

‘I was Born in One City, but Raised in Another’: Aretino’s Perugian Apprenticeship

WILLIAM T. ROSSITER

Now housed in the Galleria Nazionale dell’Umbria, Giovanni Battista “Bitte” Caporali’s depiction of the Madonna and Child Enthroned (ca. 1510–1512) was originally situated in the convent of San Girolamo in the south-east of Perugia (Fig. 1).¹ In terms of its *disegno*, the painting recalls Raphael’s 1504–1505 treatment of the same subject, which had been painted as an altarpiece for the Ansidei family chapel in the church of San Fiorenzo, situated slightly to the east of the Duomo (Fig. 2).² Both Caporali and Raphael had trained under Perugino.³ Caporali imitates the three steps which Raphael had placed directly under the throne in his work, but he transformed his top step into a cartulary case (Fig. 3), containing the scroll of a popular hymn to the Virgin, ‘A dimandar pietà’.⁴ The lines depicted in the scroll are recalled, thirty years later, in Aretino’s 1542 comedy, *Lo Ipocrito (The Hypocrite)*.⁵ At the time Caporali was painting his Madonna, Aretino was writing and publishing his first collection of poems, the *Opera nova* (1512). However, in this collection, Aretino is presented not as a poet only: it is entitled *Opera Noua del Fecundissimo Giouene Pietro Pictore Arretino*.

¹ The convent of San Girolamo stood between the Porta San Pietro and the Porta San Girolamo, situated towards the south-east of the city (today off the Via Bonfigli, before it becomes the Via San Girolamo). It was the gate one passed through when travelling to Rome (as Aretino did), hence it became known as the Porta Romana.

² Raphael had trained at Perugia under Perugino, as Vasari records in his *Vita*. See *Le Vite dei più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, ed. R. Bettarini and P. Barocchi, 9 vols (Florence: Sansoni, 1966–1997), IV (1976), 157–58. His Ansidei altarpiece reflected the influence of the artists he had encountered in Florence. Vasari records that ‘Raffaello returned to Perugia [after residing in Florence and Urbino], where he painted a panel of Our Lady, St John the Baptist, and St Nicholas, for the Chapel of the Ansidei in the Church of the Servite Friars’ (*Ibid.*, 161–2). Pope Eugenius IV had transferred San Fiorenzo to the Servites in 1444. See Mario Moretti, *La Chiesa di S. Fiorenzo Martire in Perugia*, rev. ed. Anna Maria Trepaoli (Futura: Perugia, 2011). Don Moretti was the last incumbent parish priest of San Fiorenzo.

³ On Caporali and Perugino see Vasari, *Vite*, III (1971), 614.

⁴ See Agostino Ziino, ‘“A dimandar pietà”: Laude musicale in un dipinto attribuito a Giovanni Battista Caporali’, in Biancamaria Brumana and Francesco F. Mancini (eds), *Arte e musica in Umbria tra Cinquecento e Seicento* (Perugia: Centro di Studi Umbri, Casa di Sant’Ubaldo in Gubbio; Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia dell’Università degli Studi di Perugia, 1981), 81–7.

⁵ See below.



Fig. 1 Giovanni Battista Caporali, *The Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints John the Baptist, Francis of Assisi, Jerome and Anthony* (Pala di San Girolamo), ca. 1510–1512, Perugia, Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria (reproduced with permission)

Like Caporali, Aretino is identified as both poet and painter, and more emphatically as the latter. It is possible that Caporali's painting of the Madonna features the hand of Aretino himself, whose love of art would be lifelong. This possibility raises a series of questions: when and why did Aretino arrive at and depart from Perugia? What was he doing there? Who were his circle? And how does Aretino's Perugian apprenticeship shape our understanding of his career(s) and the means of his rise to fame in Rome and Venice? I contend that in Perugia we find the blueprints for Aretino's later years – both in terms of his networks and voice – and the creation of his public identity. Crucially, Aretino's artistic apprenticeship was to be the crucible of his painterly prose.



Fig. 2 Raphael, *The Madonna and Child with Saint John the Baptist and Saint Nicholas of Bari* (*The Ansidei Madonna*), 1505, Oil on poplar, 216.8 x 147.6 cm, London, The National Gallery (reproduced with permission)

Aretino's Perugian cityscape is reconstructed by triangulating his later letters, which recall his youth, the publication of the *Opera nova*, and the significance of the addition to the Caporali altarpiece. What we discover is not only the plurality of Aretino's informal training in the humanities during his years in Perugia, but also their complex cultural interfusion. The city is recalled as an earthly paradise of intermingling music, art, poetry, learning, and intense friendships – Aretino paints a picture of Perugia as a nostalgic haven against his present disillusion, to which he can return via his epistolary. It is a cityscape organized not by topography, but by ethnography. There are of course



Fig. 3 Detail of cartulary case from Caporali, *Madonna*

references to specific locales and features throughout the letters, but above all Aretino's Perugia is bustling with people. The Etruscan and medieval walls of the hilltop university town were, after all, punctuated by over twenty gates, which made it a cultural hub between Florence to the north, and Rome to the south, welcoming an influx of travellers and students. We might in fact think of Aretino's time in Perugia as his college years.

LE BRIGATE PERUGINE: ARETINO'S CIRCLE AND THE POETICS OF NOSTALGIA

As with almost every other aspect of Aretino's life, his departure from his hometown of Arezzo is larded with anecdote. It has, for example, been repeatedly claimed that Aretino left under a cloud, on account of some critical verses he wrote about papal indulgences.⁶ However, this allegation was the invention of Girolamo Muzio.⁷ Muzio's claim was made two years after Aretino's death, appearing in a letter of 3 May 1558, to Giovanni Bernardino Scotti, Cardinal Trani. Pope Paul IV had made Trani a member of the *Congregatio pro Doctrina Fidei* (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith), the Holy Inquisition, which was responsible for rooting out heresy and enforcing the *Index librorum prohibitorum*. Muzio was writing to report false

⁶ See *La vita di Pietro Aretino scritte dal conte Giannmaria Mazzuchelli bresciano* (Padua: G. Comino, 1741), 11–12.

⁷ Girolamo Muzio, *Lettere Catholice del Mutio Iustinopolitano* (Venice: A. Valvassori, 1571): 'This I will further add, which has been said to me: these [heresies] are nothing new to him. Indeed, the first time he left Arezzo was because he fled for having written a sonnet against indulgences' (232, my translation; letter dated May 3, 1558). On Muzio see Marco Faini's biography in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 77 (2012), and Paul Larivaille, *Pietro Aretino* (Rome: Salerno, 1997), 24.

doctrine and heresies published in Aretino's religious work, the *Humanità di Christo* (1535). He was evidently successful, as Aretino's *opera omnia* were prohibited the following year. Muzio needed to prove Aretino was an inveterate heretic, hence the anecdotal allegation, the source for which was not provided. However, we can suggest a time-frame for Aretino's sojourn in Perugia, identify the circles in which he moved and the lifelong friendships he forged, and offer some hypotheses regarding how he spent his time there.

In a letter of June 1548 to the jurist and poet Antonio Mezzabarba, Aretino recalls how it was 'more than forty years' since he first underwent an epiphany after hearing one of Mezzabarba's sonnets: 'at Perugia the sweetness of your sonnet in praise of your *bella donna* at that time penetrated my soul. Immediately my spirit was enamoured of poetry [...] having tasted the sweetness of that manna'.⁸ Aside from the revelatory momentousness of the occasion, this letter also confirms that Aretino arrived in Perugia before June 1508. In the records of entrants and departures of the Collegio di San Girolamo, one finds a 'Petrus de Aretio' listed as arriving on January 28, 1507.⁹ As Maria Silvestrelli records, the college's constitution required it to house forty impecunious foreign students, in addition to two chaplains and a *familia* of servants, specifying various kitchen staff.¹⁰ Petrus de Aretio is listed amongst the *familia*, and Silvestrelli argues it is very likely that he was employed 'in a subordinate position' but 'in close contact with the ambit of students and professors whom he will address in familiar terms in the years to come'.¹¹

Indeed, Mezzabarba was one of a circle of scholars, poets and artists who were integral to Aretino's cultural education, or rather concentric circles, which he called 'le brigate Perugine'.¹² He maintained close contact with certain friends for the rest of his life, whilst others proved useful acquaintances. His inner circle included the aforementioned painter, architect and poet Giovanni Battista ("Bitte") Caporali, Giambernardino Cusse, Carubino da Benedette, and a friend named Friano.¹³ His wider circle also included Alessandro Vitelli, the *condottiere* who later led the Medici militia; the surgeon Lucalberto Podiani, who also

⁸ *Lettere*, IV.657: 'Più di quaranta anni'; 'a Perugia mi penetrò a l'animo la dolcezza del sonetto lodatore de la bella donna vostra a quel tempo, subito il mio spirito se innamorò de la poesia [...] gustavo la soavità de la manna'. I have translated both *dolcezza* and *soavità* as sweetness, although they have different connotations beyond this context. Aretino's use of them here comes uncharacteristically close to Neoplatonism; he refers to 'the great Bembo', Petrarchan Neoplatonist par excellence, in the same letter.

⁹ 'Petrus de aretio Ingressus est die d[i]c[t]o [viz. 28 Jan.]': ASUPg, Sapienza Nuova, *Entrata e uscita*, reg. n. 4, c. 133^v. See Maria Rita Silvestrelli, 'Il giovane Aretino e i sodalizi artistici perugini', in Anna Bisceglia *et al.* (eds), *Pietro Pictore Aretino: Una parola complice per l'arte del Rinascimento* (Venice: Marsilio, 2019), 23–42 (25). The college was renamed Sapienza Nuova before being demolished ca. 1542 to make way for the Rocca Paolina fortress, erected following the Salt War of 1540.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Lettere*, II.403 (15 July 1542), to Giulio Oradini. The term *brigata* was famously used by Boccaccio to describe the ten nobles of the *Decameron*.

