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Parisina: Literary and Historical Perspectives Across Six Centuries

John S. Evans

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis explores the relationship between the many literary texts referring to the deaths of Ugo d'Este and Parisina Malatesta, who were executed in Ferrara in 1425 in accordance with an order by Niccolò III d'Este after he discovered their incestuous relationship. The texts are divided in three categories: (1) the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italian novellas and their translations; (2) the seventeenth-century Spanish tragedy; and (3) the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Romantic works. Although these categories divide the various texts chronologically, they also represent a thematic grouping as the texts within each category share common themes that set them apart from those in the other groups.

While the various texts all tell the same story, each approaches the tragedy slightly differently based largely on the audience for which it was intended. Thus, the time and place of each text greatly affects its telling. Still, the fact that substantial differences exist between texts that were produced in both geographic and temporal proximity suggests that these are not all-determining factors.

Although scholarship exists analyzing individual texts, a comprehensive study of the literary accounts relating to the tragedy has never been undertaken. Rather than detracting from the story, the differences put forth in each of the literary texts enrich the global reading experience by offering many perspectives on the tragedy. In addition, these differences influence how the reader reacts to each of the other texts. Familiarity with one version of the story changes the way a reader approaches the others. A parallel reading of the different versions of the story also shows the power culture has on interpretation. Texts referring to a singular event from one time and place sharply contrast with those that are the product of other circumstances.

Keywords: Matteo Bandello, Anton Francesco Grazzini, il Lasca, François de Belleforest, Pierre Boaistuau, Lope de Vega, Lord Byron, Gaetano Donizetti, Tomás Giribaldi, Felice Romani, Gabriele D'Annunzio, Pietro Mascagni, Niccolò III d'Este, Parisina Malatesta, Ugo d'Este, Histoires Tragiques, El castigo sin venganza, La Parisina, Parisina d'Este, Ferrara, Le Cene.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS	iv
Introduction	1
Chapter 1	10
Chapter 2	27
Chapter 3	53
Conclusion	69
Works Cited	74

Introduction

In the spring of 1425, the Marquis of Ferrara, Niccolò III d'Este, ordered the imprisonment of his wife and son on grounds of adultery. On the twenty-first of May, Ugo d'Este and Parisina Malatesta were publicly beheaded for their crime. Their deaths marked the beginning of a citywide purging of adulteresses lead by the Marquis himself who, seeing himself publicly humiliated by his wife's incestuous relationship with his bastard son, sought to avenge his cuckoldry by sending Ferrara's unfaithful wives to the chopping block.

At least ten distinct literary accounts of the story exist. A century after Parisina and Ugo lost their heads, the Italian author Anton Francesco Grazzini¹ included the story in his book *Le cene*. Five years later, Matteo Bandello², an Italian bishop living in southern France, included the story in his collection of 214 novellas. A decade later, it found its way into France when Pierre Boaistuau and François de Belleforest³ translated the stories into French. This French translation was subsequently translated into

¹ Anton Francesco Grazzini (1504-1584), also known as il Lasca, included the story in the second volume of *Le cene* (a three-volume collection of novellas situated within a frame narrative) which he began writing in 1549. *Le cene* was first published posthumously in 1743 by A. Bonducci in Florence.

² Matteo Bandello's (1485-1561) version of the story appears as the forty-fourth novella in the first volume of his collection published in Lucca by Vincenzo Busdraghi in 1554.

³ François de Belleforest (1530-1583) and Pierre Boaistuau's (1500-1566) translation of Bandello's novellas was published in seven volumes from 1564-1582 in Paris.

Spanish⁴. In Spain, legendary playwright Lope de Vega⁵ adapted the tragedy for the stage in 1632, but the play was performed only once before censors shut it down. While the exact reasons remain unknown, C. A. Jones suggests in his 1966 edition of the *comedia* that the story may have too closely resembled that of the ill-fated Don Carlos whom, according to the *leyenda negra* that spread across Europe, Felipe II poisoned after marrying Élizabeth de Valois, the very woman to whom he had betrothed his son (cited in Wade 364). Edward Wilson proposes that the *comedia* may have seemed like a critique of the libertine Felipe IV himself (296). Nearly two hundred years later, Lord Byron⁶ turned the story into a poem and the tragedy found new life with nineteenth-century romantics. Italian composer Gaetano Donizetti⁷ brought the tragedy back to

⁴ Vicente de Millis Godínez translated several novellas from the French translation of Bandello into Spanish, they were published in Salamanca by Pedro Lasso in 1589.

⁵ There is some debate as to when the first performance of Lope de Vega's (1562-1635) *El castigo sin venganza* took place. Although most scholars agree that it occurred in 1632, some believe that it was on February 3, but the first known license for performance is dated May 9. For more information on the subject, see Gerald E. Wade's article "Lope de Vega's *El castigo sin venganza*. Its Composition and Presentation." *Kentucky Romance Quarterly* 13.3 (1976): 357-64.

⁶ George Gordon Byron (1788-1824) wrote the poem "Parisina" in 1815. It was published by John Murray of London in 1816.

⁷ Composer Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848) and librettist Felice Romani (1788-1865) wrote the opera *Parisina d'Este* in 1833. It premiered at the Teatro della Pergola in Florence on March 17, 1833.

Italy in the first of three operas, two Italian⁸ and one Uruguayan⁹, based on Byron's poem. The Englishman's poetry also inspired two nineteenth-century playwrights, Antonio Somma¹⁰ and Laughton Osborn¹¹, to adapt the story for the stage in 1835 and 1861, respectively.

If not for its success as a literary subject, perhaps the story would have faded into complete oblivion or become merely a historical footnote, but the arts have kept it alive, perhaps not thriving, but alive nonetheless. Still, while critics have mentioned the literary relationship of a few of the texts—most notably between Byron and the operas as well as *Bandello*, *Belleforest* and *Lope de Vega*—no critical study has yet examined the full genealogical relationship between the various accounts of the story as well as the historical documents relating to the romance and death of Ugo and Parisina, each of which varies from the others by exploring different facets of the myth by means of distinct expressive mediums.

⁸ Composer Pietro Mastagni (1863-1945) and librettist Gabriele D'Annunzio (1863-1938) wrote the second Italian opera, *Parisina*, in 1913. It premiered at Milan's famous La Scala opera house on December 15, 1913.

⁹ Using the Romani libretto, Uruguayan composer Tomás Giribaldi (1847-1930) wrote a new score for the opera he named *La Parisina*. The opera premiered at Montevideo's Teatro Solís on September 14, 1878.

¹⁰ The Italian author Antonio Somma's (1809-1864) play *Parisina* was published in 1835 by the Venetian publisher Antonili.

¹¹ Laughton Osborn (1809-1878) wrote the play *Ugo da Este* in 1861. The New York Printing Company first published it in 1869.

One hundred years ago on December 15, 1913, Mascagni's *Parisina* premiered at La Scala in Milan. Taking advantage of the publicity hype for the new opera, Raffaello Barbiera compiled the most definitive, albeit incomplete, compendium of texts associated with the Parisina myth. The book, published by Fratelli Treves in Milan, included brief selections of historical documents, the novellas by Bandello and il Lasca, Andrea Mafei's Italian translation of Lord Byron's "Parisina", Felice Romani's libretto used by Donizetti in *Parisina d'Este* (1833), and Antonio Somma's five act play *Parisina*. Barbiera wrote a short introduction praising the genius of Gabriele D'Annunzio (Librettist for Mascagni's opera) and briefly outlined the literary appearances of the tragedy in Italy. With the exception of Byron's poem, Barbiera included only Italian texts.

Although Barbiera's compilation notably brings together many of the texts that tell the tale of the tragedy, it fails to explore the relationships between the texts, their authors and the time and place of production. Nor does Barbiera's compilation include, or even mention for that matter, Belleforest's French translation and Lope's *El castigo sin venganza*. Nevertheless, in the act of publishing multiple accounts of the story together, Barbiera facilitated a step forward in the global analysis of the Parisina myth, even if it merely brought the texts together without offering a comparative analytical study.

While each of the accounts is unique in both its content and its approach, the intertextual comprehension of all the texts makes for a rich and rewarding study of the Parisina myth. Each takes on new meaning in light of what is found in the others. Except in the case of Belleforest, none of the works can be considered translations in the

strictest sense of the word, nor are they *refundiciones*¹², with the exception of *La Parisina* by Giribaldi who took Felice Romani's libretto—originally written for Donizetti—and composed new music to create the first Uruguayan opera. Perhaps they fall under the category of “literary translations” as described by Rainer Schulte, co-founder of the American Literary Translators Association at the University of Texas at Dallas, who defines a literary translation as one in which “the translator recreates the refined sensibilities of foreign countries and their people through the linguistic, musical, rhythmic, and visual possibilities of the new language” (1). Such a translation is less concerned with a word-for-word rendering in a new language, but tries, rather, to recreate the text using the cultural and linguistic resources available in foreign tongues. Although it may be the case that each of the texts explores the vast possibilities of the language in which it was produced, the fact that six were produced in Italian makes the corraling of the works under the umbrella of translation a somewhat dubious application of the term.

Rather than translations, each of the works is a literary refraction produced by the distorting prisms of language, medium and culture. While the product of each is somewhat different from that of the other refractions, the source of illumination, namely the tragedy of the House of Este, remains the same for all. Even in those cases where texts are based on other literary works, eventually they can trace their origin back up the chain to one common source. Each refraction offers a unique vision of the tragedy based on the time and place of its creation. The medium through which it shines is none other than that of the cultural values and biases of the people for whom

¹² Literally a “recasting”; a literary term of art used to describe the reworking of literature, especially a *comedia*.

each author produced his work. Therefore, an analysis of each not only allows for an appreciation of a particular author's literary craft, but also presents a sociological vantage point from which a community—or at least that group for which the work was produced—can be observed.

Each refraction is autonomous yet incomplete. A reading of Byron is in no way requisite to the appreciation of Donizetti, and sixteenth-century Italian readers did not find Bandello lacking because Somma had yet to publish his dramatic interpretation of the tragedy. Such an idea is absurd, risible even. Nevertheless, Lope de Vega enriches Mascagni and vice versa even though audiences enjoyed *El castigo sin venganza* long before the first notes of *Parisina* ever graced La Scala. Even though each of the literary refractions of the Parisina myth differ in the details included and the medium of production, they tell the same story, a story enriched by the very differences themselves. Together they create a multidimensional view of the events surrounding the execution of Ugo d'Este and Parisina Malatesta as they have been observed and interpreted by multiple cultures. This intertextual projection is far more complex than any single refraction because it takes into account a multiplicity of conflicting perspectives impossible to reconcile in a single work. Each character is both a hero and a villain, justified and disparaged for his part in the tragedy, and in being both, is neither. Viewed separately each of the refractions champions a protagonist, or protagonists, but seen together protagonists and antagonists fuse into people. Black and white dissipate into a muddle of grey. Nobody is completely virtuous, nor are they entirely evil. Perspective determines everything.

The perception of the tragedy differs according to the lens through which the observer sees it. Viewed as refracted through the prism of the quasi-levitical inquisitional Catholicism of the Renaissance the story takes on an entirely different

meaning from that of the nineteenth-century romantic refractions. Refractions reverse roles and confuse archetypal themes. Yet, somehow this chaos achieves universal clarity. The result is somewhat akin to that produced by a photographic collage, which achieves a global unity when observed as a whole, despite the dissimilarities in the photographs. When viewed as an ensemble, literary refractions, like collages, produce a multifaceted effect far more interesting and detailed than the individual stories themselves. They allow an observer the opportunity to see from multiple perspectives. This global view affects how the individual refractions are perceived as well. While each remains fundamentally unchanged by the others, an audience—whether comprised of readers or theatergoers—familiar with the refractory collage mentally superimposes the refractions upon each other and thereby subjects their perception of each to that of the others. A parallel reading of the texts also highlights the possibility of multiple interpretations of a single event and the role that society plays in analyzing a text. The fact that the same event can be seen in so many ways encourages the modern reader to think critically about his own cultural biases and how they influence the way he approaches a text.

The Parisina myth can be divided into three large categories: the Italianate novellas, the Spanish *comedia*, and the Romantic adaptations. The first comprises Bandello's novella, Belleforest's French translation, and the 1603 Valladolid Spanish translation of the French edition as well as a completely distinct novella written by Anton Francesco Grazzini (*il Lasca*). In contrast to Bandello's Italian text, which simply narrates the story, the French—and consequently the Spanish—translation adds moral commentary condemning incestuous relationships before the story begins and uses the story to illustrate God's divine justice. The narrators, without being completely unsympathetic to the young lovers' plight, appear to condone the Marquis's decision to

sentence them to death for their crime. Despite the fact that the texts are similar, each—with the exception of the Spanish text, a near word-for-word rendering of the French—approaches the story slightly differently. Il Lasca's novella removes the story from Renaissance Italy and Ferrara, setting it instead in the Roman city Fiesole near present day Florence. Even though the subject matter remains the same, il Lasca changes both the names of the characters and the manner of execution. His novella casts the lovers as protagonists and turns the cuckolded husband / father into the antagonist.

The second category contains a single text: Lope's *El castigo sin venganza*. Although the idea for the play was undoubtedly taken from Bandello (likely via the Spanish translation), Lope writes life into the story. While Bandello's novella is almost completely narrative, dialogue drives the *comedia* facilitating character development. Not only does the *fénix de los ingenios* create complex characters from the archetypes bequeathed him by his predecessors, he manages to turn the story from an Italian novella into a quintessential Spanish wife-murder drama.

