VERONICA FRANCO:
A PROFILE OF A CORTIGIANA LETTERATA
OF THE LATE RENAISSANCE

by

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ABSTRACT

One of the most significant trends in contemporary literary criticism, both in Italy and abroad, is constituted by the effort to review the previous critical approach to the literature of the Italian sixteenth century, which is generally considered as one of the richest and most varied in the entire literary history of that country. The results of the works of the new generations of students of the Italian Cinquecento are already evident: former attitudes are corrected, or modified; major authors are seen in greater depth; writers, little known before or practically forgotten, are rediscovered and re-evaluated.

In a sense Veronica Franco can be considered as one of the poets of the Cinquecento who begins only now to be seen in a full light. As we read older critical works on this Venetian writer we can see that she is frequently treated as a kind of historical curiosity, as a symbol, or a personification, of the alleged immorality of the time and of the society to which she belonged.

The purpose of the present work is to outline an intellectual profile of Veronica Franco in order to define the actual character of her poetry and her prose and to determine her contribution to the development of Cinquecento lyrical poetry and more specifically to what is known as
the crisis of the Petrarchan tradition. The investigation of the contributions of Veronica Franco to Italian literature is made more difficult by the fact that her reputation has been for a long time obscured by her avowed profession as a courtesan. This fact may determine a priori either a negative attitude, based on moralistic preconceptions, or an excess of enthusiasm, which is again of noncritical nature, as it may derive from the admiration for a free, unashamed and libertine conduct both in private and in public.

In order to avoid these excesses the present work begins with an analysis of the intellectual milieu in which Veronica Franco lived. Particular attention is given to the illustration of the concept of cortigiana letterata or cortigiana onesta. This appears to be quite necessary once we consider the fact that in her poetry and even in some of her letters Veronica Franco openly admits that she is professionally a prostitute and even declares that she frankly enjoys the pleasures of the flesh. Artistic endeavours on the other hand constitute for Veronica a way to redeem herself and to acquire a special kind of nobility. Indeed, the Venetian poetess may be considered 'honest' because of her sincere and profound appreciation of cultural values, because of her
determination to acquire and refine the techniques of expression indispensable to the professional writer, and finally because of her sincerity, which constitutes one of the more relevant qualities of her literary production.

The second part of the present study is devoted to the close analysis of the prose work, and the third to the evaluation of Veronica's poems. Recent critics have repeatedly stressed the frankness and candor with which Veronica speaks about herself and about the circumstances of her life. Indeed, the literary production of Veronica is mainly of autobiographical and we might even say confessional nature. Contrasted with the artificiality of some of the sixteenth century collections of lyrical poetry, written in the manner peculiar to the Petrarchan tradition, the poems of Veronica, as well as some of her letters, impress the reader first of all because of their utter spontaneity. This is one of the more relevant novelties of Veronica's poetry. Franco's lack of affectation and pretentiousness, what we might call her inner coherence, permits her in her most felicitous moments to anticipate some of the conquests brilliantly exemplified in the lyrical production of Torquato Tasso. Franco's attitude towards the Petrarchan tradition is independent and intelligent: rather than passively repeating
situations and forms of expression typical of that tradition, Veronica strives to adapt the Petrarchan language to the expression of her personal world. In doing so she emerges as one of the most original and significant among the minor poets of the Italian sixteenth century.

The methods of investigation followed in the course of the present work do not adhere strictly to the doctrines of any specific school of criticism. The investigation follows the lines of development usually adopted by contemporary scholars in studies of monographic nature as the present one. Particular attention was paid, both in the phase of preliminary research and in the actual writing, to the primary sources; namely, to the texts of Veronica Franco. The text itself, therefore, is considered the most important document. Also great attention has been paid to the bibliography: all the studies on Veronica Franco have been read and considered, except perhaps for some minor contributions difficult to obtain through the usual sources. Important works on the literary currents of the sixteenth century, of interest for the clarification of the position of Veronica Franco, have also been duly consulted.
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It is a widely known fact that during the XVI century intellectual and artistic life in Italy attained some of its highest expressions. The Cinquecento is the age of Ariosto, Machiavelli, Bembo, Castiglione, Tasso, Bruno; writers who could by themselves establish the glory of a national literature. Their achievements were paralleled in the figurative arts and architecture by the works of Michelangelo, Titian, Tintoretto, Cellini, Palladio, Scamozzi, Serlio and a host of others. Literature, criticism, historiography, philosophy, painting, sculpture, architecture, music, drama, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, flourished in Italy during the XVI century in an unprecedented manner. Even minor arts, like acting and stagecraft, were developed to a point that may astonish the modern historian. This century however can also be considered as an age of permissiveness and corruption in many circles of society. Indeed, Cesareo voices the general interpretation of other historians when he tells us:

...che la libertà dei costumi nel secolo decimosesto fosse veramente eccessiva è una di quelle notizie trite e ritrite,
It was also during the sixteenth century that Castiglione wrote *Il Cortegiano* and Della Casa his *Galateo*, two treatises on human conduct which even today are read and appreciated as works of literary and practical value. The age demanded these writings. Bruno Maier, in his introduction to Castiglione's work, tells us that one could not explain the immense fortune *Il Cortegiano* enjoyed in the sixteenth century if one did not admit the full correspondence of the book to a then living ideal and to the profound spirit of the late Renaissance. The figure of the courtier, Maier continues, was a reality of the courts, and it was only natural that someone should want to celebrate this reality and codify it in theory. One might add that Della Casa held a similar position with his manual on etiquette and good manners, while Bembo presented a set of rules on the Italian language.

The Cinquecento required all of this. The *cinquecentisti* were veritable children of humanism and of the curriculum of *studia humanitatis*. Eugenio Garin tells us that in this society education was held in utmost importance. In another of his studies Garin describes the spirit of the entire humanistic education as characterized by the exigency of a formation of the integral man, good citizen and, if necessary, good soldier, but all together, a man (or
woman) of culture, of taste, one who knows how to enjoy beauty and life; a human being, in other words, who knows how to live and who knows how to utilize what the world can offer. And in Della Casa's work Garin finds that

Eleganza, grazia, e leggiadria estenuavano così in una atmosfera di aristocratica raffinatezza l'originario ideale umanistico dell'uomo integrale.