¹³ Friano is thus far unidentified, though he might be the Foiano referred to in a letter to Cusse ('A Cusse Perugino') of May 1545 (*Lettere*, III.196).

compiled pasquinades, the genre which made Aretino's name in Rome, and who, crucially, was the rector of the college of San Girolamo from 1506–1507; Lelio Torelli, who became one of Cosimo de' Medici's ministers; and Count Giano Bigazzini, who published Caporali's translation of Vitruvius in 1536, amongst various others. Agnolo Firenzuola had studied law in Siena until 1515 before relocating to Perugia to complete his studies in 1516, following which he joined the Roman Curia in 1518.¹⁴ If Aretino is, as traditionally thought, the author of the anti-Curial satire, *Il testamento dell'elefante*, which was circulating in Rome after June 1516, then he evidently was still at Perugia in 1515, where he befriended and influenced Firenzuola (who later forsook law for a literary career, writing his own *Ragionamenti*). If the *Testament* is not Aretino's, as I believe, this supports the argument for a less urgent flight from Perugia, and a more leisurely stint in Siena en route to Rome, arriving in the eternal city in 1517.¹⁵ Aretino thus spent the best part of a decade in Perugia; at least as long as he would reside in Rome.

Perugia at the turn of the sixteenth century had shrunk to roughly a third of its size in its late thirteenth-century heyday; the population had decreased from around 34,000 in 1285 to around 12,000 in 1498, increasing slightly to 'between 13,095 and 13,775 in 1511' during Aretino's residence.¹⁶ The reassertion of papal authority in 1506 by Pope Julius II, which diminished the rule of the dominant Baglioni family and brought peace to the city after almost thirty years of factional in-fighting, evidently contributed to its growth spurt, and likely informed Aretino's relocation in January 1507.¹⁷ Once a third of the size of Florence and Venice, equal in stature to Verona, Bologna, Padua and Siena, by the end of the fifteenth century it was a fifth of the size of Florence and a third of the size of Verona. The powerful late

¹⁴ On Firenzuola see Franco Pignatti's entry in the *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 48 (1997): http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/agnolo-firenzuola_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/.

¹⁵ See Larivaille, *Pietro Aretino*, 39. The *Testament* has traditionally been ascribed to Aretino on the basis of his references to it in the both the 1525 and 1534 redactions of the *Cortigiana*, which function, as Angelo Romano notes, 'almost to claim the authorship of the text for himself'. However, Romano does not vindicate Aretino's authorship, and credible doubt has been cast on the attribution. See Romano (ed.), *Cortigiana; Opera nova; Pronostico; Il testamento dell'elefante; Farza* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1989), 356, and Giuseppe Crimi, 'Pietro Aretino: Attributed Works', in Marco Faini and Paola Ugolini (eds), *A Companion to Pietro Aretino* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 271–99 (272). Giulio Ferroni also suggests a Venetian author for the *Testament*, on the basis of the lexical and syntactical elements. See *Teatro*, Vol. I, ed. Paolo Trovato and Federico Della Corte, intro. Giulio Ferroni (Rome: Salerno, 2010), 45. I am inclined towards Aretino not being the author of the *Testament*, as its having been composed by mid-June 2016 truncates the timeline between Aretino befriending Firenzuola in Perugia and arriving in Rome. It leaves barely if any time for his sojourn in Siena, whereto Aretino might have repaired on the basis of his acquaintance with Firenzuola. Tolomei recalls their time together in Siena and Rome in a letter found in the first volume of *Lettere volgari di diversi nobilissimi huomini, et eccellentissimi ingegni* (Venice: Manutius, 1544), sig. Siiii^r. Ferroni argues likewise: 'if Aretino were the author, his arrival in Rome would have to be backdated by at least two years' (*Teatro I*, 44).

¹⁶ See Sarah Rubin Blanshei, 'Population, Wealth, and Patronage in Medieval and Renaissance Perugia', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 9/4 (1979), 597–619 (599).

¹⁷ Indeed, Aretino left Perugia at around the time that Giampaolo Baglioni undermined Pope Leo X's campaign against Urbino in 1517. Leo had him killed in revenge in 1520. See C. F. Black, 'The Baglioni as Tyrants of Perugia, 1488–1540', *English Historical Review*, 85/335 (1970), 245–81.

medieval family clans, such as the Baglioni and Oddi, had nevertheless consolidated and expanded their power during this period of the city's contraction, constituting 'the economic and political elite of the Renaissance city'.¹⁸ Aretino thus arrived in a relatively compact, centralised, interconnected city shaped by clan kinship networks or *alberghi*. Indeed, as we shall see, Aretino's letters to his Perugian circle are marked by a sense of enclosed intimacy, whereby the cityscape is its community.

Whether it was by strategy or dint of good fortune, Petrus de Aretio made his way to the *Studium*, which provided a means of accessing the social enclosure.¹⁹ As Sheri Shaneyfelt notes in her discussion of the Società del 1496, a Perugian artists' cooperative, its members were 'highly visible, prominent members of the community' who

were fully integrated into the life of their city and were well respected not just as artisans but also as citizens, as a result of the high status of the civic positions that they held. They were entrusted not only with representing the painters' guild internally within the Perugian commune but with representing the commune itself beyond its borders, *extra civitatem*.²⁰

The Società was a collaborative community, established in part to meet the demand for religious artworks – which was significant as Perugia was a dependency of the Papal States – especially those which were in or after the style of the city's celebrated son, Pietro Perugino. As noted, Aretino's mentor in Perugia, Giovanni Battista Caporali, was taught by Perugino, alongside Perugino's more famous pupil, Raphael. Caporali also collaborated with members of the Società (such as Sinibaldo Ibi and Eusebio da San Giorgio; both of whom were later elected to Perugia's General Council) and appraised their works.²¹ The number of religious commissions and the collaborative networks in Perugia led Sylvia Ferino Pagden to describe the city as 'one large bottega' or artists' workshop.²² The Società was housed near the Piazza del Sopramuro (now the Piazza Matteotti), where most of Perugia's artists were located, including Perugino's workshop. It was also in close proximity to the Collegio di San Girolamo, where Petrus de Aretio arrived in 1507. The two are connected by the via Baglioni, heading north from the Collegio (now the site of the Rocca Paolina), whilst nearby to the south is the Porta San Pietro and the church of San Girolamo. We can thus map Aretino's Perugia through these sites, and locate him in or near to the

¹⁸ Blanshei, 607.

¹⁹ The *Studium Generale* was comprised of the Collegio di San Gregorio and the Collegio di San Girolamo.

²⁰ Sheri Francis Shaneyfelt, 'The Società del 1496: Supply, Demand, and Artistic Exchange in Renaissance Perugia', *Art Bulletin*, 97/1 (2015), 10–33 (13).

²¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

²² 'The Early Raphael and His Umbrian Contemporaries', in James Beck (ed.), *Raphael before Rome* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1986), 93–107 (95).

artistic centre of the city. This means of infiltrating elite or influential civic circles via its painters, poets and thinkers was of course a practice Aretino repeated with great success in Venice, where he ingratiated himself with the young patrician class.²³

As such, Perugia was more than a *bottega* for Aretino, and in more ways than one. In his *Street Life in the Italian Renaissance*, Fabrizio Nevola notes how the three literary-dramatic modes – pastoral (satire), comedy and tragedy – were represented by Sebastiano Serlio as theatrical *scaenarum frontes* in his *Libro de prospettiva (On Perspective)* of 1545. As Nevola notes, Serlio’s account and representation of ‘the “comic scene” stands out for its architectural variety, where a rich mix of Gothic and classical forms combines to shape a diverse urban environment [...] imitat[ing] the streetscape that would have been prevalent in the cities of the time’.²⁴ This description of the mixed comic scene – arguably Aretino’s preferred mode – certainly accords with Benedetto Bonfigli’s cityscapes of Perugia, and even, unintentionally, with Berto di Giovanni’s votive banner (1526) depicting Perugia and its roiling mass of citizens that hangs in the cathedral of San Lorenzo. The scenographic configurations of the major dramatic modes thus provide a useful model for considering how Aretino variously remembers Perugia as pastoral, as comedy, and as tragedy. For Aretino, the city was theatre, hence the blurred boundaries between the civic audience and its representation in his comedy *La Cortigiana*. And for Aretino theatre was variously representative and multi-modal – poetic, painterly, and musical – as indeed was his experience of Perugia.

Aretino’s letters to his Perugian friends glow with nostalgia, and frequently show a more intimate side to his correspondence. Paul Larivaille has rightly noted a sense of sincere affection for his formative years in Perugia, but there is also a careful rhetoric of nostalgia that operates across these letters, which intersects with a series of other recurrent tropes. The starting point is the distance between past and present, a distance the letters to the Perugia circle seeks to elide. Thus, writing to Alessandro Vitelli on 5 May 1537, Aretino recalls their time together with Giovanni dalle Bande Nere before the great *condottiere*’s death in 1526. Interestingly, Aretino frames his present and past selves in a Petrarchan idiom. Giovanni’s son, Duke Cosimo, ‘does not know the one I was then, nor perhaps the one I am now’, recalling Petrarch’s memory of his ‘juvenile error,/when I was in part another man from that which I am now’ in the opening sonnet of the *Canzoniere*.²⁵ As we shall see, in Perugia Aretino had been a student of

²³ See Christopher Cairns, *Pietro Aretino and the Republic of Venice: Researches on Aretino and His Circle in Venice, 1527–1556* (Florence: Olschki, 1985), 13–30.

²⁴ Fabrizio Nevola, *Street Life in the Italian Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 135–36.