The final category is made up of Byron's poem "Parisina" and the theatrical adaptations that stemmed from it consisting of three operas and two plays. Byron's poem is hugely important to the development of the Romantic perception of the Parisina myth because it shifts the Marquis of Ferrara from protagonist to antagonist, changing the focus from the cuckolded husband to the lovers and their tragic demise. All subsequent authors do likewise. Unlike Lope's *comedia*, Byron relies on historical rather than literary texts in writing "Parisina." As a result, many of the details included in the nineteenth-century refractions differ from those of the previous authors. Another notable difference in the Romantics' treatment of the story is their preference for beginning *in media res*. These refractions focus on the tragic and violent execution rather than expounding upon the events leading up to it.

A fourth category could exist comprised of the tidbits available in history books. For the most part, these histories are little more than the skeleton upon which the literary works hang. Yet small differences and inconsistencies in the historical record are the underpinnings for many of the differences found within in the literary refractions themselves.

Chapter 1

In his *Memorie per la storia di Ferrara*, the Italian historian Antonio Frizzi records how Niccolò III, Marquis of Ferrara, came to know of the incestuous relationship of his wife and son when a disgruntled maid informed the Marquis's servant Zoese—according to some accounts, her lover—of the affair:

Avvenne un giorno che un famiglio del Marchese detto Zoese, o come lo chiamano alcuni Giorgio, passando davanti alle stanze di Parisina vide uscirne una cameriera di lei tutta scapigliata e piangente, le ne chiese la cagione, ed ella disse per lieve cagione l'aveva la padrona battuta, e soggiunse piena di sdegno, che ben n'avrebbe potuto prender vendetta se avesse palesato al Marchese la illecita dimestichezza che passava tra Parisina ed il figliastro. Il famiglio notò le parole, e le riferì al padrone. Egli ne stupì, e quasi nol credendo se ne accertò purtroppo li 18 di Maggio da un pertugio fatto nella soffitta della stanza della moglie. (451-52)

Immediately thereafter, the enraged nobleman ordered that both be imprisoned and promptly executed. The captain of the guard, Pietro da Verona, escorted the lovers to cells in separate towers of the ancestral castle of the House of Este where each awaited their imminent death (Lazzari 55-56). While Ugo prepared for death with two Dominican friars, Parisina begged permission to speak with her husband. Upon being refused, she sent word that she alone deserved to die for having seduced her stepson. In spite of her supplication, the dual beheading took place Monday, May 21, between two and five in the afternoon at the foot of the Tower of the Lions (Lazzari 57-58).

According to the dedicatory note to his forty-fourth novella, Matteo Bandello first heard the story of Ugo and Parisina from Bianca d'Este, granddaughter of Niccolò III, when she recounted it at a party in Milan. The date of the alleged party remains unknown, however it must have taken place sometime between 1507 and 1526 during the time in which the author principally resided in the Dominican convent Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan. Bandello originally entered the convent, where his uncle Vicenzio Bandello was Prior, at the age of ten. After some schooling, the boy traveled the Italian Peninsula with his uncle visiting other religious institutions in Florence, Rome, and Naples. After his uncle's death in 1506, Bandello returned to Milan where he befriended and moved about with many Milanese noblemen.

In his note to his friend and fellow author Baldassare Castiglione, Count of Casatico, Bandello states that Lucio Scipione Attellano hosted a party one July afternoon in honor of Bianca d'Este's coming to Milan with her husband, Amerigo (or Alberigo) Sanseveriono (515). After dancing and playing in the heat of the day, the company found a cool room and began telling stories. Camilla Scarampa, the famous poetess from Asti, began, after which both men and ladies followed with their own tales. Finally, Bianca d'Este recounted her "most notable" story which Bandello, "being there present," and "having written it, added it to [his] collection" (516).

During his years in Milan, Bandello accompanied Alessandro Bentivoglio on diplomatic missions to France, which controlled much of the territory of the Northern Italian Peninsula during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Russo 24). However, after the Holy Roman Emperor Carlos V defeated and imprisoned François I of France at the Battle of Pavia in 1525, François renounced France's claim to territories in Flanders, Burgundy and Italy to Spain. With the passing of Lombardy into Spanish hands, Bandello permanently left first for Mantua, then to Venice, Rome, and finally France,

where in 1550—owing to the political allies garnered with his previous patrons—he was appointed to the episcopacy of Agen, a town of some 7,000 inhabitants situated 110 kilometers south-east of Bordeaux (Gould 83).

Four years after his appointment, the Bishop of Agen sent his collection of novellas to the Lucchese printer Vincenzo Busdraghi, who published the collection of 186 novellas in three volumes. In 1573, a publisher in Lyon produced a posthumous fourth volume containing twenty-seven novellas written after the publication of the first three volumes along with another, which censors had removed from the 1554 publication (Margolin 246-47). Together the novellas of Matteo Bandello number 214.

The forty-fourth novella of the first volume retells the story of the fateful love affair of Ugo and Parisina as narrated by Bianca d'Este in Milan. Notwithstanding the fact that Bianca never met her paternal grandfather, Niccolò III—he having died when her father Sigismondo was only eight years old—the close familial relationship between the narrator and the Marquis of Ferrara likely explains both the historical accuracy of the account as well as the lack of sympathy for the lovers that permeates Bandello's novella and all subsequent translations. Still, though the genealogy produced in the novel reflects that of the historical record, the two differ on one central relationship: the legitimacy of Ugo.

Bianca d'Este affirms—both at the outset and the conclusion of her tale—that Ugo was the son of Niccolò by his first wife Gigliuola da Carrara and, therefore, the legitimate heir to the march (517, 524). Not only does the narrator affirm Ugo's legitimacy, she emphatically denies allegations of his bastardy: “Io so che sono alcuni che hanno openione che lo sfortunato conte non fosse figliuolo de la prima moglie del marchese Niccolò, ma che fosse il primo figliuol bastardo che avesse; ma essi forte s'ingannano, perché fu legitimo ed era conte di Rovigo, come più volte ho sentito dire a

la buona memoria del signor mio padre" (*sic*) (524). Referring to this affirmation of Ugo's legitimacy in *Bandello*, Laughton Osborn observed:

It is difficult to see what motive there could be in altering the facts, when the legitimacy of Ugo would rather, by reason of the prejudices of mankind, add to the enormity of his crime, a bastard's virtue being always looked upon with suspicion,—otherwise, not so much being expected of him,—I can only suppose the memory of the narrator to have been at fault...If such a story was told, *Bandello* may himself through fault of memory or through indifference to facts, have slightly, yet materially, distorted some of its details. (71)

Considering, however, the relationship of the narrator to the Marquis, adding to the enormity of Ugo's crime might have been exactly what she—or her father, from whom she heard the story—had in mind.

Whether the legitimization occurred within the diegesis itself—*Bandello* having purposefully un-bastardized Ugo—or as a result of misinformation in the extra-diegetic world is immaterial. Whatever the case, it works to the detriment of the lovers' image in the public eye. If *Bandello* really did hear the story from the mouth of Bianca d'Este and the novella is an accurate redaction of what he heard, either Sigismondo or Bianca altered the details of the story and, thereby, created one in which their predecessor's violent execution of his wife and son was eclipsed by the heinous offense of the lovers themselves. "Bianca d'Este," states Angelo Solerti, "in certo modo, ci deve rappresentare la tradizione viva in casa propria; ed è vero che questa versione, mentre mostra maggior colpevole Parisina, straniera, attenua la colpa di Ugo, estense" (66). The legitimization functions to justify the Marquis's actions by elevating Ugo socially to the level of his father—perhaps even above, as Niccolò was himself a bastard—and thereby

accentuate his fall from grace making him comparatively more vile than his father whose virtues are extolled. If, on the other hand, Bandello consciously made the change himself, it is likely that it was done to make the story more appealing to the intended public.

Apart from legitimizing Ugo, Bandello's novella does something else to shift the blame from the nobleman to his wife and son. While the narrator acknowledges the Marquis's extramarital relations after Gigliuola's death and continuing after his marriage to his second wife—whose name is never mentioned, only that she was the daughter of Carlo Malatesta—, she says little of the matter and focuses, instead, on his second wife's desire not to spend her youth in vain but rather seduce her stepson. Ugo, the narrator assures, "a sí gran sceleratezza non averebbe pensato" (218). The contrasting description of the lovers paints a picture reminiscent of the Catholic conception of Adam and Eve, in which the woman, after having succumbed to the devil, beguiles the man and drags him into sin with her. Such imagery, Mary Augusta Scott argues, embodies the spirit of Italian Renaissance writers whose works depict a revolt from "mediæval asceticism and ecclesiastical hypocrisy" and "return to nature" without "ceasing to be Catholic[...]" (437). Despite the fact that Bandello makes no mention of the Church and prefers the use of pagan rather than Judeo-Christian motifs, there is in his writings—as is the case with his contemporaries—an underlying Catholic understanding of the world that functions as a lens through which all events are perceived. The narrator continues to contrast the two throughout the novella, portraying Ugo as a victim of his stepmother's wicked seduction and ultimately damning her as she refuses to confess her sins and seek absolution before her execution. In contrast, Ugo spends the three days of his imprisonment in the company of two friars

who say Mass to him and, on the morning of his execution, he confesses and partakes of the “sacratissimo corpo del nostro Salvatore” (524).

Saint Jerome’s translation of the Bible contains the following verse condemning incestuous relations between a man and his stepmother: “Qui dormierit cum *noverca* sua, et revelaverit ignominiam patris sui, morte moriantur ambo: sanguis eorum sit super eos” (emphasis added) (*Sacra Vulgata*, Lev. 20:11). While subsequent translations in vernacular languages translate the passage to read “father’s wife,” Saint Jerome’s translation read “noverca” (stepmother), making Ugo and Parisina’s act the very sin condemned by the Bible used in sixteenth-century Italy. True, Bandello makes no reference to the Biblical passages condemning incestuous relations, but refers to their crime as an “abominevol scheleratezza,” and cites the Greek myth of Phaedra and Hippolytus¹³ (522-23).

It is not altogether surprising that Bandello’s novella does not contain Biblical passages or pass any sort of formal judgment on the lovers for their crime. The Italian novella was never intended to denounce injustice or provide a forum for social or religious criticism; it was, rather, the literary genre in which “the spirit of the Italian Renaissance expressed itself most naturally and most freely, and...that spirit was gay, unreflective, optimistic, and frankly sensuous” (Scott 436). True to the genre, Bandello’s forty-fourth novella does not attempt to moralize; it is quite simply a narrative of illicit

¹³ Book XV of Ovid’s *Metamorphosis* tells how Phaedra fell in love with Hippolytus, her husband Theseus’ son, but when the boy refused to succumb to her desires, she accused him of having raped her. Theseus called upon his father Poseidon to curse Hippolytus and a sea monster frightened the boy’s horses, which drag him to death. The myth is also the subject of Euripides’ tragedy *Hippolytus*.

love—a love in which “refinement, brutality, and cruelty are strangely mixed,” the poetic love of the troubadours, rather than the “spiritual passion” of Dante—told unadorned as if recited among friends (Scott 435). And like other novellas, “the whole force of the narrative is expended on the action,” inevitably flowing toward the “most natural outcome of the circumstances,” and undisturbed by explanations of motives, character development, or ethical intentions (Scott 434).

While Bandello’s novella makes no attempt to use the story of Ugo and Parisina didactically, François de Belleforest’s French translation does just that. It was Belleforest who actually translated the forty-fourth novella from Bandello’s first volume, not Pierre Boaistuau who began the project of translating Bandello into French a decade earlier. Richard Carr notes that in Boaistuau’s translation the Frenchman “allows himself complete freedom with his source, changing details when he feels necessary, adding and deleting passages wherever required by his understanding of the story” (25). Such treatment was nothing new for Boaistuau who, in 1558, had published *Histoires des amans fortunez* a liberally edited edition of Marguerite de Navarre’s celebrated *Heptaméron*. As a result of the overwhelming negative public outcry for his treatment of the late monarch’s work, Boaistuau turned to a previously untranslated source unknown to his French readers: Matteo Bandello. *Histoires Tragiques*, argues Nancy Virtue, is a “specifically *male* vision of power, one which is reflected in the text’s repeated references to various forms of public, physical chastisement, especially dismemberment and decapitation” in which Boaistuau “attempt[s] to sustain the patriarchal, monarchical order and to regain the lost sense of authority he so obviously took for granted in his editing of Marguerite’s novellas but which ultimately failed him” (35). In 1566, after completing six of the novellas, Boaistuau turned the rest of the translation over to Belleforest who finished the project in 1583.

The note to the reader from the first volume of Boaistuau and Belleforest's *Histoires Tragiques* (1567) contains the following explanation for the changes made to Bandello's novellas due to the translator's contempt for his prose:

fa phraſe m'a ſemblé tant rude, ſes termes impropres, ſes propos tant mal
liez, & ſes ſentences tant maigres, que i'ay eu plus cher la refondre tout de
neuf, & la remettre en nouvelle forme, que me rendre ſi ſuperſtitieux
imitateur, n'ayant ſeulement prins de luy que le ſubiect de l'hiſtoire,
comme tu pourras aifement decouurir, ſi tu es curieux de cōferer mon
ſtyle avec le ſien. (*sic*) (3)

Most of the changes made to the novellas, including the tragedy of Ugo and Parisina, are aesthetic; the plots remain intact. Still, many critics have viewed the changes as so drastic that they "[transgress] the reasonable bounds" permitted by a translation (Virtue 41).

Bandello's forty-fourth novella appears as the eleventh story in the first volume of the French translation. In place of the Italian author's dedicatory note to the Count of Casatico appears a stern notice warning of the evils of incest. While Bandello—whose novellas, as Joseph Jacobs put it, "reflect as in a mirror all the worst sides of Italian Renaissance life" (xvi)—declined to pass judgment on the events that transpired in the pages of his novella, the French translators condemned the behavior depicted therein:

*Combien que de toute memoire d'homme les inceſtueuſes amours ont eſté
deſplaiſantes en la preſence de Dieu, & au reſpect des hōmes, les ſcādales, qui en
font enfuiuis, font aſſez de foy, et de la grauité de peché, et du mal qu'il engēdre
aux maſons, & aux perſonnes, ou il a prins quelque accroißemēt, et d'ou il a receu
ſes femēces . . . Il me ſuffira de vous reciter vne hiſtoire auenue depuis deux cens*

ans en nostre Europe, & en icelle vn acte autant detestable, pernicieux, & deraiionnable . . . que jamais, ny les hiftoires, ny les poëtes en ayent mis en lumiere. (sic) (Italics in original) (159)

In contrast to Bandello, who narrated the events without editorializing, the French translation begins by declaring that incestuous love affairs are “displeasing before God” and warning of the evils that will befall the households of those who participate in such illicit acts.