As for Castiglione's *Cortegiano* Garin sees it as a document of sixteenth century life: "opera che é quasi un finissimo compendio della visione della vita rinascimentale." But if Garin here uses the adverb "quasi" perhaps he does so to demonstrate, as does Maier, the presence of idealism as well as autobiography in Castiglione, two criteria which necessarily overlook the often corrupted life of the courtier. Maier admits that the figure of the perfect courtesan was a myth since every century and every age need some myth. It was a motif dear to the Renaissance, it was something which they had to believe in, but it was still and primarily a myth.

In the sixteenth century, and particularly in the second half of the century, Venice was one of the centres of the intellectual life of the Renaissance. Venice, the queen of the seas, still enjoyed the opulence that her fleet had brought and was even now bringing home, in spite
of the increasing attacks by the Turks. As a commercial and mercantile centre and home of various intellectual circles, sixteenth century Venice was one of the great Renaissance cities. Visitors from every country came to admire the riches, the beauty, and the culture of la città galante. Even more stopped there and stayed to admire and perhaps win a grateful glance from the famous and vain Venetian ladies. Kings, princes, cardinals, and dignitaries of every sort travelled to Venice to visit the place which remained for them afterwards a sweet memory of admiration. Academies were founded in this period, and the most renowned and most illustrious minds of the time founded or took part in them. Speaking of the Accademia Veneziana, also known as the Accademia della Fama, founded in 1557, Oliver Logan in a recent study mentions some writers, artists, musicians, and philosophers who were members of this academy. Logan also informs us that a great number of noble men and women belonged to such circles and that "lectures were held at the Academy daily, allegedly on 'every' subject." Still on the subject of academies or cenacoli, of their functions in the Venetian society of the time, and of their didactic usefulness, Logan rightly states, referring particularly to the Accademia della Fama, that "although its achievements were limited, its history provides an interesting testimony of the range of interest of the Venetian intellectual
mieu." Logan then touches upon a point of major importance for our purpose:

Especially important groups of a less formal nature were those of Domenico Venier and Paolo Paruta and that of Andrea Morosini...(...) The Venier circle seems to have been more a literary and poetical one. The Paruta and Morosini circles would appear to have been fairly strongly aristocratic in character, but this was not so evidently the case with the Accademia della Fama, the second Accademia Veneziana and the Venier circle; the latter two in particular contained a substantial number of non-Venetians.10

And evidently if even Tasso "sottomise il suo poema alla censura di Domenico Venier..."11 then we can realize the influence that these literary and artistic circles must have had on the life and culture of the time. If the great genius of the Gerusalemme Liberata submitted his poem to the Venier circle, one can well imagine the reciprocal influences which such literary figures must have created on each other, as well as on their less talented literary colleagues.

In this intellectual and artistic environment the woman of the Renaissance held a place comparable to that of the man. Burckhardt, in his work on the Italian Renaissance, writes:

To understand the higher forms of social intercourse during the Renaissance, it is, finally, essential to know that women were regarded as equal to men.(...) The edu-
cation of the women in the upper classes was essentially the same as that of the men. The Italian of the Renaissance did not have the slightest misgivings about putting sons and daughters alike under the same course of literary and even philological instruction. This philosophy of education had already been formed with the **studia Humanitatis** and **humanae litterae** in the Quattrocento. Garin agrees with Burckhardt on this but warns that often this system of humanistic education was available only to an elite, and certainly not to the poor, nor was it present in the elementary or popular schools. Furthermore, Garin points out that by the middle of the sixteenth century:

...the ideal of humanistic education had been the formation of the complete man through the experience of classical culture. This ideal degenerated into a purely literary training incompatible with genuine education.

The possible degeneration of pedagogy notwithstanding, the important fact remains that both men and women of an upper social stratum by birth and those who achieved this status by other means enjoyed more or less the same curriculum of education. This is undoubtedly one of the reasons why woman makes her entrance into Italian literature with the lyric poetry of the sixteenth century. But his entrance is also part of the larger phenomenon of the all-pervasive
desire to appear literary. Not only men and women of the nobility or of the aristocracy who obviously had the opportunity for instruction, but all who possessed that great desire for learning, which the sixteenth century had created, aspired to the "higher forms of social intercourse".

In Venice, even if one agrees with William Bowsma's belief in the qualitative discrepancy between Venetian humanism and Florentine humanism, the opportunity for a free and liberal learning was nonetheless more realistic than anywhere in the Italian peninsula, except perhaps in Ferrara and Mantua. Garin points to Antonio De Ferri-riis, better known as Galateo, who in 1504 in his De educa-tione observes:

Nella sola città di Venezia è l'immagine dell'antica libertà d'Italia; spento è dovunque lo spirito d'Italia; vive solamente in quella città e facciamo voti che lungamente viva... Essa favorisce in Italia la disciplina militare, e la marina da guerra e i commerci marittimi, città nemica ai pirati e ai predoni... Essa è custode delle lettere greche e latine, degli studi liberali, di tutte le arti e discipline. Dovunque l'Italia è morta; solo a Venezia vive e vivrà, e di là, io prevedo, sorgerà la libertà d'Italia. Là i figli dei cittadini e dei nobili... attendono allo studio delle lettere e delle scienze. Non fiorirono le lettere ad Atene più di quello che oggi fioriscano a Venezia.
Women and especially Venetian women of the upper classes, could enjoy and, more often than not, did enjoy the same liberal education, literary and philological, as the men. It is then not difficult to see how in this social situation the Renaissance woman succeeds in acquiring a liberty, a conscience of herself, and an individuality which were, in a not too distant past, man's prerogatives. Doubtless, with the same method of education, women would develop an individuality and a consciousness in the same way as their contemporary male counterparts.¹⁸

Individuality is the most characteristic aspect of the literary woman in the sixteenth century. Absolute individuality was, one would think, the raison de vivre for these letterate who, conscious of their integral self, sought to live their lives according to their wills, free to themselves and the world around them:

The highest praise that could be given at that time to great Italian women was that they had the mind and courage of men.¹⁹

The sense of individuality is possibly the direct result of a tradition established initially by the teachings of the great humanists of the Quattrocento such as Luigi Marsili and Coluccio Salutati to whom Garin points as the
fathers of humanism. But it is in Pier Paolo Vergerio that Garin finds the creed or the central theme of the whole humanistic education. In this humanistic vision of man (and for our purposes, woman, too) at the centre of the Universe with the value it places on the individual, human dignity, freedom and learning, lies one of the most characteristic and most consistent aspects of the late Renaissance.

