INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES TO MUSICAL PORTRAITURE OF THE

LATE RENAISSANCE AND EARLY BAROQUE: READING MUSICAL

PORTRAITS AS GENDERED DIALOGUES

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century portraits from the Italian peninsula that depict women with keyboard instruments have been discussed as an apparent trend by feminist art historians and musicologists. While the connection between these portraits and the well-known iconography of the musical St. Cecilia has been noted, the association between keyboard instruments and the female body has been less frequently explored. In this study, I use methodologies from feminist theory and gender studies, most notably gender performativity, in order to explore how an artist's dialogue between the portrait subject and her instrument creates and is created by complex relationships ingrained by the dominant patriarchal structures that circumscribed women's lives at the time. To realize these interpretive goals, I have chosen two paintings that are less often discussed in art historical and musicological literature: the self-portrait attributed to Marietta Robusti, and *St. Cecilia Playing the Keyboard* in the style of Artemisia Gentileschi.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

St. Cecilia as Spiritual Authority and Cultural Capital

In 1585, a papal bull established the *Congregazione dei Musici sotto l'invocazione della Beata Vergine e dei Santi Gregorio e Cecilia*, that is, the Congregation of Musicians under the Invocation of the Blessed Virgin and of the Saints Gregory and Cecilia. The economic implications of the formation of this musical guild were vast. Throughout most of the seventeenth century, this group had, by papal decree, a monopoly on music publishing, education, and performance in Rome.[1] The figures of Christian authority that were used to back the legitimacy of this powerful group were none other than the Virgin Mary, Mother of God; Gregory I, pope to whom Gregorian chant is mythically attributed; and the Roman virgin-martyr St. Cecilia, more popularly known today as the patron saint of music.

Despite this illustrious inclusion of St. Cecilia as a musical authority, there is only scant mention of music in her vita. Apart from mentioning the secular instruments played (*cantantibus organis*) at her Roman wedding feast, the *Passio Sanctae Caeciliae*, written AD 495–500, says that Cecilia "sang in her heart to the Lord" during the tribulation of her marriage to her pagan betrothed.[2] As her vita recounts, St. Cecilia was kept chaste after her marriage because of her prayers, and her husband Valerian and brother-in-law

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[1] Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, "About us," Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, http://www.santacecilia.it/en/chi_siamo/accademia/storia.html (accessed August 24, 2014).

[2] Translation by Thomas Connolly, *Mourning into Joy: Music, Raphael, and Saint Cecilia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 14.

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Tiburtius were converted to Christianity before the eventual martyrdom of all three. The vita of St. Cecilia was popularized by its inclusion in one of the most widely disseminated books across Europe: the *Legenda aurea*, Jacobus de Voragine's thirteenth-century compilation of saints' lives that became a standard text in Latin and vernacular translations through the early seventeenth century.

While the *Legenda aurea* enjoyed great popularity, iconography in the Middle Ages and Renaissance was the dominant mode of transmission of saints' special attributes. The iconography of St. Cecilia changed over time to become more musically oriented, and early images varied widely. Some depicted her simply in a white robe, her name labelled above her, while others showed her in prayer, usually with an angel nearby, and sometimes in the company of musicians. More gruesome images showed her in a boiling, fiery bathtub or being beheaded. Later images emphasized the musical aspect of Cecilia, and showed her listening to angels in concert, holding a portative organ in her own hands, or even playing it. The proliferation of images that spread throughout Europe depicting Cecilia with an organ even led to the rumor that she invented the organ, and seventeenth-century portraits of Cecilia showed the saint performing effortlessly upon a variety of instruments, her rapt attention turned heavenwards.[3]

While I will delve more deeply into the theories behind the association of St. Cecilia with music in the next chapter, it will suffice for now to say that this musical bond might be interpreted in two ways: as a symbol of the earthly pleasures that must be

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[3] It seems relevant here to note that the Congregazione's name was changed in the nineteenth century to the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia as it became more of a conservatory, a change which doubtless reflects the more modern and popular interpretations of Cecilia as a performing musician.

renounced, or as the spiritual celebration of a joyful and chaste soul.[4] As the full name of the Congregazione demonstrates, by the mid-1500s St. Cecilia's legend and her link with music had grown to such proportions that her name invoked theological and musical authority on par with that of Pope Gregory I, the storied "author" of Gregorian chant.

To further situate St. Cecilia's fame and popularity in the early modern era, in 1599, just a scant fourteen years following the official founding of the Congregazione, what was thought to be the tomb of St. Cecilia was uncovered in Rome at the church of Santa Cecilia in Trastevere. Her body, which would have been in decay for some 1300 years by this point, was reportedly miraculously incorrupt, an event which undoubtedly magnified her estimation in the popular imagination.[5] In addition to housing her "remains," Santa Cecilia in Trastevere is widely believed to have been built on top of the third-century house of Cecilia. The architectural pastiche that exists today is indeed built on the foundations of an early Roman home, but the impressive structure that currently stands there is an amalgamation of different building styles and eras, each spurred on by a particularly zealous pope, each eager to glorify another facet of St. Cecilia's legend.

Despite St. Cecilia's position as the namesake of a musical guild in the city that housed her remains, women musicians in Rome at the time of the Congregazione's founding were not allowed to participate professionally in music. Even nuns' musical practice in Rome was severely restricted by the church officials due to fears about

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[4] Of the many scholarly interpretations of Cecilian legend and symbolism, the one that delves most thoroughly into Cecilia's probable origins as a means to propose this theory of dual symbolism is Connolly, *Mourning into Joy*.

[5] For an explanation of why it is unlikely that the remains found in Cecilia's tomb actually belonged to any third-century woman, see Connolly, *Mourning into Joy*, 35–36.

music's sensual possibilities.[6] The Congregazione, which is still thriving today, attempts to address its historical exclusion of women by making a special note on its official website that the first female member admitted was Maria Rosa Coccia in 1774. The erasure of the professional female musician from the historical record until fairly modern times is only further highlighted by the Congregazione's proud proclamation on their website that a 1716 Breve by Pope Clement XI made it mandatory for all musicians in Rome to join the society, which predated the inclusion of women from the society by fifty-eight years. Ergo, women in Rome were not considered professional musicians in the intellectual sphere of Rome until at least the late eighteenth century, and then only in rare cases.

The point that I wish to emphasize here is that the close association of St. Cecilia with music was being propagated in spite of the official exclusion of most women from educational and professional opportunities. This exclusion was systemic, and it arose due to patriarchal authoritarian beliefs, influenced by Galenic medicine and Aristotelian thought that women were mentally, physically, and spiritually incomplete and inferior.[7]

Another way to understand the role that the figure of St. Cecilia played for the early church is to examine the origins of her cult. Because the ruins of an altar to the Roman pagan goddess Bona Dea also stood at Santa Cecilia in Trastevere, Thomas Connelly has hypothesized that the sudden appearance of Cecilian fervor at the turn of the sixth century was instigated by the Christian church, which wished to convert those

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[6] Kimberlyn Montford, "Holy Restraint: Religious Reform and Nuns' Music in Early Modern Rome," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 37, no. 4 (Winter 2006): 1015, http://www.jstor.org/stable/20478126 (accessed August 27, 2014).

[7] Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman: A Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 31.

who still clung to the cult of the pagan goddess Bona Dea.[8] In ancient Rome, rites of the "Good Goddess" consisted of women gathering together, sharing strong wine, and conducting a ritual sacrifice; apart from this exception for Bona Dea's rites, the latter two activities were otherwise unlawful for Roman women. Men were not allowed at these rites, and even pictures of men were covered during the ceremonies. While it is unknown to what extent Bona Dea's rituals continued on through the centuries, many still took comfort in her ability to heal. Certainly, Bona Dea and her rites presented a challenge to male authority in general, and one can imagine that the church would be anxious to rid the populace's fascination with such a powerful and autonomous female aura.

I use the two examples above, that of the invocation of St. Cecilia's musical authority by the Congregazione and the theory that St. Cecilia herself was fashioned from legend to supplant devotion to a pagan female deity, in order to emphasize the cultural and spiritual clout St. Cecilia's ethos wielded. Both examples can also be read as cases in which the exaltation of St. Cecilia by the authoritarian church precluded women's ability to relate to her. St. Cecilia, a paragon of virtue, was never meant to encourage female autonomy or women's musical practice.

This brief introduction to St. Cecilia's place in the Western Church and popular Western imagination illustrates a central understanding of feminist consciousness: that the female body has been used by patriarchal systems as a kind of cultural capital that women themselves provide but are not allowed to prize or claim. The high status afforded to St. Cecilia by the Church of Rome was paradoxically met by the fact that women could never aspire to be like her. Connolly offers that she had a Marian quality due to her

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[8] Connelly, *Mourning into Joy*, 40–51.

"perfection in the three conditions of virgin, spouse, and widow."[9] This exclusion certainly has its origins in Antiquity: women in art and music are often fashioned as symbols of great disciplines, such as the Liberal Arts or the Muses, and seldom as flesh-and-blood practitioners. This theme of women as idealized locations of inspiration in conflict with women as creators of art and culture is one which will recur throughout this thesis.

The Influence of Cecilian Iconography on Women Artists

Feminist scholars have worked to reclaim erased instances of women's participation from prevailing historical narratives. Within the movement of women's reclamation history reignited by second-wave feminism, feminist historians have promoted and analyzed works by women artists, musicians, writers, and others. Within this scholarship, art historians such as Katharine McIver, Mary Garrard, Catherine King, and Ann Sutherland Harris have sought to uncover the cultural contexts surrounding works by Renaissance and Baroque women artists and the social, political, and economic implications that reside in them.[10]

In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, there is a particular vein of artistic activity by women painters that hearkens back to the musical imagery of St.

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[9] Connolly, *Mourning into Joy*, 182.

[10] Mary Garrard, "Here's Looking at Me: Sofonisba Anguissola and the Problem of the Woman Artist," *Renaissance Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (Autumn 1994): 556–622; Ann Sutherland Harris, *Women Artists, 1550–1950* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1976), 12, 105–114; Catherine King, "Looking a Sight: Sixteenth-Century Portraits of Woman Artists," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 58, no. 3 (1995): 381–406; Katherine A. McIver, "Lavinia Fontana's 'Self-Portrait Making Music,'" *Woman's Art Journal* 19, no. 1 (Spring–Summer 1998): 3–8. As for the status of the paintings as a group of "self-portraits," most of these sources weigh in on the debate as to whether or not the portraits by Sofonisba Anguissola and Caterina van Hemessen are self-portraits or portraits of their sisters.

Cecilia. These images include portraits of women positioned with keyboard instruments. Painters who chose this particular arrangement include Flemish artist Caterina van Hemessen (1528–after 1587), Cremonese artist Sofonisba Anguissola (ca. 1532–1625), Bolognese artist Lavinia Fontana (1552–1614), Venetian artist Marietta Robusti (ca. 1560–1590), and Roman artist Artemisia Gentileschi (1593–c. 1652).[11] The Cecilian references in some of these portraits are clear and have been noted in the literature.[12]

Within these paintings of women by women artists, there is an opportunity to explore how they enter into dialogue with the dominant structures that prevailed at the time of their creation. Excluded from the academies and thus from a comprehensive education in visual art, these women painters—most of them recognized as possessing rare abilities during their own lifetimes—were operating at the margins of the world of professional painting. As such, do their works offer a sense of resistance, of promoting values and ideologies that were themselves marginalized? Did the works instead participate in the reinforcement of dominant systems? As postmodern thought demands multiplicity and eschews binarisms, the answer would appear to be "both." Rather than ask the question, "How were their paintings different from those by men?" (code for, "Did they paint like women?"), the relevant question is instead, "How did their paintings interact with the systems which both validated and excluded them?"

Some scholars, writing on the topic of self-portraiture of women with keyboard instruments, have suggested in passing that the relationship of the subjects of the portraits

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[11] Linda Austern has also written about these portraits as a group in "Portrait of the Artist as (Female) Musician," in *Musical Voices of Early Modern Women: Many-Headed Melodies*, ed. Thomasin K. LaMay (Aldershot Hants, England: Ashgate, 2005), 15–59. See also Fredrika Herman Jacobs, "Misplaced Modifiers," in *Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa: Women Artists and the Language of Art History and Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 123–156.

[12] Austern, "Portrait of the Artist as (Female) Musician," 31, 49; Garrard, "Here's Looking at Me," 591–595.

and the musical objects represented can be explained both by the association of women's bodies with keyboard instruments and through the influence of Cecilian iconography. To further investigate these claims, I propose reframing the motif of women and keyboards by using Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. Performativity uncovers how gendered femininity and masculinity and sexed femaleness and maleness constitute and are constituted by "the 'stylized repetition of acts' that involves bodily movements and gestures (corporeal styles) that are socially approved and politically regulated in keeping with a cultural field of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality."[13] In other words, performativity investigates how seemingly natural attributes of gender and sex are actually culturally constructed by the repetition of linguistic cues that in turn influence actions.

Using performativity as a lens, how can we go back and view some of these works by Renaissance and early Baroque women artists? Depicted bodies in painted portraits also constitute acts of gender performativity, because they have been created by and preserved as ideals of culture. Supported by the feminist art historical work on these women artists that incorporates performativity as a methodology (discussed in the next chapter), I argue that the keyboard instruments in these paintings, which have also been gendered, can be viewed as bodies interacting in dialogue with the women who are depicted alongside them. The instrument in each painting can be viewed as a gendered reflection and extension of the human body that has been gendered as feminine. Some questions to consider include the following: How does the artist create the dialogue

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[13] Gill Jagger, *Judith Butler: Sexual Politics, Social Change and the Power of the Performative* (London: Routledge, 2008), 27.

between the body and the body's own symbol? What are the implications of a woman acting upon a keyboard instrument?