Another difference is the choice to include Biblical imagery to accompany the mythological. Rather than condemning incest as a sin in the sight of God and illustrating the consequences with the story of Phaedra and Hippolytus, the French introductions turns to the Biblical account of King David’s sons Ammon and Absalom found in the thirteenth chapter of the Second Book of Samuel. Even though the circumstances of the incest in the Biblical account differ from those of Ugo and Parisina—Absalom has his half-brother Ammon killed after the latter raped his sister Tamar—Belleforest uses the story not to tie the present story to a well-known literary theme—as Bandello does with Phaedra and Hippolytus—but rather to illustrate the consequences of breaking God’s laws. The details of the incest itself are immaterial; the consequences, on the other hand, show that the crime led to the death of both Ammon and Absalom and the dividing of the house of David.

The concept of God’s divine justice appears not only in the introduction, but throughout the text and takes the place of fate as the driving force behind the events of the tragedy. The narrator also includes language to reaffirm that the text is to be an example of divine justice: “le bon Chrestien doit diligemment difcourir tous les exemples...pour apprendre qu’à la longue rien ne demeure impunity en la prefence du feigneur” (*sic*) (162). While the introduction states that the *raison d’être* of the novella is

to show the consequences of incest, the narrator makes it clear that the incest itself came as a divine punishment for the Marquis's own sexual misconduct: "Dieu pour l'en punir, luy enuoya vn scandale en sa maifon, digne certes d'estre noté...Car quelle plus grande ruine peut aduenir à la maifon d'un Prince, que le deshonneur de foy, ou des fiens? quel plus grād creuecueur, que de se veoir le bourreau de son sang mefme?" (*sic*) (161-62). Apart from adding a didactic element to the story, this change makes clear the fact that it is the nobleman, and not his wife and son, who is the real protagonist—perhaps even tragic hero—of the novella. Like the tragedies of ancient Greece in which a hero's tragic flaw leads him to an unavoidable destruction, Niccolò's adulterous acts bring upon him the judgments of God which come in the form of his wife and son's incest. As a result, the nobleman is forced to execute his wife and his only legitimate son, destroying both his dearly beloved heir and the only person by whom he might produce another and, thereby, symbolically destroying himself. Although his own life remains intact, his house is left desolate. The idea of divine retribution for sin is better suited to sixteenth-century catholic France than Classical notions of fate. Thus, tragedy does not befall Niccolò and his household because it is his inescapable destiny, but rather because it is the consequence of his own sins. Because the nobleman willfully disregarded divine laws, he brought upon himself the God's wrath.

In contrast to the original Italian novella, Belleforest departs from the Bandello's purely narrative style and creates dialogue, which in turn gives his characters greater depth than they previously enjoyed. The only dialogue in Bandello's novella occurs when Parisina seduces her stepson; Belleforest, however, includes several pages of dialogue between the Marchioness and a lady in waiting in which she laments her husband's promiscuity and the inequality that arises from both gender and class distinctions. "Helas que bien heureufes font celles qui eftans de basse condition, ofent,

fans grande confcience, maculer le fang, qui ne redonde point qu'au deshonneur de peu de gens" (*sic*) (163) Parisina exclaims, wishing that she herself were not of noble birth and, therefore, not so bound by the strict honor code of the day, which controlled people by instilling fear of tainting one's bloodline. "Ah! honneur, & grandeur, combien tyranniquemēt vous bridez les dames," she continues, "Au moins fi les loix puniffoient auffi bien ces defloyaux maris, comme elles font les fimples femmelettes . . . ioyeulement certes ie me vengeroy de l'iniure, que me fait ce pariure, & peu amy mary, afin que tous deux egalement receuffions la peine & fupplice felon le merite de noftre faute" (*sic*) (163). Through dialogue, Belleforest creates a far more sympathetic character than Bandello's seductress without materially altering the story itself. The Marchioness still plots to seduce her stepson that she might avenge Niccolò's infidelity, however, the French edition focuses more on her emotional distress from being ignored by her husband than the seduction itself. This change in focus not only gives more depth to Parisina, it also begins to shift the focus of the novella from the Marquis to the lovers.

Parisina is not the sole recipient of Belleforest's character development. The Frenchman also reveals the thoughts and feelings of Niccolò d'Este, though not nearly to the extent of Parisina. Upon discovering his wife and son's incestuous relationship, the Marquis tearfully laments the part he must play in the tragedy: "feray ie point le tefmoing, iuge, & partie, en cefte caufe, & fur l'execution de ce iugement, faudra il que ie face, & par loy, & par mon iufte courroux, mourir les deux perfonnes de ces monde, que i'ay aymé le plus?" (*sic*) (171). Still, though he would rather not punish his own wife and son for their offence, he realizes that, as ruler of Ferrara, his hands are tied and he cannot allow them to go unpunished. Thus, he finds himself pleading to God for strength to carry out his duty: "Ia ne plaife à Dieu, ã pitié emeue mon cueur, pour luy

pardonner ceste faute" (*sic*) (171). When he speaks with his subjects and defends his decision to execute the lovers, he tells of his heartbreak and says that were it not for the gravity of the offence, he would not have punished them thus: "Las le cueur me creue, le fens me faut, mes forces s'aneantiffent, seulement me refte le defir de faire la iustice, non pas (peut efre) condigne à l'abonination de ce fait" (*sic*) (174). In spite of his own anguish, the nobleman feels bound by his responsibility as head of State to carry out the execution.

Belleforest's portrayal of the nobleman differs from Bandello's and more closely approximates that of historians who describe Niccolò's overwhelming grief. According to one, after the execution, which Niccolò did not attend, the nobleman sought out Pietro da Verona, the captain of the guard, and asked him if the sentence had been carried out. Upon learning that both Ugo and Parisina were dead, he cried out: "Fa tagliar la testa anche a me, perché cosi presto hai decapitato il mio Ugo!" and spent the night wailing and gnawing at his walking stick (Lazzari 59). Far from the almost indifferent man in the Italian's novella, Belleforest's character borders on tragic; just like Ugo and Parisina, he becomes a victim of God's vengeance, being himself the principal recipient.

In both versions, Ugo remains largely ignored, most of the action focusing on his father and stepmother. The narrator describes him as among the most virtuous and valiant men of Italy (161). As a result of his own virtue, he does not anticipate his stepmother's ulterior motives in taking him into her confidence and unwittingly becomes a victim of her seduction. After his imprisonment, both Bandello and Belleforest report that he spent his time with a friar, confessing and taking communion before his execution. The latter, however, includes that upon hearing his sentence the

boy cried out lamenting not that he must die, but that he should have been the cause of his father's wrath and dishonored the House of Este:

Ah! chair infaite & charongne puante, est ce pur tes plaifirs, qu'il faut que ie muere aujourd'huy? O malheureux que ie fuis! non de mourir, puis que c'est par le commãdment de celuy, de qui i'ay estre, mais pour estre le motif de sa cholere, & cause de son dueil, & pour auoir mis vn trouble en sa maison, qui ne se passera, ou oubliera pas si tost, que ie souhaitteroy bien. Las mon feigneur & pere! pardonnez l'offense de ce detestable qui a autrement vñé vers vous, que ne doit faire l'enfant vers son pere. (*sic*) (174)

Ugo then pleads to God for forgiveness and asks for comfort to be able to patiently endure his fate. In contrast, Parisina would not hear the friars sent to admonish her.

Evan though Belleforest spends more time developing the characters than Bandello, characterization remains secondary to narrative and is exploited only to further the didactic purposes of the novella. The paternal love of the Marquis and the virtue of his son are no match for divine justice. The novella remains an example of the necessity to eradicate sin before it overtakes virtue and completely destroys it, for, as the narrator advises, "vn peu de leuain . . . fait facilement leuer, voire & aigrir toute vne masse de pain: aussi vn vice si scandaleux offusque toute la clarté des vertus precedents, & empunait la bonne odeur de la vie passée" (*sic*) (175).

While Bandello and his translators' account of the execution of Parisina and Ugo is the most obvious sixteenth-century literary account of the tragedy, the Bishop of Agen was not the only Italian to include the story among his novellas. Another sixteenth-century Italian *novelliere*, Anton Francesco Grazzini (commonly referred to as "il Lasca"), included a similar story in his collection *Le Cene*. Like Boccaccio, il Lasca situates his novellas within a frame story: ten friends gather together during carnival

and, over the course of three nights, tell stories. During the *Seconda Cena*, after one of the group finishes telling a particularly funny story, Siringa resolves to tell a story to “farvi tanto piangere, quanto egli vi ha fatto ridere, e forse più” (113). Siringa’s tale neither names Niccolò III d’Este as its subject, nor takes place in Ferrara; rather the events transpire in Fiesole, a small town in Tuscany near Florence—and incidentally the location of the villa in Boccaccio’s *Decameron*. Although the date of the story remains unknown, the narrator makes it clear that the events transpire sometime during the Roman Republic. Yet in spite of the changing of names, places, and even time, the story so closely resembles that of the Marquis of Ferrara that they are undeniably one and the same.

Il Lasca does, however, make several changes to the novella’s plot. Most notable among these changes is his addition of how Sergio (Ugo) becomes so enamored with Tiberia (Parisina) that he takes to his bed in a deathly fever. As Sergio suffers thus, Tiberia goes to him and nurses him back to health. In spite of the fact that most of the household is astonished by Sergio’s miraculous recovery, his observant nurse realizes the cause of his illness and taking upon herself the role of Celestina, persuades Tiberia to organize a party for the feast of Mercury and request that Sergio attend. There, Tiberia begins to see Sergio with new eyes.

In the Bandellian novellas Parisina is portrayed as a seductress set on avenging her husband’s unfaithfulness; in il Lasca’s story Sergio, not Tiberia, falls in love first and make advances on his stepmother. Rather than condemning the lovers, the narrator sympathizes with them, after all, Tiberia “molte più convenevole moglie del figliuolo,” given that both were around sixteen years old; Currado (Niccolò) had already passed fifty (114). Rather than focusing exclusively on the action, il Lasca takes time to develop the thoughts and feelings of the characters throughout the story, in contrast to

Belleforest who chose one brief moment for each. Even so, his style more closely resembles Bandello's than Belleforest's in that he makes no attempt to moralize the tale. Despite the fact that both Sergio and Tiberia recognize that what they are doing is wrong, the concept of divine justice never appears. Furthermore, by removing the story from Judeo-Christian culture and placing it in a pagan setting, *il Lasca* prevents Currado from rationalizing the brutal execution of his wife and son with Biblical language condemning incest and adultery. The result is a much more black-and-white version of the events free of the sometimes obfuscating lens of religion.

In spite of the fact that religious themes are muted throughout the text as a whole, the characters themselves seem to exercise much more self-restraint than in the other novellas. *Il Lasca's* characters are more complex. Sergio, rather than initially acting on his love for his stepmother, pines away and falls ill. Even after Tiberia nurses him back to health, he does not open up to her and confess his love, but waits patiently for her to demonstrate that the feeling is mutual. While "*il giovane . . . averebbe voluto corre i desiati frutti amorosi, quantunque la riverenza del padre,*" (*sic*) Tiberia suffers as a result of her desire to be with Sergio and her fear of bringing shame upon her husband's house (123, 121). Though both of the lovers suffer, each unaware that their love is reciprocated, neither is willing to make their feelings known, and each contemplates the disastrous consequences that might transpire.

Yet neither of them could have imagined the terrible fate that eventually befalls them when, after finally giving into their passion and consummating their love, Currado discovers the affair. Of all the versions of the story, *il Lasca's* is the most graphic in terms of his descriptions of the lovers' passionate relationship and their untimely demise. Rather than publically beheading them, Currado has Sergio's eyes gouged out, his tongue ripped from his mouth with pincers, and his hands and feet

chopped off. Tiberia, after witnessing the mutilation of her beloved, suffers the same fate. The lovers—barely alive—are then placed on a bed together to die a slow, agonizing death: “I poveri sfortunati amanti, senza lingua, senza occhi, senza mani e piedi trovandosi, egualmente per sete parti del corpo a ciascheduno uscendo sangue ...e con i mozziconi abbracciatisi, l’una bocca all’altra accostando, e restringendosi il più che potevano insieme, dolorosamente la morte aspettavano” (136). This pathetic image of the lovers’ final embrace makes it clear that the unfortunate couple ought to be pitied and creates a sense of outrage against the cruel man who could order such a terrible execution for his wife and son.

Not only is this the only version of the story in which the lovers are brutally tortured, it is also the only account in which the husband / father dies as well. The morning after the brutal execution—the circumstances surrounding Tiberia and Sergio’s death having run through the city like a wildfire—, a lynch mob storms the castle, takes Currado by force, and stones him in the plaza. After this impromptu *coup d’état*, the people of Fiesole establish a republic until Rome destroys their city.

Il Lasca’s novella is unique for its time. Its focal shift from Niccolò to Ugo and Parisina and sympathetic treatment of the lovers’ plight more closely resembles the nineteenth-century version written by Lord Byron and the operas that stemmed from the Englishman’s poem than his contemporary Bandello’s work. Although the sixteenth-century novellas share a common theme, each is unique in its treatment of characterization, its narrative style, and its overarching interpretation of the events. Bandello’s story is written almost as if he were writing a historical account rather than a work of fiction. His narrative style is simple, to the point, and almost painfully unsentimental. Nonetheless, while on the surface it appears impartial, a closer reading reveals that his account is undeniably prejudiced against Ugo and especially Parisina.