The sixteenth century witnesses also the partial fall and the return to power of the Church of Rome. The Counter Reformation in Italy, and particularly in Venice, was generally considered adverse to the ideal of extreme individualism which was an inherent aspect of the Renaissance. But the voices of the Reformation and Counter Reformation were more clangorous across the Alps than they were at any time in Italy. And on the peninsula the Venetian republic was least of all affected by Rome's desperate efforts to restore its Church to the dignity and power of old. Bouwsma in his excellent study of Venice emphasizes the spirit of secularism present in that city. And to further show the freedom and sense of individuality present among the Venetians, Bouwsma notes that although they possessed this secular bias in view of the Venetian distant and indifferent policy toward the Church, Venetian religious life did not suffer. On the contrary, the religious man or woman in Venice was more honest and sincere in his or her
belief because of the free and conscious involvement in that belief:

In spite of the charges that would eventually be levied against Venetian society and the Venetian church during the Counter Reformation, there is little evidence that the quality of moral and religious life supported by this unusually autonomous church was inferior to what prevailed elsewhere in Italy. Indeed, the reverse may have been true.

Bouwsma gives us a lucid insight into sixteenth century Venice and its almost total indifference to the religious preoccupations of Rome when he writes, quoting Francesco Sansovino, that the Jews "preferred Venice to any other part of Italy...because there they were safe from the violence and tyranny to which they were exposed elsewhere, and could obtain justice against all." Both historians, Logan and Bouwsma, agree on the tremendous importance of the Venetian state. Politics were always indirectly the major issue in the Republic. It was for the good of the state that personal freedom and initiative were urged-

Although Venice lagged considerably behind Florence in many dimensions of Renaissance culture, she had nevertheless long realized one major Renaissance ideal in abundance: her subjects enjoyed a high degree of personal liberty. In a society
where an internalized conformity to the fundamental demands of the state was so dependable, much could be tolerated: and Venice managed to contain a wide range of individual difference, especially in matters of religious opinion, within a relaxed homogeneity secured by education rather than compulsion. Because agreement on essentials went so deep, freedom and difference (which the enemies of Venice called license), were possible to an unusual degree.25

In these circumstances it is not difficult to see how the Venetians could be relatively immune to the tremendous importance which those religious movements were to exercise upon the western world. It is easy to see how the Venetians failed to grasp "the significance of contemporary religious movements, both Protestant and Catholic"26 in view of their isolated policies and their enjoyment of tolerance as well as their remarkable personal liberty at home. And while many, even in Italy, during and after the Council of Trent felt a pious and sincere religious fervour and zeal which led to the creation of new religious orders, there were still many, especially in Venice, who little realized the shaping of religious currents in their own time.

At the same time moral decadence was extremely rife in the major cities of Italy, and especially so in Venice.27 As a matter of fact, moral corruption alone in 1511 had expanded to such a degree that when on the twenty-sixth
of March of that same year Venice was brutally stricken by an earthquake many thought and really believed that that was the end of the world, or some signa Dei. Of this horrible event in the history of Venice, Molmenti writes:

Le matin du 27 mars 1511, Venice fut bouleversée par un violent tremblement de terre. On crut à un châtiment du ciel provoqué par les iniquités des hommes, et le patriarche Antoine Contarini prêcha alors contre les nombreux et criminels excès de son peuple l'invitant à la pénitence et prescrivant un jeune de trois jours au pain et à l'eau avec processions et chant des litanies.  

Contarini desperately tried to move his flock to bread and water, to hymns and litanies, to fasting. But few souls were moved by his religious zeal and eloquence. And, as Molmenti himself notices, "Venise voyait tous les jours augmenter ses richesses et ses plaisirs." The Venetian government had no real or practical authority to stop or even curb the deplorable state of corruption. But, here too, let us remember the policy of the Venetian state: its desire for peace and stability at home and with it, necessarily, the allowance of personal liberties with the inevitable results of corruption.

Perhaps it is true that religious tolerance and
individual freedom as well as the "relative political reticence and the ecclesiastical autonomy of Venice were accompanied by some cultural peculiarities." But perhaps it is equally true that the comparative stability of Venetian society provided an adequate soil on which priest and prostitute could silently accept and justify their social functions. And it provided a soil where both of these professionals could enjoy the fruits of literary expression in their diverse forms, if they so wished. Certainly this individuality, this freedom of mind, exercised enormous influence on the freedom of actions. In Venice "...la liberté de la vie surtout était extrême" and perhaps the high corruption was due to this excess of freedom. Certainly the strategic position of Venice in trade and commerce, with the influx of visitors and foreigners it brought, her political and ecclesiastical autonomy, her curriculum of liberal studies, all these coexisted with and perhaps even contributed to corruption at home. Indeed it is true that "un tel goût du plaisir, une recherche si raffinée de l'élegance n'allaient point sans une corruption profonde des moeurs." Thus Venice with her splendour in civic and intellectual life became also one of the more outstanding centres of corruption.

Of particular significance for this study is the cultural and social phenomenon of cortigiania in sixteenth
century Venice. To envision the finish and charm as well as the emergence of woman in a "corrupt but eminently refined" Venetian society, the historian Molmenti in speaking of the dual appearance of la grande dame and la courtisane actually stresses again the idea of the liberty enjoyed by the members of all classes of society. 

The cortigiana in the sixteenth century in Venice is already immersed in the intellectual life and society. She is not only part of this intellectual milieu, she plays a very significant role in it. This courtesan, who had coined her name in the late fifteenth century, was no longer the villainous and impure prostitute of former times. In the sixteenth century that title of cortigiana in many instances brought her honour and fame. It is well known how the masculine form cortigiano took on strong literary and cultural connotations in the sixteenth century. In the words of Antonio Zernitz:

...si moltiplicano i centri letterarî, compaiono nuove accademie, si organizzano in ogni corte convegni di letterati. Cortigiano e letterato, cortegiano e poeta diventano sinonimi, e Baldassare Castiglione non sa altri-menti intitolare che Il Cortegiano un libro in cui insegna di quali doti debba essere fornito un uomo di cultura e di buona società.

And one should not forget that not only men but also the
ladies of the Renaissance courts were at this time graced with culture and graceful manners. Furthermore, it would seem that the cultural function of woman was of relevance to the courtesan as well as to the lady of the court.

The feminine counterpart of cortigiano, once that term had become so changed, must have enjoyed some of the positive connotations. Arturo Graf, in his volume of singular importance for students of the Cinquecento observes that:

Il Rinascimento fiorito chiama dunque con nome onorifico la donna che l'età precedente chiamava con nome d'infamia...