In a macroscopic sense, this study is an exercise in exploring the integration of art history, musicology, gender studies, and feminist scholarship. To do this, I will closely focus on two portraits that I contend deserve more discussion within the discourse of feminist art historical and musicological scholarship: the self-portrait attributed to Marietta Robusti, shown in Figure 1, and the lesser-known St. Cecilia painting sometimes attributed to Artemisia Gentileschi, shown in Figure2. Both of these portraits, when interpreted through the framework of the confluence of linguistic and performative cues, deliver a multiplicity of readings.[14] The themes in each portrait oscillate between the realms of secular and sacred, and the meanings change based on which features of the portrait are emphasized in analysis.

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[14] Feminist methodologies and gender studies can be problematic as theoretical frameworks because of the amount of disagreement about what those frameworks should encompass in order to provide successful critiques. An excellent introduction to the issues inherent in feminist methodology is given in Susan Bordo, "Feminism, Postmodernism, Gender Skepticism," in *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 215–243. For an introduction to the problematic nature of Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, see Gill Jagger, "Performativity, Subjection and the Possibility of Agency," in *Judith Butler: Sexual Politics, Social Change and the Power of the Performative* (London: Routledge, 2008), 89–113.

Figure 1. Marietta Robusti (?), *Self-Portrait*, oil on canvas, c.1580, Uffizi Gallery, Florence

Figure 2. Artemisia Gentileschi (?), *St. Cecilia Playing the Keyboard*, oil on canvas, c.1620, private collection, Trent

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender Performativity and Body History

In this thesis, I will draw on the theory of gender performativity in a way that questions the complex relationships between the gender of an artist, how a portrait subject is presented, the gendered nature of an instrument, and how the human subject and instrument interact as two bodies that have both undergone systems of gendering. This kind of interpretation extends outside of the normal application of performativity, which, in its strictest sense, explains how gender and sex are products of linguistic cues translated into actions. Performativity asks the question, "How are individual bodies as well as the larger social body carved into regularizing grids of narrow binary possibility?"[15]

In order to describe how a subject is both formed and forming at the same time, Butler's theory of performativity accounts for the production of gender differences without denying the agency of the subject formed and described by these differences. According to sociologist Gill Jagger, "…[performativity] does not involve the notion of a pre-existing subject *on* whom power and discourses act, but rather that subjects are formed *through* their discursively constituted identity."[16] Simply defined, "discursive practices" refer to "ways of knowing which include language and representation as well

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[15] Vicki Kirby, *Judith Butler: Live Theory* (London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006), 21.

[16] Jagger, *Judith Butler*, 3.

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as modes of behavior, perception and deportment such as dress, regimes of cleanliness and self-care, the architectural organization of bodies, systems of belief and so on."[17]

The reactions of feminist scholars to the theory of gender performativity have been mixed. Some scholars believe that discussions of gender that do not include equal consideration of the sexed body tend to erase the historical experiences of women. Kathleen Canning, a historian who specializes in body studies, explains that a focus on gender has made the biological body more of a polarized subject, fraught with the restrictive implications of the Cartesian duality of mind versus body: "Thus the repudiation of sex in favour of gender left sex inextricably linked to body, and body stigmatized with biologism and essentialism. This explains in part the apprehension many feminist historians have shown towards a more explicit theoretical or methodological engagement with the body as a historical concept."[18]

Feminist scholar Susan Bordo shares these concerns about trivializing the biological body in gender-based scholarship. She notes that one consequence of the multiplicity of postmodern thought has been to deny the existence of a collective identity, such as "woman."[19] While Bordo argues for the importance of gender performativity in understanding how dominant systems have been created, she also believes that performativity is the key to understanding the perspective gained by female-gendered people. By invoking an idea of "alterity"—which rather reminds me of Butler's concept

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[17] Kirby, *Judith Butler*, 40.

[18] Kathleen Canning, "The Body as Method? Reflections on the Place of the Body in Gender History," *Gender & History* 11, no. 3 (1999): 501, Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost (accessed November 3, 2013).

[19] Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, 41

of "resistance" practicable by a subject—Bordo carves out a place for the biological

female body in scholarship:

> The most powerful revaluations of the female body have looked, not to nature or
> biology, but to the culturally inscribed and historically located body (or to
> historically developed practices) for imaginations of alterity rather than "the
> truth" about the female body…. Without imaginations (or embodiments) of
> alterity, from what vantage point can we seek transformation of culture? And how
> will we construct these imaginations and embodments, if not through alliance
> with that which has been silenced, repressed, disdained?[20]

Bordo notes that many post-structural feminist scholars find the historical

importance of the biologically female body an uncomfortable or impossible concept

because they claim that it "only inverts the classic dualisms rather than challenging

dualistic thinking itself."[21] She goes on to say that this outright dismissal of utilizing

disvalued systems to resist against dominant structures is "abstract, disembodied, and

ahistorical."[22] Instead, Bordo proposes approaching the gender-versus-sex debate in a

way that continues to emphasize the importance of marginalized identities:

> To be concretely—that is, culturally—accomplished requires that we bring the
> "margins" to the "center," that we legitimate and nurture, in those institutions
> from which they have been excluded, marginalized ways of knowing, speaking,
> being. Because relocations of this sort are always concrete, historical events,
> enacted by real, historical people, they *cannot* challenge every insidious duality in
> one fell swoop, but neither can they reproduce exactly the same conditions as
> before, "in reverse." Rather, when we bring marginalized aspects of our identities
> (racial, gendered, ethnic, sexual) into the central arenas of culture they are
> themselves transformed, and *transforming*."[23]

The tension between feminist thought and historical studies informed by gender

performativity can therefore be summarized as a tension between the real, physical

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[20] Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, 41.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid., 42.

experiences and perceptions of individuals, and a more monolithic account of stereotyped experiences suggested by categories of gender and sex. This dilemma directly parallels problems noted by Canning in a field she loosely denotes as "body history." According to Canning, "slippage commonly occurs between individual bodies as sites of experience/agency/resistance and social bodies, formed discursively, or between bodies as sites of inscription/intervention and notions of nation, class or race as 'reified bodies.'"[24] While Canning maintains that the history of the body is not yet a well-defined area of study, mainly because there is so much ambiguity of language and definition among self-described "body historians," she does give suggestions on how to more clearly delineate the concept of the historical body by using "concepts of embodiment, bodily reinscription and bodily memory." Using a theory of embodiment as a method, Canning thus juxtaposes the study of body history against the study of history. She says, "A far less fixed and idealized concept than body, embodiment encompasses moments of encounter and interpretation, agency and resistance."[25] "Embodiment as method," then, can perhaps be understood as analogous (or synonymous?) to the process of performativity. Quoting N. Katherine Hayles, Canning then seems to further relate performativity and embodiment by saying, "during any given period, experiences of embodiment are in continual interaction with constructions of the body."[26]

Instead of being weakened by poststructuralist and postmodern theories, the original impulse of reclamation history of second-wave feminism has emerged on the

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[24] Canning, "The Body as Method?" 503.

[25] Ibid., 505.

[26] Canning, "The Body as Method?" 505, quoting N. Katherine Hayles, "The Materiality of Informatics," *Configurations* 1, no. 1 (Winter 1993): 147–170.

other side of the late-twentieth century to be reconsidered in a new light. It is true that the idea that no subject can ever truly act independently of its system does have the capacity to hinder the political and social agenda of feminism. Despite this, historians have successfully incorporated such shifts in thinking, and feminist art historians have done much work to reveal how women artists in history have claimed their own agencies. Thus, the relevance of these historical studies becomes much clearer, for they can serve as proof that agency and resistance are possible, and give courage and a sense of solidarity to those involved in similar struggles today.

For my own thesis, the main question that arises from the intersections of feminism, body studies, and gender studies is this: how can I give an embodied reading of a painting without having the sure knowledge of who created it? The two paintings that I will discuss in the next chapter, the self-portrait attributed to Marietta Robusti and the portrait of St. Cecilia in the style of Artemisia Gentileschi, have numerous scholars voicing their opinions both for and against their current attributions. In my opinion, I am reluctant to uphold an attribution to Marietta Robusti because of inconsistencies involving the instrument and music in the portrait. I agree with the argument given by several art historians, expounded on in Chapter 2, that the portrait of St. Cecilia was probably not painted by Artemisia Gentileschi, principally because of the discrepancies in execution that exist between this work and other confirmed works by the masterful painter. From the perspective of the discipline of musicology, however, I cannot conclusively solve the problems of attribution that surround these portraits.

As a musicologist, though, I can strive to provide an embodied reading of the portraits by connecting my observations back to instruments and musical practices

specific to the relevant geographies and time frames that surrounded these works. Both of these portraits are products of forces and histories that have directed the distinctions between the labels "secular" and "sacred." In turn, these labels were fluidly involved in forming femininity and the actions proscribed to female-bodied people, especially in terms of musical practice. Performativity describes not only how the portraits portray women and femininity, but also how the instruments and music were involved in the process of describing and idealizing depictions of women. The performativity of gender is a useful analytical tool because it effectively allows a layered and fluid analysis. In this way, uncertain attribution is not a crippling hindrance to the integrity of my investigation.

Although attribution is uncertain in these two portraits, it is important to discuss the lives and livelihoods of the artists to whom the portraits stylistically point. Marietta Robusti was a highly educated musician and painter, and Artemisia Gentileschi was a brilliantly talented painter with no music education. These different perspectives are useful in seeking to ground any discussion of these works in actual lived experience. For example, the portrait ascribed to Marietta Robusti depicts a young woman in late-sixteenth-century Venetian attire who is actively involved in music. Even if this is not a portrait of or by Marietta Robusti, it does depict a woman in similar economic and educational circumstances. Knowledge about the lives of Marietta Robusti and Artemisia Gentileschi is vitally important to understand how women artists were functioning in their work environments and geographies at the time.

Before I discuss the literature relevant to the portraits in question, however, I must first discuss in greater detail the tradition of Cecilian iconography. As noted in Chapter 1, the iconography of St. Cecilia was, and still is, a pervasive visual tradition throughout

Europe. As such, a discussion of the role that depictions played in the performative nature of gendered instruments would be incomplete without a recounting of the documented iconographical trends of St. Cecilia.

The Iconography of St. Cecilia

The representations of saints were primarily used to teach both spirituality and church history, a method which took into account the majority of the populace's illiteracy throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance. As such, representations of saints concisely conferred their chief attributes and virtues. In 1555, Venetian author Giovanni Michele Bruto published a volume entitled *Institutione di una fanciulla nata nobilmente*. It served as a guide to raising young women by instilling within them a moral vigor that would hopefully lead to a prosperous marital match. Bruto advised caretakers of young girls to give them plenty of virtuous female role models, and he also emphasized the impactful nature of a visual education:

> …if possible, [the instructor's] pupil should see everything that she has read in charming and beautiful paintings—for it cannot be emphasized enough how effective they are on the tender souls of delicate children (*delicati fanciulli*); she will increase her natural virtues of ornament and grace as well as her generosity and magnanimity, with which nature generously endowed her, thanks to such useful and beautiful lessons, *learned from the sight of such illustrious deeds and glorious enterprises of great women famous for their rare virtues—and not from words*, which teach very little to people of her age, if they lack examples to imitate [emphasis added].[27]

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[27] Bruto, 30v–32r. Translated by Marta Ajmar, "Exemplary Women in Renaissance Italy: Ambivalent Models of Behavior?" in *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society,* edited by Letizia Panizza (Oxford: European Humanities Research Centre, 2000), 244–264. Interesting to note is that when "delicati fanciulli" are mentioned in this passage, the gendering of the pluralized noun is male, even though Bruto's volume was specifically targeted towards the education of young women. Perhaps the generalized nature of the statement—that pictures can make deep impressions on children—necessitated the use of the male form of the noun as a way to signify the general educational effect illustrations could have on all children.

Elsewhere in this volume, Bruto specifically mentions St. Cecilia as an example of piety. Given that the iconography of St. Cecilia was ubiquitous, the above passage highlights how a visual tradition, such as the iconography of St. Cecilia, could be used to supplement a moral and spiritual education from a very young age. I read an enculturation of this sort as a kind of visual manifestation of the performativity of gender. Young girls of a certain social and economic class were taught to emulate those storied virtuous ladies who were sanctified and thus sanctioned by the church, and their lessons were incomplete without recourse to visual representations.

The iconographic tradition of St. Cecilia has varied throughout time, and a more thorough explanation of the different iterations of Cecilian iconography will be useful to understand the extent of her cultural influence. There exist many published resources on the various iconographic trends of the representations of St. Cecilia, and studies have focused mainly on situating specific representations of St. Cecilia within the traditions from which they evolved.[28]

St. Cecilia has been represented in numerous ways throughout her iconographic history, including praying, kneeling, during the moments of her martyrdom, and with musical instruments. Frequent commonalities between any sort of representation include nearby angels, flower crowns for St. Cecilia and her husband, and St. Cecilia gazing heavenward in prayer. It is also common to show her at the site of her first miracle: the scene where she prays that she may be kept chaste in her marriage. The main traditions of

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[28] Three main contributors to this scholarship that I reference are Connolly, *Mourning into Joy*; Nico Staiti, *Le metamorfosi di Santa Cecilia: l'immagine e la musica* (Lucca: LIM, 2002); and Albert P. de Mirimonde, *Sainte Cécile: métamorphoses d'un thème musical* (Geneva: Minkoff, 1974). It is useful to note that none of these reference sources claim to be or act as comprehensive image catalogues.