All stories are biased. Just as Bandello leans in favor of Niccolò d'Este, *il Lasca* takes sides with Parisina and Ugo; Belleforest falls somewhere in the middle. Belleforest offers a quasi-fundamentalist framework in contrast to *il Lasca's* more liberal treatment of the events. Rather than being mutually exclusive, the differences espoused by these novellas compliment each other, facilitating a multi-dimensional comprehension of the nuances of the situation. Parisina's experience is incompatible with Niccolò's, yet, if only one is considered, a whole world of perception is lost. Each person experiences life as it relates to his or her self, interpreting the unceasing stimuli with which they are continually bombarded in terms of how they personally are affected. Reading, then, becomes a vehicle by which one can vicariously experience the world of another through a temporary shedding of self by taking on the life of another—or others—in print. Though each individual reader ultimately interprets these secondhand experiences, the exercise of perceiving through the senses of another encourages a temporary suspension of judgment, long enough to allow the seeds of empathy to take root before utterly dismissing the perspective because it differs slightly from one's own.

The multiple accounts of Ugo and Parisina's love affair and execution provide an opportunity to experience a single series of events in multiple ways. Though the accounts are not first person narratives from each of the participants, the differences offer a similar experience. Each focuses on specific details, leaving others aside. Each superimposes a distinct value system by which the events are interpreted. Each offers an autonomous yet incomplete version of the occurrences, capable of standing alone, but united to a greater body of texts, knowledge of which greatly enriches a reading of any and all.

Chapter 2

In 1589, six years after Belleforest and Boaistuau completed their translation of Matteo Bandello's novellas into French, a selection of the novellas—translated from the French edition into Spanish by Vicente de Millis Godínez—went to press in Salamanca. The collection, published by Pedro Lasso and paid for by Juan de Millis Godínez, contains fourteen novellas, including the story of Niccolò III d'Este. The *dedicatoria* states that the novellas were selected “para industrial y disciplinar la juventud de nuestro tiempo en actos de virtud, y apartar sus pensamientos de vicios y pecados” (cited in Menéndez Pelayo 36). While the note to the reader states that the translator made minor changes in order to make them sound better in Spanish and divided the stories into chapters “porque la letura larga no canse” (*sic*), the novellas are essentially identical to those found in Belleforest's French edition (A2).

Among the several hundred *comedias* authored by Lope de Vega, scholars agree that at least ten were inspired by Bandello (with four or five others being attributed to the Italian bishop by some but not all) (Bradbury 53). In this practice of diegetic appropriation the *Fénix de los ingenios* did not act alone; many of his contemporaries, including Cervantes, Tirso de Molina and Calderón de la Barca, borrowed heavily from the Italians, especially Boccaccio, Giraldo and Bandello. Boccaccio's *Decameron* was translated into Castilian in 1496 and enjoyed great popularity in Spain until the Inquisition banned it in 1559 (Ferrerías 450). Yet, it was Bandello's novellas that served as the source text for many of the *comedias* of the Golden Age. Comparing the popularity of these two great *novellieri* Menéndez Pelayo wrote: “de todos los novelistas italianos Mateo Bandello fue el más leído y estimado por los españoles después de

Boccaccio y el que mayor número de argumentos proporcionó a nuestros dramáticos” (34).

While translations of Boccaccio, Giraldo, Bandello and others were readily available in seventeenth-century Spain, there exists little doubt that “la novela italiana [era] conocida...por la lectura directa de los originales, ya que el toscano era lengua literaria entonces, y muy estrechas las relaciones de todo tipo entre Italia y España” (Ferrerías 450). In *La Dorotea*, Lope—as Fernando—declares: “comencé a juntar libros de todas letras y lenguas, que después de los principios de la griega y ejercicio grande de la latina, supe bien la toscana, y de la francesa tuve noticia” (1462).

The fact that many of Lope’s *comedias* have literary predecessors in the Italian novellas of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries does not, however, detract from the ingenuity of the dramatist in taking already well-known Italian sources¹ and re-crafting them for the Spanish public and stage. In this process of adaptation Lope and the Spanish were not alone, in fact it was quite common among writers across Renaissance Europe:

The Renaissance was such a time when subject matter was pillaged shamelessly . . . Indeed it has become fashionable in recent years to minimize the indebtedness of sixteenth-century writers to their literary models in order to emphasize the degree to which their borrowings are incorporated within a new and original version. (Carr 32)

¹ For a more comprehensive analysis of Lope’s plays borrowed from Bandello, see Gail Bradbry’s “Lope Plays of Bandello Origin.” *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 16 (1980): 53-65.

It was an age in which “subject matter was the common property of all prospective writers...[and] artistic achievement was measured in terms of the arrangement and expression of the subject regardless of its originality” (Carr 32). Shakespeare himself relied heavily upon the writings of others for his inspiration including the aforementioned Italians, from whom the plots of some of his more famous dramas (e.g. *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet*) were borrowed. Therefore, the fact that in large degree many of Lope’s *comedias* owe their plot to sources other than the ingenuity of the playwright in no way compromises or calls into question their literary achievement. As the nineteenth-century romantic poet Mariano José de Larra so eloquently put it, “el ingenio no consiste en decir cosas nuevas, maravillosas y nunca oídas, sino en eternizar, en formular las verdades más sabidas” (1).

When Lope adapted the story of Niccolò III for the *corral de comedias* in 1631, he had already written several *comedias* based on Bandello’s work. Whether the playwright was inspired by the Spanish or French translations or worked exclusively from the original Italian texts remains unknown. Of the ten *comedias* undisputedly derived from Bandello’s stories, only four came from novellas that were ever translated into Spanish: *Castelvines y Monteses*, *El desdén vengado*, *La quinta de Florencia*, and *El castigo sin venganza*. Writing of the latter, Gail Bradbury observed: “It is very evident . . . that the characterization and moral implications of *El castigo sin venganza* are more akin to those of the associated Belleforest novel (in both Spanish and French editions), than to those which Bandello worked into his original version of the story” (59). The very title of the play seems to be derived from the language of the Spanish translation when Niccolò contemplates his role as father, son, and executioner: “No quiera ni permita Dios, que la misericordia mueva mi animo, para que le perdone este error, ni menos que disimule

tan graue dolor como efte, pues me hara morir viuiendo, fi vengando esta injuria ñ fe me haze, no castigaffe el peccado mas abominable ñ fe puede imaginar” (*sic*) (312). Lope takes this dichotomy between *castigo* and *venganza*, punishment and vengeance, and—instead of following Belleforest’s lead in making Niccolò desire not only punishment, but vengeance also—creates a story in which punishment is meted out in the absence of vengeance.

“Of the four tragic tales adapted by Lope from Bandello only two retain their unhappy conclusion: *El mayordomo de la Duquesa de Amalfi*...and *El castigo sin venganza*,” states Nancy L. D’Antuono, who adds that “since in both works the endings are historically accurate, Lope was constrained to honor that veracity” (106). Although historical accuracy may have played a part in Lope’s treatment of the story, the very subject of the play requires a restoration of honor in order to be acceptable to the public for which it was written. The Golden Age *reparto* suffers from a sort of literary predestination that either saves or condemns and is brought into effect only during the lattermost moments before the final curtain. This is due to the strict adherence of the playwrights to the honor code of seventeenth-century Spain. For this cause, the *comedia* can seem somewhat confusing, out of joint and, at times, utterly absurd with a conclusion that seems to jump out of nowhere contradicting the action leading up to that point. Speaking of the frequent multiple marriages with which many *comedias* are ended, Arnold Reichenberger states that “it is often of no importance that a *dama* gets *her* man, the one she loves, as long as she gets *a* man and is thereby placed in the socially accepted *estado* of married women” (310). These seemingly ridiculous weddings represent a restoration of order to combat the chaos generated over the course of the play, and reflect the Spanish ideology of the period that women without “male

protectors in their lives” posed a real threat to a society that idealized chastity and motherhood (Vollendorf 147). The chastity of women also plays an important role in the more serious honor plays in which cuckolded husbands restore their honor by executing their wives. The literary predestination of the *comedia* stipulates that she end either in marriage or in death.

The actions of Bandello’s Niccolò III in making known the sin of his wife and son and publicly executing them would have been completely inadmissible in seventeenth-century Spain:

[E]l público español no podría gustar una comedia en la que personajes nobles, los más exigidos y los más favorecidos por la honra, se condujeran sin atención al código sagrado. No es que el público quedara escandalizado; quedaría incrédulo, lo tomaría por inverosímil . . . y en la venganza del marqués que pinta el Bandello no funcionan los ideales de honra . . . Dar publicidad al agravio hubiera sido como complacerse en el estado de deshonra, detenerse en él, agrandararlo y agravarlo voluntariamente, lo cual invalidaría la venganza subsiguiente como imperativo y como limpieza de la honra. (Alonso 10)

This being the case, Lope’s decision to make the execution a private matter shows both a knowledge of his public and their expectations as well as his ability to recast the work of another—in this case Bandello—and, without changing its fundamentals, create something altogether novel.

Lope’s ingenuity extends well beyond merely altering the details surrounding the execution in order to create a Spanish masterpiece out of Bandello’s *novella*. The playwright also includes many secondary characters and subplots that allow for the creation of roles typical to the *comedia*—for example the *gracioso*—and shed further light

on the plot itself. While in Bandello's story a servant brings the incestuous relationship between stepmother and stepson to the Marquis's knowledge, Lope creates a subplot in which Aurora, a niece of the Duke's (the Marquis in Bandello) who is in love with Federico (Ugo), finding herself rejected by the man she loves, writes a letter to the Duke informing him of the situation. Lope's crowning achievement, however, is neither his plot nor his addition of persons, but rather the way in which he develops his characters and brings them to life by endowing them with great psychological depth.

In speaking of Boaistuau and Belleforest's *Histoires Tragiques*—from which the 1589 Spanish (Salamanca) edition was translated—as well as citing Bandello's original Italian text, Richard A. Carr notes:

Little effort is initially expended on the characters in these tales. They are all essentially types ranging only slightly from moral abstractions in human form who act out their roles to illustrate ethical ideas to versions of historical characters and accepted social types . . . and since they are to act in a generally given fashion, elaboration is unnecessary, nor is any indication of complex inner life essential to the basic moral purpose. (95-96)

In *El castigo sin venganza*, Lope takes the "types" created by Bandello and fashions them into complex literary beings that go far beyond being puppets used to illustrate moral ideals. Lope's characters are complex and fully developed creatures tormented by the expectations placed upon them by society and their own desires.

In developing his characters, Lope continues to move away from Bandello's black-and-white portrayal of the characters. Picking up where Belleforest left off, *el fénix de los ingenios* writes characters that are no longer classifiable as *either* heroes or villains, rather they are personages constantly giving in to both noble and ignoble urges. In

short, they more closely approximate human beings than archetypal literary creations and thus are far more sympathetic than any of their literary predecessors. As Felipe Pedraza Jiménez so eloquently put it, “[t]odos los personajes tienen razón, pero sus respectivas razones son incompatibles, el choque es obligadamente mortífero” (258). Rather than portraying Casandra (Parisina) as a calculating seductress bent on exacting revenge on her husband by seducing her stepson as did Bandello, Lope’s portrayal continues in the trajectory of Belleforest, who hones in on the noblewoman’s emotional distress at finding herself utterly ignored by her husband and diminishes the importance of her plot to seduce Ugo. Lope destroys the possibility of seduction by planting the seed of love in the heart of both Casandra and Federico when they first encounter each other along the road between Mantua and Ferrara. Thereafter, *El castigo sin venganza* becomes a tale of star-crossed lovers.

All the literary refractions take great liberties in regard to how Ugo and Parisina fell in love. It was certainly not love at first sight. Niccolò and Parisina were married in Ravenna in 1418. Parisina was fourteen, Niccolò thirty-five. When the couple came to Ferrara, Ugo—approximately the same age as Parisina, perhaps even slightly younger—took an immediate disliking to his stepmother, viewing her as having usurped the position his mother, Stella de Tolomei, ought to have occupied (Mistri Parente 15). Over the next several years the two remained at odds until Niccolò decided to send Ugo with Parisina when she traveled to visit her family in Ravenna in hopes that the two might reconcile (Mistri Parente 15-16). Little did he know the disastrous consequences of that journey.

In contrast to the historical record, Casandra and Federico immediately fall for each other in the first act of *El castigo sin venganza*; but only in the second act does Lope begin to flesh out the character of the Duchess. Until then, she resembles any number of

Golden Age *damas* who find themselves hopelessly in love with their *galán* in spite of any number of obstacles. What makes, *El castigo sin venganza* unique, however, is the insurmountable obstacle that is the marriage. While betrothals are frequently broken in order to accommodate a happy ending, the fact that Casandra has married the Duke of Ferrara leaves only one option for the *dénouement*: tragedy and her death.

While both Bandello and Belleforest largely ignore Ugo, going only so far as to state that he was a virtuous youth and one of the most noble of Italy, Lope fleshes out the character of Federico. A large portion of the action on the stage is dedicated to Federico rather than merely focusing on the tragic hero, the Duke. Consequentially, the final execution becomes all the more terrible because the lovers' plight rivals that of the Duke in importance in Lope's tragedy. Rather than being a pawn used by his stepmother to exact revenge, Federico plays an active part in the development of the tragedy in a way that more closely resembles Sergio in il Lasca's novella than Ugo in the other versions. Still, he differs greatly from Sergio, exercising much more self-restraint. Federico is never at peace. Conflicting feelings tear him apart from the time he first appears on the stage in the first act. From his entrance on the road to Mantua, the playwright portrays the young nobleman as deeply troubled. Though Batín's dialogue suggests that his master's melancholic state is far from normal (234-37), he remains depressed for the duration of the *comedia*. In contrast to the Duke's jovial carousing in the first *cuadro*, the serious conversation between Federico and Batín in the second sets the stage for the tragic events to follow.