Also on this point Maier might be found indirectly helpful when he declares that:

Accanto alla figura - mito del cortigiano il Castiglione ritrae la figura, non meno perfetta, della "donna di palazzo", della "gentildonna" (già allora opportunamente distinta dalla "cortigiana"), nella quale si esprime il senso gentile, delicato e verecondo della femminilità...

But this gentle and delicate sense of femininity is also present in our courtesans. In the fifth chapter of the
third book of **Il Cortegiano** Castiglione says that the

*gentildonna* "che vive in corte"^40^.

parmi convenirsì sopra ogni altra cosa una certa affabilità piacevole, per la quale sappia gentilmente intertenere ogni sorte d'omo con ragionamenti grati ed onesti...

(...)

coi costumi placidi e modesti e con quella onestà che sempre ha da componer tutte le sue azioni una pronta vivacità d'ingegno, d'onde si mostri aliena da ogni grosseria, ma con tal maniera di bontà, che si faccia estimator non men pudica, prudente ed umana, che piacevole, arguta e discreta...^41^

This ideal of Castiglione's *donna di palazzo* is not, however, exclusive to the grand lady of the Cinquecento. Courtesans, too, not only wanted, but had to share this ideal, and succeeded in always being treated as great ladies during their "formal" rapports with their intellectual friends. Venice was indeed a "poker-faced society"^42^, a stage where the pervasive desire for learning on which we touched and which had conquered all in the sixteenth century, men and women alike, was in the case of the *cortigiana* as much a desire as a necessity; a necessity because, as Graf explains:

Chiamata a vivere in mezzo ad una società in cui la coltura era largamente diffusa, e che aveva la col-
tura in grandissimo pregio, la cortigiana doveva esser colta, tanto più che le donne oneste erano, in certe classi, spesso coltissime.43

This again gives us a better understanding of the world in which these courtesans lived. It is really their age, the time of history in which they lived, that made them what they were; that is, not simple carnal prostitutes, but elevated women of pleasure. One must, however, show discretion here in differentiating the two. While the courtesan does practise the profession of the prostitute, the environment in which she does so is a refined and exclusive one, different from that of her inferior, the simple prostitute. The world of the courtesans was one of high society and culture. It was a milieu consisting of an elevated social, economic, and most of all cultural, ensemble.44

This brings us to a point which almost every scholar or historian of the Cinquecento and particularly of the phenomenon of the cortigiana touches on; and that is, the possible interpretation of the courtesans as the Renaissance equivalent of the Greek heterae. In fact, the courtesans in the Cinquecento were much honored and admired in ways certainly reminiscent of those in which the heterae of classical antiquity were by the cultured Athenians. Although in ancient Greece "most hetairai were slaves or
came from the poorest class" they did bear a certain similarity to the courtesans of the Renaissance in that:

If as children they showed signs of being pretty or, better still, developing good figures... some benevolent female, often their own mothers, would be on hand to undertake their training for the lucrative career they would shortly be in a position to exercise and eventually introduce them to it.

This is also true of many of the Renaissance courtesans, although Chambers prefers to explain the Cinquecento's phenomenon from a more sociological and economic point of view:

...if their parents could not muster a sufficient dowry, either from family or charitable funds, the most lively future was as a nun or prostitute.

At any rate, the comparison has always been a point of interest, if nothing more, for many scholars. And Molmenti, in speaking of one of the most prominent courtesans, cannot refrain from calling her "...la nouvelle Aspasie vénitienne." The greatest point of contact between the two is, of course, that they both practised the same profession, that of prostitution, and both practised it among an intellectual elite. However, judging
from Flacelière's study, and his accounts of the rapports between some young and beautiful heterae and certain Greek intellectuals, it would seem that our Renaissance cortigiane were not only freer, in mind as well as in social and economic conditions, but also more conscious of the profession and the literary and artistic milieu in which they partook. 49 Be that as it may, the sixteenth century Venetian cortigiana

...non si contentava della sola cultura letteraria; essa doveva ancor andare adornata di altre 'virtù', come allora dicevansi; cantare, se la natura le aveva fatto dono di bella voce, sonare uno o più strumenti, danzare con grazia, e usare poi sempre soavità nel parlare, e garbatezza nei modi...(...) La cortigiana non aveva obbligo d'essere letterata e scritrice; ma doveva avere lo spirito pronto e la lingua sciolta; doveva sapere coi vezzi, col brio, con l'arguzia, coi modi affabili e accorti, col vario uso delle sue varie 'virtù', invaghire i cortigiani, ammaliare i letterati, imbertonire i prelati, intrattenere un crocchio, prender parte a una disputa, dar anima a una festa. 50

The cortigiana studiously developed some of the qualities attributed by Castiglione to the donna di palazzo in the third book of his dialogue. This courtesan wished to be on a par with the lady of the court. She wished to possess the same culture, the same social refinements, the same
The Venetian courtesanship flourished to such a degree in the sixteenth century that the courtesans' clothes, jewels, houses, and overall possessions often became objects of admiration and envy. Cesareo thinks that this is perhaps one reason why the courtesan of Venice

...non aveva allora alcun motivo di dissimulare la sua professione, anzi si sforzava di divulgalarla... per cavarne il maggior profitto.\textsuperscript{51}

Such being the situation, one can surely see why in Venice the propagation and the feasibility of that profession

...poteva apparire invidiabile fortuna, e le madri pensavano seriamente a quel collocamento per assicurare alle figliole un brillante avvenire.\textsuperscript{52}

Graf, in his complete study of the courtesanship of the sixteenth century, goes on to describe with painstaking accuracy all kinds of details that made up the lives of the courtesans, from the great amounts of money that the most beautiful and talented ones could make to the following which these gracious daughters of pleasure enjoyed when promenading in St. Mark's square with all their lavishly tailored clothes and precious jewels on display.\textsuperscript{53}

But throughout Graf seems to warn us that
Certainly, living in a level of society in which all were highly cultured and in which culture and learning were regarded most favourably, even the courtesans were called upon to satisfy the refined taste of the age. This does not exclude the fact that some of these courtesans had a genuine desire for learning and culture, a fact validated by their frequent visits to the intellectual and artistic circles as well as their close friendships with literary minds. Not only were they invited to take part in such reunions but they themselves very often offered their not humble abodes to serve as the *cenacoli* to these literary meetings, followed, no doubt, by music and dancing, and ultimately by the proud *cortigiana* 's choice of her passionate and poetic *cortigiano* to spend the night with her. These courtesans were after all veritable daughters of the Renaissance and as such, enjoyed the refined and decadent atmosphere of the time.55

Ruth Kelso, in her voluminous work on the woman of the Renaissance, states that it is indeed with the Renaissance that one notices the "faint stirrings of a new conception of women as fully human".56 Furthermore, Miss Kelso says that "... Italian women seem freer, for large
numbers studied and wrote books as a matter of course..."57
This freedom and this consciousness of one's own self were perhaps the strong driving forces behind woman's appearance in the literature of the Cinquecento. Lyric poetry became the major medium of their expression: grand ladies, gentil donne, and cortigiane began a new chapter in the history of Italian literature.