Cecilian iconography that deserve further explanation in this project are images of the saint in a fiery bath, and images of the saint with musical instruments.

The work of Thomas Connolly has been essential is dispelling the modern fallacy that St. Cecilia appeared with musical instruments only later in fifteenth-century depictions. He gives four examples of works that date from the late-thirteenth to the mid-fourteenth century: two statutes (one wood, one in stone), a panel, and a fresco, all of which depict the saint engaged in musical activity.[29] Of these four works, one statue shows St. Cecilia holding a portative organ in her hands, an image which is replicated widely in later centuries. Aiming to dispel the centuries-old mystery which has surrounded St. Cecilia's connection to music, Connolly has shown that St. Cecilia became increasingly associated with vibrant, joyful music in the popular imagination and in iconographical sources from the thirteenth century onward due to liturgical connections to King David. As the liturgical texts accompanying St. Cecilia's feast day focused on the transformation from sadness to joy, Connolly interprets the organ commonly shown in St. Cecilia's hand as a symbolic counterpart and continuation of the penitential David's lyre.[30]

Another tradition common to fourteenth-, fifteenth-, and early sixteenth-century Cecilian images—especially found in books of hours—is the depiction of the saint in a fiery bath. Sometimes St. Cecilia is presented in a tub of flames together with Valerian and Tiburtius, but in others she is alone, standing nude amidst the tub of flames. The

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[29] As listed by Connolly, *Mourning into Joy*, 214: "The works are a large, stone statue in the Castelvecchio Museum, in Verona; a fresco in the Church of the Annunziata, Minturno; a panel… on a late thirteenth-century cope in the treasury of the Cathedral at Anagni; and a small, wooden statue from Willebadessen, now on display in the Diocesan Museum at Paderborn." A more complete discussion of these four works follows in Connolly, 214–219.

[30] Ibid., 219–220.

iconography of St. Cecilia in flames has parallels to several other traditions that have been noted in the literature: depictions of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in flames, as well as Bathsheba and Susanna. For my study, it is most important to further investigate the parallels between St. Cecilia and Bathsheba because of St. Cecilia's symbolic connection with David, and because of the similarities between the depictions of the two women.

The iconography of Bathsheba is highly sexualized. Nude, and with long flowing hair, she is the center of attention in these miniatures. When David is present in these scenes, he is usually peering at Bathsheba from a distant tower. This use of perspective almost feels like the viewer is made to feel complicit in the sins of David through the objectification of Bathsheba. It is pertinent here to note that at the end of the story of David and Bathsheba, David's penitence transforms him, while Bathsheba's presence in the story is effectively neutralized and normalized through her actions of mourning Uriah and becoming David's wife and child-bearer. Bathsheba's reputation as a character in the Christian mind was therefore on unsure footing, vacillating between temptress and victim.[31]

Read through a feminist lens, it is easy to see how Bathsheba functions in the story as a tool, a convenient conceit for David's chance to prove his humanity and mortality to readers. If David had not sinned so grievously through adultery committed with Bathsheba, and through the murder of her husband, David would not have had the chance to act as the symbol for a penitential soul. Thus, Bathsheba's loss of bodily autonomy in this story is necessary for the emergence of one of the most earnest and

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[31] Guyot, Elsa, "Étude iconographique de l'épisode biblique: 'Bethsabée au bain' dans les livres d'heures des XVe et XVIe siècles," *Reti Medievali Rivista*, 14, no.1 (2013): 279.

prolifically sorrowful Biblical figures: the penitential David. Simply put, her body is the

catalyst for and location of David's humanization.

It has been argued that the nude representations of biblical figures such as

Bathsheba and Susanna served as an example of the late-medieval church's conflation of

penitence in general with contrition for sexual sin in particular.[32] However, an

interpretation of Cecilian fiery bath iconography that argues for a preoccupation with

sexual sin is unfounded in St. Cecilia's case, as her miracle revolves around her steadfast

commitment to her own chastity. This raises the question: why is St. Cecilia's

iconography so closely connected to Bathsheba's iconography?

The explanation given by V. A. Kolve echoes the argument for a preoccupation

with sexual sin: bathing images of nude Cecilias, Bathshebas, and Susannas were popular

simply because they offered a connection with the viewer's own medieval life that

involved public bathhouses, which Kolve says were, "often charged with sexual

licentiousness."[33] Thus, the images of bathing or seeing someone bathing were relatable

while still being understood as morally perilous.

Connolly, on the other hand, posits that the earlier iconographical tradition of the

fiery bath was a meaningful precursor to St. Cecilia's later role as patron saint of music.

He notes that the phoenix, while not commonly depicted with St. Cecilia, describes her

story in a way. The phoenix is a musical bird that bursts into flames before rising from

the ashes to sing again. Thus, Connolly argues that the fiery baths are part of the

symbolism that references the fire in which a phoenix burns before its transformation into

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[32] Clare L. Costley, "David, Bathsheba, and the Penitential Psalms," *Renaissance Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 1252, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4143695 (accessed May 14, 2014).

[33] V.A. Kolve, *Telling Images: Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative II* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 209.

ashes and subsequent resurrection. As such, these fiery baths provided an opportunity for music to be associated with St. Cecilia via the phoenix.[34]

My own reading of the connection of St. Cecilia and Bathsheba's tradition is somewhat of an amalgamation of the two theories above. In order to connect the fiery bath tradition with later Cecilian iconography, I suggest that the sexualization of St. Cecilia in these bathing scenes might influence the understanding of her later representation as a musician. This early eroticization of St. Cecilia's story perhaps made it more permissible to associate her intimately with music, a practice that was always viewed as inherently dangerous by church authorities. As Bathsheba functions as the site of David's sins, crucial to his later salvation, St. Cecilia can possibly be understood as a sign that represents both the dangers of music and the divine nature of it. It should be recalled that in St. Cecilia's later iconography, her relationship with music is often depicted ambiguously: does the music function as a reminder of turning away from earthly sins, or does it represent a way to communicate spiritual joys?

Understanding the ambiguity of St. Cecilia's affiliation with music is vital to understanding the readings of the two portraits in this thesis that I use as my case studies. Succinctly put, St. Cecilia's iconographic trends are a manifestation of the performativity of gender that influenced the popular association of the female body with the keyboard instrument. As the opening of this chapter also noted, however, images of St. Cecilia were directly used to educate young women in order to show them how they should act in their society and who they should emulate, which is itself a direct manifestation of the performative nature of gender.

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[34] Connolly, *Mourning into Joy*, 205–214.

Up until now my discussion has mainly focused on abstracted bodies. I have no firsthand account of how the educational treatise mentioned at the beginning of this chapter was actually used. The caveat given by Susan Bordo about this certainly demands attention. She warns that "the pure possibilities of interpretation rather than an embodied point of view" that become the focus of some postmodern cultural and historical scholarship hearkens back to the "view from nowhere" of Cartesian bodily transcendence.[35] As such, as I introduce the literature surrounding the portraits attributed to Artemisia Gentileschi and Marietta Robusti, it is important for me to situate each artist with respect to educational opportunity and geographic areas of activity to avoid giving completely disembodied interpretations of the works attributed to them.

The Portrait of St. Cecilia in the Style of Artemisia Gentileschi

As the daughter of the painter Orazio Gentileschi, Artemisia received an intensely focused art education from her father. Her focus on painting was so narrow that she had barely even grasped literacy by the age of nineteen, although she did come to read and write proficiently in her adult life.[36] Following an excruciating and public rape trial during her later teenage years, she moved to Florence in 1614. Garrard notes that Artemisia probably had a special protection and endorsement in Florence from her advocate, Michelangelo Buonarroti the Younger.[37] Her career flourished in Florence, and she became the first woman admitted into the Florentine Accademia del Disegno, which

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[35] Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, 39–40.

[36] Mary Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, 17.

[37] Ibid., 34.

Garrard hypothesizes probably had a good deal to do with the involvement of the Medici family in the Academy, specifically Ferdinando I and then Cosimo II.[38]

Despite Artemisia's powerful connections and raging artistic success in Florence, for the next ten years (1620–1630) she worked elsewhere—likely in Genoa, definitely in Venice, and especially in Rome.[39] From Rome, she moved to Naples for eight years (1630–1638), then to England to the court of Charles I for three years (1638–1641), and finally back to Naples for the remainder of her life (1642–c.1652).

Bathsheba, St. Cecilia, and Susanna were all depicted by Artemisia Gentileschi (Rome, 1593–Naples, c.1652) in masterful works that have been interpreted as expressing the psychological state of the painted subject.[40] Often her works portray women from familiar biblical narratives as empowered subjects; perhaps the best known examples of this are Artemisia Gentileschi's paintings of Judith confidently and violently beheading Holofernes.[41]

Biographies of Artemisia Gentileschi from her own time were quite lacking in information and scope, and much of what we know conclusively about her comes from her own letters. Six of her letters were first published in the 1820s, with other letters trickling in from various published sources throughout the years. These surviving letters by Artemisia mostly document her interactions with patrons. Mary Garrard, in her

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[38] Mary Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, 35.

[39] Ibid., 54.

[40] *Susanna and the Elders*, 1610, Schloss Weissenstein, Pommersfelden; *St. Cecilia Playing a Lute*, c. 1610–1612, Spada Gallery, Rome; *David and Bathsheba*, c. 1640, Museum of Art, Columbus, Ohio. For black and white reproductions of other works depicting Bathsheba attributed to Artemisia, see Mary Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi: The Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), 128–135.

[41] Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, 1612–1613, Museo di Capodimonte, Naples; *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, c. 1620, Uffizi Gallery, Florence.

comprehensive study on Artemisia Gentileschi, includes the twenty-eight letters by Artemisia translated for the first time into English in her monumental 1989 volume.[42]

Artemisia Gentileschi and her father Orazio treated many similar themes in their work, and St. Cecilia was a recurring theme, especially for Orazio. Of the known works that have been attributed to Orazio and Artemisia, Orazio seems to have favored the theme of St. Cecilia, whereas only two works thought to represent St. Cecilia have been attributed to Artemisia: *St. Cecilia Playing the Keyboard* and *St. Cecilia Playing the Lute* (Figs. 2 and 4 in this study.) Of the two, the attribution of the former is much more highly contested among art historians, yet musicologists—myself included—seem much more willing to lay aside the jumbled question of attribution in order to discuss the piece in its place in Cecilian iconography.

Art historian R. Ward Bissell succinctly describes the history of the attribution debate surrounding this work. He notes that this painting was originally attributed in the mid-twentieth century to Orazio, but in 1979 Benedict Nicholson was the first to propose Artemisia as painter. Following an exhibition of the work, Nicholson's attribution was supported in the 1990s by art historians Roberto Contini, Gianni Papi, Luciano Berti, John Spike, and Claire-Lise Bionda.[43] While Bissell himself disagrees with the positive attribution of the portrait to Artemisia, he does believe it is closely linked to her work in Florence. To support his skepticism of the attribution to Artemisia, he gives a thorough breakdown of the stylistic and artistic problems in the work. He cites the flattened

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[42] Mary Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, 54. For a complete bibliography of the published letters of Artemisia Gentileschi, see 399n4. The translated letters appear in Appendix A of Garrard's work.

[43] R. Ward Bissell, *Artemisia Gentileschi and the Authority of Art: Critical Reading and Catalogue Raisonné* (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 335–337. The bibliography for the aforementioned authors is given on 337. It must be noted that Bissell also questions the attribution of *St. Cecilia Playing the Lute* to Artemisia in part due to a "curious remoteness" of the subject, 333–334.

perspective of the keyboard, other dimensional flaws, and poor execution as reasons why

this portrait is "simply not up to Artemisia's standards." His hypothesis is that this work

may be a less-skillful copy of a now lost work by Artemisia.[44]

In addition to the several art historians who have unquestioning upheld

Nicholson's assignment of this portrait to Artemisia Gentileschi, musicologists have also

used this portrait as evidence central to their theses. Sabine Meine uses this portrait as the

crowning visual example for her claim that musical virtuosity manifested itself in the

secularization of music in the early seventeenth century.[45] Another musicologist, Barbara

Russano Hanning, uses this portrait of Cecilia in order to uncover the extent of St.

Cecilia's influence and presence in Florence in the seventeenth century. In her article,

Hanning is influenced by art historian Luciano Berti's identification of the portrait

subject as a singer, Arcangela Palladini, famous for her role as St. Cecilia in a Florentine

staged performance in 1619.[46] For visual comparsion, Berti suggested that a self-portrait

painted by Arcangela Palladini serves as proof that Palladini was the model in this

portrait of St. Cecilia.[47] Given that Artemisia Gentileschi and Palladini were both active

in Florence at the same time, it is not an unlikely assumption. However, this assumption

still hinges on the unquestioned attribution of the portrait to Artemisia Gentileschi, which

is quite problematic. Hanning thus reads Artemisia Gentileschi's portrait of St. Cecilia at

the keyboard as one that represents a historical performing musician, who is "inviting *us*

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[44] Bissell, *Artemisia Gentileschi and the Authority of Art*, 335–337.

[45] Sabine Meine, "Cecilia without a Halo: The Changing Musical *Virtus,*" *Music In Art: International Journal For Music Iconography* 29, no.1 (2004): 104–112. Art Full Text, EBSCOhost (accessed September 2, 2014).

[46] Barbara Russano Hanning, "From Saint to Muse: Representations of Saint Cecilia in Florence," *Music in Art: International Journal for Music Iconography* 29, no.1 (2004): 98.