²⁵ *Lettere*, I.122. The Petrarchan idiom is taken from the opening sonnet of Petrarch’s *Canzoniere*: ‘mio giovanile errore/quand’era in parte altr’uom da quel ch’i’ sono’. Aretino writes ‘ch’io mi fussi già, né forse quel ch’io mi sono ora’.

Petrarchism, and vernacular poetics more widely; it was later that he adopted his equally studied *antipetrarchismo*. In his later letters to his Perugian friends he frequently echoes the idiom of Petrarchan poetics, as if he has slipped back into the role of the aspiring young poet of their memories. This is entirely appropriate, of course, given that Petrarch thematised the distance between present and past selves, and measured it through insistent commemoration. He writes to Caporali on 3 August 1537 that 'I am [still] that good companion that I was in those days [...] and the burden of the years would seem light if I were not grown fat'; a sentiment that becomes a trope.²⁶ Here again Aretino approaches the language of the Petrarchan anniversary poems:

Vero è 'l proverbio, ch'altri cangia il pelo
anzi che 'l vezzo, et per lentar i sensi
gli umani affecti non son meno intensi

The proverb is true, that our hair changes
before our vices, and though the senses slow down,
the human passions are no less intense. (*Rvf* 122.5–7)²⁷

Ultimately, this trope, and Aretino's, are variants upon Matthew 26:41, which Petrarch renders as 'Lo spirito è pronto, ma la carne è stanca' (*Rvf* 208.14): the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. Yet, the act of reading and writing the Perugian letters is a means of both spiritual and carnal rejuvenation. Indeed, the act of reading is an embodied, sensuous experience for Aretino, which offers a return to the prelapsarian 'garden where my youth flowered'.²⁸ Perugia is frequently configured as a demi-Eden – the city's pastoral mode – where youth is not only recalled, but relived, effected here by his euphonic formula: *giardino/gioventù*.

Aretino's reversion to the Petrarchism of his Perugian *gioventù*, his epistolary rejuvenation, seeks to confirm that he remains the youthful poetic spirit he once was, and his letters to the Perugia circle are often marked by his poetic self-consciousness.²⁹ As we shall see, the poems Aretino com-

²⁶ *Lettere*, I.169: 'io sono quel buon compagno ch'io era a quei tempi [...]. E il carico de gli anni mi parebbe leggieri se io non fusse grosso'. Cf. *Lettere*, II.70: 'onde col tener sempre giovane la volontà, spero non sentir mai vecchiaia la carne. [...] è buona a raffrenare il corso de gli anni' ('by keeping my will ever young, I hope never to feel old in my flesh [...] it is good to rein in the running of the years'); *Lettere*, IV.448: 'lodato sia Cristo, non sento scropolo alcuno di vecchiaia, e da un poco di grossezza in fuori, tengo in me le medesime prosperità che mi teneva prima' ('praised be Christ I do not feel any of the difficulties of old age, and aside from a little outward thickening, I hold in me the same prosperity that I did before').

²⁷ All quotations from the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta (Canzoniere)* are taken from Robert M. Durling (ed.), *Petrarch's Lyric Poems: The Rime sparse and Other Lyrics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976). See also *Rvf* 30.28–9 and *Rvf* 118.9–14.

²⁸ *Lettere*, I.62 (28 January 1536), to Francesco Buoncambi: 'il giardino, dove fiori la mia gioventù' (*sic*). On Aretino's efflorescent language of gardens see J.G. Turner's contribution to this issue.

²⁹ We find it again in a later letter to Mezzabarba (*Lettere*, V.33) concerning 'your prudent judgment upon my composition' ('[il] giudizio fatto da la di voi prudenza sopra la di me composizione').

posed in Perugia following his conversion, and published as his *Opera nova* in 1512, are steeped in the same Petrarchan motifs and conceits. In the letters Aretino is then performing his younger self to prove his constancy – ‘I am that I was’ – but also his constancy with his *brigata*: ‘Bitte [Caporali] is me, and I am Bitte’.³⁰

Yet, despite such rhetoric, Aretino’s affections in these letters, the emotional and sensual recall of his juvenile error, are by no means insincere – rhetoric is used to enhance, not counterfeit, the emotion. In a letter sent to Oradini on 15 July 1542, Aretino speaks of the benevolence which he ‘had, has, and always will have’ towards his Perugian friends, and how he feels misery and joy when he hears of their ills and felicities.³¹ Perugia was engulfed in bitter violence from the 1520s to the early 1540s – the city’s tragic mode – as the powerful Baglioni family warred against the Papacy, which ultimately exerted its control over the town, culminating in the construction of the mighty fortress Rocca Paolina, which necessitated the destruction of the college of San Girolamo.³² As such, the representation of Perugia in Aretino’s letters during this period shifts at times from heaven to hell, or vice versa, as when he writes in September 1549 to congratulate Giulio Oradini on the appointment of Giulio della Rovere as Papal legate to Perugia: ‘Our Lord has made a paradise of Perugia, that was an inferno’.³³

Set against the turmoil of the 1530s, Aretino’s rhetoric of feeling increases in his letters to the Perugian inner circle. His letter to Carubino di Benedetto, dated August 14, 1538, opens by relating how Carubino’s previous letter not only reminded him of ‘the cordiality of old friendships’, but of how ‘superfluous it is to renew words due to old certainties’, before embarking on a pseudo-Ciceronian discussion of friendship.³⁴ The tone is contemplative, and almost physically intimate. In his letter to Caporali of 3 October 1537 he writes, while waiting for him to visit, that ‘your letters instead satisfy the desire I have to embrace and kiss you; by God I embrace you and kiss you reading them, so write to me often’.³⁵ This is a recurrent trope of the Perugian correspondence, whereby the letter performs embodiment.

Caporali evidently shared Aretino’s nostalgic sentiments, returning them in a sonnet published in his 1540 *Rime*.

³⁰ Letter to Giulio Oradini, July 1548. Another Petrarchan trope, the becoming of the beloved (see for example *Ruf* 51.5–6).

³¹ *Lettere*, II.403: ‘È vero che io le tenni, tengo, e terrò sempre collocato ne l’anima [...] il dolore e la letizia ch’io provo ne lo udire il lor male e il lor bene’.

³² And of course long before. As noted above, the city was pacified by Julius II in August 1506. Aretino thus settled in Perugia during a ten-year period of relative peace. See C. F. Black, *op. cit.*

³³ *Lettere*, V.294: ‘nostro S. [ha] fatto paradiso di Perugia, ch’era inferno’. Giulio was only fourteen at this point, having been made cardinal at thirteen.

³⁴ *Lettere*, II.70: ‘lettra [sic] vostra [...] mi rammenta la cordialità de l’amicizia antica, ma [...] è di superfluo il rinovar parole per conto de le certezze vecchie’.

³⁵ *Lettere*, I.169: ‘le carte in vece vostra sodisfaccino a la volontà ch’io tengo d’abbracciarvi e di basciarvi; che per Dio vi abbraccio e bacio leggendole. Per ciò scrivetemi spesso’.

Qual lieta Stella, o in ciel buon segno
 Oprò di farne cari & fidi amici
 Et fruir in que tempi alhor felici
 O mio divin Pietro Aretino degno?
 [...]
 Dogliomi a quanto posso che piu breve
 Fusse lo starci insieme che l'absentia:
 Ma speme ho che colui che 'l tutto cura
 Un giorno alleviera mio viver greve
 Per sua benignita, con tua presentia.

What lucky star, or good omen in heaven
 Moved to make us dear and loyal friends
 And to enjoy those happy times then,
 O my worthy, divine Pietro Aretino?
 [...]
 It saddens me how much more brief
 Was our time spent together than our absence:
 But I have hope that He who heals all
 One day will alleviate my lively grief
 Through his goodness, with your presence.³⁶

Aretino even enjoys recalling his *giovenile errore* in his letter to Carubino of April 1549:

As soon as I received your letter – given to me by your own grandson – no less with the heart than with the hand I felt myself become wholly tender again through some kind of intrinsic affection, which I don't know how to speak with my tongue, but rather express with my soul. It refreshed in my mind the loving fraternal conversation [*conversazione*] that together we exercised in the dear spring of our years. Although we would still do the exact same if we were together, in the grateful winter of our years, and perhaps with a greater, more agreeable pleasure.³⁷

The term *conversazione* here translates insufficiently as conversation; in the early modern period it also suggested a community, as recorded in the *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca* (1612): 'il conversare, e la gente stessa unita, che conversa insieme'.³⁸ Aretino's Perugia was a community of

³⁶ Caporali, *Rime*, sig. A1^v.

³⁷ *Lettere*, IV.448: 'La lettera che da parte vostra mi ha dato il vostro istesso nipote, nel subito pigliarla non meno con il core che con la mano, sentimmi tutto rintenerire da quel non so che di affetto intrinseco, il quale non si se dire con lingua, se bene si exprime con l'animo. Egli mi rinfrescò ne la mente quella amorevole conversazione fraterna, che insieme esercitammo ne la cara primavera de gli anni. Benché faremmo il simile, se stessimo apresso, nel grato verno della età nostra ancora, e forse con un piacere assai più lieto e ameno'.