When one speaks of lyric poetry in early sixteenth century Italy, and especially in Venice and Padova, one speaks almost synonymously of Pietro Bembo who, particularly in these two cities, "...pontificava indiscusso."58 Bembo inaugurated a school which saw Petrarch worshipped and disseminated in the vernacular which the Venetian also formalized. But this new Petrarch was but a shadow of the author of Il Canzoniere. Bembo was after all the product of an age which desired learning, sometimes at any cost. And it is true that "il petrarchismo inaugurato dal Bembo fu anche un fatto del costume cinquecentesco."59 Bembo emphasized above all the bella forma and, understandably,

...la lirica cinquecentesca trae dal Petrarca temi, situazioni, movenze, linguaggio, ma il suo spirito è lontano dal petrarca...60

Sixteenth century lyric poetry in Italy was a phenomenon of purely literary taste. It served the exigency
of the spirit of the Renaissance, and Bembo was its codifier. Especially strong was Bembo's influence on Venetian culture because Venice enjoyed him for many years as the "attivo suscitatore di cultura". Bembo also responded to the individuality of the Renaissance by arguing that the freedom of creativity, or imagination, should be used. This then offered creative subjectivity to the poet of the Renaissance. This poet, however, was still to be guided somewhat by reason; that is, culture and science. But more often than not this new theory of poetics was confused and dominated by rhetoric, which not surprisingly was the main criterion of humanistic study.

Attilio Momigliano writes that "l'ideale del Bembo, come quello del suo tempo, è smussare e abbellire la realtà". Petrarch's reality, his eternal song of love to Laura, was imitated and construed by many who wished to be like the great master of love. But they could never be like Petrarch because, unlike Laura's lover, they could never feel that poetic reality. They could only be and remain imitators because rhetoric was their game. And so we have a procession of 'poets', men and women alike, who as veritable children of that century of Castiglione and Bembo, sought as much ostentation and form in life as they did in their literary output. And for de Blasi:

Il cinquecento è, in letteratura, uno
splendido carnevale: chi più ha, sciala
... ciascuno abbaglia, sfoggia...
Esprimere se stessi è il men che conta
... L'importante è fare spicco.65

Content for most of these followers of Bembo was neither honest nor ideal. Form was what really counted. It was regular, sometimes complex, and severe. Indeed, the lyric poetry of the sixteenth century is more a document of the literary customs of the refined centres of the time and of sentimental aspirations than any real proof of art.66

Bembo, in the second book of his Prose della volgar lingua, had written:

Due parti sono quelle che fanno belle ogni scrittura, la gravità e la piacevolezza
... sotto la gravità ripongo l'onestà,
la dignità, la maestà, la magnificenza,
la grandezza e loro somiglianti; sotto
la piacevolezza ristringo la grazia, la
soavità, la vaghezza, la dolcezza, gli
scherzi, i giuochi, e se altro è di questa maniera...67

Momigliano is no doubt right in saying that we find in these lines the crux of the rhetorical education of the sixteenth century writers, the definition of the stylistic and conventional character of the century.68 Bembo also gave great importance to the word. The writers, the poets, not only should but must utilize parole usate; but they must also, and that is where their art lies, use them with a new feeling, a new sentiment. Indeed, this new senti-
ment is that which animates the used word, that which gives the used word a new dimension and a new tone. And here again is to be found the sense of freedom and individuality which was so important to the talented poet of the time. Only when imitation was not plagiarism could the work be successful. The poet of the Cinquecento who was influenced by Bembo's theories could actually construe his own language with these used words, and at the same time remain along traditional lines. Thus one can see how the solution offered by Bembo to the question of the language was in harmony "con l'indirizzo del secolo il quale, in virtù dell'umanesimo, tendeva verso un'arte d'imitazione." Malagoli is very penetrating in his study of sixteenth century lyric poetry:

...il petrarchismo è solo un magistero di forma letteraria ed è solo una summa di motivi, d'immagini e di linguaggio avulsi dal loro substrato naturale e trasferiti a soddisfare le esigenze di perfezione, di armonia e di considerazione letteraria delle cose che sono le caratteristiche proprie dello spirito rinascimentale... l'esercizio letterario come fine a se stesso diventa la prima professione dell'individuo... Petrarchism then, the "malattia cronica della letteratura italiana", was in many instances during the Cinquecento, as projected by Bembo and practised by many, an exercise in rhetoric. All in the sixteenth century, especially
in Venice, knew their *Canzoniere*, and many during their long walks, always carried their *petrarchino* in their hands. But not all imitated in the same manner, nor followed Bembo's theories, nor imitated at all. But it would be safe to assume that all who desired to enter the realm of poetry must have been influenced, consciously or unconsciously, by Bembo's doctrines.

If it is true that "l'ingegno femminile imita anche quando crea", then woman must have found Bembo's intellectual world a paradise of creativity, or should one say imitation? In this favourable setting the *cortigiana* became one of the authorities and promoters of the cult of Petrarch. But the effort, the exercise, was still one in rhetoric. And petrarchan motifs, words, and images were transplanted from a world of poetic reality into one of ostentatious and literary savoir-faire.

At the same time the Cinquecento was also an age of antipetrarchism, at least for some:

> L'antipetrarchismo, in parte è semplice resistenza ed opposizione all'andazzo comune; in parte è espressione di concetti e d'ideali nuovi nella vita e nell'arte.

