning, written in the aftermath of d'Avalos's death. Even within these sonnets, she is occasionally dismissive of her poetic practice, as poets of this period—both male and female—frequently are. Poem 104, for example, begins: "My grief pushed me to write, and yet I found / No style worthy of my noble cause." Her "sad song," she laments, "Annoys others more than it comforts me." There is no way to distinguish between what is largely a rhetorical stance and what reflects genuine feeling, but in Colonna's case, her doubts about her poems connect directly to her eventual disavowal of them altogether. By the time the *Rime* appeared in print, what Colonna refers to in poem 74 as her seven years of "mortal grief" have passed, and she has moved away from the role of widow as her defining identity. She had also, as

24. For attempts to identify Vercelli, see Brundin, "Vittoria Colonna in Manuscript," 46.

25. See letter 1967 in Pietro Bembo, *Lettere*, ed. Ernesto Travi (Bologna: Commissione per i Testi di Lingua, 1987–1993), 4:140–42. Translation mine.

we will see, almost entirely given up writing secular poetry in favor of devoting herself to what would become a substantial corpus of spiritual verse.

However silent Colonna remained on the subject of the 1538 publication, her seeming indifference was by no means shared by those around her. In particular, Bembo, who had assumed the unofficial role of Colonna's literary advisor, found the book horribly flawed. In the November 1538 letter he sent to Gualteruzzi, he describes the "injury and villainy done to the Signora Marchesa di Pescara by whoever printed her poetry most incorrectly." In addition to the errors of the printing, he judged the physical qualities of the edition to be very poor: it was made, he complained, with "the worst form and paper." Bembo made clear that he wanted to oversee a new edition himself, and told Gualteruzzi that he had "begg[ed] her to be content with sending me a corrected copy of the *Rime*, so that I could have them printed here in a proper manner."²⁶ The poems apparently were never sent to Bembo, and in a subsequent letter to Gualteruzzi he expressed his frustration.²⁷ Whatever Bembo's motives may have been in wanting to take control over Colonna's text, he was right to complain that the poems in the 1538 *Rime* were often "incorrect": as Pirogallo acknowledges in his dedicatory letter, he had gathered the poems from a "diversity of different pens that have copied them out," leading to an inevitable "accumulat[ion]" of mistakes. Although there is no authoritative manuscript for these poems—and thus it is impossible to determine what constitutes the "correct" version of any single poem—the 1538 volume was in fact riddled with errors of all kinds; beginning as early as 1539, subsequent editions (albeit not produced by Bembo) boast on their title pages that the poems have been corrected. On the whole, this was not actually the case—the editions had no more authority than Pirogallo's and were typically based on the same versions of the poems—but at least typographical mistakes were often fixed.

The 1538 *Rime* also included several poems not attributed to Colonna. Of its 143 sonnets and two *canzoni*—long poems typically ranging from seven to twenty verses per stanza, written in a range of metrical forms—eight of the sonnets have subsequently been identified as having been written by other poets: five sonnets are believed to be written by Molza, and three remain without definitive attributions but seem almost certainly not to be her work.²⁸ Of the two *canzoni* included at the end of the book, one was also not written by Colonna and has now

26. Bembo, *Lettere*, 4:140–42.

27. For a discussion of Bembo's exchange with Gualteruzzi, see Targoff, *Renaissance Woman*, 166–68.

28. The sonnets in the 1538 edition not by Colonna are poems 39, 71, 81, 112, 128, 129, 130, and 131. For the attribution of sonnets 39, 128, 130 and 131, see Alan Bullock, "Vittoria Colonna and Francesco Maria Molza: Conflict in Communication," *Italian Studies* 32 (1977), 41–77, at 47–50. On sonnet 71, see Bullock, "Vittoria Colonna e i lirici minori," 391–92. On sonnet 81, see Aida Consorti, *Il cardinale Pompeo Colonna su documenti editi e inediti* (Rome: Consorti, 1902), 123. On sonnet 112, see Pietro Ercole Visconti's edition of Colonna's *Rime* (Rome: Salviucci, 1840), 430; and Bullock, "Vittoria Colonna e i lirici minori," 391–92. On sonnet 129, see Rinaldo Corso's edition of Vittoria Colonna's

been definitively attributed to Ariosto; the mistaken attribution probably arose because the poem was written in the voice of a woman.²⁹ Colonna's twentieth-century editor Alan Bullock has suggested that Colonna's secretary Gualteruzzi jumbled these verses in with her correspondence, as he includes many of the same poems in the manuscript he compiles for Marguerite de Navarre by 1540, and that Pirogallo failed to recognize their origin in the copy he ultimately received.³⁰