As was the case with Ugo when Niccolò married Parisina, Federico is keenly aware that his father's marriage will bring an end to his own hopes of inheriting. On the road to Mantua, the young man declares:

Camino a Mantua, de sentido ajeno;

que voy por mi veneno
en ir por mi madrastra . . . (253-55)

Later he continues:

Mas ¿qué me importa a mí que se sosiegue
mi padre, y que se niegue
a los vicios pasados,
si han de heredar sus hijos sus estados,
y yo, escudero vil, traer en brazos
algún león que me ha de hacer pedazos? (307-12)

Federico clearly understands the implications of his father's marriage. Until this moment, he assumed that he would be his father's heir even though he was illegitimate. But this hope of inheriting would be permanently dashed if his father produced a legitimate heir by his new wife. With this in mind, Federico goes to meet his own destruction by escorting his stepmother-to-be to Ferrara. This destruction, however, proves to be more literal than he could have imagined in that moment, foreshadowing the gruesome and violent death that awaits both him and Casandra.

Federico's melancholy only worsens when he meets Casandra and instantly finds himself in love with his father's soon-to-be bride. While Federico does not take to his bed with *mal de amores* like Sergio in *il Lasca's* novella, his sudden change in *ánimo* is apparent, though all—with the exception of Batín—attribute his dismal spirits to his fear that Casandra will produce a legitimate heir. Not even Casandra, suffering in her own right, guesses the true cause of her stepson's despondency. Under her false assumption, she tries to encourage Federico by admitting that there is little chance that she will ever have a child as the Duke continuously ignores her:

Y siendo así que yo causo

tu desasosiego y pena,
desde aquí te desengaño,
que puedes estar seguro
de que no tendrás hermanos,
porque el duque, solamente
por cumplir con sus vasallos,
este casamiento ha hecho; (1339-46)

When this fails to alleviate his suffering, she guesses that he is suffering from lovesickness but erroneously supposes that he is in love with Aurora. Nevertheless, even after breaking his silence and confessing his love for Casandra, Federico remains troubled.

At the heart of Federico's agitation is the internal conflict between his feelings and his values. While he believes that loving his stepmother is sinful, he cannot rid himself of the feelings he has for her. As a result he finds himself alienated from God, Cassandra, and even himself. In the final *cuadro* of the second act, Federico laments his position in the *glosa*:

*En fin, señora, me veo
sin mí, sin vos y sin Dios:
sin Dios, por lo que os deseo;
sin mí, porque estoy sin vos;
sin vos, porque no os poseo. (1916-20)*

Though Lope does not adopt Belleforest's overtly religious tone in *El castigo sin venganza*, the *comedia* is full of religious themes and the characters are undoubtedly motivated by religious ideals. Federico explains how his love for Casandra has

estranged him from God by giving in to his incestuous desires for the beauty of his stepmother in spite of the fact that such desires are forbidden.

Though Casandra and Federico are much more developed than any other their earlier literary counterparts, the Duke of Ferrara is the most psychologically elaborate personage of *El castigo sin venganza*. Using his vast knowledge of theatre, gained over the course of more than fifty years as a playwright, and of the human soul, the *Fénix de los ingenios* instills in the Duke the intricacy of the human psyche. Is he a tragic hero, a heartless butcher or something in between? This question has been debated by critics including T. E. May, E. M. Wilson, Janet Murray and Geraldine Nichols during the past half century, a testament to multifaceted and complex nature of Lope's protagonist—if indeed he is the protagonist. Some, including van Dam and Vossler, have argued that Casandra is the true protagonist of the tragedy, however, Parker maintains that such an interpretation is inconsistent with the *comedia* itself due to the fact that “the Duke not only opens and closes the stage action but is the agent who determines the whole course of the plot...This being so,” he concludes, “it is impossible that anyone else can be the protagonist” (50). If the work is to be classified as a tragedy, the Duke of Ferrara is the only possible tragic hero. This would also explain why Lope goes to such great lengths to develop his character throughout. Indeed, the tormented Duke brought to his knees in the final act is far removed from the jovial Duke of the first *cuadro*.

The *comedia* opens with the Duke of Ferrara and two of his servants out for a night of carousing hours before he is to marry Casandra. After being denied entrance to a house of ill repute and being chided by Cintia, the matron of the establishment, on account of his debauchery—as a result of which the nobleman has never married and, thus, has never produced a legitimate heir to the duchy—the Duke confesses that his

desire to live unfettered and his love for his illegitimate son Federico have kept him from marrying and producing a proper heir:

Yo confieso que he vivido
libremente, y sin casarme,
por no querer sujetarme;
y que también parte ha sido
pensar que me heredaría
Federico, aunque bastardo. (165-70)

From the beginning, the Duke demonstrates his multidimensional nature proving that he does not belong among the ranks of the “flat” characters described by E. M. Forster. “Flat characters,” said Forster, “are constructed round a single idea or quality: when there is more than one factor in them, we get the beginning of the curve towards the round” (35). While the opening shows the moral depravity of the Duke who, on the eve of his own wedding, finds himself in search of sexual pleasures, Lope’s multifaceted portrayal of the Italian nobleman sets him apart from the artistic depictions of other womanizing nobility such as that of Verdi’s Duke of Mantua who, from the first curtain to the last, is motivated alone by his insatiable sexual appetite. In contrast to the Duke of Mantua who is clearly “flat” throughout, the “round” nature of the Duke of Ferrara is at once made manifest, albeit rather subtly in the first *cuadro* of the drama.

As the action progresses and the nobleman marries Casandra, he becomes aware of the change that has overcome Federico whose melancholy he attributes to a fear that his new bride might provide a legitimate heir to the duchy of Ferrara and thereby disinherit Federico. This realization awakens within the Duke a sense of remorse for unwittingly inflicting so much pain upon his son whom he dearly loves. During the

time that the truth behind Federico's altered state of mind remains unknown to him, the Duke suffers for having betrayed his love for his bastard son:

. . . en fin, Federico estaba
seguro en su pensamiento
de heredarme, cuyo intento,
que con mi amor consultaba,
fundaba bien su intención,
porque es Federico, Aurora,
lo que más mi alma adora,
y fue casarme traición. (660-67)

Later, in an exchange with Federico himself, the Duke admits that were he to have known the extent of the pain his marriage to Casandra would cause his son, he would rather have died than gone through with it:

Si yo pensara, Conde, que te diera
tanta tristeza el casamiento mío,
antes de imaginarlo me muriera. (1114-16)

This remorsefulness, born out of the love the Duke feels for his only son, foreshadows the repentance the Duke later experiences when fighting for the pope and adds another dimension to the character of the Duke of Ferrara, penetrating his "inner life" and exploring the psyche of the Italian nobleman. While in his first appearance on stage he confesses that he loves his son and hopes that Federico might inherit him, the extent of his paternal love is unknown until he believes that he himself is at fault for his child's unhappiness. In this moment he finds himself torn between his obligations as a father, husband and sovereign and must decide how best to proceed in the fulfillment of each of these roles. His resolution is telling of his priorities.

The Duke's determination to marry in the first place had come not from within—having an aversion to the prospect as it would deprive him of his libertine lifestyle—but rather from his subjects who feared the possible, indeed probable, bellicose result were Federico to inherit Ferrara:

. . . mis vasallos han sido
quien me han forzado y vencido
a darle tanto disgusto;
si bien dicen que esperaban
tenerle por su señor,
o por conocer mi amor,
o porque también le amaban;
mas que los deudos que tienen
derecho a mi sucesión
pondrán pleito con razón;
o que si a las armas vienen,
no pudiendo concertallos,
abrasarán estas tierras;
porque siempre son las guerras
a costa de los vasallos.
Con esto determiné
casarme: no pude más. (669-85)

Lope makes no mention of the illegitimacy of the Duke himself, yet both Bandello's *novella* and history affirm that he was, in fact, a bastard. Bandello begins his tale by telling of the war that Niccolò III fought with his cousin Azzo d'Este who challenged his right to rule Ferrara because of his ignoble birth. The Marquis of Ferrara was forced to

call upon Venice, Florence and Bologna in order to secure his inheritance. This being the case, the Duke of Ferrara would have known all too well the problems caused by naming an heir whose right to reign could be so easily contested. Hence, both the nobleman's marriage and his concern that his subjects should not be made to suffer the horrors of an unnecessary war show his political perspicacity. Still, though his intentions were good, when he was forced to decide between what was best for Federico and what was best for his people after his marriage, he was swayed by his paternal affections and opted for ignoring his conjugal responsibilities in order that his son might not suffer.

This decision, which apparently favors Federico, does nothing to dissatisfy his vassals who know nothing of his less-than-intimate relationship with his wife and is, therefore, advantageous to both. It is also convenient for the Duke who uses it as an excuse to return to his sinful ways, preferring the company of courtesans to that of the wife he met on his wedding day. This resolution allows a glimpse into the mind of the Duke. His words express concern for both his son and his subjects and his decision appears to be a viable solution to pacify both. Nevertheless, the Duke's choice greatly favors Federico and does nothing to resolve the original concern of the people of Ferrara who remain without hope of a legitimate successor to their lord. Although the Duke does not expressly mention himself in his deliberations, his determination to abandon the bed of his wife is personally amenable as it leaves him free to spend his nights with whomever he desires. Notably absent from the Duke's considerations is Casandra, for whom he never shows much interest.

Perhaps no element of *El castigo sin venganza* has been so widely disputed as the Duke's repentance while fighting for the pope, which takes place off-stage sometime between the second and third acts. Some, such as T. E. May, argue that the Duke's repentance is false and that the images of divine justice evoked in the final act of the

comedia are evidences not of the Duke's penitent soul, but rather of his own idolatry for he worships not a God in whose image he has been created, but a "God that is modeled upon himself...an offended calculating tyrant" (162). Cornelius Van Dam affirms that the modern spectator finds the Duke's sudden change hard to believe on account of his previous actions, but he also states that the conversion could have been believable to Lope's seventeenth-century Spanish audience (23). Others see the Duke's repentance as integral in understanding the *comedia*. "The Duke's conversion is crucial to the play," states Geraldine Nichols, "to reject it or to hedge about it detracts from the tragic force and complexity of the work: the Duke becomes a two-dimensional villain; the ending an archaic blood-bath; the poetic justice risible" (215). Whether genuine or feigned, the change of the Duke of the first and second acts into he of the third is a substantial example of his developing nature.

Both the dialogue and the actions of the Duke in the first half of the *comedia* establish him as a carnal-minded man. When in the first *cuadro* the Duke and his servants try to gain admittance to a brothel, Cintia declares that the nobleman's lecherous lifestyle is famous in all of Ferrara:

pues toda su mocedad
ha vivido indignamente,
fábula siendo a la gente
su viciosa libertad. (97-100)

The prostitute's commentary and the very fact that the Duke is at her doorstep the night before his marriage give evidence of his debauchery. His continuation in vice after his wedding also suggests his unwillingness—or inability—to reform. Regardless of previous failures, the months spent in battle on behalf of the Pontiff seem to tame the Duke's wild spirit and bring about a change of heart.

It is no coincidence, of course, that such a change should come to pass during the time that the Duke was in the service of the Vicar of Christ. Historic accounts suggest that it was the lovers who left Ferrara and fell in love while far from the watchful eye of the Marquis; Bandello states that Niccolò d'Este was absent at the bidding of Filippo Visconte, Duke of Milan and returned two years later without any sort of reformation (519). Lope's Duke, on the other hand, goes to Rome, receives a military commission from His Holiness and returns to Ferrara a changed man. The journey to the Holy City and audience with God's mouthpiece is a highly symbolic physical representation of the Duke's spiritual rebirth. Upon returning to Ferrara, Ricardo announces that his master has become a saint:

. . . traemos otro duque:
ya no hay damas, ya no hay cenas,
ya no hay broqueles ni espadas
ya solamente se acuerda
de Casandra, ni hay amor
más que el conde y la duquesa:
el duque es un santo ya. (2358-63)

The authenticity of this conversion is reinforced by the biblical imagery present in the final act of *El castigo sin venganza*. Ricardo and later the Duke himself compare the latter to King David:

Ésta fue la maldición
que a David le echó Natán:
la misma pena me dan,
y es Federico Absalón.
Pero mayor viene a ser,

cielo, si así me castigas;
que aquellas eran amigas,
y Casandra es mi mujer.
El vicioso proceder
De las mocedades mías
trujo el castigo y los días
de mi tormento, aunque fue
sin gozar a Bersabé
ni quitar la vida a Urías. (2508-21)

This biblical comparison is evidence, Nichols insists, of the veracity of the Duke's rebirth. "David," she argues, "is not remembered as a great sinner, but rather as a genuinely penitent man who the Lord always forgave . . . Lope's comparing of the Duke to David leaves us little choice but to judge the Duke's reformation to be equally so" (216). Accepting the change as genuine is also necessary if one is to believe the title of the tragedy, namely that story is one of *castigo* and not *venganza*. Lope's use of Biblical imagery, as Nichols points out, makes it clear that this is the case.

This drastic change in the Duke reinforces the complexity / roundness of his character as well as his developing nature. "The test of a round character is whether it is capable of surprising in a convincing way," says Forster, "If it never surprises, it is flat. If it does not convince, it is flat pretending to be round" (41). The Duke's conversion is unexpected; his marriage, a sacrament of the Roman church, failed to reform him, yet going into battle—an act that it usually hardening and corrupting—for the Pontiff served as a catalyst to turn him from his iniquitous ways. Before going to war he loved his son but felt little for his wife, when he returned he was resolved to be a faithful and loving husband.