[47] Ibid., 99; 103n21.

to contemplate *her* and listen to her music."[48] The implications of this conclusion would further serve to underscore the secularization and virtuosity present in music at the time, which supports Sabine Meine's reading of this portrait. It is vital to reiterate that neither of these scholars' works draw upon the rich history of disagreement about the attribution of this portrait.

It is important here to note that Mary Garrard believes attributing a painting lacking in execution to Artemisia Gentileschi serves to lessen the status of the artist in modern scholarship. This is most likely why Garrard does not mention *St. Cecilia Playing the Keyboard* in her writings on Artemisia Gentileschi.[49] Garrard also notes that the trend to identity Artemisia's face in most of her works is a widespread practice, but she cautions against it. Instead, Garrard is a proponent of looking at the painted subject's hands in order to discern some sort of extra intelligence and vitality.[50] However, since the hands in the portrait in question have been so heavily reworked, it is extremely difficult to discern any similarity to the hands in Artemisia's other portraits, other than that they are present and active.

While the veracity of attribution and the identity of the model have been called into question, no one disagrees that this portrait represents St. Cecilia. The crown of flowers, faint traces of a gold halo, and position at a keyboard are the main signifiers that show up in countless other portraits and representations of St. Cecilia. Despite the uncertainties about this portrait discussed above, this work does bring understanding to the way that artists responded to the tradition of Cecilian iconography in the early-to-

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[48] Barbara Russano Hanning, "From Saint to Muse," 99.

[49] Mary Garrard, "Artemisia's Hand," in Mieke Bal, *The Artemisia Files: Artemisia Gentileschi for Feminists and Other Thinking People* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 22–23.

[50] Ibid., 1–3.

mid-seventeenth century Italian peninsula, much in the same way that the self-portrait attributed to Marietta Robusti casts light on the musical culture available to women in late-sixteenth-century Venice.

The Self-Portrait Attributed to Marietta Robusti

Marietta Robusti (ca. 1560–1590), an accomplished Venetian court painter and musician, was trained in painting by her father, the renowned Venetian painter Jacopo Robusti, more commonly known as Il Tintoretto. The most substantial biography concerning Marietta Robusti was published by Carlo Ridolfi in 1642 as an addendum to the biographies of her father and her brother Domenico. Ridolfi's account is one of the most concentrated sources of biographical information about the Robusti family, but it can hardly be taken as indisputable fact given the fifty intervening years between Jacopo's death and its publication.

Ridolfi's slim biography of Marietta relates how Jacopo dressed her like a boy: "Her father took her with him wherever he went and everyone thought she was a lad."[51] While Ridolfi does not explicitly relate that Marietta studied art outside her home while accompanying her father, the reader is left to draw this conclusion given Jacopo's numerous commissions around Venice, along with Ridolfi's statement two paragraphs earlier that "….it is a fact that that unhappy sex, because of being reared within the confines of the home and kept from the exercise of the various disciplines, becomes soft,

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[51] Carlo Ridolfi, *The Life of Tintoretto, and of His Children Domenico and Marietta*, translated by Catherine and Robert Engass (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1984), 98.

and has little aptitude for noble pursuits."[52] Travelling in Venice with her father would have given Marietta Robusti access to artists' studios and workshops—an education that many women painters never enjoyed.

Apart from the education in visual art that Marietta received—albeit disguised by her father—she also received an excellent musical education. Both Ridolfi and Borghini say that Marietta played the harpsichord very well, and it is known that her music teacher was Giulio Zacchino (fl.1572–84), the organist at San Giorgio Maggiore in Venice.

Along with her musical gifts, Ridolfi praises Marietta's ability to paint portraits of nobles, and calls her ability a "special gift."[53] However, he belittles the skill of portrait painting in the biographies of Jacopo and Domenico in favor of praising large-scale works. About Domenico, he says, "But even though Domenico drew much praise and profit from painting portraits, it is to be regretted that they were given precedence over his other work, and took pride of place."[54] His dismissal of Jacopo's portraiture is evident in another off-handed comment: "His genius must not be confined to a small canvas."[55] The small canvas can be read as a reference to portraiture, and after this Ridolfi mentions that many of these small things were done quickly in order to give to friends as gifts. For comparison, many of Jacopo's most well-known works are large-scale works with biblical, mythological, or allegorical themes. Borghini also mentions that Marietta

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[52] Ridolfi, *The Life of Tintoretto*, 98.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid., 92.

[55] Ibid., 54.

painted "many beautiful works," but the biography ends there as he professes that he

cannot discuss them because he does not actually know the works personally.[56]

Ridolfi does address why Marietta did not have a professional career as a painter

at court. Emperor Maximillian II, Philip II of Spain, and Archduke Ferdinand all inquired

about procuring Marietta to render artistic services at their courts, but Ridolfi says,

"Tintoretto was satisfied to see her married to Mario Augusta, a jeweler, so that she

might always be nearby, rather than be deprived of her, even though she might be favored

by princes, as he loved her tenderly."[57] Marietta's talents might have extended fully into

the professional sphere had it not been for what her biographies describe as the protective

nature of her father. While Ridolfi's biography does not describe Marietta's life after

marriage, Borghini does go a step further to say that marriage did not restrict the output

of her painting.[58]

The culture enacted by the biographies of Marietta Robusti is representative of the

perception of intellectual, musical, and artistic women in late-sixteenth- and early-to-mid-

seventeenth-century Venice, and gendered concepts such as delicacy, virtue, modesty,

and talent, gleaned from Marietta's biographies and discussed further in Chapter 3, are

reflected in this portrait even if it does not depict Marietta Robusti herself. In the words

of Mary Garrard, the biographies of Marietta Robusti reveal the "re-naturalization" of

Marietta's story.[59] Her talents are both feminized by being described in decorative terms

and underemphasized when compared to the far more detailed description found in the

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[56] Raffaello Borghini, *Il Riposo*, edited and translated by Lloyd H. Ellis, Jr. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 265.

[57] Ridolfi, *The Life of Tintoretto*, 98.

[58] Borghini, *Il Riposo*, 265.

[59] Garrard, "Here's Looking at Me," 573.

biographies of Jacopo and Domenico. Ridolfi laments that when Marietta died, the world was not deprived of genius, as it was characterized in Jacopo's biography, but instead lost a "noble ornament." He concludes Marietta's biography with a moralistic remembrance: "This excellent lady will serve in the future as a model of womanly virtue, making known to the world that gems, gold and precious clothing are not the true female adornments, but rather those virtues that shine in the soul and remain eternal after life."[60]

Historians have treated the portrait attributed to Marietta Robusti in various ways: as a complement to the group of self-portraits with keyboards by women artists, as an outlier to that group, and as a way to address details in works by Jacopo Robusti. It is often read by art historians and musicologists as a literal representation of a performer instead of a depiction of an artist trying to elevate her status as a painter through inclusion of musical references. The music depicted in the painting is the salient feature of this portrait, and H. Colin Slim identified it as the madrigal *Madonna per voi ardo*, written by Philippe Verdelot in the 1530s. Slim does not question the attribution to Marietta, and he even uses this portrait to call into question the accuracy with which musical notation was copied into Jacopo Robusti's painting *Music-Making Women*.[61]

Some scholars, however, do question the role of music in this painting. For instance, Linda Austern reads the portrait as a metaphor for music's perceived role in healing lovesick men. Austern asserts that a man viewing this portrait in the late sixteenth century would have understood the portrait subject's invitation to complete the musical

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[60] Ridolfi, *The Life of Tintoretto*, 99.

[61] Tintoretto, *Music-Making Women*, oil on canvas, after 1566, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden. Interpreted by H. Colin Slim in "Tintoretto's 'Music-Making Women' at Dresden," *Imago Musicae* 4 (1987): 45–76. Republished in H. Colin Slim, *Painting Music in the Sixteenth Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), XII.

harmony with her.[62] The text of Verdelot's madrigal, given below, encapsulates a

feverish longing, the high temperatures of which could perhaps be subdued only by the

conjugal harmony that Austern proposes.

> *Madonna, per voi ardo,*
> *Et voi non lo credete,*
> *Perchè non pia quanto bella sete.*
> *Ogn' hora io miro et guardo.*
> *Se tanta crudeltà cangiar' volete,*
> *Donna, non v' accorgete*
> *Che per voi moro et ardo?*
> *Et per mirar vostra beltà infinita*
> *Et voi sola servir bramo la vita.*
>
> My lady, I burn with love for you
> And you do not believe it,
> For you are not as kind as you are beautiful.
> I look at you and admire you constantly.
> If you wish to change this great cruelty,
> Lady, are you unaware
> That for you I die and burn?
> And in order to admire your infinite beauty
> And to serve you alone, I desire life.[63]

Mary Garrard suggests that this erotic subject matter and its proximity to the

portrait subject is one reason that the attribution of this painting to Marietta Robusti

should be questioned. Garrard's argument rests on the assertion that self-portraits by

other sixteenth-century Italian women painters, such as those by Sofonisba Anguissola

and Lavinia Fontana, expressed strong-willed identities in their portraits instead of

functioning primarily as titillating visual creations.[64] Despite these qualms, Garrard does

give two possible readings of the portrait by Marietta Robusti: one from the perspective

of a sixteenth-century male consumer, and another from the point of view of a female

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[62] Austern, "Portrait of the Artist as (Female) Musician," 46.

[63] Transcription and translation from H. Colin Slim, *A Gift of Madrigals and Motets*, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 2: 443.

[64] Garrard, "Here's Looking at Me," 596n78.

viewer. She notes that for a male viewer, the positioning of the woman and instrument "recalls the admirable purity of Saint Cecilia pleasantly mingling in the imagination with the erotic accessibility of another kind of woman altogether."[65] This interpretation, enabled by the suggestive madrigal text, certainly can lead the viewer to understand the keyboard as a male presence, an idea which is explored further in Chapter 3. "Simultaneously," Garrard continues, "[the portrait] might be understood by many women as representing a female who manages her sexuality as competently as she performs upon the musical instrument that symbolizes her total creative potential."[66] The latter suggestion of women's views of the painting certainly does have a Cecilian quality to it. A female consumer of Cecilian iconography would have been visually instructed to guard her chastity (i.e. "manage her sexuality") due to St. Cecilia's status as virgin-martyr. Given the extent to which most young women's pursuits were constrained by familial duties, however, it seems unlikely that "creative potential" would be among the visually-transmitted qualities for which young women could strive.

Apart from the hypotheses put forward by Austern and Garrard, modern scholarship has little questioned the attribution of this portrait. The traditional attribution given by Marco Boschini in 1675, coinciding with the purchase by Cardinal Leopoldo di' Medici for his collection, has remained mostly unchallenged with one important exception. Italian author Melania Mazzucco has contributed substantially to the biographies of Jacopo Robusti and his family, although her work has often gone uncited in scholarly publications. Her archival research proves that the history of attribution for this painting is more complicated than it first appears. Before this portrait was sold as a

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[65] Garrard, "Here's Looking at Me," 595–596.

[66] Ibid.

self-portrait of Marietta Robusti to Leopoldo di' Medici in 1675, it was passed off earlier that year as a portrait by Titian in a potential sale to a different Cardinal. When that sale fell through, the false attribution to Titian was dropped in favor of the attribution to Marietta Robusti.[67]

However, Mazzucco also notes that the attribution of the portrait to a member of the Robusti family does at least extend a little farther back than 1675. Nicolas Régnier, a Franco-Flemish painter living in Venice in the mid-seventeenth century, became a noted buyer and seller of paintings in Venice. In 1665, he held a large auction for which an inventory was made, and the portrait attributed to Marietta Robusti is described in the inventory as being by the hand of Jacopo Robusti (*il Tintoretto vecchio*).[68]

Melania Mazzucco's own interpretation of this portrait is unique. Instead of interpreting the madrigal lyrics as a presence that curtails the power of the woman in the portrait, Mazzucco reads the lines of the madrigal in an empowering voice for Marietta. The clear anguish which the male voice experiences in the madrigal gives Marietta the upper hand: "Come a dire: 'Sono io la donna che ti fa soffrire tanto.'" ("As if to say: 'I am the one who makes you suffer so much.'")[69]

Mazzucco's inclination to read this as a self-portrait by Marietta Robusti is strengthened by her interpretation of the gaze of the woman. Instead of looking outward at the viewer, Mazzucco reads Marietta's gaze as looking inward, as if she is showing herself catching her own impassioned reflection in a mirror. Her final estimation of this

[67] Melania G. Mazzucco, *Jacomo Tintoretto & i suoi figli: Storia di una famiglia veneziana* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2009), 458–459.

[68] Ibid., 460–461.

[69] Ibid., 466.

piece is that it might have been used either as a dowry for Marietta's future husband, or perhaps as a secret message between father and daughter.[70]

Among those who have questioned the attribution of this portrait, art historian Joanna Woods-Marsden has done so based purely on the execution of the work itself. It is, quite frankly, painted rather sloppily. In her words, "If Robusti was indeed trained by her father so as to be 'expert in portraits' (*saper fare bene i ritratti*), one might almost be inclined to deny this mediocre work to her, so lacking is it in elementary skills, notably foreshortening and anatomy."[71]

The quality of work in the portraits believed to be by Robusti and Gentileschi is lacking, which has caused the most serious questions of attribution in both cases. However, by considering both artists as would-be authors in this study and citing their biographies in connection with the two portraits in question, I do not desire to lessen the estimation of either artist. I must reiterate that the importance of these works comes from a discussion of the works themselves and how the portrait subjects interact with gendered musical bodies in the paintings.

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[70] Mazzucco, *Jacomo Tintoretto & i suoi figli*, 467.

[71] Joanna Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance Self-Portraiture: The Visual Construction of Identity and the Social Status of the Artist* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 218.