³⁸ 'Conversazione' in *Vocabolario degli accademici della Crusca* (Venice: Alberti, 1612), 223. See also Rona Goffen, 'Nostra Conversatio in Caelis Est: Observations on the *Sacra Conversazione* in the Trecento', *The Art Bulletin*, 61/2 (1979), 198–222 (199).

mostly young men who were bound by deep affection. Indeed, there is a certain homosocial discourse recurrent throughout Aretino's Perugian correspondence, which might even point to some of Aretino's earliest homosexual experiences. In a letter to Mezzabarba of December 1548, which was meant to be consoling him on the death of his daughter, Aretino refers to 'the affectionate carnality of friendship, which joins us together, as two begotten of the same origin and blood'.³⁹ Also in the letter to Caporali he refers to a certain Friano, another of the inner sanctum and representative for Aretino of the city's comic-pastoral mode, of whom no other information exists save Aretino's account: 'Friano, our sweetest delight, in whose breast Love always carved the image of some new Ganymede, which led him to sing his passions in eclogues'.⁴⁰ These 'carnal' friendships perhaps inform an account of how Aretino spent his time in Perugia. In his 1953 biography, Domenico Fusco claimed that Aretino was receiving an annuity from Count Luigi Bacci, but in exchange he had to submit to the 'filthy Socratic pleasures' of an older Perugian notary.⁴¹ Unfortunately, Fusco did not provide any evidence to support his claim. We know that Aretino was happily homosexual at different points in his life.⁴² For example, when in 1524 he became besotted with a woman he wrote to Giovanni dalle Bande Nere that 'if I escape with my honour from this madness, I will bugger as much, and as much for me as for my friends'.⁴³ This knowledge no doubt informed Fusco's augmentation, although, conversely, he more frequently claims that Aretino's professions of homosexuality were not to be taken seriously.⁴⁴ Fusco did not have history on his side, however. Homosexuality was widespread in early modern Italy, as confirmed both by the measures taken to suppress and penalize sodomy on the one hand, and on the other, the civic habit of turning a blind eye to it precisely because it was so widespread.⁴⁵ As Michael Rocke has noted of late fifteenth-century Florence, 'sodomy was inextricably enmeshed in broader forms of male association and sociability in this community', and one might say the same for Perugia,

³⁹ *Lettere*, V.125: 'l'affettuosa carnalità de l'amicizia, che ci fa essere insieme come due procreati da la istessa origine del sangue proprio'.

⁴⁰ *Lettere*, I. 169: 'Friano, dolcissimo nostro trastullo, nel petto del quale amore sempre teneva sculpito qualche nuovo Ganymede; onde si riduceva a cantare le sue passioni in egloghe'.

⁴¹ See Domenico Fusco, *L'Aretino sconosciuto ed apocrifo* (Turin: Berruto, 1953), 15, 34.

⁴² As Michael Rocke has shown, homosexuality was prevalent in early modern Italy. See *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence* (Oxford: OUP, 1996).

⁴³ ASF, Cart. med. av. Princ. VI, 824 (ms. 32). Trans. in Ian Frederick Moulton, *Before Pornography: Erotic Writing in Early Modern England* (Oxford: OUP, 2002), 140. Cf. Sonnet XXV in Danilo Romei (ed.), *Scritti di Pietro Aretino nel codice Marciano It. XI 66 (=6730)* (Florence: Franco Cesati Editore, 1987): 'Sia not'a ogni persona et manifesto/come Isabella Sforza ha conuertito/l'Aretin, da ch'ei naque sodomito' 'It is known and manifest to everyone how Isabella Sforza has converted Aretino from a born sodomite' (XXV.1-3), 52.

⁴⁴ See Rictor Norton, *Myth of the Modern Homosexual: Queer History and the Search for Cultural Unity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 145-6.

⁴⁵ As far back as 1410-1420 Domenico of Prato had claimed that 'the love of men for boys was so widespread, and not only in Florence, that it no longer troubled anyone'. Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships*, 19.

or at least of Aretino's *conversazione*.⁴⁶ A common form of homosexual relationship in early modern Italy was pederasty, itself partly legitimized as another example of Graeco-Roman cultural *imitatio*.

One can see how Fusco reached his conclusion as Aretino was part of a homosocial circle that included at least one openly homosexual member, and his relationship, as he himself framed it, to at least three members of that circle was as a student embarked upon a *paideia* or programme of study, however, informal. One of Aretino's teacher-figures, as we have already seen, was Mezzabarba, who first enflamed Aretino's soul with poetry. A second figure was a certain Francesco Buontempi.⁴⁷ The third, and most important, was Bitte Caporali.⁴⁸ This question of whether Aretino had undertaken a semi-formal *cursus*, or even an apprenticeship, during his Perugian adolescence, leads to the core question: what was Aretino *doing* in Perugia?

'LEARNED IN THIS FACULTY AND IN PAINTING': THE NEW WORK

On November 29, 1532 the Venetian diarist Marin Sanudo recorded that a poem attacking Aretino was posted to a column on the Rialto, which claimed that it would have been more fruitful and praiseworthy had Aretino not abandoned his paintbrush: 'if once you were a painter, as I hear'.⁴⁹ In 1512 a poetry collection was printed in Venice entitled *Opera Noua del Fecundissimo Giouene Pietro Pictore Arretino*. There are various questions attendant upon this publication: was it the same Pietro Aretino? If so, why was it published in Venice when he was resident in Perugia? In what sense was it a 'new work'? Had he published poems previously? Answering these questions will provide us with a clearer picture of Aretino's time in Perugia.

The poem recorded by Sanudo supports the claim that the young and most fecund painter from Arezzo was our Pietro. Moreover, the collection is organised around specific poetic forms, as its extended title affirms – 'zoe [cioè] *Strambotti*[,] *Sonetti*[,] *Capitoli*[,] *Epistole*[,] *Barzellette*[,] & *una Desperata*' (Fig. 4). To mark the *strambotti* giving way to the sonnets, a statement appears, which reiterates the author's double expertise: 'Alquanto cose de uno adolescente arretino/Pietro, studioso in questa facultà et in pittura' ('Some things [poems] by Pietro, a young man from Arezzo, studios in this faculty and in painting').⁵⁰

In the sonnet which follows, the author explains that he did not take up his pen of his own volition:

⁴⁶ Roche, *Forbidden Friendships*, 149.

⁴⁷ Discussed below.

⁴⁸ I am inclined to agree with Larivaille (37–8) that whilst it is not inconceivable Aretino would have agreed to sex with an older man for money, there is no motive or evidence to support such an argument.

⁴⁹ 'O quanto ti saria frutto e lodo/non havessi lassato il tuo pennello/se pyntor fusti un tempo, come odo'. The poem ('Capitolo contra Pietro Aretino') is in Bibl. Marciana cod. It. IX, 369 (=7203), c. 214^v. Sanudo notes that the vituperative posts are attempting 'to imitate those [posted] in Rome to Pasquino' (*ibid.*).

⁵⁰ Pietro Aretino, *Opera nova*, in *Poesie varie*, Vol. I, ed. Giovanni Aquilecchia and Angelo Romano, Edizione Nazionale 1 (Rome: Salerno, 1992), 56.

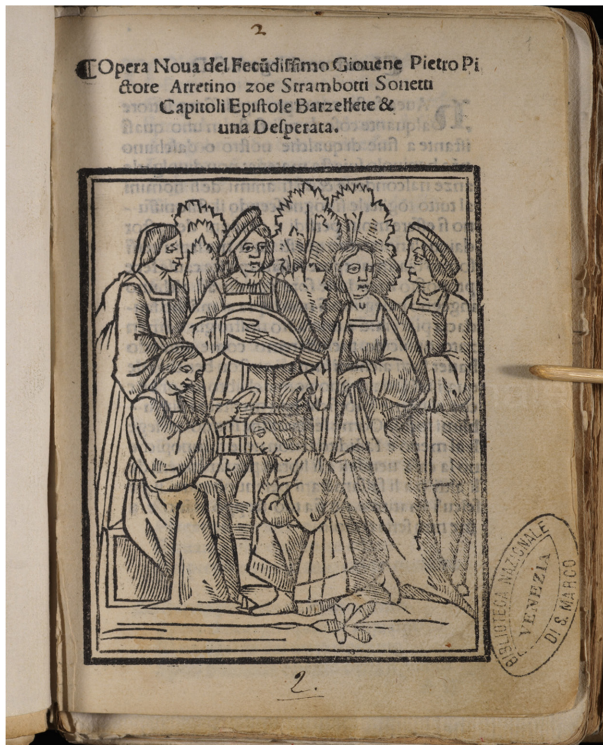


Fig. 4 Arretino, *Opera nova* (Venice: Zoppino, 1512), frontispiece. Reproduced courtesy of the Biblioteca Marciana.

ma sol per satisfar quel che piú deggio
 Francisco de Bontempi perusino,
 che per altr'occhi al mondo piú non veggio.
 E lui fia scorta col suo terso latino,
 e fida tramontana, al piccol seggio
 del rude socio suo Pietro Arretino.

But only to satisfy the one I owe most,
 Francesco de Bontempi, of Perugia,
 Since I can no longer look at the world through other eyes.
 And may he, with his terse Latin
 And the Northern wind, be escorted to the little seat
 Of his coarse friend, Pietro Arretino.⁵¹

There is no further record of a Francesco de Bontempi in Arretino's correspondence, although the Bontempi were a significant family in Perugia.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 57. John Florio translates 'deggio' as 'I owe', which agrees with the usage here. See Queen Anna's New World of Words (London: Melch. Bradwood for Edw. Blount and William Barret, 1611), sig. M4^v.

There is, as we have seen, a Francesco Buoncambi of Perugia to whom Aretino writes in the first volume of *Lettere*.⁵² It is not impossible that Buoncambi is Bontempi, as the two families were very close.⁵³ Conversely, it is unlikely that there were two poets named Pietro Aretino living in Perugia in 1512. This being the case, we are faced with accepting that Aretino was studying to be an artist in Perugia.