More often than not antipetrarchism in the sixteenth century did not necessarily mean the opposite of petrarchism. More often, it implied adversion to some of the doctrines and
or interpretations of the imitators. But a point of special interest is offered by Ettore Allodoli who bluntly states:

Se si dovesse fare poi una statistica di questi antipetrarchisti per il sesso si vedrebbe che sono tutti maschi: le donne furon sempre petrarchiste sfegatate e fautrici, in teoria, dell'amore puro, comprese le cortigiane...

Nevertheless, Venice, more than any other centre in Italy, had a nest for Bembo and his petrarchism; it was here that one would find the most bembisti, including Domenico Venier, "d'alto sangue e di non comune cultura". And in this society, in this setting:

Partecipì della vita culturale, le donne coltivarono la poesia come manifestazione tra le più alte di gentilezza, ed in genere accettarono le norme della sapiente retorica insegnata dal Bembo, sì che nei loro componimenti, anziché la facile effusione sentimentale, che sembra tipica della donna scrittrice, si osserva più spesso eleganza di dettato e una ferma, quasi virile compostezza.

In this setting, too, the cortigiana expressed herself generally in the same literary terms that the age dictated. For instance, the poetic expression of love voiced by the courtesan did not differ from the expression of the innocent and loving maid or wife. In general, the theme of
love in lyric poetry in the sixteenth century was no more than a simulation of the true sentiment, and who could be more adept at writing in this manner than a courtesan who could also perhaps use this literary form to impress her cortegiani? Lyric poetry was their chosen medium; it enriched their earnings and raised their status in society. Their lyric poetry combined, in the more talented and beautiful courtesans, with their skills in dancing, music, and fine arts, as well as with their seemingly impromptu recitals of Virgil or Petrarch, earned them, along with higher pecuniary profits, the much sought after title of cortigiana onesta or onorata.

Veronica Franco, poetess and cortigiana, belonged to this sixteenth century Venetian elite in which individualism and the cult of poetry, letters, and form often superseded content and morality to the point that such paradoxes as a cortigiana onorata could be conceived and such a lady could express herself in terms of carnal or platonic love.
FOOTNOTES

1G.A. Cesareo, Gaspara Stampa Donna e Poetessa (Napoli, 1920), p.1. This fact is generally agreed upon by Renaissance scholarship.


5Ibid, p.10.


7Culture and Society in Venice - 1470-1790 (London, 1972), p.71. The basic text on this subject is: Michele Maylender, Storia delle accademie d'Italia (Bologna, 1926-30).

8Ibid, p.72.

9Ibid.

10Ibid. Germans, Slavs, Greeks, and even Jews were integrated and accepted in these social and cultural groups.

11Marco Foscarini, Ragionamento della letteratura della nobiltà veneziana (Venezia, 1826), p.29.


13L'Educazione in Europa, p.85.

14Italian Humanism, Philosophy and Civic Life in the Renaissance, trans. Peter Munz (Oxford, 1965), p.75. Although the texts by Garin deal mainly with fifteenth century education it is clear from this citation that by the sixteenth century the attitude toward education had definitely altered.

Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1968), p.84, Bouwsma writes: "Venice, in short, was exposed to humanism early, but she failed to respond to it with an enthusiasm comparable to what it aroused in Florence." And on p.86: "Venice at last became a true center of humanistic activity in the later fifteenth century, but this was less the result of any deep (if delayed) attraction to humanistic culture than of the needs of the growing printing industry."

*L'educazione umanistica in Italia*, p.169.


*L'educazione umanistica in Italia*, p.11.

*Ibid*, p.75, Vergerio writes on studii liberali: "Io chiamo liberali quegli studii che convengono a uomo libero, per i quali si esercita o si coltiva la virtù e la sapienza, e il corpo e l'animo ad ogni miglior bene si educa, e coi quali siamo soliti procurarci gloria ed onore, premii promessi, dopo quello della virtù, all'uomo sapiente. Poiché come le arti ignobili hanno per fine il guadagno e il piacere, così la virtù e la gloria rimangono lo scopo degli studii liberali." And Garin most acutely notes: "E, questo, il tema centrale di tutta l'educazione umanistica: gli 'studii humanitatis' a questo mirano, a fare l'uomo pieno, integro, perfetto...a farlo libero."


*Ibid*, p.81. Incidentally, an interesting papal remark is documented by Maurice Rowdon in his study on the society of Venice in the sixteenth century, *The Fall of Venice* (London, 1970), p.99, where he quotes Pope Gregory XIII's angry statement: "I am pope everywhere except in Venice...". John a Tedeschi provides a vast and interesting bibliography in *The Literature of the Italian Reformation* (Chicago, 1971). In the introduction to this catalogue, p.5, Tedeschi writes: "As a result of the increasing efficiency of the Inquisition and the failure of a single prince or republic to take up the cause against Rome, Protestantism in Italy proper gradually was extinguished."
The few exceptions to this, Tedeschi points out, were the Piedmontese valleys near the French border.

24 Ibid, p.117, Bouwsma likes to emphasize the liberty with which Venice treated the Jews, especially at a time when the Fathers of the Holy See sought to take all kinds of extreme measures to assure the authority of Rome. Bouwsma again quotes Sansovino who wrote about these Jews: "Living in most singular peace, they enjoy this country almost like a true Promised Land." In 1569, on orders from Rome, the senate refused to order the expulsion of the Jews. Although Bouwsma's interpretation is correct in showing Venice's expression of autonomy in disregarding Rome's orders, it is probably not justifiable in portraying Venice's social treatment of Jews at large. Conceding that the Jews were perhaps better off here than anywhere in Europe, another social historian, D.S. Chambers in his work, The Imperial Age of Venice 1380-1580 (London, 1970) is not so ready to see any great Venetian leniency toward Jews. However, even considering the few laws that were directed against them, Jews were generally happy and free in Venice. Chambers also argues that the state really needed Jewish money lenders and merchants, and perhaps this is the reason it tolerated them. It is noteworthy that Chambers admires the complete lack of conflict between classes of Venetian society.


26 Ibid, p.118, Bouwsma also writes: "Long habituated to view the institutional church as a dimension of politics, Venice could explain the religious behaviour of others only in terms of such motives as had guided her own policy." And "...Venice preferred to regard the issues raised by Protestantism as essentially political and institutional, and Venetians persisted in regarding the Reformation and its causes in these terms. Retaining her suspicious and essentially political view of the papacy, Venice was generally as oblivious to the emergence of a serious reform movement in Rome as to religious developments elsewhere in Europe."