CHAPTER III

READING MUSICAL PORTRAITS AS DIALOGUES

Keyboards as Gendered Objects

That human bodies and musical instruments have close associations is certain.[72]
Although I have found instances where the connection between the female body and
keyboard instruments has been explicitly mentioned, no one source has provided a
thorough explanation of this relationship. In order to read the two musical portraits in
question as a dialogue, however, it is important to first establish that musical instruments
also underwent variable systems of gendering throughout history. While instruments have
certainly been gendered, a literal performativity of instruments cannot exist because the
instruments, while acted upon by language and other forces, obviously cannot enact any
resistance. They are objects in the physical world, not subjects.

While I cannot give a comprehensive overview of the historical link between
women and keyboard instruments in this thesis, I have found several mentions of this
affiliation in the literature. Mary Garrard briefly suggests that "boxy shapes" are
responsible for the geometric relation of women's bodies to keyboard instruments.[73]
Another understanding of a geometric connection between women's bodies and keyboard
instruments is the possible word play inherent in the naming of the virginal. The name
might obviously refer to the virtuous and chaste state for which the young women who

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[72] Emanuel Winternitz, *Musical Instruments and Their Symbolism in Western Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 48.

[73] Garrard, "Here's Looking at Me," 590n73.

were educated musically on the instrument were supposed to strive. A second interpretation, however, might come from the use of the Latin *virga*, which translates to "rod," and might have been used to describe the action inside the instrument itself.[74]

To evoke a connection between the female body and keyboard instruments based on geometry alone is in a way reminiscent of how the medieval *hortus conclusus* was intimately connected with the virginal female body. The *hortus conclusus* is a garden filled with life-giving force, and it is also a contained, exclusive, and enclosed space. This hearkens back to idea of Mary's womb as a fertile yet unpenetrated place.[75] However, given the sensate pleasures also found in such a garden, earthly connotations can be easily understood as well. The idea of the garden as an enclosed space which harbors life and fruitfulness does present a fitting analogy to a musical instrument, especially a keyboard instrument, in which a lively, music-producing mechanism is encased in a geometric resonant wooden housing.

In depictions of enclosed gardens, women are shown surrounded by a wall in the shape of a circle, oval, rectangle, or square. Perhaps one of the best known series of works that includes a recurring motif of the *hortus conclusus* is the series of the Lady and the Unicorn tapestries.[76] Many interpretations of these tapestries venture that five of the six tapestries represent the five senses as allegories: Sight, Hearing, Taste, Touch, and

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[74] Garrard traces the history of this debate in "Here's Looking at Me," 590n72. She supports the claim that the virginal was connected to the moral status of the female musician rather than a physical feature of the instrument by citing Sibyl Marcuse's connection of the virginal with the *cembalo*, a frame drum played by women in Mediterranean societies. Sibyl Marcuse, *Musical Instruments: A Comprehensive Dictionary* (New York: Norton, 1975), 581.

[75] For descriptions of Marian iconography that included enclosed gardens, see Brian E. Daley, "The 'Closed Garden' and the 'Sealed Fountain': *Song of Songs* 4:12 in the Late Medieval Iconography of Mary", in *Medieval Gardens*, edited by Elizabeth B. Macdougall (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1986), 256–257. See also Stanley Stewart, *The Enclosed Garden: The Tradition and Image in Seventeenth-Century Poetry* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966).

[76] The Cycle of the Lady and the Unicorn, tapestries, 1475–1515, Musée de Cluny, Paris.

Smell are all depicted as richly dressed courtly women enclosed in an oval-shaped

garden, each busy in a task relating to the sense at hand. The sixth tapestry, which depicts

a woman handling precious jewels under a tent displaying the banner "À mon seul désir"

has been interpreted by many as an allegory of Desire.[77] The tapestry that might represent

the allegory of Hearing, Figure 3, shows a woman playing a positive organ while her

maidservant attends to the bellows. The instrument in this tapestry certainly functions as

an element of design; the organ appears central to the composition of the tapestry and is

balanced by the performer and the servant as well as the standard-bearing unicorn and

lion.
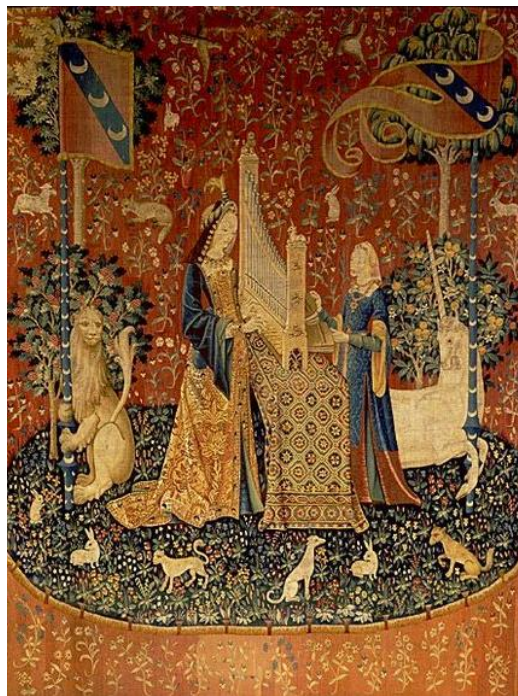
Figure 3. Detail, *The Allegory of Hearing* from *The Cycle of the Lady and the Unicorn*, tapestry, 1475–1515, Musée de Cluny, Paris

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[77] Helmut Nickel argued for a different interpretation of the sixth panel based on a definite order of the panels that he proposed. According to him, the Desire panel could function as an alternate to Touch, and that the Touch panel, which is unlike the other panels in many ways, might have been designed for an alternate wall space. In this way, the panel with the phrase "a mon seul désir" would have hung as the central panel in a set of five tapestries overall. "About the Sequence of the Tapestries in the Hunt of the Unicorn and the Lady with the Unicorn," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 17 (1982), http://www.jstor.org/stable/1512782 (accessed September 14, 2014): 9–14.

In addition to geometric likeness between physical bodies and instruments, the inclusion of keyboards in scenes involving women can also be traced back to the status that such an expensive instrument would relay, as well as the docile and static comportment required to perform the instrument.[78] (This assumes, of course, that the courtly lady in these depictions would never be pumping the bellows of a positive organ.) Of all the instruments that could have been chosen for the Hearing tapestry in the Lady and the Unicorn cycle, an organ is certainly the most spatially impressive, and the instrument would also have been costly as a status symbol. As it is believed that these tapestries were designed as a wedding gift, a display of opulence would have been a primary objective. The visual combination of courtly lady, enclosed garden, and the act of performing music is indeed striking, and the sounding tones of the organ might also symbolize marital harmony.

In addition to these observations on gendered geometry and musical practice, of which the tapestry above is a fine example, it is possible to understand the connection of instruments and the female-sexed body in the popular sixteenth- and seventeenth-century imagination by examining the role that women and instruments played in literature. By briefly analyzing one of Shakespeare's "Dark Lady" sonnets, number 128, and a passage from Baldassare Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*, I will show how these selections equate the physical presence of women with that of an instrument, albeit in different ways and with different gendered consequences.

In Shakespeare's Sonnet 128, a woman performs a keyboard instrument, and her musical actions are framed by the male speaker's arousal:

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[78] Austern, "Portrait of the Artist," 34.

How oft when thou, my music, music play'st,
Upon that blessed wood whose motion sounds
With thy sweet fingers when thou gently sway'st
The wiry concord that mine ear confounds,
Do I envy those jacks that nimble leap,
To kiss the tender inward of thy hand,
Whilst my poor lips which should that harvest reap,
At the wood's boldness by thee blushing stand!
To be so tickled, they would change their state
And situation with those dancing chips,
O'er whom thy fingers walk with gentle gait,
Making dead wood more bless'd than living lips.
Since saucy jacks so happy are in this,
Give them thy fingers, me thy lips to kiss.

The lady in question unusually functions as muse *as well as* creator in the first line: "How oft, when thou, my music, music play'st." This woman both physically creates sound and functions allegorically, a powerful dual role. In order to curb the autonomy of the sonnet's subject, however, the keyboard is ignored as a traditionally feminine-gendered instrument. The keyboard is gendered male by the male speaker, and it is positioned as a physical body rivalling for the woman's affections. The speaker here is aroused by the interaction of the woman and the instrument. If he cannot exercise complete control over the performer's affections, he feels that her attention and body at least should be divided equally between the instrument and himself: "Give them thy fingers, me thy lips to kiss" (line 14). Here, the dialogue between woman and instrument is framed by the male speaker as a sexual one, and it is placed firmly within the realms of the man's heterosexual fantasy. This again reflects the interplay between the instrument taught to girls (the virginal) and how a woman's actions upon the instrument could be considered less than chaste because of the sensual nature of music.

The Shakespeare sonnet illustrates that the instrument, here gendered male, was raised to the status of physical body in a way that affected the jealously of the male speaker. In the passage in *Il Cortegiano*, however, an opposite metaphor is enacted, one which relegates women as a group to the status of musical accessory. Speaking of courtly musical practice, Federico voices his opinion on the best instruments to perform: "Sono ancor harmoniosi tutti gli instrumenti da tasti, perche hanno le consonantie molto perfette, et con facilità vi si possono far molte cose, che empiono l'amino della musical dolcezza." ("Also all instrumentes with freates are ful of harmony, because the tunes of them are very perfect, and with ease a manne may do many thinges upon them that fil the minde with the sweetnesse of musike.")[79] After a brief description of ideal groupings of stringed instruments, Federico goes on to explain ideal situations in which male courtiers should perform music: "Ma sopra tutto conviensi in presentia di donne, perche quegli aspetti indolciscono gli animi di chi ode, e più i fanno penetrabili dalla suavità della musica; e ancor svegliano gli spiriti di chi la fa." ("But especiallye they are meete to bee practised in the presence of women, because those sightes sweeten the mindes of the hearers, and make them the more apte to bee perced with the pleasantnesse of musike, and also they quicken the spirites of the verye doers.")[80] In this second passage, Federico mentions women as being distinct from a group of listeners. The presence of women at a courtly musical performance, he says, is desirable primarily in order to "sweeten the

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[79] Baldassare Castiglione, *Il Cortegiano* (Venice: Alberti, 1606), 58r, in the Bavarian State Library, http://www.mdz-nbn-resolving.de/urn/resolver.pl?urn=urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb10040105-1 (accessed September 13, 2014). The English translation used here is the 1561 translation by Sir Thomas Hoby, edited by Walter Raleigh (London: David Nutt, 1900), 118, in the University of Toronto Robarts Library, https://archive.org/details/bookofcourtierfr00castuoft (accessed September 13, 2014). For context, the Federico in *Il Cortegiano* was Federico Fregoso, a Genoese nobleman.

[80] Ibid., Alberti edition, 58v; David Nutt edition, 119.

mindes of the hearers." In this way, Federico seems to be gendering the category of listener as male.

Instead of the instrument being elevated to gendered personhood, as in Shakespeare's sonnet, women's generalized position in this musical setting is lowered to be analogous to that of an instrument. Both function mainly as stimuli for the male listeners. At the same time, it is implied that women, in Federico's words, are denied the opportunity to be considered as active, educated listeners.

Given the above cases—instances presenting the gendering of musical instruments, both keyed and fretted—when an artist paints herself interacting with an acoustic, mechanical body associated with her own—as with women artists in the sixteenth-century Italian peninsula with keyboard instruments—what implications arise from the interactions between those two bodies, one biologically sexed and culturally gendered, and the other mechanical and culturally gendered?

Musical self-portraiture in the Renaissance was a clever strategy used by painters in order to elevate their positions from that of craftsperson to artist, as music was often viewed as a discipline requiring more ingenuity than visual art.[81] However, creative endeavors can be understood as more than embodied snapshots of their creators. To extend this metaphor to visual art, when a self-portrait is created, inhabiting the body and depicting it become a circular relationship as form is both enacted and described. However, this self-representation is limited by the performative cultural forces that an artist experiences.

This central consideration is complicated in this study by disputed attribution of both portraits, which are perhaps unanswerable given the current historical evidence.

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[81] Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance Self-Portraiture*, 217.

While it has been suggested that the portrait of St. Cecilia in the style of Artemisia Gentileschi is a self-portrait, this opinion is not the prevailing one among those who hold the work to be by her. It has already been noted, moreover, that the portrait believed to be by Marietta Robusti cannot be conclusively attributed either. Even though the attributions are unsure, however, there is still something to be gained from reading the dialogue between woman and instrument interacting as two gendered bodies.

In each of these portraits, three basic elements work together to inform a viewer's reading of the painting. Both depict attractive women by conventional Western standards and a keyboard instrument, which means that the performance of gender has already channeled the appearance and actions of the portrait subject, as well as the appearance and inclusion of the instrument. In the portrait attributed to Marietta Robusti, the image itself has literally been transformed through the addition of a musical partbook, which I contend was not originally planned in the painting. In the portrait of St. Cecilia in the style of Artemisia Gentileschi, on the other hand, the image of the patron saint of music has been secularized by the attention-grabbing floral headpiece and by the posture of the portrait subject.

The use of the theory of gender performativity in this analysis is powerful because it seeks to prove that none of these interpreted elements in these paintings can be considered as natural or given. The components of these portraits (women, music, instruments, costumes, postures) have such potency as symbols because of the way their readings can fluidly transition between secular and sacred interpretations, and this fluidity is due to the long histories of social construction which these elements have undergone.

The task at hand, then, is to uncover the place of each portrait in the gendered discourse they both paradoxically affirm and reshape.