That Aretino had trained to be an artist makes a great deal of sense, of course. His responsiveness to art, the way in which he spoke about it, described it, and anatomized it, made him something of an authority and arbiter of taste. The treatise on art by Aretino's former secretary and long-time friend, Lodovico Dolce, which was written in response to Vasari's *Lives of the Painters*, was entitled *L'Aretino*.⁵⁴ In the mid-twentieth century Aretino's writings on art were collected and edited by Fidenzio Pertile and Ettore Camesasca – they filled three volumes.⁵⁵ Crucially, Aretino sought to imitate the techniques of the visual arts in his writing, which one might describe as painterly. In his letter to Michelangelo containing Aretino's own conception of the Last Judgement, the emphasis throughout is on *disegno*, in accordance with the Florentine tradition. In his letter to Titian describing the bustling life of the Grand Canal as he looks upon it from his window, the technique is one of *colorito*, in accordance with the Venetian tradition.⁵⁶ Aretino seeks not only to describe works of art, but to reproduce the immediate experience of engaging with something brilliantly conceived and executed, both at the level of overall effect and at the level of detail. In doing so he does not attempt to produce a detailed ekphrasis or reproduction of the work's content, but seeks to emulate verbally the process whereby it was produced, adding rhetorical colour to his design, or departing from his design by adding colour upon colour. He uses this same technique to capture arresting scenes and the sensations they create at the moment of observation, in the same way an artist might. His writing, in other words, seeks to recreate the experience of aesthesis in his reader. When we read Aretino's descriptions of an artwork, a scene, an object, or even a sex act, we do not just see it reproduced, we feel its effects. Through this technique he originates an entirely new way of writing about art, beginning a tradition which was still influential in the writings of William Hazlitt and Walter Pater in the nineteenth century. The *Opera nova's* description of Aretino as being 'studious in this faculty and in painting' is entirely prescient in its encapsulation

⁵² *Lettere*, I.62.

⁵³ This was A. Luzio's argument, in *Pietro Aretino nei primi suoi anni a Venezia e la corte dei Gonzaga* (Turin: Loescher, 1888), 110 n.1, latterly reinforced by Silvestrelli, 'Il giovane Aretino', 31.

⁵⁴ See Mark W. Roskill, *Dolce's Aretino and Venetian Art Theory of the Cinquecento* (New York: New York University Press, 1968).

⁵⁵ See *Lettere sull'arte di Pietro Aretino*, ed. Fidenzio Pertile and E. Camesasca, 3 vols (Milan: Milione, 1957–1960). The topic is re-examined in Bisceglia *et al.*, *Pietro Pittore Aretino*.

⁵⁶ On design and colour see Roskill, 116–17.

of the faculties which produce what we might call the ‘mature’ style of his masterpiece, the *Letters*.

What, however, does ‘this faculty’ mean? Petrus de Aretio was not, it seems, enrolled as a student at the Collegio di San Girolamo. ‘Faculty’ here means the poetic tradition, to which he was introduced by Mezzabarba, encouraged by Bontempi, and trained by Caporali. Caporali is surely Aretino’s *maestro* in Perugia, being himself a poet and a painter. Aretino’s time spent in Perugia certainly corresponds to the time required to complete an apprenticeship, even if it were not a formal *cursus*.⁵⁷ It is certainly more credible that Luigi Bacci was funding Aretino’s studies under Caporali than to believe he was paying for him to be sodomized by a bureaucrat. There may well have been a ‘Socratic’ element to their relationship, as Caporali was almost twenty years Aretino’s senior (ca. 1475–1555). If Aretino arrived in Perugia in January 1507, he would have been fifteen, and Caporali thirty-two, which was not unusual for a pederastic relationship – we recall that Friano kept carved in his heart the image of his latest Ganymede. Caporali could well have taught Aretino to paint and to study poetry, as whilst he is primarily known as a painter – and as the son of a greater painter, Bartolomeo Caporali – he was also a poet.

The question of why the *Opera nova* was published in Venice is less problematic. It was not uncommon for publishers to send works to Venice – the print capital of Europe – to be printed. The Cartolari publishing family, for example, who were based in Perugia, sent works to Niccolò Zoppino, the publisher of the *Opera nova*.⁵⁸ Caporali’s mother was Brigida Cartolari, so it is not impossible that Caporali was instrumental in the publication. The question over the title of the publication is similarly straightforward: it is not Pietro Aretino’s new work so much as a new work by Pietro Aretino. The title speaks to the market; by calling it the *Opera nova* Aretino (or Caporali, or the Cartolari) was acknowledging a public voracious for new titles. It was this awareness of his reading public’s tastes and habits that helped to make the *Letters* such a success.

What kind of work is the *Opera nova*? Surprisingly, it is learned, and confirms that Aretino did have some kind of education in poetry.⁵⁹ Surprisingly, because Aretino would later condemn all pedantry, convention, and Petrarchism, especially the kind of Neoplatonic Petrarchism that had been made *de rigueur* by the cultural arbiter Pietro Bembo in 1525.⁶⁰ In this it bears the stamp of Caporali’s

⁵⁷ In his *Libro dell’arte* Cennino Cennini recommended thirteen years for an artist’s apprenticeship, although six to seven years was more realistic, as Peter Burke records in *The Italian Renaissance: culture and society in Italy*, 3rd edn (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 56–67.

⁵⁸ On Zoppino see Luigi Severi, *Sitibondo nel stampar de’ libri: Niccolò Zoppino tra libro volgare, letteratura cortigiana e questione della lingua* (Manziana: Vecchiarelli, 2009), Lorenzo Baldacchini, *Alle origini dell’editoria volgare: Niccolò Zoppino da Ferrara a Venezia. Annali (1503–1544)*, with a Note by Amedeo Quondam (Manziana: Vecchiarelli, 2011), and below, 24–25.

⁵⁹ See Angelo Romano’s introduction in *Cortigiana; Opera nova; Pronostico; Il testamento dell’elefante; Farza*, 185–97; Roberto Fedi, “Juvenilia” Aretiniani’, in *Pietro Aretino nel cinquecentenario della nascita*, 87–119; Silvestrelli, ‘Il giovane Aretino’.

⁶⁰ Although see n.7, above.

own *Rime*, which were published much later, in 1540. Aretino's seemingly programmatic study and imitation of earlier poetry puts pay to another myth surrounding his time in Perugia: that he was an autodidact who learned about literature due to his time spent working in a bookbinder's shop. A 1603 poetry anthology published in Vicenza for the Venice-based printer Barezzi Barezzi includes Francesco Berni's capitolo *Contra Pietro Aretino*, which dates from the 1520s. The poem is accompanied by an anonymous printed commentary which asserts that Aretino's first job was as a bookbinder in Perugia.⁶¹ Mazzuchelli suggested that the reason Aretino never mentioned this job was out of shame, but that whilst working in the bindery he began to read the books, and then began to write, developing a reputation as an *uomo letterato*.⁶² Mazzuchelli's wishful thinking and the anonymous commentary share a source: Aretino himself. Aretino later developed his autodidactic, iconoclastic public image, claiming no education but what his mother taught him, and a contempt for learned pedants. This is the most likely reason he never made reference to the *Opera nova* in later years – it predates and undermines that image. Aretino – like Petrarch before him – championed his own ignorance, and – like Petrarch before him – he was being insincere.⁶³

Of course, it might seem strange to compare Aretino to the figure against whom he (ostensibly) defined himself – Petrarch was the forefather of Latin humanism, and in terms of vernacular poetry Petrarchism signified a series of prescribed formulas, rules and words which would become prerequisites for any aspiring poet. Despite having died in 1374, he dominated the poetry of the sixteenth century. He was also from Arezzo.⁶⁴ In his first collection, Aretino had clearly not yet renounced Petrarchism.⁶⁵ The recurrent themes of the *Opera nova* are love, death, time, fame and fortune. Aretino follows the *Trionfi* of Petrarch, which have the same emphases.⁶⁶ He also follows the most important Petrarchan poet of the fifteenth century, Serafino dell'Aquila, from whom he learned the art of the *strambotto*.⁶⁷ Serafino represents the *lirica antebembiiana*, the Petrarchan tradition as it was before Bembo's reformulation of it. If we were in any doubt that Aretino began his career not as a bookbinder but as a Petrarchist, we need only compare the opening lines of Petrarch's sonnet sequence, the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, with Aretino's opening *strambotto* in the *Opera nova*:

⁶¹ *Delle rime piacevoli del Berni, Copetta, Francese, Bronzino, Martello, Domenichi, Strascino, E d'altri Ingegni simili* (Vicenza: Barezzi Barezzi, 1603), c.12^f.

⁶² Mazzuchelli, *Vita*, 13.

⁶³ See Petrarch's *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia*.

⁶⁴ On Aretino as counter-Petrarch see Raymond Waddington, *Aretino's Satyr: Sexuality, Satire, and Self-Projection in Sixteenth-Century Literature and Art* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 20ff.

⁶⁵ On Aretino's ongoing relationship with Petrarchism see Paolo Procaccioli, 'Pietro Aretino sirena di antipetrarchismo: Flussi e riflussi di una poetica della militanza', in Antonio Corsaro, Harald Hendrix, Paolo Procaccioli (eds), *Autorit , modelli e antimodelli nella cultura artistica e letteraria tra Riforma e Controriforma* (Manziana: Vecchiarelli, 2007), 103–30.

⁶⁶ The order of the *Trionfi* is Love, Chastity, Death, Fame, Time and Eternity.

⁶⁷ Caporali also wrote *strambotti*, although far fewer than Aretino. In his 1540 *Rime* there are seven *strambotti* grouped together on sigs. Di^o-Dii^o, loosely on the theme of natural wonders.