The Duke's final decision to punish his wife and son lacks the element of surprise of his conversion, not because his rebirth is unbelievable but rather because, given the circumstances, there are no options left to him by the dramatic conventions of the day. His initial reaction of rage is to be expected by one who finds his aspirations shattered by the grossness of the offense reported to him. Still, his desire that his son might be killed and subsequently raised from the dead to suffer death over and over again (2526-31) is soon eschewed as the Duke berates himself for having so easily believed his son guilty without evidence of the alleged crime. Ultimately the Duke concludes that the news of his son's incest must be the invention of some enemy bent on destroying him (2628-35). His initial wrath becomes denial, his denial resignation.

After ascertaining the truth of the matter, the Duke finds himself *entre la espada y la pared*: between his own feelings, his sense of religious justness and the cultural expectation that his honor be restored. The Duke's love for his son is unquestionable and has been established since the opening of the *comedia*; he has expressed a willingness to die rather than wound his son and, in spite of the initial fury subsequent to the accusation against him, the nobleman remains disposed to believe in the goodness of his child rather than condemn him. His newfound faith in God, though heretofore untested, is another important factor in his decision. Although it might be thought that the Duke's own history of extramarital relations would move him to empathize with the lovers, their sin was much more grievous than mere adultery: it was incest, a sin condemned in holy writ and punishable by death. After turning from his own sins, the Duke desires to do what he sees as the will of God. Basest among the influencing factors is honor—in this case his mortal enemy—yet it too holds a claim on the Duke that cannot be ignored:

¡Ay honor, fiero enemigo!
¿Quién fue el primero que dio
tu ley al mundo, y que fuese
mujer quien en sí tuviese
tu valor, y el hombre no?
Pues sin culpa el más honrado
te puedo perder, honor.
Bárbaro legislador
fue tu inventor, no letrado. (2811-19)

It would be useless to speculate as to how Lope might have ended his *comedia* were he not constrained by the conventions of his day, yet he fills the mouth of his protagonist with criticism of the honor code. While the Duke appeals to God for strength to uphold His will and to Love that he might be forgiven for what he must do, he declares his enmity toward honor, which he must inevitably recover. In this context, the Duke attempts to find balance by meting out a “castigo sin venganza.” This resolution represents a surrender of his own personal will (love) to the will of God and society, both of which demand that the culprits be punished for their offense. “Castigarle no es vengarme,” says the Duke, “ni se venga el que castiga” (2546-47). Over the course of the *comedia* the Duke experiences a complete change. Once he thought only of himself, the “castigo sin venganza” is evidence of the surrender of his personal feelings. It is the attestation of his total repentance.

The final glimpse at the Duke’s inner life is offered in his great soliloquy in the third act, only moments before sending his wife and son to their graves. It is a prayer in which the Duke surrenders his will to God’s. He has experienced a change of heart, which has caused him to fear to offend God, yet he is willing to be the instrument of

Heaven in administering divine justice. His attitude is that of “not my will, but thine be done”:

Cielos,
hoy se ha de ver in mi casa
no más que vuestro castigo;
alza la divina vara.
No es venganza de mi agravio;
que ya no quiero tomarla
en vuestra ofensa, y de un hijo
ya fuera bárbara hazaña.
Éste ha de ser un castigo
vuestro no más, porque valga
para que perdone el cielo
el rigor por la templanza,
seré padre, y no marido,
dando la justicia santa
a un pecado sin vergüenza
un castigo sin venganza. (2834-49)

There is no doubt that the Duke loves his son and that he laments what he must do. His claim to be father and not husband is evidence of his feelings of paternal affection. He punishes his son for having committed adultery and, more importantly, for being guilty of incest. Pedraza Jiménez observed, “[e]l duque no puede tolerar el incesto ni desde el punto de vista del gobernante ni del ciudadano particular; el entorno social no había de consentírsele.” (258). Even so, the thought of carrying out such a sentence on his son is almost unbearable:

Pero dar la muerte a un hijo,
¿qué corazón no desmaya?
Sólo de pensarlo ¡ay triste!,
tiembla el cuerpo, expira el alma,
lloran los ojos, la sangre
muere en las venas heladas,
el pecho se desalienta,
el entendimiento falta,
la memoria está corrida
y la voluntad turbada,
como un arroyo que detiene
el hielo de noche larga. (2868-79)

Conspicuously absent from the Duke's mind is his wife, Casandra. As has been the case since their marriage, the Duke has consistently ignored her and thought more on the welfare of his son and of his people than that of his wife. Even when he returns from battle a changed man, his first expression of love is for his son, and only after does he tell Casandra that his love for her equals that which he feels for Federico (2295-306). His internal battle as to whether or not to punish and to what extent does not seem to include his wife. The only time he mentions her in the soliloquy is to say that the "infame Casandra" has been tied up and awaits her punishment (2858-65); apparently, he does not shrink from punishing her at all. Yet his heart faints within him when he considers the fate of his child. Simply put, while the Duke has always been a loving father, he has failed miserably as a husband, a failure that is at the heart of the tragedy. Casandra found solace in the arms of her stepson because her husband ignored her.

Reichenberger argues that the play “borders—but only borders—the tragic,” because it ends with the restoration of order and therefore cannot be considered a “fully developed tragedy”. “The tragic potentialities in the character of the Duke,” he continues, “never seem to have occurred to Lope” (313). On the other hand, Pedraza Jiménez contends that “Lope ha sabido crear una auténtica y sobrecogedora tragedia . . . [la] fatalidad encierra a los personajes en su trampa. Todos los caminos conducen al fracaso” (258). The Duke symbolically destroys himself in the destruction of his wife and son. The nobleman himself declares that Federico is his double: “me ha retratado tan igual en todo estado, que por mí le habéis tenido” (2657-59). The Duke’s punishment is in effect suicide. Suicide because he destroys his double, and even more so because he destroys Casandra: the woman through whom he hoped to produce a legitimate heir. In destroying her, he leaves his house desolate.

One of the great images of the soliloquy is that of the trial. Although the two lovers were denied an earthly tribunal, owing to the fact that the Duke has witnessed their own confession while spying on them and that the making public of the affair would only increase the stain on the nobleman’s honor, the Duke conjures up the image of a trial in which Federico and Casandra are condemned. Love, God and Honor are the key players in the case. Honor is the prosecuting attorney, demanding that they be punished for their sins against the law, which have been corroborated by the testimony of the principle witnesses: the Duke’s own eyes and ears. Again, honor takes the role of the enemy to the Duke’s personal feelings, which become the advocates on behalf of the accused. God’s law relates the verdict as it is in accordance with the teachings found in Holy Scripture:

Perdona, Amor, no deshagas
el derecho del castigo,

cuando el honor, en la sala
de la razón presidiendo,
quiere sentenciar la causa.
El fiscal verdad le ha puesto
la acusación, y está clara
la culpa; que ojos y oídos
juraron en la probanza.
Amor y sangre, abogados
le defienden, mas no basta;
que la infamia y la vergüenza
son de la parte contraria.
La ley de Dios, cuando menos,
es quien la culpa relata,
su conciencia quien la escribe.
¿Pues para qué me acobardas?
Él viene. ¡Ay, cielos, favor! (2897-914)

The soliloquy is the culminating moment of the *comedia* and the pinnacle of the Duke's development as a complex and introspective character. The trial brings face to face the three powers that influence the Duke and those around him for the whole of the play: God, society and love. "Esos mecanismos represores," observes Pedraza Jiménez, "lo alejan de lo que quizá hubiera deseado hacer y le imponen el sangriento castigo con que culmina la obra" (258). Each of these opposing factors influences the decisions of the Duke at different moments throughout, but in the final act he is forced to reconcile them.

The Duke of the opening act is a sexual reprobate who is completely self-absorbed. Although his love for his son is unquestionable, it does not occur to him that sending his would-be-heir to bring his future bride, the very person who is to deprive him of his inheritance, might give his son reason to lament. The Duke of the second act is much more aware of the impact his actions have on those around him, especially on his beloved son. Still immoral, he uses his son's best interest as an excuse to indulge in illicit relations. Yet, it is here that the love he confesses in the first act begins to blossom. The Duke of the third act is moral and unselfish. He returns from battle ready to assume his responsibilities as faithful husband and love his wife and son. However, he is forced by circumstance to renounce his own desires in order to do what the laws of God and society require of him, even though that means giving up what he loves most. In contrast to his inner conflict over executing Federico, the Duke never appears to experience any pangs of remorse for Casandra. He offers no heartfelt prayers in her behalf and altogether fails to acknowledge his spousal neglect as a motivating cause in the tragedy.

The developing nature of the Duke of Ferrara is accompanied by an ever-broadening glimpse of his *anima*, culminating in his final soliloquy in act three. Whether his prayer be a demonstration of Machiavellian self-vindication or an affirmation of sincere humility makes no difference in terms of characterization; either way it gives evidence of his extraordinary mental faculties and ability to reason, a far cry from what Carr describes as "types" and "moral abstractions" lacking in "complex inner life" that abound in Lope's source text (95-96). Though Belleforest began the process of vitalizing Bandello's lifeless characters, Lope's pen breathed life into them in such a way as to liberate them from the page and allow them to step onto the stage in a wholly convincing manner.

As the action progresses, Lope's characters become increasingly complex. The constant development of the principle personages not only creates a more intense atmosphere, but also allows the audience to better relate to each. More than any of the other versions of the tragedy, Lope's puts forth the idea that none of the characters have a monopoly on the guilt for the tragic outcome. *El castigo sin venganza* is full of people who struggle to find balance between their feelings and their beliefs. As a result each experiences an internal tug-of-war as he or she grapples to choose between love and the governing societal—including religious—expectations that have sway over them. Though very much a product of its time, the *comedia* seems somewhat critical of the brutality of the *código de honor* and hones in on the destruction caused thereby, rather than portraying it as a systematic restorer of order.

Chapter 3

In 1796, two years after Edward Gibbon's death, John Lord Sheffield published a compilation of the celebrated historian's unpublished works under the title *Miscellaneous Works of Edward Gibbon, Esquire*. Included in the collection was Gibbon's *Antiquities of the House of Brunswick*, a narrative describing the Italian origins of the British royal family. In a letter written to M. Langer, Librarian to the Ducal Library of Wolfenbittel, written by Gibbon and found with the manuscript, the author explained his purpose in writing the history: "The first view of the antiquity and grandeur of the House of Brunswick excited my curiosity, and made me think that the two nations, which I esteem the most, might be entertained by the history of a family, which sprung from one, and reigns over the other" (Gibbon B2). As the House of Brunswick descended from the Italian House of Este, Gibbon briefly mentioned the tragedy of Ugo and Parisina:

Under the reign of Nicholas III, Ferrara was polluted with domestic tragedy. By the testimony of a maid, and his own observation, the Marquis of Este discovered the incestuous loves of his wife Parisina and Hugo his bastard son, a beautiful and valiant youth. They were beheaded in the castle, by the sentence of a father and husband, who published his shame, and survived their execution. He was unfortunate, if they were guilty: if they were innocent, he was still more unfortunate: nor is there any possible situation in which I can sincerely approve of the act of the justice of a parent. (118-19)

Gibbon's paragraph mentioning of the tragic demise of Ugo and Parisina inspired Lord Byron to write "Parisina" in 1815 (Byron 145). Byron's poem, in turn, inspired several nineteenth- and early twentieth-century authors to bring the tragedy back into the public eye.

These Romantic retellings of the story differ greatly from those of earlier centuries, shifting the focus entirely to the star-crossed lovers and vilifying Niccolò III in a way not seen in the earlier refractions. Thus, these Romantic versions represent a complete shift from Bandello's sixteenth-century novella whose narrator, Bianca d'Este, retold the tragedy as it had been passed down to her from her father Sigismondo who in turn heard it from his father, Niccolò III himself (Bandello 525). While the earlier novellas were painfully apathetic, the modern retellings are emotionally charged and full of passionate characters. They are melodramatic.

Notwithstanding the fact that Lord Byron was initially inspired by Gibbon's *Antiquities of the House of Brunswick*, the Englishman's writings were not his only source of information. In his Prefatory Note to "Parisina" Byron mentions that "[t]he name Azo is substituted for Nicholas, as more metrical" (154). This name change is reflected in subsequent works based on Byron's poem. Although this change is not important to the development of the story, it reflects the poet's familiarity with the history of the House of Este beyond the tragedy of Parisina and Ugo. Bandello mentions that Azzo was a cousin and rival to Niccolò III (516-17). When Byron first published "Parisina" in 1816, he included translated portions of the Italian historian Frizzi's *Memorie per la storia di Ferrara* (Byron 150). It is also likely that the Englishman read from Camillo Laderchi's notes regarding the story (Solerti 82). However, in spite of the fact that Byron had access to several historical accounts of the events that transpired in Ferrara in 1425, the poet altered the story significantly.

In contrast to all previous literary versions of the story and the majority of the historical accounts, Lord Byron's poem states that Hugo and Parisina were already in love with each other when Parisina married the Marquis of Ferrara. The poet likely took this idea from Camillo Laderchi who wrote that Parisina had first been betrothed to Ugo, but that Niccolò, upon seeing Parisina, fell in love with her and took her for himself after telling her that Ugo had decided to wed another (Solerti 82). Byron brings out this detail when Hugo—while standing trial—dramatically condemns his father Azo for the part he played in the ill-fated love affair:

'Tis true that I have done thee wrong—
But wrong for wrong—this deemed thy bride,
The other victim of they pride,
Thou know'st for me was destined long.
Thou saw'st, and coveted'st her charms— (252-56)

This small detail not only contradicts the largely held view that Ugo and Parisina disliked each other for the first several years of the marriage, but also the idea that Niccolò loved his son dearly and did all that he could to care for his well-being.