Reading the Portrait of St. Cecilia in the Style of Artemisia Gentileschi

While the attribution of this portrait is highly disputed, Artemisia would have been very familiar with the Cecilian trend in painting because of her father's many depictions of St. Cecilia, discussed in Chapter 2. Furthermore, while Artemisia was growing up in Rome, news would most likely have spread about the discovery of St. Cecilia's remains in 1599, when Artemisia was at the impressionable age of six. What *St. Cecilia Playing the Keyboard* has in common with other portraits of St. Cecilia from around the same time is that it depicts a conventionally attractive subject, and the instrument chosen to represent St. Cecilia's spiritual joys is a keyboard. Whether or not this instrument is an organ is ambiguous due to the manner in which it is cut out of the frame.

Where this portrait departs from convention is the gaze of the portrait subject. While it is usual for portraits of St. Cecilia to depict her head thrust forwards and upwards, the gaze usually follows the direction of the head. In this portrait, the gaze is remarkably expressive, and cuts through to the viewer despite, or perhaps because of, the claustrophobic cropping out of the chair, keyboard, and floral crown. Because of St. Cecilia's gaze and the action of her hands, the line between saint and real person is drawn quite thin here, which is a trademark of other works by Artemisia Gentileschi. The action in this portrait is palpable: the look St. Cecilia gives the viewer as she is interrupted by

our presence while performing translates a self-assuredness that is lacking in most of portraits of Cecilia. It is the gaze in the portrait that gives a distinct voice to the saint. Here, St. Cecilia is creating music, unswayed by any divine directives in the form of shining lights, vapid upward stares, or meddlesome angels. In other paintings from the seventeenth century, St. Cecilia is herself depicted almost as an instrument, a vessel through which divine presence in the form of music can become manifest.[82]

While the gaze of the portrait subject certainly is arresting, the floral crown is undoubtedly the visual focus of this work because of its detailed rendering, which sharply contrasts with the dark background. This St. Cecilia is thrice crowned. The bottom tier of the floral crown is composed of red and white flowers, including roses. Whether or not the white flowers represent lilies or narcissi, the colors of red and white are colors that have long been associated with floral crowns in Cecilian iconography.[83] Above this striking garland, a spray of small white flowers or buds elevates the headpiece, taking it almost out of the frame of the portrait, while a sheer halo is barely visible as the third diaphanous layer. Given the prominence and clearly-articulated beauty of the floral crown in this portrait, the viewer is more reminded of the Roman goddess Flora than the virgin-martyr St. Cecilia.

The keyboard depicted in this painting has a range of a little over three octaves. Given that St. Cecilia's finger tips are cut off in the frame of this reproduction, it is reasonable to assume that the portrait might extend further in all directions. It would be

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[82] Also cited in Meine, "Cecilia without a Halo." See especially Carlo Dolci, *Saint Cecilia*, oil on canvas, 1670–1671, State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, and Dolci, *Saint Cecilia*, oil on canvas, 1671, Gemäldegalerie, Dresden.

[83] I read the large white flowers most probably as narcissi, also noted in Meine, "Cecilia without a Halo," 107, and Hanning, "From Saint to Muse," 99, but this is a conclusion I arrived at independently of these texts.

especially helpful to see the portrait to determine if any other black keys are visible, apart from the ones visible in the reproduction. In the image to which I have access, I count at least twenty-four white keys, which could possibly indicate an instrument with three full octaves and a short bottom octave. If the instrument in the portrait of St. Cecilia playing the keyboard is indeed an organ, the lack of pipes only adds to the ambiguity between the line between secular and sacred nature of the work. The keyboard itself gives the viewer just enough information to cement the reference to St. Cecilia that the sliver of halo and crown of flowers suggest.[84] The only other work by Artemisia Gentileschi that depicts a keyboard instrument is *St. Cecilia Playing the Lute*, Figure 4. The organ in the background of this painting also seems to fade out of the frame, and the icon most closely connected to St. Cecilia is thus de-emphasized in both portraits. Instead, the musical actions of Cecilia herself, along with her billowing draperies, seem to fill the frames of both works to capacity.

Figure 4. Artemisia Gentileschi, *St. Cecilia Playing the Lute*, oil on canvas, c.1610–1612, Spada Gallery, Rome

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[84] The secular nature of the portrait of St. Cecilia playing the keyboard is also suggested by Meine, "Cecilia without a Halo," 107.

It is true that the artistic skill in the portrait of *St. Cecilia Playing the Keyboard* is lacking in execution, but in this study I do not set out to prove an attribution. It is important to note, however, that the spirit of the work is Artemisian, even if its execution is not. Since it has been suggested that this portrait was copied by someone who admired the style and subject matter of Artemisia, it is conceivable that it could have been rendered even by one of her own daughters. In letter written from Artemisia in Naples to Andrew Cioli in Florence on December 11, 1635, Artemisia notes that the portrait of St. Catharine for which she was commissioned would in fact be arriving to Cioli along with "a youthful work done by my daughter. As she is a young woman, please don't make fun of her. These will be a token of my pledge to you."[85] Another letter to Don Antonio Ruffo, written by Artemisia in Naples on March 13, 1649 states, "As soon as possible I will send my portrait, along with some small works done by my daughter, whom I have married off today to a knight of the Order of St. James."[86] While it is not possible at this time to determine the identity of the artist who painted the portrait of St. Cecilia at the keyboard, it is useful to know that Artemisia instructed her own daughters in drawing and painting and promoted their talents to patrons in the process.

Despite the unresolved question of attribution, this portrait does present St. Cecilia with an earthly force that is unusual in Cecilian iconography. There is no outside force, no guiding hand, no text, music, or heavenly decree. Cecilia in this portrait truly has been reclaimed.

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[85] Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, 385.

[86] Ibid., 391.

Reading the Self-Portrait Attributed to Marietta Robusti

Previous interpretations from art historians and musicologists regarding the portrait attributed to Marietta Robusti have presented various persuasive analyses, but several oddities in this portrait remain unexplained. Most noticeable is that the partbook was added to the painting—an addition clearly shown in Figure 5 by the fading of the white pigment of the partbook pages. Additionally, the meticulously copied music notation contrasts with the relatively sloppy copying of the text underlay, which I will discuss in detail further in this chapter. The layout of the partbook has also been changed from that of the printed version from which it was copied. Another musical detail that seems peculiar is the keyboard instrument in the painting. A closer look reveals that it is unfinished and contains a highly unlikely combination of white and black keys. Through a new close visual investigation in this chapter, I use these details in order to emphasize the unusual state in which the portrait was left unfinished. Furthermore, by contrasting the painstakingly copied partbook with the unfinished instrument, certain priorities for interpretation arise.

Figure 5. Detail of faded pigment, Marietta Robusti (?), *Self-Portrait*, oil on canvas, c.1580, Uffizi Gallery, Florence

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I conclude that reading the portrait without the music, as it was perhaps originally conceived, gives the portrait an overwhelmingly Cecilian reference. Although no floral crown or halo is present, the virginal white costume and positioning of the instrument would send a message of purity vis-à-vis the internalized musical iconography of Cecilia. Reading the portrait with the music, however, permanently distorts that Cecilian reference and introduces a host of complexities more difficult to untangle. In the partbook, the madrigal text itself is clearly legible and becomes the focal point of the work, much as Gentileschi's flower crown overshadows the halo and becomes the focal point of the portrait of St. Cecilia. Given the accompanimental practices of the day, the portrait may or may not musically even make sense. If it is implied that Marietta Robusti, the portrait subject, is supplying the lower voices to the madrigal, then her musical talent would have been considered truly extraordinary. In this case, it is likely that the keyboard would have been given both more detail and more prominence in the portrait.

In my following discussion of this portrait, I bring together several distinct sections of evidence to support my claims. First I compare this work to other portraits based on pose, physical attributes, and the gaze of the portrait subjects, all read through lenses of what was clearly influenced by the performativity of gender. Next, I return to the biographies of Marietta Robusti in order to explore how language affects ideas of gendered musical performances. The sections that follow delve deeply into a close examination of the instrument and the madrigal depicted in the painting in order to highlight the strange, unfinished nature of the portrait. I then strive to anchor the juxtaposition of the music, instrument, and woman in terms of madrigal performance practice in the late sixteenth century. Finally, I consider the implications of this body of

evidence while discussing the possibilities of dialogue between woman and gendered instrument in this painting.

Reading the Body: Pose, Physical Attributes, and Gaze

The pose and the physical attributes of the portrait subject are extremely conventional for late sixteenth-century portraits in the Italian peninsula. The portrait of Marietta Robusti is three-quarter-length portrait, the subject is slightly turned with the right arm outstretched, left arm held in front of the body, and she gazes out directly at the viewer. This stance recalls many poses in portraits of noble women, such as that of Faustina Orsini Mattei by Scipione Pulzone (c.1540–1598), or that of Elisabeth of Valois by Anthonis Mor (c.1517–1577).[87] Furthermore, it is known that Marietta Robusti painted many portraits of nobles. Ridolfi relates that Marietta interacted well with the Venetian nobility because of her portrait painting, musical skill, and overall virtuous and tactful personality.[88] Perhaps by portraying herself in this pose, Marietta might have wished to establish a visual link between herself and the subjects she portrayed.

While most of these heraldic paintings have a definite stiffness and formality in the poses, Marietta Robusti's pose conveys soft lines and openness, even though her overall portrait is structured by the rigid pyramidal shape formed from the base of the

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[87] Scipione Pulzone, *Portrait of Faustina Orsini Mattei*, oil on canvas, private collection, Milan. It is shown in black and white in Maria Teresa Cantaro, *Lavinia Fontana bolognese "pittora singolare," 1552–1614* (Milan: Jandi Sapi, 1989), 262. This portrait, once dubiously attributed to Lavinia Fontana, was recently exhibited in "Scipione Pulzone: Da Gaeta a Roma alle Corti Europee," shown at the Museo Diocesano, Gaeta, June 27–October 27 2013. See also Anthonis Mor, *Portrait of Elizabeth of Valois*, c. 1560, oil on canvas, Várez Fisa Collection, Madrid. A black and white reproduction in available in *Sofonisba Anguissola e le sue Sorelle* (n.p.: Leonardo Arte, 1994), 130.

[88] Ridolfi, *The Life of Tintoretto*, 98.

keyboard to the top of her head. It was not unusual to stand and play a keyboard instrument, and her stance makes it seem almost as if the viewer has caught her in the act of turning around in the middle of an interrupted performance. While the portrait subject is not actively performing music in this portrait, she is visually supported and balanced by the geometry of the keyboard and the madrigal.

In addition to similarities in pose, the physical features of the woman in this portrait conform to Petrarchan gendered standards of beauty. The ideal of the blonde-haired, fair-skinned woman was a familiar convention, and it was copied relentlessly throughout Venetian portraits of women in the late sixteenth century. Marietta Robusti's blonde hair, which frames her face, along with her pearly skin, ruddy blush, smooth, proportioned forehead, and white clothing, all conform to the standards of beauty touted by different male authors throughout the Renaissance. In this way, these physical standards can be understood as a sort of performativity, rooted in secular poetry, and enacted on the streets of Venice and in its portraiture.

For a quick visual comparison of these physical conventions, see the following portraits: Veronese, *Lady with a Heron*, Figure 6; Veronese, *Portrait of a Venetian Lady, Called La Belle Nani*, Figure 7; and Titian, *Lady in White*, Figure 8. Besides the usual attributes of physical beauty, these four portraits, the three above and the self-portrait attributed to Marietta Robusti, all have a common gaze. The coy smile and a gaze directed at the viewer form a new engaging trend in portraiture that replaces the more conservative model of eyes averted. Titian's portrait in particular is especially evocative of the self-portrait by Marietta Robusti due to the pose and costume.

Figure 6. Veronese, *Lady with a Heron,* oil on canvas, c. 1560, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

Figure 7. Veronese, *Portrait of a Venetian Lady, Called La Belle Nani,* oil on canvas, c. 1560, the Louvre, Paris

Figure 8. Titian, *Lady in White*, oil on canvas, 1553, Alte Meister Gallery, Dresden

The Gendering of Musical Performance: Delicacy and Virtue

Both Ridolfi and Borghini say that Marietta played the harpsichord very well. Borghini goes on to say Marietta also played the lute as well as other unspecified instruments. Her music teacher was Giulio Zacchino (fl.1572–84), born in Trieste and employed as organist at San Giorgio Maggiore in Venice. According to Ridolfi, Marietta "had a brilliant mind like her father. She played the harpsichord delicately and sang very well. She united in herself many virtuous qualities that singly are seldom found in other

women."[89] ("Fù Marietta di vivace ingegno, come il Padre suo. Toccò gentilmente il Clavicembalo e cantò assai bene di musica, onde in lei sola si videro unite molte virtuose qualità, che sparse difficilmente si trovano in altre.")[90] In a formidable tribute almost Marian in quality, Ridolfi applauds Marietta's "many virtuous qualities," noting that most other women cannot even lay claim to one. This daunting statement perhaps serves to further remove Marietta, along with her intellect and her immense artistic and musical talent, from the realm of human achievement and possibility.

"Gentilmente" is the word that Ridolfi chose, which the Engass' have translated as "delicate." Is it possible to read "gentilmente" as a synonym for what was understood as gendered keyboard performance practice? And what did a delicate style even consist of? To answer these questions, it is helpful to look at the use of the word "delicate" by other influential sixteenth-century authors. In his *Discorso della virtu feminile, e donnesca*, Torquato Tasso connects women with delicacy and the resulting binary division of labor as an overall condition arising out of the perceived medical differences between men and women: "As nature has produced man and woman of very different temperature and complexion, they are not likely to be suited to the same tasks. Man, as stronger, is inclined to some, and woman, as more delicate, to others."[91]

In Book III of Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*, the character of Giuliano de' Medici gives a description of his ideal lady at court:

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[89] Ridolfi, *The Life of Tintoretto*, 99.