Voi ch'ascoltate in rime sparse il suono
 di quei sospiri ond'io nudriva 'l core
 in sul mio primo giovanile errore
 quand'era in parte altr'uom da quel ch'ì sono,
 del vario stile in ch'io piango et ragiono
 fra le vane speranze e 'l van dolore,
 ove sia chi per prova intenda amore,
 spero trovar pietà, nonché perdono.
 (Petrarca, *Rvf* 1.1–8)⁶⁸

You who hear in scattered rhymes the sound
 Of those sighs whereby I nourished my heart
 In my first juvenile error
 When I was in part another man from the one I am now,
 Of the varied style in which I weep and talk,
 Between vain hopes and vain melancholy,
 Where there is anyone who understands love through experience
 I hope to find pity, not only pardon.

Voi ch'ascoltate il lamentabil verso
 Fugite Amor amaro e sua facella,
 Che per l'impio seguire ho il tempo perso
 E tronca la mia barca a buona stella
 Et ogni ritto ho trouato riuerso
 [A] l'accostare di tal nauicella
 Fugite tutti l'amorosa uoglia
 Che dona pianti, stenti, afanni, e doglia.

You who hear my lamentable verse,
 Flee bitter Love and his torch,⁶⁹
 Since through the impious pursuit I have lost time
 And severed my ship from the good star
 And everything upright I found turned away
 At the approach of such a little boat.
 Flee, all, the amorous desire
 Which brings complaints, hardship, anxieties and misery.⁷⁰

Aside from the opening line, which is a conventional echo – compare Serafino's 'Voi ch'ascoltate mie iuste querele' or Gaspara Stampa's 'Voi ch'ascoltate in queste meste rime' – Aretino's poem abounds with Petrarchan commonplaces. The little boat (*barca/ navicella*) that is put asunder from its guiding star recalls Petrarch's *Rvf* 28, 132 and 189; the emphasis on flight and pursuit echoes *Rvf* 140 and 190; whilst particular phrases such as 'l'amorosa uoglia' are lifted verbatim out of Petrarch

⁶⁸ Petrarch's title, *Fragments of Vernacular Things*, is approximated by the statement that precedes Aretino's sonnets in the *Opera nova*: 'Alquante cose'.

⁶⁹ Florio (1611), *facella*, n.: 'a little brand or burning light'.

⁷⁰ *Opera nova*, 40; Petrarch trans. Durling, 36–7.

almost unconsciously (see *Ruf* 270. 65). One finds these echoes of Petrarch, Serafino and Dante, amongst others, in every poem in the collection. Indeed, Aretino had evidently internalised Petrarch's rules on imitation.⁷¹ Some of Aretino's poems are pleasantly conceited, whilst others, such as this opening *strambotto*, are somewhat disjointed collections of typical tropes. None of the poems ever quite matches the musical brilliance and structural control of Petrarch himself. Perhaps Aretino knew this, and it was one of the reasons for his subsequent turn against Petrarch(ism). Or perhaps Aretino disapproved of the Neoplatonic Petrarch of the sixteenth century, who seemed to put words in the fourteenth-century poet's mouth, preferring instead the more traditional approach of Serafino. We know that Aretino favoured an ethos of naturalism in his writing (albeit offset by his painterly mannerism), as one of the few writers he ever praised was Erasmus: 'who has enlarged the confines of the human genius, and by imitating himself has remained in the memory of men as the only model of himself'.⁷² Nevertheless, the collection reveals a careful study of poetic traditions, which likely came in part from Caporali, but also from the streets of Perugia itself.

THE CAPORALI ALTARPIECE: SHOWCASING THE VERNACULAR

As noted at the outset, Caporali's Madonna and Child was painted in 1510–12, when Aretino was writing and publishing his first collection of poems. It does not have its meaning alone, but must be viewed in relation to Raphael's *Ansidei Madonna* (1504–1505).⁷³ In Raphael's painting, the Madonna is holding a book. Its size, rubrication and gilt edges suggest it is a Latin breviary (Fig. 2).⁷⁴

⁷¹ See Petrarch's *Familiars*, XXIII.19.

⁷² *Lettere*, II.69 (13 August 1538, to Giambattista Salis Grisone): 'che ha islargati i confini de l'umano ingegno, e ne lo imitar se stesso è restato ne la memoria de gli uomini come un solo esemplare di se medesimo'.

⁷³ Both paintings in turn recall Perugino's *Madonna and Child with Sts Laurence, Louis of Toulouse, Ercolanus and Constance* (Altarpiece of the Decemviri), tempera grassa on wood, 193 × 165 cm, Musei Vaticani cat. 40317 (ca. 1495–96).

⁷⁴ It was not uncommon for the Madonna to be depicted reading Latin – having been elevated to a *de facto* Doctor of the Church – perhaps the most famous example being Botticelli's *Madonna del Libro* (ca. 1480–1481), in which the page opens on the *De profundis*. In Raphael's slightly earlier *Madonna and Child with Book* (oil on panel, 55.2 × 40 cm, Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, CA, ca. 1502–1503), the Madonna is clearly reading a Latin breviary, as we glimpse the opening of the office of the ninth hour, *nones*, the hour when Christ died. The Scriptural reference reinforces the iconographical circularity of *Madonna and Child/Passion*. On the Virgin's doctoral status see E. Hall and H. Uhr, '*Aureola and Fructus*: Distinctions of Beatitude in Scholastic Thought and the Meaning of Some Crowns in Early Flemish Painting', *Art Bulletin*, 60 (1978), 249–70 (264ff.). Whilst one cannot say for absolute certain that the book in Raphael's *Ansidei Madonna* represents a Latin prayer-book or breviary (it contains no words; text is represented by horizontal lines of paint, except for a rubricated sign of the cross on the verso), probability and tradition suggest it. There were some vernacular books of hours, and by the sixteenth century their numbers had grown, but this was due to print. They mostly postdate Raphael and more often than not were German. The rubricated books in the paintings by Botticelli and Raphael are not printed editions; in Italy, in 1505, such a book would have been in Latin, although some Books of Hours did have vernacular rubrics (for example the *Morrisset Hours*, which is Florentine in origin: see Brent Burbridge, 'A Matter of Life and Text: The Lives of a Fifteenth Century Florentine Book of Hours in the University of Ottawa's rare books library', *Memini: Travaux et documents*, 17 (2013), doi: <https://journals.openedition.org/memini/594>). See Rudolf Hirsch, *Printing, Selling and Reading, 1450–1550* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1974), 132.

The Madonna reads the book carefully, silently. It is for her eyes only. This is the most immediately visible distinction between the Caporali and Raphael paintings. In Caporali's painting the Madonna is not holding a book. Rather beneath her feet the cartulary case displays its contents to the congregation: a hymn sheet. The hymn is not written in Latin, but Italian, most likely part of the popular *cantasi come* ('sing it like...') tradition – hymns or *laude* set to the melodies of well-known secular songs – and its accompanying musical parts show it was supposed to be used.⁷⁵ It is a painting of a popular Marian hymn that was to function as an actual hymnal. The symbolism is not insignificant, as it emphasizes the function of the space in each instance: the prayer-book of Raphael's *Ansidei Madonna* signifies private (Latinate) devotion; the hymnal of the Caporali altarpiece signifies collective (vernacular) worship.⁷⁶ This corresponds to Raphael's Madonna gracing the private chapel of the *Ansidei* family in the church of S. Fiorenzo, whereas Caporali's altarpiece was painted for the high altar of the community of *Amadeiti* Franciscan friars who resided in the convent of S. Girolamo.⁷⁷ Yet any simple distinction between Latinate and vernacular religious cultures would be misleading. As Blake Wilson has noted in relation to the Florentine *laude* tradition, 'the worlds of private, elite traditions and those more public and popular seem to be separated not so much by clear lines as by porous membranes across which cultural goods were continually exchanged'.⁷⁸ The *lauda* in Caporali's altarpiece, a popular song painted for the Latinate friars, exemplifies the porous membrane of cultural exchange. As Edward Dent noted over a century ago, '[w]e may assume from the fact of the hymn being painted on the picture that it was a favourite with the congregation, and therefore fairly representative of popular taste at the time'.⁷⁹ It ought to be noted also that Umbria was the cradle of the *laude* tradition.⁸⁰

Moreover, the extant *laude* not only show that they were apt to be performed in monastic institutions, but a number of the *cantasi come* pieces dating from the

⁷⁵ See Ziino, 'A dimandar pietà', 83; Silvestrelli, 'Il giovane Aretino', 30.

⁷⁶ Or at least collective vernacular worship informed by Latinate study – as SS. Francis of Assisi (left) and Antony of Padua (right) are carrying books; St. Jerome, to whom the church was dedicated, is, as ever, reading.

⁷⁷ On the exact location of the altar see Donal Cooper and Carol Plazzotta, 'Raphael's *Ansidei* Altarpiece in the National Gallery', *The Burlington Magazine*, 146/1220 (2004), 720–31.

⁷⁸ Blake Wilson, 'Song collections in Renaissance Florence: the *cantasi come* tradition and its manuscript sources', *Rececare*, 10 (1998), 69–104 (93).

⁷⁹ Edward J. Dent, 'The *Laudi Spirituali* in the XVIth and XVIIth Centuries', *Proceedings of the Musical Association*, 43rd Sess. (1916–1917), 63–95 (67).