Byron's Hugo differs greatly from his earlier literary counterparts. Rather than silently accepting his fate, he verbally confronts his father, attempting to shift most of the blame of the events to Azo. Yet in spite of the fact that the boy would like to see himself as different from his father, the image of Hugo as a reflection of Azo appears throughout, both having participated in illicit love affairs. Indeed, Hugo was "The offspring of his wayward youth/ When he betrayed Bianca's truth" (103-04) a fact of which his son reminds him before being executed:

See what thy guilty love hath done!
Repaid thee with too like a son!

.....

And, harsh as sounds thy hard decree,

'Tis not unjust, although from thee.

Begat in sin, to die in shame,

My life begun and ends the same;

As erred the sire, so erred the son—

And thou must punish both in one. (294-95, 310-15)

By bringing up his father's own indiscretions, Hugo attempts to excuse himself by shifting the blame for his acts to his father. Azo stole Parisina from his son under the pretext that Hugo's ignoble birth rendered him unfit to inherit his father's title, and thus not a worthy match for her (256-63). Ironically, by pointing out his son's low status, Azo draws attention to his own sins. William Marshall even suggests that Azo's fervent desire to destroy his son stems not only from his rage at having discovered the affair, but also from his subconscious desire to rid himself of a reminder of his own guilt (216-17). Furthermore the fact that Niccolò III was himself a bastard—though never mentioned by Byron—makes these jabs even more paradoxical.

Apart from portraying Hugo as much more vocal than any of his counterparts, Byron also depicts the young man as somewhat vindictive. There are hints in "Parisina" that Hugo's love affair was motivated by seeking retribution not only for his father's stealing of his bride-to-be, but also for having jilted his mother. Marshall intimates that in Hugo's mind his mother and Parisina have fused into one, Parisina becoming a substitute for his mother (219). Prior authors largely gloss over the circumstances surrounding Ugo's birth. Bandello makes him the legitimate son of Niccolò's first wife, consequently so does Belleforest, however il Lasca, Lope de Vega and all historians agree that Ugo was undeniably a bastard, probably the son of Stella de Tolomei—or

Stella dell'Assassino as she is called by many—who was the known mother of at least two of Niccolò's children (Lazzari 30). As Hugo defends himself to his father, he calls attention to his father's conduct regarding his mother:

Nor are my mother's wrongs forgot,
Her slighted love and ruined name,
Her offspring's heritage of shame;
But she is in the grave, where he,
Her son, thy rival, soon shall be. (243-47)

Whether Hugo touches upon his father's infidelity to merely demonstrate that Azo's hands are far from clean, or to cite it as a motivating factor in his decision to exact revenge upon his father by stealing away his bride is unclear. Whatever the reason, Byron makes it obvious that the son is cognizant of his father's indiscretions and keenly aware of their effect upon both his mother and himself. Although the part Stella dell'Assassino plays in Byron's "Parisina" is minimal, subsequent authors inspired by Byron give her a much more prominent role in the action.

In spite of the fact that the title of the poem is "Parisina," the lady has relatively little part in the action. Unlike the earlier writers who maintain that a servant told Niccolò of his wife's infidelity, Lord Byron has Parisina herself—albeit unwittingly—reveal the secret to her husband while sleeping. Twice only does she speak, first she "mutters in her unrest/ A name she dare not breath by day," (71-72) the name of her beloved Hugo, which utterance compels the Marquis into a terrible frenzy; finally she lets forth a tremendous shriek when Ugo loses his head (485-501). In contrast to earlier versions—especially Bandello's and those that stemmed from it—, Byron does not draw attention to Parisina and the part she played in the affair. Rather than playing a central part in the poem, she exists almost exclusively in the mouth of others. She is the victim

of the power struggle between Hugo and Azo, a pawn used by each to show superiority over the other. Although the Oedipal nature of the relationship is alluded to in other works, in Byron the idea ripens to fruition. "Parisina becomes the signifier of the rivalry between father and son;" states Loren Glass, "her complete lack of dialogue testifies of her lack of development as a subjective presence" (221). Although before, Parisina was portrayed as a motivating force in the tragedy, the Parisina of the Romantic era finds herself collateral damage of the battle raging between her husband and her lover. The role of women is greatly diminished; they are objectified. Hugo's mother was used and cast aside by Azo, Parisina was the victim of the power struggle between the boy and his father, even the new bride Azo finds at the end of the poem is merely a vehicle by which he produces "goodly sons" to "gr[o]w by his side" (530-31).

Another of Byron's departures from the traditional plot is that instead of executing Parisina with Hugo, the exact fate of the unfortunate lady remains unknown. Azo condemns the lovers and, as was the case with Niccolò, refuses to watch his son's execution: "Farewell! I will not see thee die," still he forces Parisina to do just that: "But thou, frail thing! shalt view his head / ...Go! if that sight thou canst outlive, / And joy thee in the life I give" (116-17, 121-22). Instead of elaborating on Parisina's death, he shrouds it in mystery suggesting several unhappy outcomes, each more pathetic than the previous:

But Parisina's fate lies hid
Like dust beneath the coffin lid;
Whether in a convent she abode,
And won to heaven her dreary road.
By lighted and remorseful years
Of scourge, and fast, and sleepless tears;

Or if she fell by bowl or steel,
For that dark love she dared to feel;
Or if upon the moment smote,
She died of tortures less remote;
Like him she saw upon the block,
With heart that shared the headsman's shock,
In quickened brokenness that came,
In pity, o'er her shattered frame,
None knew—and none can ever know; (513-27)

Whether Parisina died after many years in a convent, or by suicide or simultaneously with her lover of a broken heart, or by some other means remains unknown. By denying her closure, Byron adds to the tragedy of the events. While a speedy execution of the lovers is tragic, by executing the one and leaving the other the sense of tragedy is greatly intensified. No longer does Parisina suffer the mental anguish of knowing that her own actions have led to the demise of the person she loves most for a finite period before being relieved of all such torment by the executioner's axe, in "Parisina" she is forced to live on indefinitely, her suffering infinitely compounded by each moment of each day.

Byron's "Parisina" takes many of the ideas present in earlier versions of the tale and fashions them for a nineteenth-century audience. Far from the highly moralized French account written by Belleforest or Lope de Vega's *El castigo sin venganza* full of religious imagery and ideas, the religious overtones in Byron are for the most part muted. Although Hugo still confesses before being led to his death, the incest itself is portrayed more as an affront to societal norms rather than religious. "Parisina" argues Daniel Watkins, "while at the level of plot portraying the taboo issue of incest,

illustrates on a larger level the complexity of individual desires and belief systems, and the ineluctable authority of social relations in forming those desires and beliefs" (95). "Parisina," therefore, represents not so much the juxtaposition of the will of the individual and that of God, but rather the conflicting nature of the individual's desires and the requirements of society. Notwithstanding the fact that in earlier works societal considerations reflected and upheld religious practice, in "Parisina" society has almost completely eclipsed the church. In this way Byron presents perhaps a more honest depiction of the events surrounding the execution of Ugo and Parisina in 1425 by removing the pretext of religious justification and instead honing in on the personal power struggles at play. In reality, the whole discussion on incest—so important to earlier versions of the story—falls apart in "Parisina": "the mother-son attachment is originally innocent, emotional, mutual commitment made by two individuals to each other, and it becomes incest only when Azo abuses his political power, marrying Parisina to taunt Hugo" (Watkins 98). The only way the relationship between Hugo and Parisina can be classified as incestuous is by applying social or religious definitions, given that no blood relationship exists between the two. Thus, the incest charge becomes merely a pretext, an abuse of the system in order to justify the unjustifiable. By removing the religious overtones from the text, the poet strips the mask from Azo, unquestionably revealing his less than virtuous motives for destroying his son.

"Parisina" offers a singular glimpse into the character of Ugo. Rather than portraying him as the virtuous and goodly son who was among the noblest of all the lads of Italy who silently accepts—or even defends—his father's punishment, Byron's hero is undaunted by the political power his father wields. Rather than meekly accepting Azo's word as law, he rebels against it. Hugo is a soldier, undaunted by death, who nevertheless refuses to die without being heard (234-36). Rather than

becoming a victim of fate, Hugo rebels against his father in an Oedipal struggle in which he seeks to usurp the authority Azo has denied him by stealing his bride. His rebellion is at first covert, then blatant as he freely confesses his acts while, in the same breath, thrusting the guilt upon his father.

Byron's Parisina also differs greatly from earlier depictions. Far from the seductress of *Bandello* and *Belleforest*, in Byron she plays the part of victim of the whole affair. Rather than using her stepson to exact revenge upon her husband for his infidelity, both father and son play Parisina like a pawn in order to further their own purposes. The fact that she is not even executed further goes to show her relative insignificance to her husband. It is Hugo's head he wants, not hers; she was only ever a means to an end, a mechanism for humiliating his bastard son. She is subhuman, an object to be used and cast aside, not even deserving of death. "The real victims of the poem," writes Watkins, "are women, as power is arbitrarily exercised against them, effectively silencing them and relegating them to the fringes of society" (98). Azo used Ugo's mother and then cast her aside rather than making her his bride (103-106). Years later, he took Parisina for his own in order to humiliate his son. In both cases, the women of the poem are objects used for the gratification of male desires for power. Unlike her earlier counterparts, Byron's Parisina is practically silent and never takes an active role in the development of the story.

Byron's "Parisina" is the model other nineteenth- and twentieth-century authors followed. In 1833, Italian composer Gaetano Donizetti and librettist Felice Romani turned the poem into an opera *Parisina d'Este*. Half a century later, Uruguayan Tomás Giribaldi took Romani's libretto and set it to new music in Montevideo. Nearly one hundred years after the publication of "Parisina," another Italian composer, Pietro Mascagni wrote an entirely new opera entitled *Parisina* in conjunction with Gabriele

D'Annunzio. Even though each of these operatic renditions relies heavily on Byron's poem, none does so exclusively. Each brings to the table a unique perspective on the centuries-old tragedy of the House of Este.

Felice Romani's libretto takes elements of Byron's poem and combines them with his own ideas in order to create a story loosely based upon the events that took place in fifteenth-century Ferrara. Rather than relying upon historical accounts of the events, the Italian librettist drew upon his own creativity to craft the storyline of Donizetti's opera. Lord Byron's "Parisina" takes several liberties with the story, but many of them are founded upon the writings of historians even if some of the facts are not the most widely accepted. Romani takes even greater liberties in his libretto, adding characters and obfuscating their relationships one with another.

The opera begins *in media res*; Ernesto, one of Azzo's ministers (Romani, like Lord Byron uses the name Azzo in place of Niccolò), brings him news of a great victory over the Ghibellines at Padua, restoring Parisina's father, the Lord of Carrara, to his throne. Azzo, however, is troubled because he suspects that his wife is unfaithful and with the returning army will come Ugo whom he sent away to fight in order to keep him from Parisina (96, 102). Although Azzo suspects that Ugo is his rival, in *Parisina d'Este* the nobleman is unaware that the young man is his son, believing only that he is the adopted son of Ernesto (103). In this way, Romani's characters resemble those of Laius and Oedipus in Sophocles' tragedy, neither father nor son aware of their true relationship. Nor is the audience aware of the truth until Ernesto reveals it near the end of the second act in an effort to save Ugo from Azzo's wrath (151).

Parisina d'Este is not the tale of a father torn between his love for his son and the duty he feels to God and society, instead it is a Romantic mutation of the age-old hero myth. Ugo is born of noble lineage, but left to be raised by Ernesto, his adoptive father.

He is reared in his father's household as a page where he falls in love with the young Parisina. Azzo sees the boy as his rival and banishes him. After achieving great success in battle, he seeks to win Parisina's favor in spite of the fact that he is still a *persona non grata*. Upon returning, he participates in a tournament and is crowned the victor by Parisina, whose demeanor betrays her love to him. Later, while waiting for Parisina, Azzo's soldiers arrest him and bring him to stand trial. There, Ernesto discloses his true identity and Azzo releases him. Ugo writes a letter beseeching Parisina to run away with him, but as she reads it Azzo appears and shows her Ugo's corpse. Upon seeing her beloved's lifeless body, Parisina falls dead.

In spite of the fact that Romani's story maintains many of the characteristics of a hero myth, he breaks free from the classical model infusing the text with Romantic ideals. Rather than being governed by reason, the characters are swayed by their emotions. Chief among these in *Parisina d'Este* are love and jealousy. The love of the Romantics is, according to Bárbara Mujica, "un delirio," capable of either destroying or saving (208). The conflict between love and jealousy and their predominance over reason remains at the heart of the tragedy. Ugo is the product of both, his father having chased his mother from his side because of his jealous suspicions while she was carrying his child. His own passion leads him to return from exile to what can only be a tragic fate. Azzo's decision to execute his son is a direct result of his emotions overcoming his reason.

In contrast to earlier texts—both historical and literary—which portray Niccolò III as sexually promiscuous, the nobleman in Romani's libretto is not only chaste but constantly worried that his wife is not. In fact, it is his unfounded paranoia that leads to his first wife Matilde's untimely death. When Ernesto reveals the secrets of Hugo's birth to Azzo in the second act, he tells him that Matilde fled from her husband for fear that

he would view her pregnancy as confirmation of his suspicions of infidelity and entrusted him with Ugo's care before dying of a broken heart (151-52). Later, when Azzo wed Parisina, similar suspicions of unfaithfulness led him to banish Ugo from his palace and send him to fight against the Ghibellines (102). Nothing in the text suggests that Azzo's intuition regarding his first wife's infidelity was more than pure paranoia; his inkling that Parisina is unfaithful is also unsupported by any tangible evidence, as Ugo and Parisina's love remains unconsummated.