[90] Ridolfi, "Vita di Marietta,"in *Vite dei Tintoretto da Le Maraviglie dell'Arte, overo Le Vite degl'Illustri Pittori Veneti e dello Stato*, 1648, with an introduction by Antonio Manno (Filippi Editore: Venice, 1994), 13.

[91] Torquato Tasso, *Discorso della virtu feminile, e donnesca* (Venice, 1582), 3v, 5r, translated by Mary Rogers and Paola Tinagli in *Women in Italy, 1350–1650: Ideals and Realities: A Sourcebook* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 26–27.

But principally in her facions, maners, woordes, gestures and conversation (me thinke) the woman ought to be muche unlike the man. For right as it is seemlye for him to showe a certain manlinesse full and steadye, so doeth it well in a woman to have a tendernes, soft and milde, with a kinde of womanlie sweetnes in everye gesture of herres, that in goyng, standinge and speakinge what ever she lusteth, may always make her appeere a woman without anye likenes of man.[92]

If the reader of this courtly instruction manual were to take this advice to heart, delicate tenderness in every gesture would naturally extend to playing music. Here Giuliano de' Medici illustrates what is essentially the male gaze. His stated preferences for how he would like to see women at court act is contrasted in a self-aware manner by his proclamation of courtly men's need to appear a certain way. In Castiglione's passage, courtly women were not able to define the standards of attraction for their own behavior. The two examples above demonstrate the delicacy was not just a mode of acting for women who wished to be admired and thought of highly. Delicacy in women, read as frailty by Tasso, was either an unchangeable physical state of being, or it was a form of constant self-policing, as in Castiglione's example.

The delicacy that Ridolfi spoke of might have had a broader connotation along these lines, but it also had a direct connection to the lightness of touch on an instrument. Isabella d'Este, in a letter to Lorenzo Gusnasco dated to March 1496, asks the instrument maker for a clavichord: "We do not give you any other particular instruction, other that it should be easy to play, because our touch is so light that we cannot play well when the keys are stiff. You will understand our need and desire; for the rest, make it as you

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[92] The English translation used here is the 1561 translation by Sir Thomas Hoby, edited by Walter Raleigh (London: David Nutt, 1900), 215–216, in the University of Toronto Robarts Library, https://archive.org/details/bookofcourtierfr00castuoft (accessed September 16, 2014).

wish."[93] Isabella insists that the instrument, a clavichord, be altered in its design to be suitable for noblewomen to play. Clavichords already had a soft sound, which limited the distance the sounds could carry and made them popular instruments for use in intimate domestic settings.

As I have already discussed in Chapter 2, the surviving biographies of Marietta Robusti are part of the discursive process in the feminization of portraiture and styles of musical performance. Because of their role in this process, these biographies ultimately served to dilute the intellectual life, independence, creativity, and overall vitality of Marietta Robusti as a historical subject.

The Keyboard Instrument

The instrument in the self-portrait attributed to Marietta Robusti is situated on a tabletop covered in a patterned cloth or brocade. H. Colin Slim calls the instrument a harpsichord, a view echoed by most others who mention the work.[94] However, I have ascertained that the instrument is a polygonal spinet. The lid of the instrument, though barely visible against the dark background of the portrait, is simply not big enough to belong to a harpsichord. I was fortunate to view this painting in person, and I was able to see details unobservable in printed reproductions that support my claim that the instrument is a polygonal spinet.[95] First, the lid of the instrument clearly extends at a

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[93] Mary Rogers and Paola Tinagli, *Women in Italy, 1350–1650: Ideals and Realities: A Sourcebook* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 246–247.

[94] Slim, *A Gift of Madrigals and Motets,* 1: 215.

[95] I viewed the painting in the exhibition "Venice: The Golden Age of Art and Music," Portland Art Museum, Portland, Oregon, February 15–May 11, 2014.

slight diagonal from left to right behind the portrait subject, and then down again sharply on the right side. Secondly, when viewing the painting in person I discerned a thin dark line depicting the break where the key cover of the spinet would fold down.

The keyboard of the polygonal spinet is depicted completely inaccurately at the top and the bottom of its range, and this points away from an attribution to Marietta Robusti, an accomplished musician. The outer cabinet of the instrument appears to extend to the right, and the inner scroll and edge of the outer case are clearly visible, as seen in Figure 9. Late-sixteenth-century Venetian virginals did have keywells that extended outwards from the instrument, but the space depicted here on the right is concave, suggesting an absence. The portrait is clearly unfinished.

Figure 9. Detail of the clear absence of keys at the uppermost section of the keyboard, Marietta Robusti (?), *Self-Portrait*, oil on canvas, c.1580, Uffizi Gallery, Florence

While it might be tempting to assign aesthetic reasons for the absence of keys, the unlikely combination of black and white keys in the lower register indicates additional problems with the depiction of the instrument. The two oddly-spaced single black keys at the bottom of the range, shown in Figure 10, also raise some questions. The self-portrait was restored in 1974, and a few centimeters of the left edge of the canvas were cut away.

Photographs of the unframed portrait taken prior to the restoration show that the white keys extended farther to the left than what is seen today, and the keyboard's black key pattern was unaltered at least as early as 1910 when the photographs were taken.[96] While it was not uncommon for keyboard instruments to have a short octave at the bottom of the range, I have not found any examples of extant instruments that contain two black keys spaced as in Figure 10.

Figure 10. Detail of the lowest notes on the keyboard, Marietta Robusti (?), *Self-Portrait*, oil on canvas, c.1580, Uffizi Gallery, Florence

Furthermore, the detailed and accurate musical notation of the score, discussed in the next section, stands in stark opposition to the unfinished and inaccurate spinet. As Marietta is known to have musical training, it is simply nonsensical that in a self-portrait she would allow for such glaring inaccuracies, and this is the strongest evidence against the attribution to Marietta Robusti. An alternate possibility remains that the inaccuracies are a result of overpainting, which could have been intended mask any damages to the canvas.

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[96] Wolfram Prinz, Ulrich Middeldorf, and Ugo Procacci, *Die Sammlung der Selbstbildnisse in den Uffizien* (Berlin: Mann, 1971), fig. 49.

Perhaps the most drastic new observation offered here is that the musical partbook was added as an afterthought to the rest of the portrait. Due to fading of the white pigment on the pages of the partbook, it is possible to see the yellow and red lines of the instrument extending behind the left side of the book. On the right page of music, it is possible to see the lines of the subject's bodice clearly behind the music in transparency, indicating that the music was not planned originally. Thus, the music, the most sexually-charged object in the painting, appears to be added in later. This contrasts with several decades earlier when it was common to change suggestive portraits towards more saintly themes because of Counter-Reformation decrees: "…off with the lute, the white dog, the rose, replaced by a wheel of St. Catherine, the palm of martyrdom or a plate with St. Lucia's eyes."[97] Perhaps the partbook was painted over another object in a curious reversal of symbols. An x-ray of this portrait would be most telling.

H. Colin Slim notes that the sixteenth-century madrigal was widely performed by musicians of all rank, and the fact that the madrigal survived in many printed editions helps to bolster this claim. In support of his argument that the notation in the portrait attributed to Marietta Robusti was copied from a printed edition of the madrigal, Slim notes that all printed editions used soprano clef in the cantus part, which is also found in the painting.[98] Furthermore, an F-sharp is preserved in the second line on the right page, which H. Colin Slim notes in his transcription only appears in the 1537–1539 printed versions of the madrigal. This narrows the possible versions from which the painter might

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[97] Gaia Servadio, *Renaissance Woman* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 135.

[98] Slim, *A Gift of Madrigals and Motets*, 1: 215.

have copied the music. While I cannot say for certain which edition the music was copied from, a very close match for the musical notation seems to be the 1537 edition of *Il primo libro de madrigali di Verdelotto* published in Venice by Ottaviano Scotto. By comparing this printed copy of the cantus partbook with the painted notation, I found meaningful discrepancies in the page layout and text underlay.[99]

The painter deviates drastically from the printed layout of the partbook. While the decorated initial, madrigal number, voice part, and composer are all situated correctly in accordance with the 1537 printed version, the printed version lays out the entire madrigal over two pages with five lines per page, shown in Figure 11. In the painted version the madrigal is spread out over two pages with three lines of music and text per page, as seen in Figure 12.
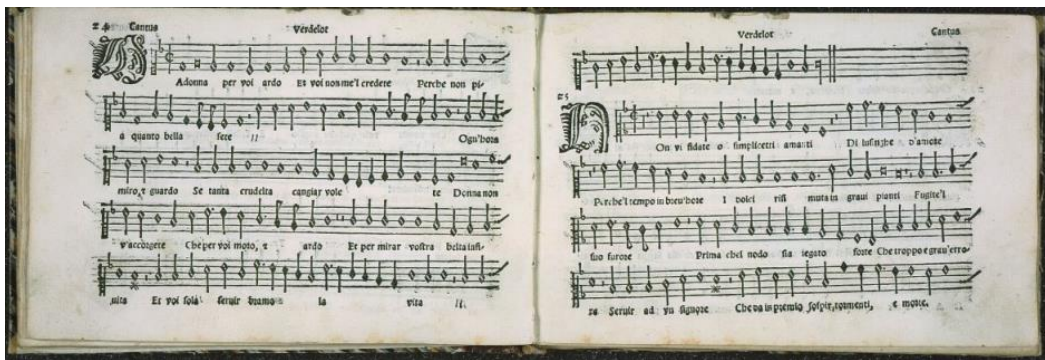

Figure 11. Layout of *Madonna per voi ardo*, *Il primo libro de madrigali di Verdelotto*, published by Ottaviano Scotto, 1537, Museo Internationale e Biblioteca della Musica di Bologna, U.308

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[99] Museo Internationale e Biblioteca della Musica di Bologna, U.308. The partbook is digitized at http://imslp.org/wiki/Il_primo_libro_de_madrigali_%28Verdelot,_Philippe%29 (accessed October 12, 2014).

Figure 12. Detail of layout of *Madonna per voi ardo*, Marietta Robusti (?), *Self-Portrait*, oil on canvas, c.1580, Uffizi Gallery, Florence

Did a slimmer version of this printed madrigal exist, or did the painter take liberties to introduce a symmetrical layout of the partbook? If the latter is true, another possible explanation could be that the painter intended to convey a streamlined message through the manipulation of one text onto two pages rather than having two pages with two different texts in the painting.

Furthermore, the meticulously copied notation and clearly legible *capoverso* supports the idea that the painter who added the music, even if different from the portrait artist, was trying to convey a clear message through the addition of the music and the text. What was this message? Who was it meant for? Certainly the portrait subject herself seems to be affected by the thematic content of the music she holds. Her broad cheeks, and even her ears, seem to burn with fiery intensity. In fact, the most striking color in the portrait comes from the woman's flushed cheeks; the rest of the palette is muted in comparison and contains a dark background, pale tones in the clothing, musical partbook, and in her skin and hair.

Even though the layout has probably been altered, the painter has taken great care to preserve the amount of music on each line. The painter has even meticulously copied out the correct placement of the custodes on the staff at the end of every line. Overall, the musical notation is copied quite well but is not a perfect match. In line two, the C following the B-flat is omitted. In line five, the painter faithfully recreates the music until the string of semiminims running down from B-flat. Somewhere in the string of A-G-F semiminims, the painter forgot one. The stroke suddenly becomes much less controlled in the semiminim after B-flat, perhaps resulting from frustration at misplacing a notehead. However, in line six, the painter seems to proceed carefully in the second round of copying, and the repetition is faithful to the printed version in reproducing the entire string of semiminims.

Though the music is copied with remarkable accuracy—save for that opening line—the madrigal text is incorrectly reproduced and presents problems with text underlay and omission. The general trend throughout the painted partbook is that the text of the right and left edges are preserved at the expense and exclusion of textual material in the interior of the page. This condensing of text in the interior of the page also makes orthographical analysis difficult. *Madonna per voi ardo* is clearly readable in the opening line. So clearly, in fact, that the text is expanded to such a degree that it no longer lines up with the music. By the time the painter has started "et voi", the higher note that supposedly corresponds with the "et" is situated over the first iteration of "voi" in the opening line. After the "vo," which is missing an "i," the painter scrunches what should be "non lo credete / Perchè non" into one illegible syllable, and then ends the line with the "pi-" before skipping ahead to the second line on the page to paint "-a quanto bella

sete//." Most tellingly, in the second painted line, after the repeat of "Perche non pia

uanto bella sete", the painter clearly reproduces the words "ogn'hora" but displaces them,

entering them three notes to the left of where they should be to start the new phrase, as

seen in Figure 13. This is clearly not a spacing issue, as the painter has plenty of room on

the right side of the page to line up "ogn'hora" with the F-G-F breves to which it is

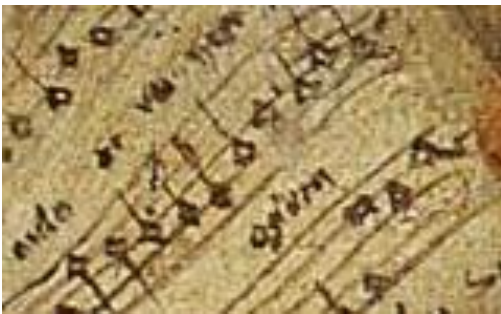aligned in the printed part, as is clearly visible in Figure 14.