⁸⁰ St. Francis of Assisi writes some of the earliest recorded *laude*, the *Laudes creaturarum*, or the *Canticle of the Sun*. Fra Benedetto, known as Cornetta due to the trumpet he used to summon the faithful during the Great Alleluia of 1233, was from Perugia. It is Jacopone da Todi, however, who is synonymous with the *laude* tradition. See Rosanna Bettarini, *Jacopone e il Laudario Urbinate* (Florence: Sansoni, 1969). It was in Perugia, moreover, that the *laude drammatiche* developed, the vernacular religious drama (*sacra rappresentazione*) that was instrumental in the development of Italian poetic drama. On the various strands of the *laude* tradition see Mario Pelaez and Fernando Liuzzi's entry, 'Lauda', in the *Enciclopedia Italiana* (1933) and Matteo Leonardi, *Storia della lauda: Secoli XIII-XVI* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021).

early sixteenth century originated in convents. Indeed, the proximity and interchangeability of the *laude* and *cantasi come* traditions was underlined by the publisher Filippo Giunti in his foreword to the 1563 collection of *laudi spirituali* made by the Dominican monk Fra Serafino Razzi, in which he recommends that the musical settings of the *laude* in the volume should replace the 'foolish' tradition of 'sing it like this or that'.⁸¹ Interestingly, the Caporali showcase confirms 'the likelihood that the *laude* were sung polyphonically', as it includes musical notation for four voices, which in turn reinforces the argument that the *cantasi come* repertory corresponded with 'the newer, four-part settings of the formally compatible *canti carnascialeschi*' or carnival songs.⁸² The painted hymnal is polyphonic, set for four voices: on the painted verso is the notation for *superius* and *tenor*, on the recto *altus* and *bassus* (see Fig. 3).⁸³

How does this painting relate to our knowledge of Aretino in Perugia? It does so on two levels: the first pertains to Aretino's conferred status in the *Opera nova*; the second pertains to the sensorium of the Perugian cityscape, and Aretino's experience of it.⁸⁴ The *Opera nova*, as we have seen, repeatedly insists that Aretino was a painter as well as a poet: *Pietro pittore Arretino*. Yet there is no record of his fledgling artistic career. There is, however, an anecdote, a distortion which, I contend, is apocryphally connected to the painting of the Madonna. In his commentary on the *Rime di Cesare Caporali*, his grandson Carlo recorded that in a piazza in Perugia which Aretino frequented was a painting of the Magdalene at the feet of the crucified Christ. She was depicted in an attitude of mourning, with her arms open. According to the anecdote, Aretino returned to the piazza by night and painted a lute into her open arms.⁸⁵ Mazzuchelli cautiously noted that Carlo Caporali lived a century after Aretino, and offered up no source or authority for the anecdote.⁸⁶ Yet Carlo was the grandson of Cesare, who was the illegitimate

⁸¹ 'Fra Serafino [...] n'haueua [...] raccolto un libro delle piu antiche, e moderne, & aggiunto loro il modo cantarle, lasciando quelle scioccha manere di dire: Cantasi come la tale, e come la quale' ('Fra Serafino has compiled a book of the oldest and modern [songs of praise], and added the way to sing them, forgoing that foolish manner of saying "sing it like this, or like that"'). See *Libro primo delle laudi spirituali da diuersi eccellenti e diuoti autori antichi e moderni composte* (Venice: Giunti, 1563).

⁸² Wilson, 'Song collections', 83, 94–6. Aretino was imbued in the carnival tradition, and would be responsible for the Roman carnival of 1525.

⁸³ See Ziino, 'A dimandar pietà', 82. For another example of the *laude* influencing painting see Raffaele Marrone, "'La donna fo tutta turbata/ (la raina incoronata!)": le laudi mariane tardoduecentesche e gli affreschi di Ambrogio Lorenzetti a Montesiepi', *Prospettiva*, 161/162 (2016), 100–3.

⁸⁴ On the city-as-sensorium see the chapter in the present volume by Marlene Eberhart.

⁸⁵ 'Osseruò in luogo frequentato nella Piazza una pittura, dou'era la Maddalena à piè d'un Christo in positura di braccia aperte, e in atto di dolersi. Vi ritornò di nascosto, e dipinsele un leuto tra le mani.' See *Rime di Cesare Caporali con l'osservazioni di Carlo Caporali* (Venice: Giacomo Bortoli, 1656), c. 217. This was in fact a popular artistic motif of the time. The *lira da braccio* angel is often found beneath the Madonna Enthroned, where we find Caporali's *lauda*. The *lira da braccio*, moreover, was synonymous with *laude*. In Caporali's painting the members of the congregation figuratively replace the *lira da braccio* angel by singing the *lauda* themselves. See Katherine Powers, 'The *lira da braccio* in the Angel's Hands in Italian Renaissance Madonna Enthroned Paintings', *Music in Art*, 26, 1/2 (2001), 20–9.

⁸⁶ Mazzuchelli, *Vita*, 12.

son of Canon Camillo Caporali, the brother of Aretino's mentor, Bitte, who painted the S. Girolamo altarpiece. As such, it's not impossible that a story had passed through history into the distortions of anecdote. It was not the Madonna, but the Maddalena. All of the same emphases are there, but rearranged: the religious artwork, the musical addition, the fusion of the religious and the secular. So is it possible that Pietro the painter-poet from Arezzo had a hand in the Caporali altarpiece?

Aretino himself writes in *strambotto* 17 from the *Opera nova* that 'il pictor parla di gesti e disegni' ('the painter speaks of deeds and designs').⁸⁷ On a literal level this is just what artists discuss. Yet it also suggests that paintings might be read as texts: il pictor *parla*. This certainly accords with the words put into Aretino's mouth by his friend and former amanuensis, the scholar Lodovico Dolce, in his treatise on painting, entitled *L'Aretino*:

ARETINO: [...] il Pittore è intento a imitar per via di linee, e di colori [...] tutto quello, che si dimostra all'occhio: & il Poeta col mezo delle parole va imitando non solo cio che si dimostra all'occhio, ma che ancora si rappresenta all'intelletto. [...] che si possono dir quasi fratelli.

FABRINI: Questa diffinitione è facile e propria: e similmente è propria la similitudine tra il Poeta et il Pittore: havendo alcuni valenti huomini chiamato il Pittore Poeta mutolo, e il Poeta *Pittore, che parla*. (Emphasis added.)

ARETINO: [...] the painter is concerned to imitate, by dint of lines and colours [...] everything that presents itself to the eye; while the poet, through the medium of words, characteristically imitates not only what presents itself to the eye, but also what presents itself to the intellect. [...] one can almost call them brother arts.

FABRINI: This definition of yours is simple and appropriate; equally, the resemblance you note between the poet and the painter is fitting, in that some men of parts have called the painter a "mute poet" and the poet a "speaking painter."⁸⁸

We recall how Aretino is described in the *Opera nova* as 'studioso in questa facultà e in pittura' ('studious in this faculty [poetry] and in painting').⁸⁹ One can see how the anecdote of the lute painting might have emerged from the Caporali painting, and Aretino's possible addition to it. Perhaps, then, it was not that Aretino painted a lute into the hands of the Maddalena, but that he painted a popular hymn, complete with full musical score, into a portrait of the Madonna,

⁸⁷ *Opera nova*, 44.

⁸⁸ Roskill, *Dolce's Aretino*, 96–7. Dolce has Fabrini say that Aretino never lifted a brush in his life, but this is probably an attempt to defend Aretino against the *capitolo* pasted to the Rialto. Dolce only knew Aretino from his Venetian years. Caporali's libretto *Capitolo del honore della Pittura* ends with a sonnet in which Painting herself speaks in the first-person. See Silvestrelli, 'Il giovane Aretino', 34.

⁸⁹ *Opera nova*, 56. In the letter to Caporali (*Lettere*, I.169) we find a similar doubling, as Aretino formally addresses him as 'Pittore e Architetto'.

where it occupied the traditional position of the laudatory angel with *lira da braccio*. Indeed, the anecdote functions as an inverted metaphor of the *cantasi come* tradition: the hymn which borrows its music from popular song becomes a symbol of popular music (the lute) being added to the religious subject.

What evidence is there, however, that the hymn in the showcase was Aretino's work? Caporali's painting is the only surviving record of this hymn's existence.⁹⁰ It consists of two stanzas, the first of which is as follows:

A dimandar pietà
vengo Maria a te
per che el mio amor vero è
a la tua servitù,
e di te sempre fu,
ne mai d'altri serà.
A dimandar pietà
vengo Maria a te.

To beg mercy
I come Mary to thee
Because my love is true
To your service;
and yours it ever was,
never another's will it be.
To beg mercy
I come Mary to thee.⁹¹

Except, in Act V sc 8 of Aretino's later play, *Lo Ipocrito*, we find the following lines alternately interspersed in the dialogue:

A dimandar pietà [...]

Vengo, Madonna, a te [...]

Perché il mio cor non è.

To beg mercy
I come, Madonna, to you
Because it is not my heart.

Aretino, like Shakespeare after him, was apt to include snatches of popular songs in his plays.⁹² The hymn would need to be very popular if it was

⁹⁰ Though see Silvestrelli, 'Il giovane Aretino' (30) on recently discovered musical graffiti in Assisi that are close to that depicted in San Girolamo, and n.93, below.

⁹¹ I have used the archaic accusative 'thee' instead of 'you', which only works in the first utterance, in order to maintain the sonority of the hymn.