27 Giuseppe Tassini, Veronica Franco, celebre poetessa e cortigiana del secolo XVI - con una introduzione sui costumi e il libertinaggio nella Repubblica di Venezia tratta dal libro Storie intime di Venezia Repubblica del Cav. Enrico Volpi, ed. Gianni Ghirardini (Venezia, 1969), Numerous laws and regulations were passed in Venice against liber-
tinage and mal costume. Volpi points out, for instance, that the first such law came out on July 24th, 1232, and the last one September 15th, 1796. But apparently such laws and restrictions served little or no purpose at all.


29Ibid, p.201.

30Tassini, op.cit. On p.18 Volpi writes: "È noto che le donne galanti veneziane nel secolo XVI si tingevano i capelli per renderli biondi e così le sopracciglia, bellettandosi anche la faccia. Ciò alle meretrici era proibito di fare, ma esse al contrario lo facevano di più." Tassini tells of the scandal and corruption which had also abundantly invaded convents and other religious institutions. Of these celebri oscenità he says: "... erano dunque passati nell'abitudine e permessi quei divertimenti."

31Bouwsma, op.cit., p.83.


33Ibid.


35Op. cit., pp.173-4, Molmenti observes: "Mais en face de la grande dame, on voit s'élever et regner la courtisane. Celle-ci, à la vérité, n'exerce aucune influence sur les affaires publiques, mais on lui décerne des honneurs extraordinaires; elle inspire l'art, elle en est la muse." It would be quite interesting to follow the evolution of the term cortegiano (in the Venetian dialect cortesan/ cortezan), to see the changes of its meaning, within the context of the transformations in Venetian society from the second half of the XVI century to the second half of the XVIII century. We may observe in fact that there is quite a difference between the cortegiano, as conceived by Castiglione, and the cortesan as conceived by Goldoni. While Castiglione's cortegiàno is a brother in spirit to Bembo, and with Bembo is united in the neoplatonic prayer at the end of the Courtier, Goldoni's cortesan becomes a comedy...
character. He appears in the first of Goldoni's comedies: Momolo cortesan (1738). On the first edition of the comedy only the part of the cortesan was entirely written, the other parts were improvised in the style of the commedia dell'arte. When (1755 or 1756) Goldoni wrote the comedy again and completed the text, giving it the new title of L'uomo di mondo, he stated in the preface (L'autore a chi legge): "Questa commedia...diedi al pubblico molto prima, parte scritta, parte non scritta, intitolata Momolo cortesan. Questo titolo Veneziano, che pronunciamo noi cortesan, non suona lo stesso che altrove intenderebbesi, né in forza di addittivo, né in forza di sostantivo (italics mine). Intendesi da noi per Cortesan un uomo di mondo, franco in ogni occasione, che non si lascia gabbare sì facilmente, che sa conoscere i suoi vantaggi, onorato e civile, ma soggetto però alle passioni, e amante anzi che no del divertimento." Could not this be a suitable description of the elegant cortigiana of the Venetian Cinquecento?

It might also be legitimate to wonder whether some traces of the Cinquecento concept of the cortigiana (the type at least exemplified by Veronica Franco) are evident in Goldoni's Donna di garbo (Cfr. the introduction to this comedy). We might also consider Il cavaliere di buon gusto (1750) as a kind of cortesan. A propos of this comedy Giuseppe Ortolani writes: "L'autore volle offrire alla nobiltà veneziana il modello del Cavaliere in una specie di cortesan dell'ordine patrizio, il quale non sdega di far società con un mercante, e ama la buona tavola, la buona filosofia, le belle lettere, le belle arti, la compagnia degli amici e più ancora quella delle donne:: un gaudente...che si sente a suo agio in quel periodo di lenta trasformazione sociale precedente alla Rivoluzione." (Cfr. Carlo Goldoni, Tutte le opere, ed. G. Ortolani (Milano, 1959) I, p.781, 1017-1021; III, p.1186).


37Ibid, p.7, Zernitz continues: "Se le moderne paragonassero il loro sapere all'erudizione solida e profonda delle donne del Cinquecento, che traducevano con la massima facilità le più grandi opere classiche e commentavano i più difficili lavori poetici dell'antichità, avrebbero di che vergognarsi."

38Attraverso il Cinquecento (Torino, 1916), p.225,
Graf also thinks that the name cortigiana had already been coined just prior to the 1500's: "La storia delle cortigiane indubitamente si lega alla storia dell'umanesimo; ma dove e in qual modo cominci nel Quattrocento a delinearsi la figura della nuova etera, non ci è noto." p.227. En passant, Jolanda de Blasi, in her work Le scrittrici italiane dalle origini al 1800 (Firenze, 1930), also thinks that the cortigiana, developed as we see her in the Cinquecento, must have had her embryonic moments in the late fifteenth century. On p.79, de Blasi states that the "cortigiana, che fu nel cinquecento la ragion prima del garrulo sciamare di tante poetesse e di tante dissertatrici, s'era già venuta formando nel quattrocento, e le dotte e piacevoli riunioni che si pregiavano, ornamento indispensabile e prelibato, dell'ingegno e del virtuosismo femminile, avevan già chiesto alla donna d'apparecchiarsi per tempo a quelle gare di socievole amabilità e di quintessenzismo disquisitore."

40 Ibid, p. 343.
41 Ibid.
42 Chambers, op.cit., p.136.
46 Ibid.
Flacelière, op. cit., pp.115-183, A.Graf, in op. cit., p.279, concludes that the one noteworthy difference between the heterae and our cortigiane is one of religious morals: "La etera, dunque, non offendeva la morale religiosa del tempo suo; per contro la cortigiana offende nel modo più grave la morale religiosa del proprio."

Graf, op. cit., pp.231,233. On page 235, Graf, to further demonstrate the incredible taste and desire for art and literature at that time also shows that even panders exhibited those so-called virtù: "Che le cortigiane dovessero avere in tutto o in parte le 'virtù' testé enumerate non parrà certo strano a chi ripensi i caratteri di quella civiltà, le usanze e i gusti degli uomini di quel tempo; ma che quelle stesse 'virtù' s'avessero a trovare in qualche misura anche negli agenti di esse cortigiane, e procuratori d'amore in genere, ossia, per parlar più chiaro, nei mezzanì, parrà strano a più d'uno. E pure era così."