Romani's Azzo is not hypocritical like his literary counterparts, punishing others for crimes of which he himself is also guilty; but whatever reasonableness might be ascribed to him is quickly overshadowed by the fact the crime for which he condemns his son to death is inchoate. *Parisina d'Este* is, then, a tragedy motivated more by thoughts than actions. While in *El castigo sin venganza*, Lope de Vega develops the idea of the dangerous nature of thoughts as Federico defends his lustful thoughts as harmless to Batín: "las imaginaciones/ son espíritus sin cuerpo" (968-69), Romani's tragedy makes those very thoughts deadly. Azzo condemns the mere feelings of love, as there is no guilty act to punish.

Another Romantic theme that creeps into the hero myth is that of the quest of the individual for personal liberty in the face of traditional social institutions. The rivalry between Azzo and Ugo is more a rivalry between the individual and society than a father-son Oedipal rivalry. Ugo symbolizes the solitary individual, exiled for his unwillingness to conform to societal norms, who defiantly returns in order to liberate his emotions. Azzo, as ruler, represents governing order, in spite of his tendency to give more sway to emotion than reason.

The quality of Donizetti's music was exceptionally high, as was Romani's libretto (Prefumo 7). The French novelist Alexandre Dumas praised the opera, writing that the

duet between Azzo and Parisina after the latter utters Ugo's name in her sleep is "un des plus beaux, des plus expressifs et des plus terribles qui soient sortis de la plume féconde de Donizetti" (345). Still, audiences found that the opera lacked dramatic development and, therefore, it never achieved great popularity (Prefumo 7).

In 1878, the Uruguayan composer Tomás Giribaldi took Romani's libretto and rewrote the score. *La Parisina*, Uruguay's first national opera, premiered at Montevideo's Teatro Solís on September 14 of that same year (Salgado 59). The following morning, *El Correo Uruguayo* described the public's reaction: "Reinó verdadero delirio anoche en Solís. Los aplausos y los bravos no tenían conclusión, por que no bien el eco de los aplausos arrancados por una belleza de la partitura iba a extinguirse, nuevas melodías hacían estallar estruendosos bravos y vivas" (cited in Manzano 100). The success was such that on the 25 of September Lorenzo Latorre, President of Uruguay, wrote Giribaldi a letter congratulating him on the success of *La Parisina* and offering him "a nombre de la Nación, una pensión de cien pesos mensuales, para continuar sus estudios musicales en Europa" (cited in Manzano 109).

In 1913, eighty years after Felice Romani and Gaetano Donizetti's *Parisina d'Este* debuted in Florence, Pietro Mascagni and Gabrielle D'Annunzio collaborated to bring the tragic story of Ugo and Parisina to the operatic stage for the third and final time. Before opening night, Mascagni wrote to a friend, praising the merits of the new opera:

L'Opera è ponderosa per contenuto musicale, arditissima nella [sic] espressione della parola, estremamente forte e violente nelle situazioni tragiche. Nella forma è liberissima, salvo in alcuni brani, inquadrati nel ritmo, nella misura e nella tonalità. L'Opera è tematica per eccellenza, con continui richiami, e con ripercussioni di idee; però questi richiami e queste ripercussioni sono ispirati a un concetto profondo, e qualche volta

filosofico, che rispecchia le anime dei personaggi più che la figure e la parola loro, e tutte le riproduzioni dei temi sono sempre velate, alcune volte addirittura nascoste, meno in certi casi speciali in cui il richiamo deve imporsi al senso dell'uditorio. (cited in Lualdi 63)

Unfortunately, the premiere kept the audience in La Scala from 20:30 on December 15, 1913 until 1:40 the following morning soliciting scathing reviews from critics regarding the opera's inordinate length (Viagrande 4). Although Mascagni shortened the opera considerably before the next performance—cutting the entire fourth act—it never achieved the popularity enjoyed by his other works.

Notwithstanding that D'Annunzio's primary inspiration was Lord Byron's "Parisina,"—having been translated previously into Italian—his libretto departs from the Englishman's poem in an attempt to provide a more historically accurate telling of the story (Barbiera VII). Regardless, *Parisina* differs from all of the previous literary versions of the story in that it gives a major role to Stella dell'Assassino, the woman most historians agree was Ugo's mother. *Parisina* is a great story of rivalry. The Oedipal rivalry between father and son continues to play an important role, but it is paralleled by the rivalry between Stella dell'Assassino and Parisina Malatesta. In the first act, Stella—consumed with jealousy at having been cast aside when Nicolò marries Parisina—conspires with Ugo to take the life of her young rival. Although none of the other literary or historical accounts mention any such plot, Mistri Parente mentions that Ugo acted with hostility toward his stepmother because he considered that she has usurped his mother's place at his father's side (15). Rather than administering the poison Stella gives him, however, Ugo falls in love with Parisina. At the end of the opera, Stella comes to the prison where both Ugo and Parisina are awaiting their

execution and laments the imminent death of her son and the role Parisina played in bringing tragedy upon their family.

Apart from the addition of *Stella dell'Assassino*, D'Annunzio's libretto also incorporates the historical journey on which Niccolò III insisted Ugo accompany Parisina in hopes that time together would attenuate the ill feelings that existed between them. Rather than being a visit to Parisina's relatives as Mistri Parente writes, the two make a pilgrimage to the *Santa Casa di Loreto* to pay homage to the Virgin (Mistri Parente 15-16). While there, Ugo receives a wound fighting against Slavic corsairs who attempted to steal the Madonna of Loreto. There, at the foot of the Virgin, the stage directions indicate that Parisina embraces Ugo staining her white tunic with his blood (164). This action is highly symbolic; it foreshadows the sinful relationship the couple will shortly commence. Their kneeling position prefigures their final death on the execution block. Shortly thereafter, as Parisina binds up his wounds, Ugo confesses to her that as he fought his heart cried out her name:

E la battaglia mi soffiava su gli occhi come il vento di Schiavonia;
e le grida e il clamore parevano rilucere,
e la luce di tuto il cielo pareva gridare come il combattente

.....

Io non so se la mia gola facesse grido nè [sic] qual grido;
ma nel rombo de' miei polsi udivo il cor [sic] gridare un nome,
un nome, un aguzzato nome penetrabile come stocco!

Parisina! Parisina! (181-84)

Here too, the language foreshadows the lovers' violent death as Ugo proclaims that her name like a sharpened rapier penetrated him as he fought.

Unlike Byron or Romani's nineteenth-century texts in which Parisina's fate remained unknown or she died of a broken heart, D'Annunzio dooms both Parisina and Ugo to their historical fate. While Lazzari and others tell that Ugo was executed first and later Parisina, in *Parisina* the lovers kneel down together at the execution block as the final curtain drops (328). After the first performance, however, Mascagni cut the entire fourth act. Thereafter, the opera ended after Nicolò discovered Ugo in Parisina's chamber and condemned the unfortunate couple to death.

Mascagni and D'Annunzio's *Parisina* attempts to restore to the story many of the traditional aspects ignored by Lord Byron and Felice Romani. The fact that this last great literary work looks back to the events as they transpired in Ferrara nearly five hundred years previously makes it a fitting conclusion. In spite of the fact that D'Annunzio relies heavily upon historical texts in order to craft his version of the tragedy, he also infuses it with ideas of his own. The moving second act at the Santa Casa in Loreto with the exciting battle against the corsairs and the passionate surrender of the lovers to their newfound love provides the energy that was lacking in the previous operas.

Lord Byron's poem and the operas it inspired share many aspects in common. They represent a shift from the earlier works that largely centered on Niccolò to the star-crossed lovers and their terrible predicament. These nineteenth- and twentieth-century texts, full of passion and fury, starkly contrast with the early novellas and their painfully impersonal narrations of the tragedy. Nevertheless, while they share more in common with each other than the previous accounts, each is unique in its own right and embodies a singular perspective on the wretched fate of Ugo d'Este and Parisina Malatesta.

Conclusion

From the sixteenth to the twentieth century, writers have been inspired by the tragic story of how Niccolò III d'Este beheaded his wife Parisina and son Ugo upon discovering their romantic relationship. Although at first glance this execution appears straightforward with little room for differing interpretations, by observing the various versions of the story refracted through carefully-crafted literary lenses—products of both their time and place of origin—the story takes on new meaning. Despite the fact that it is impossible to enter into the mind of another and truly understand him, a reading of the many literary refractions can at least serve as a reminder that everything that happens is subject to a plethora of interpretations. Indeed, there are as many interpretations as there are people. Therefore, that which may appear evil and unprincipled to one can be viewed as wholly justifiable by another. There are at least two sides to every story. Every character can simultaneously be both protagonist of his own tale and antagonist of another's. Perspective is the determining factor. Without presuming that any of the refractions hits the nail squarely on the head, or that together they faithfully reveal all there is to know about the tragedy, they do work in conjunction to present a literary mosaic with much more clarity than any single interpretation can offer.

Each author depicts the tragic events from a slightly different perspective. Even texts coming from similar geographic locations at similar time periods like those of *Bandello* and *il Lasca* can tell a surprisingly unique story. While one touts itself at the official story according to the House of Este, narrated by none other than the granddaughter of Niccolò III, and therefore takes a far from sympathetic view of the

lover's plight, the other novella turns the tables completely, sympathizing with the young couple and vilifying the barbaric acts of the jealous husband and father. The highly religious French translation of the former goes even farther to condemn the incestuous relationship between stepmother and stepson, while at the same time pointing an accusing finger at the nobleman himself for bringing the judgments of God upon his house as a result of his excessive extramarital relations.

These sixteenth-century novellas differ greatly from later versions in their presentation of the tragedy. Using the same historical facts as his predecessors—namely that the ruler of Ferrara discovered his wife and son's incestuous relationship and ordered their execution—the playwright Lope de Vega adapted the tragedy to create a masterful Spanish *comedia*, and in so doing, infused it with the values of seventeenth-century Spain. *El castigo sin venganza* centers itself on the all-important concept of *honra* and how to regain it once it has been lost. But at the same time, it is also a chilling indictment of Spanish society: a father must kill his wife and dearly beloved son not because he desires it, but because the honor code requires it.

The works of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century take the same story and present it in yet another light. Byron's poem and the operas focus on the individual rather than religion or society. In stark contrast to Lope's play, the protagonists of the Romantic period do not conform to societal norms; they openly rebel against them. Byron's poem retells the story as an Oedipal rivalry in which father and son each seek to assert their dominion over the other. Donizetti follows the same course. Mascagni's opera moves away from the clash of father and son and instead focuses on Ugo and Parisina's romantic relationship.

Were it not for these literary accounts, relatively little would be known about Ugo and Parisina. The few historical accounts that exist differ as to what exactly happened.

Many even seem to be based more on literary rather than historical documents. They all agree that Niccolò III discovered Ugo and Parisina's incestuous relationship—although the exact manner of the discovery remains debated—and that he had them executed for it. Other than these two basic facts, the historical accounts vary concerning all of the other details surrounding the affair. Each of these many versions spanning from the fifteenth- to the twentieth-century is unique, even though they tell the same story. Or rather, they each have as their central argument the same event; the stories they tell are quite different. Together, however, they offer a greater understanding of the complexity surrounding a single event.

In spite of the many differing genres and interpretations, the collection of literary texts representing the tragedy works together to tell the tragic tale of Niccolò III's execution of his wife and son in a way that does justice to the event more than any single author could. Every text has its limitations. No single version has the ability to effectively explore the many conflicting angles present without becoming unintelligibly disjointed. Nevertheless, the collection as a whole largely overcomes the limitations imposed on any single text by offering alternative accounts of the events, although the accounts themselves remain incompatible. Thus separated, the distinguishing facts allow for the uninhibited development of the various tales while still affecting the literary experience for a cognizant reader. Familiarity with the collection—whether in whole or any part thereof—necessarily influences the perception of any particular text.

At least two other Parisina texts exist apart from those discussed herein. In 1835, the Italian dramatist Antonio Somma published a tragedy entitled *Parisina*. More than thirty years later, in 1869, American author Laughton Osborn also published a play by the same name. While the former follows the traditional story, the latter intensifies even further the plot by centralizing the role of Zoese, the man who many historians say

betrayed Ugo and Parisina to Niccolò. In Osborn's version Zoese lusts after Parisina and, after having his advances spurned, takes advantage of the knowledge the maid gives him of the affair to exact revenge. On top of everything, the American author adds a final twist similar to that found in Felice Romani's libretto: Zoese discovers that he is also an illegitimate son of Niccolò. Upon realizing that he too is guilty of incestuous feelings, he enters Parisina's cell with a knife and poison, using the former to end his own life after offering the latter to save his stepmother the disgrace of a public execution.

No literary criticism seems to have been written on either of these nineteenth-century dramas. Raffaello Barbiera did, however, include the Italian play in his 1913 compilation of Parisina texts. Osborn's play apparently only enjoyed a single printing. In the future, perhaps someone will become interested in the tragedy and study these two texts. He or she might also take a deeper look into the three operas focusing not only on the texts themselves, but also the overall aesthetic experience created by the combination of the text with music. Such an analysis extends beyond the scope of the present text. Further analysis relating to the performance of the theatrical texts and their reception both in their day and in the present could also be insightful.

Although the tragedy of Parisina and Ugo d'Este may seem far removed from the twenty-first century, many of the themes explored by authors over the course of the past six centuries remain pertinent today. Love and jealousy still lead people to commit horrific crimes of passion and individuals continue to feel the oft-times conflicting pull of family, religious, personal and societal values stretching them every which way. The very fact that the tragedy has been rewritten again and again over the course of several centuries lends credence to the idea that these struggles form an eternal part of human experience regardless of where or when that experience occurs. A parallel reading of

the literary texts referring to the tragedy offers a glimpse at how other societies have responded to and dealt with these issues. At different times and places the balance has been tilted to highly favor religious ideals and at others those of society or the individual. While the tragic result is constant throughout, the different texts call attention to that which each society values most through their treatment of the tragedy. A careful observation of the differences in the various versions encourages a modern reader question the effect of personal biases and the way in which contemporary culture influences his or her approach to literature.

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