⁹² See Ziino, 'A dimandar pietà', 84. The seminal work remains Nino Pirrotta, *Le due Orfei* (1969; 1975), trans. by Karen Eales as *Music and Theatre from Poliziano to Monteverdi* (Cambridge: CUP, 1982).

known in Perugia in 1510–1512, and still familiar to a Venetian audience in 1542, when Aretino's play was written. Yet no other copies of it survive, so its continued currency is in question. Of course, many popular songs and hymns are lost, so this is not a watertight theory, but one would expect at least another extant witness if the poem had remained well-known after almost thirty years. The alternative argument is that it was not still popular, but meant something to Aretino. Notably, he switches the name Maria for Madonna; possibly a remembrance of the subject of the painting that incorporated the *lauda*, even if it is here being secularised.⁹³ This, of course, does not prove Aretino had a hand in the painting – without knowing of other paintings by Aretino by way of comparison, definitive proof cannot be provided – but when one considers the title repeatedly conferred upon Aretino in the *Opera nova*, 'Pietro Pictore Arretino', his close relationship with Caporali, the appearance of the painted hymn in his later play, the claim in the anonymous Rialto poem, and his lifelong obsession with art, one can make the argument that the Caporali showcase might have been the work of Aretino – the only known painting to which he ever contributed.⁹⁴

Where might Caporali and Aretino have heard such a song, aside from the convent? Well, anywhere and everywhere, the courts and *piazze*. Popular songs were part of the *sensorium* of the city, performed by the street singers, the *canterini*, who were to be heard in every Italian city, and who were regularly employed in an official capacity by the priors of Perugia.⁹⁵ A well-known *canterino*, Niccolò Zoppino, is referred to in two separate works by Aretino. In the first day of the *Ragionamenti*, Pippa recalls 'that Zoppino who, when he sings on his bench, all the world rushes to hear him'.⁹⁶ In *Lo Ippocrito* also – the same work in which we find the lines from the Caporali *lauda* – Zoppino is recalled,

⁹³ Although the lines from the *lauda* are immediately followed by a comic reference to scripture and song: 'IPOCRITO Lo exultare de i giusti in domino è in.../LISEO Di chi ci cridi tu?/IPOCRITO ...la Cantica de i Cantici.' (HYPOCRITE The exultation of the just in the Lord is in ... /LISEO What are you shouting about?/HYPOCRITE ... the Song of Songs', Act V sc. 8). See *Lo Ippocrito in Teatro II*, ed. Carmine Boccia (Rome: Salerno, 2010), 264. The verse 'exultate iusti in Domino' ('Exult in the Lord, you righteous') actually appears in Psalm 32:1 (Latin Vulgate), not in the Song of Songs. The *lauda* verses evidently recall their devotional usage, albeit humorously.

⁹⁴ This possibility was first raised by Umberto Gnoli, *Pittori e miniatori dell'Umbria* (Spoleto: Argentieri, 1923), 247–8. More recently, the notation in the Caporali altarpiece was compared to very similar musical graffiti in a church in Assisi, reinforcing at least the popularity of the melody, if not the *lauda* overall. See Biancamaria Brumana, 'Percorsi musicali della devozione: graffiti del Cinquecento in un ciclo pittorico della Pinacoteca Comunale di Assisi e le loro concordanze', *Imago Musicae*, 29 (2017), 53–77.

⁹⁵ See Blake Wilson, 'The Cantastorie/Canterino/Cantimbanco as Musician', *Italian Studies*, 71/2 (2016), 154–70, and the 2019 special issue of *Renaissance Studies* on European Street Singers, ed. by Luca Degl'Innocenti and Massimo Rospocher. esp. their chapter 'Urban voices: The hybrid figure of the street singer in Renaissance Italy', 17–41. See also by Rospocher, '"In vituperium status Veneti": The Case of Niccolò Zoppino', *The Italianist*, 34/3 (2014), 349–61.

⁹⁶ 'quel Zoppino che quando canta in banca tutto il mondo corre a udirlo'. See Pietro Aretino, *Ragionamento; Dialogo*, ed. Paolo Procaccioli (Milan: Garzanti, 1984), 233. *Cantimbanco*, as noted by Blake (*ibid.*) was a very closely related term to *canterino*, and often used as a synonym.

when the young Tanfuro has to apologise for arriving late because he stopped 'to hear Zoppino sing a thousand songs on his bench'.⁹⁷ It was the same Zoppino who published Aretino's *Opera nova* in 1512.⁹⁸ Zoppino, like Aretino, belies the critical dichotomy between *poesia d'arte* and *poesia popolare*, between the literary and the paraliterary. Indeed, Aretino's first published work bears many traces of the *canterini* tradition, including its frontispiece; in the foreground a courtly lady crowns a poet, but the eye is drawn to the central figure playing the lute (Fig. 4). Moreover, the title *Opera nova* recalls the phrase used by various street-singers at the close of their performances, when they would sell their wares, as Rospoche notes of one of Zoppino's *barzellette*:

The song eventually closes with another clear performative element, the customary request to pay the singer for his 'cossa novella' – the pamphlet that recorded the performance of his verses [...].⁹⁹

The *Opera nova* thus recalls the *cosa novella*, the new work available to the audience who are presently hearing its performance. Indeed, at the close of the preface to his reader, Aretino – in a voice which offers us a glimpse of the tone we recognise so readily in the *Lettere* – advises his reader to 'at least read them, and, if disgusted, you do not wish to keep them in your house, sell them to the booksellers to make covers for others, or to the grocers to wrap fish, and it will be no shame to you or trouble to me'.¹⁰⁰ The melodies for the best-known songs of the *canterini* in turn furnished the *laude* of the *cantasi come* repertory. The *lauda* in the Caporali altarpiece is not, we recall, a book of hours or a hymnal; rather it resembles one of the 'cheap printed editions' hawked by a *canterino* at the close of his performance.¹⁰¹ Moreover, and more so than Caporali in his 1540 *Rime*, the poetic forms of the *Opera nova*, which are announced in its subtitle – 'zoe [cioè] *Strambotti*[.] *Sonetti*[.] *Capitoli*[.] *Epistole*[.] *Barzellette*[.] & *una Desperata*' – are those favoured by the *canterini*.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ *Lo Ipocrito*, IV.xi: 'sentir cantar mille cose in banca dal Zoppino' (246).

⁹⁸ For many years it was thought the street-singer and the publisher were two different figures, as criticism was not ready to allow substantial contact or overlap between the literary world of early modern publishing and the allegedly paraliterary world of the *canterini*. However, recent archival work by Degl'Innocenti and Rospoche have shown them to be one and the same person. See Rospoche (2014), above, and Degl'Innocenti and Rospoche (2019), 27–31. There is a pimp named Zoppino in the *Cortigiana* (1525/1534), yet this character preceded by a decade the *Tariffa delle puttane di Venegia* (1535), a catalogue and tariff of Venetian prostitutes thought to have been published by Zoppino, and sometimes erroneously attributed to Aretino. Whether Aretino wrote the *Ragionamento del Zoppino* (1539) remains in question. See Giuseppe Crimi, 'Pietro Aretino: Attributed Works', in Faini and Ugolini (eds), *Companion*, 271–99 (281–8).

⁹⁹ Rospoche, 'In vituperium', 352.

¹⁰⁰ *Opera nova*, 39: 'legeli al meno e, fastidito, si non uole te impacceno la casa, uendeli a li librari per far couerti de li altri o a li salsamentarii per inuoluparci li pesciculi marini e né fia tuo troppo danno e a me non tedioso'. The final phrase echoes Petrarch's *Ruf* 224.14.

¹⁰¹ Rospoche, 'In vituperium', 351. See also Rosa Salzberg, *Ephemeral City: Cheap Print and Urban Culture in Renaissance Venice* (Manchester: MUP, 2014).

¹⁰² See Wilson, 'Cantastorie/Canterino/Cantimbanco', 159.

Aretino's *Opera nova* thus mingles echoes of Dante and Petrarch, refracted through Serafino and Caporali, with the modes and forms of the street-singers, who had themselves already incorporated Petrarchism into their repertoire, as Petrarch himself lamented in a famous letter to Boccaccio.¹⁰³

One cannot help but wonder if Aretino's Perugian friend Friano, who is otherwise lost to posterity, was a *canterino* too, at least intermittently. We recall how 'Love always carved the image of some new Ganymede [in his breast], which led him to sing his passions in eclogues'.¹⁰⁴ The lost Friano is profoundly suggestive of the cityscape of Aretino's Perugia, almost to the point of metonymy. The town of the universities, as it would come to be known, bustles with students, poets, artists, and street-singers. The *piazze* are filled with music and art – the apocryphal Maddalena was supposedly painted in one of the city's public squares, we remember – and the homosocial environment of the future soldiers, lawyers, doctors, poets and architects in which the would-be Scourge of Princes moved not only created lifelong loyalties and loves, but also the blueprint for how Aretino would build his later networks in Rome and Venice. The Caporali altarpiece, in addition to depicting the Madonna and Child enthroned, and showcasing the popular hymn, also constitutes what would come to be known as a *sacra conversazione* – a community of saints engaged in dialogue around the Virgin.¹⁰⁵ In his later letters, Aretino presents Perugia as a secular equivalent – 'the loving fraternal conversation that together we exercised in the dear spring of our years' – with himself at the centre. Not unlike the singer with *lira da braccio* at the centre of the frontispiece of the *Opera nova*.

University of East Anglia

¹⁰³ See *Seniles*, V.2.

¹⁰⁴ See above, 12.

¹⁰⁵ See Goffen, *op. cit.*

Abstract

According to his apocrypha, Aretino was forced to flee his hometown of Arezzo after penning some anti-papal verses. Similarly, it is claimed that he fled Perugia ten years later after painting a lute into the hands of a depiction of the Maddalena, which stood in one of the town's *piazze*. Neither anecdote is true, but they point to Aretino's early reputation for both poetry and painting. In 1512, the *Opera nova del fecondissimo giovane Pietro pittore Arretino* was published in Venice. It was the first work by Aretino to appear in print, and the fruit of the formative time he spent in Perugia, where he was part of an urban circle of poets, artists and scholars. It was a circle and a metropolitan environment he sought to recreate in Rome and Venice. This article draws together Aretino's letters to his lifelong Perugian friends and the poems in the 1512 volume in order to examine the correspondence between their rhetorical and discursive modes. This examination shows that Perugia was the crucible of Aretino's self-fashioning. It was in Perugia that Aretino became a poet. Where also, it would appear, he almost became a painter (*pittore*); a training that would equip him to become one of the most significant writers on art of the sixteenth century. The *Opera nova* shows Aretino mastering the vernacular poetic traditions available to him before, ultimately, rejecting them all in favour of himself. Perugia was the city where, with a little help from his friends, Aretino became Aretino.