As for the physical appearance of the book, Bembo's objection was less justified: the 1538 *Rime* appeared in the small, *ottavo* size which was standard for much of the lyric poetry published at the time, and the quality of the paper was in no way objectionable. It is true that Pirogallo wasted no resources on fancy ornaments or decorative flourishes: there was no frontispiece or gold leaf trimming the pages, and the only gesture of adornment on the title page was a small clover in black ink. The volume also contained fewer paratexts than might be expected for a collection of poetry by a writer with such an illustrious reputation: there were no dedicatory poems or appendices, and no address to the reader. Pirogallo's goal was simply to make Colonna's poems available in an affordable fashion to a large pool of readers. He was, in effect, entering the industry of so-called cheap literature, produced somewhere between professional printers and booksellers. His printer, Antonio Viotti, for example, was known to have rented out his press to itinerant book-peddlers and pamphleteers.³¹ Given the subsequent success of Colonna's *Rime* in print, Pirogallo's instinct to create an economical and easily portable book proved to have been wise.

Despite its many flaws, the 1538 *Rime* still deserves attention as an important historical document. Even the poems by other writers that Pirogallo haphazardly introduces alongside Colonna's give us an intriguing glimpse into what must have been his own scribal practices, conjuring scattered papers in different hands, while also occasionally shedding light on Colonna's own biography. Molza, for example, the poet who appears most often in the 1538 edition (in addition to the poems believed to be his, Colonna dedicates several poems to him directly), is someone entirely missing from Colonna's surviving letters; the sonnets Molza and Colonna seem to have exchanged are thus invaluable to understanding their relationship. More significantly, the 1538 *Rime* marks the first time an audience entirely outside Colonna's personal network of friends and acquaintances was

Tutte le rime, gen. ed. Girolamo Ruscelli (Venice: Sessa, 1558), 338; and Bullock, "Vittoria Colonna and Francesco Maria Molza," 47–50.

29. For the attribution of the canzone, see Corso, *Tutte le rime*, 350; and Michele Manchisi, "Dell'autenticità di una canzone dell'Ariosto e della persona per cui fu scritta," *Rassegna critica della letteratura italiana* 3 (1898): 247–54, at 249–53.

30. See Alan Bullock, "Vittoria Colonna and Francesco Maria Molza," 47–50.

31. On the connections between Viotti, Colonna's network, and the industry of "cheap" literature, see Crivelli, "Print Tradition," 77–84.

given the chance to read the poems of a gifted and serious woman poet, creating opportunities for generations of women to come.

Life and Works of Vittoria Colonna

Vittoria Colonna's status as the preeminent woman poet of sixteenth-century Italy stemmed not only from the excellence of her poems. Her reputation also depended heavily on the world of privilege and wealth into which she was born. The Colonna had for centuries been one of the most powerful families in Rome, controlling much of the land to the east of the city known as the *Castelli Romani*. Their holdings included more than a dozen feudal properties and a large palazzo in the very heart of Rome, which Colonna's relatives still own today. Colonna was born in Marino, one of the family's many fortified castles, and was raised between there and Naples where her father, Fabrizio (1455?–1520), held a series of important positions in the Spanish-run Kingdom of Naples, ultimately becoming Grand Constable. Soon after beginning his military service to the Aragonese king, and most likely as part of the negotiations that went into his getting the job, Fabrizio arranged for his daughter's marriage to d'Avalos, a member of one of the leading Spanish families, who was roughly two years Colonna's senior. The wedding took place in December 1509 at d'Avalos's family home—a heavily fortified castle on the island of Ischia, where he had been raised by his aunt, Costanza d'Avalos (1460–1541?), who acted as governor of the island following the death of her brother, Íñigo II (born around 1460), in 1503. We know very little about Colonna's life before her marriage—the only substantial record from this period is the elaborate wedding contract, which was signed in Marino in 1507 and provides in minute detail the terms of her dowry.³² No letters or other writings of hers have survived.

The sixteen-year period of Colonna's marriage is also not well documented, although the archive is richer: we have a single poem—the verse epistle written to her husband in 1512—and roughly twenty letters, all dated from 1523–1525, almost all of which are addressed to Colonna's friend, Giovan Matteo Giberti (1495–1543), the papal datary. This correspondence reveals her careful attention to the craft of letter writing, as in a 1524 letter where she explains her delay in replying to Giberti by wondering whether “it is because I have too great a dearth of adequate words or if you have a copious excess of elegant expressions.”³³ Another letter thanks Giberti for sending her some madrigals by her unlikely friend, the

32. Colonna's dowry has not been reprinted in its entirety; the original document is held in the Archivio Colonna at the Biblioteca Statale del Monumento Nazionale di Santa Scolastica in Subiaco, Italy. The wedding gifts are printed as an appendix to Visconti's 1840 edition of Colonna's *Rime*.

33. See *Carteggio di Vittoria Colonna, Marchesa di Pescara*, ed. Ermanno Ferrero and Joseph Müller, 2nd ed. (Turin: Loescher, 1892), letter 11: “Non so se è per che io habbi troppo inopia de accomodate parole, o lui soverchia copia de cortesi effetti.”