Figure 13. Detail of erroneous text underlay of "ogn'hora," Marietta Robusti (?), *Self-Portrait*, oil on canvas, c.1580, Uffizi Gallery, Florence
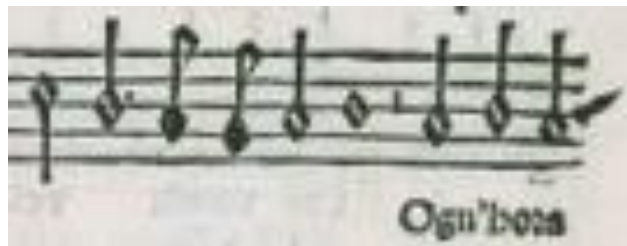

Figure 14. Detail of correct text underlay of "ogn'hora," *Il primo libro de madrigali di Verdelotto*, published by Ottaviano Scotto, 1537, Museo Internationale e Biblioteca della Musica di Bologna, U.308

As the above examples show, the painter seems to be concerned with representing

the text faithfully only to a certain degree, or perhaps did not grasp the intricacies of text

underlay. There also remains the possibility that transmitting text underlay to a sixteenth-

century viewer would have been largely unimportant, as the opening line of the madrigal

might have been enough to remind the viewer of the message of the entire song. If this

was the case, however, the puzzle still remains: why was the music copied so faithfully?

Considerations of Musical Performance

The only other painting known to include a depiction of Verdelot's madrigal

Madonna per voi ardo is the *Portrait of Johannes Münstermann* (1547) by Hermann tom

Ring (1521–1595), seen in Figure 15. To H. Colin Slim, the depiction of the same

madrigal in two portraits separated temporally and geographically shows that madrigals

belonged to a "living" repertoire, "not one reserved solely for royal eyes and ears."[100]

Figure 15. Hermann tom Ring, *Portrait of Johannes Münstermann*, oil on panel, 1547, Westphalian State Museum of Art and Cultural History, Muenster

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[100] Slim, *A Gift of Madrigals and Motets*, 1: 215.

In the portrait, Münstermann is represented with four partbooks and a flute. The cantus part, the same part of the madrigal depicted in the Robusti portrait, is open on a table in the foreground. Comparing the instrumentation depicted in the painting and the layout of the score raises questions about what textual message, if any, was to be transmitted in the act of viewing, what viewers were supposed to musically perceive when they looked at a portrait, and performance practice of madrigals.

The madrigal in the tom Ring portrait starts on the right-hand page, and in the portrait of Marietta it starts on the left-hand page. Tom Ring fits the entire cantus in four lines on the right-hand page, with space left over, while the portrait attributed to Marietta Robusti uses six lines total over two pages. Perhaps to avoid confusion of meaning with two different texts present, Münstermann points decisively at a line in the text of *Madonna per voi ardo*, leaving the viewer certain about which textual passage is emphasized. His right hand points to "Et voi sola servir," which can perhaps be read as evidence for the madrigal text being purposefully chosen to convey a message to a certain viewer. Contrastingly, Marietta does not seem to be indicating any particular portion of the madrigal text. Her hand is not pointing to any particular piece of text or music, and the way she is holding the book is not lifelike.

In both portraits the cantus part of the madrigal has been copied. In the case of the tom Ring portrait, the cantus part is understood by the viewer to be sounded by the flute, and sounding completeness is hinted at with the presence of all four partbooks. At the most fundamental level, the portrait by tom Ring provides an instrumental counterpoint to the keyboard portrait, as the flute was known as a male-gendered instrument. In the

case of the Robusti portrait, is the viewer also supposed to gain a sense of sounding completeness for the madrigal?

Accompanying oneself one a madrigal was a notable skill, especially when only one part was available. Intabulating madrigals had been in practice for at least half a century before the self-portrait attributed to Marietta Robusti was completed; in 1536 Willaert intabulated a set of Verdelot madrigals. While intabulations eased the role of the instrumental performer, a special status was reserved for those musicians who could play from the bass only. Alessandro Striggio (1536/1537–1592), an Italian composer who worked in Florence and Mantua, records one of the first instances of basso continuo practice. Writing to the Grand Duke in 1584, he mentions Giulio Caccini's renowned skill of accompanying himself with only the lowest part of a score for reference: "Giulio [Caccini] potra benissimo sonare, o con il lautto, o con il cembalo sopra il basso." ("Giulio Caccini will be able to play perfectly well with the lute or the harpsichord over the bass").[101] Nuti interprets this statement by explaining, "Clearly, specifically to play 'con il cembalo sopra il basso' was quite a new and relatively rare art; Caccini's arrival and skill seems to be the cause of some excitement, worth remarking that he can play from the bass alone."[102]

Clearly, to accompany oneself using only without an intabulation of a madrigal was difficult. Given what we know of Marietta Robusti's much touted musical skills, however, we might be able to read a sense of musical completeness in her self-portrait.

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[101] Giulia Nuti, *The Performance of Italian Basso Continuo: Style in Keyboard Accompaniment in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007), 12.

[102] Ibid., 12–13.

Although the bass part is not displayed, it might have been understood that the keyboard instrument could have functioned in the role of the lower and inner voices.

The Dialogue between the Portrait Subject and Keyboard

Without music, the portrait we read is one of a virtuous woman with physical features that both sixteenth-century Venice and modern Western society deems as attractive and desirable. The message that was sent to a viewer would have been that a certain kind of woman was proficient at an instrument typically associated with a domestic setting, and that whoever was painting the portrait of her did not finish it.

Perhaps the analysis can go deeper than this surface reading, however. In a way, the addition of the music might be a way to de-radicalize the portrait. I argue that the keyboard can be read as a companion, female-gendered body. If the woman and her keyboard were read as two separate bodies, then there is no space left in the portrait for a male presence to exert itself. Because there is a lack of notated music, there is no visible way for the musician's actions to be restricted or proscribed.

Another possible reading of the woman and her keyboard would be to view them as one body. Her hand rests above the keys, seemingly directing her fingers towards the notes, and the entire keyboard seems to form a base for the pyramid from which her person rises. The keyboard as a cyborg-like incorporation of the portrait subject's body would give her a mode of self-representation and expression that is both unpredictable and undefined because there is no definite music present. There would be no limitations on what the viewer could hear when looking at the portrait, save for the limitations

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provided by each different viewer based on his or her own experience with what music he or she has heard.

The keyboard, still in an unfinished and inaccurate state, is already in the background of the subject, but now it is further pushed into the background symbolically because of the presence of the madrigal partbook. With the addition of music and text, the association of the portrait subject and her instrument has been transformed and diluted. Before the addition of the music, there were only two entities to be understood by the viewer: woman and spinet. With the addition of the music, a male voice is exerted through the madrigal text, "My lady, I burn with love for you." Arguably, this voice, with the clearly legible opening line, exerts a certain amount of control and authority over what is happening in the portrait. Was the music added by someone who felt the need to secularize the context of the portrait? Alternately, does the woman's conventionally attractive physical appearance in the portrait already serve as proof of the exertion of influence of the patriarchal society in which she lived?

We now know what kind of music the portrait subject played, and by extension, we know the kind of message the painter wanted the portrait subject to convey. The partbook is turned towards the viewer, which gives a sense both that the portrait subject is already knowledgeable about its contents and that she wishes to convey that knowledge to a viewer.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS OF PROJECT, AND QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER

RESEARCH

Conclusions

In this study, my goal was to incorporate methodologies from musicology, art history, gender studies, and feminist theory in order to provide further contextualization for musical portraits. To do this, I chose to focus my studies on portraits by women artists of women interacting with keyboard instruments. These types of portraits have a strong analytical grounding in work by feminist art historians and musicologists, but I wanted to expand this body of interpretation and knowledge by discussing two rather problematic works: the self-portrait attributed to Marietta Robusti, and *St. Cecilia Playing the Keyboard*, in the style of Artemisia Gentileschi. After an in-depth analysis of the self-portrait ascribed to Marietta Robusti, and a shorter, prefatory analysis of the portrait of *St. Cecilia Playing the Keyboard*, I have determined that in each portrait, the dialogue between woman and instrument forms rich possibilities for interpretations of women's musical autonomy that are then altered by the inclusion of additional symbols in each work. The addition of the madrigal text of *Madonna, per voi ardo* in the portrait ascribed to Marietta Robusti serves to secularize the connection that the artist and the instrument share, and the inclusion of the vibrantly-rendered floral crown in *St. Cecilia Playing the Keyboard* reminds the viewer that the performing musician in the portrait is in fact a sainted figure.

Each of these portraits is problematic because of the question of attribution, albeit due to different circumstances. The attribution of the portrait to Marietta Robusti is looked upon with suspicion by feminist art historians and musicologists because of the salacious nature of the madrigal text in the partbook that the portrait subject holds. Others have noted that the text is much too amorous for a self-portrait that might have been used as a self-promotional tactic by the artist. *St. Cecilia Playing the Keyboard*, on the other hand, is disputed in its attribution to Artemisia Gentileschi primarily because of the lack of skill evident in the composition and rendering of the work.

My short analysis of the portrait of St. Cecilia in the style of Artemisia Gentileschi functioned primarily in this study to provide a counterpart to the self-portrait attributed to Marietta Robusti. As there are fewer musical details in this work when compared to the Robusti portrait, however, it was difficult to use the same kind of closely analytical musicological investigation. Instead, by reading the portrait subject's gaze and pose, along with her costume, I have noted that the portrait of St. Cecilia shows a shift towards secularization of the saint's imagery. In this case, it is Cecilia herself who is brought down to earth. The floral crown, so evocative of a mythological goddess, is but one indication of this shift. The main way that St. Cecilia is changed in this portrait is the way that she so confidently performs upon her instrument, without seeming to receive heavenly inspiration or direction. St. Cecilia here is less of a vessel and more of a musician.

In my case study of the supposed self-portrait of Marietta Robusti, my analysis of details of the portrait, combined with attribution history, and a discussion of gendered spheres of existence for women such as portraiture, musical performance, and general

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comportment, have shown that this portrait deserves more attention. Through close visual investigation, I have determined that the madrigal partbook was added in after the portrait subject and keyboard had already been painted. The musical partbook as an unplanned feature in the portrait completely changes the possible meanings of the work when placed in context of the established pictorial language of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Cecilian iconography. I argue that in absence of the partbook, the self-portrait of Marietta Robusti had definite parallels to the sacred iconography of St. Cecilia.

Limitations of Project: Selectivity and Bias

During this project I examined dozens of paintings depicting women and keyboard instruments created from 1500–1700. Although I chose only two paintings as case studies, my project was limited to a certain extent by the aesthetic and value judgments made by others who published reproductions and studies of the works from which I chose. To what extent might this pre-selectivity influence my evidence and conclusions? How does the selection and promotion of particular art works indicate our modern cultural bias about women's roles in history? A notable exception to the sort of bias in scholarship, of course, includes feminist scholarship on the portraits created by Sofonisba Anguissola, Lavinia Fontana, Marietta Robusti, and Artemisia Gentileschi, as these paintings were effectively given value and meaning by historians working for the reclamation of women's history.

Furthermore, to what extent does my personal belief system as a feminist limit my interpretations? Am I going to read agency and resistance where there was none? What does my study not take into consideration? Susan Bordo describes this dilemma thusly:

> No matter how local and circumscribed the object or how attentive the scholar is to the axes that constitute social identity, some of those axes will be ignored and others selected....This selectivity, moreover, is never innocent. We always "see" from points of view that are invested with our social, political, and personal interests, inescapably –centric in one way or another, even in the desire to do justice to heterogeneity.[103]

Questions for Further Research

Any further research on reading musical portraits would need to more closely consider the biases and exclusions noted above. In addition to these considerations, I found myself wishing to understand more thoroughly how body history as a discipline interacts with the history of the painted body. The painted body acts as a counterpart to the historical body, which in a way simplifies the usual lack of corporeal evidence. It also makes the study more complex, however, by providing a variety of filters through which to read such a text. Often the identity of the subject in the painting is not the same as the subject who provided the modeling, so whose body was used to model the one depicted in the painting? How can scholars invoking the framework of gender performativity incorporate painters' representations of female nudes using male models? How does one add layers of corporeal meaning and history to the special challenges posed by religious and allegorical scenes, as the subject depicted often has no historical identity? Can

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[103] Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, 222–223.

allegorical figures be read as a painted body even if there is no concrete historical identity to connect back to a body?

In summing up the difficulties that historians face in using the body as a method for study, Kathleen Canning quotes Bryan Turner as saying that the body is, "at once the most solid, the most elusive, illusory, concrete, metaphysical, ever present and ever distant thing—a site, an instrument, an environment, a singularity and a multiplicity."[104] As such, it would be particularly fascinating to expand the scope of this study to determine if women's musical performance, as read by representations and descriptions of those performances, were at all indicative of or responsible for larger shifts, such as political changes or any sort of trans-regional gender-specific identity building.

Finding answers to some of my questions posed in the above sections would further explore myriad possibilities for the interactions of interdisciplinary research between musicology, gender studies, and art history. Furthermore, it would allow me to refine my thinking about specific methodologies required to interpret the historical body and how that relates to the concept of embodied practices that inform a cultural text.

As there have been multiple studies by both art historians and musicologists on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century portraits by women artists with keyboard instruments, a question arises. Why the continued fascination, the reluctance to move beyond "female self-portraits as musicians" as a curated topic? In brief, I believe that these portraits are so compelling precisely because they are strikingly recognizable as part of an iconographical trend. The symbolism of the keyboard instruments in these works demand

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[104] Canning, 504, quoting Bryan S. Turner, *The Body and Society*, 2nd ed. (London: Sage Publications, 1996), 43.

varied interpretations as we try to make more nuanced connections to the creators of the

portraits.

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