Op. cit., p.1, "non solo ella stessa menava vanto del suo mestiere; ma lasciava che il suo nome apparisse in tariffe stampate col nome della mezzana, il proprio indirizzo e il prezzo dei 'suoi favorì', ma non s'adontava d'esser chiamata cortigiana; ma financo gli amici suoi la predicavano tale."

de Blasi, op.cit., p.97.

Ibid, p.254, Graf also touches on the insults and praises which were often directed at the courtesans: "Se frequenti erano i biasimi che toccavano alle cortigiane, non meno frequenti erano le lodi; e quanto quelli eran crudi e violenti, tanto eran queste amorevoli e smaccate."

Ibid, p.238, "I letterati potevano, è vero, aiutarle in più di una occorrenza, potevano anche adoperarsi a metterle in vista; ma avevano ad ogni modo, un ben grave difetto, quello, cioè, d'essere assai più ricchi di fama che di quattrini."

Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance (Urbana, 1956), p.77. For information regarding the Renaissance
woman, an interesting source is Sperone Speroni's Dialoghi (Venice, 1596) in which one finds such treatises as "Dialogo della dignità delle Donne", and "Dialogo delle lodi delle Donne". For further references concerning this subject see Miss Kelso's extensive bibliography, pp.326-462. It must be kept in mind that the literature against cortigiane is also quite vast during the Italian sixteenth century, and Speroni himself contributes to it. Pietro Aretino, too, directs some cruel invectives against the cortigiane. In fact the central character of one of his comedies (La Talanta) is a cortigiana. Moreover Aretino deals directly with the world of prostitution and of cortigiane in his Ragionamenti delle donne. Of particular significance for our purpose is the following passage from the Ragionamenti delle donne. Nanna, as she warns Pippa about the dangers of the life of the cortigiana, says: "Perché non ti mancherebbe altro se non che un tale ti facesse i libri contra, e che per tutto si bandisse di quelle cose ladre, che sanno dir de le donne, e ti staria bene che fosse stampata la tua vita, come non so chi scioperato ha stampato la mia, come se mancassero puttane di peggior sorte di me." Ragionamenti, ed. D.Carraroli (Lanciano, 1914), II, p.22.

57 Ibid, p.267. It might be useful for the sake of the study of French-Italian relations to inquire on the analogies between the great courtesans in XVII century France (like Marion Delorme, who later became the heroine of one of Victor Hugo's drama, and Ninon de Lanclos) and the Venetian cortigiane of the XVI century. We can see for instance that Ninon de Lanclos, like Veronica Franco, had many friends not only among the members of the high aristocracy, but also among writers and artists. Molière was a friend of Ninon and so was Saint-Evremond. As in the case of Veronica Franco many of the poems of Ninon de Lanclos were answers to admirers or rebuked suitors. For further information on Ninon de Lanclos see the monumental work of Emile Magne: Ninon de Lanclos (Paris, 1948).


60 Luigi Malagoli, La lirica del 500 e Gaspara Stampa (Pisa, 1966), p.15.
61 Ibid.

62 Bonora, op.cit., p.49.

63 Giorgio Santangelo, Il Bembo critico e il principio d'imitazione (Firenze, 1950), p.121.

64 Storia dell letteratura italiana (Milano, 1963), p. 236.

65 Op.cit., p. 80. From this sea of damnation de Blasi does exclude the true geniuses of the time. Tasso, for instance, is, of course, saved. She goes on to say that the sixteenth century was "fantasma invece di persona, apparizione invece di cosa, il cervello senza il cuore".

66 Momigliano, op.cit., p.228.


69 Santangelo, op.cit., p.82.

70 Momigliano, op.cit., p.237.

71 Op.cit., pp.16-17.

72 Graf, op.cit., p.3.

73 Toffanin, op.cit., p.74.

74 Graf and Toffanin agree fully on this point. Graf also believes that music was not unimportant in helping the cause of Petrarchism. It is interesting to note that most courtesans were fond of music and some could play different instruments to please and impress their literary friends.

75 Graf, op.cit., p.45.
"L'antipetrarchismo nel Cinquecento", in Annali della Cattedra Petrarchesca, VIII (1938), p. 78. Two most relevant treatises on the lyric poetry of the sixteenth century are: Luigi Baldacci, Il petrarchismo italiano nel Cinquecento (Milano, 1957), and Ferruccio Ulivi, L'imitazione nella poetica del Rinascimento (Milano, 1959).


Bonora, op.cit., p. 163.
THE PROSE OF VERONICA FRANCO

La donna che più di tutte incarna
in sè medesima i caratteri del proprio tempo, è Veronica Franco.¹

Veronica Franco was born in 1546, the daughter of Francesco Franco and Paola Fracassa. She had three brothers: Girolamo, Orazio, and Serafino, and an aunt who was a nun and who lived outside of Venice.² The Franco family was cattadinesca; that is, of middle class condition, between the nobility and the populace, and had its own coat of arms as well.³

Although there is no known document or information relative to her childhood and adolescence, one can easily assume that her liberal education was not neglected. It is possible that she might have been intentionally educated to become what she did become, a courtesan, as Giulio Dolci suggests:

E quasi certo che i genitori l'educarono con l'intenzione di farne una cortigiana compita.⁴
Whatever the case, by her first will, written when she was only eighteen, one learns that Veronica was already married to a doctor, a certain Paolo Panizza, of whom nothing is known except that by 1582 he was dead. This first will makes it also quite obvious that she was not living with her husband any longer since in it she expresses a desire that her mother retrieve her dowry from him. How and why she married this doctor Panizza is not known, and it can only be a point of conjecture. Graf himself falls victim to conjecture here by reminding us that it was not at all infrequent at that time for men "di condizione anche onorevole" to marry courtesans, and that oftentimes they did so in order to share in their wives large earnings. But one would think that Graf is taking too much for granted by assuming that Franco was already practising her "mestier sciagurato" even before her marriage. Given the circumstances and the customs of her time, on which we briefly touched, one must admit however that it is a fairly safe assumption indeed, but an assumption nevertheless. Less flamboyant than Graf, the more conservative Tassini relies less on conjectures and more on factual evidence. He gives the reader the distinct impression that she did not take up her eventual profession until after her marriage. Whatever the case, it is important to note that Veronica's
family relationships were never marred, a fact which renders Graf's safe assumption even more safe. Why would a woman of her profession not break relations with her family? Two answers might satisfy our modern reasoning here. First, it might be explained by the accepted image of the perfect courtesan, woman of culture and taste. Luigi Russo shows tremendous insight in his comparison:

Per attutire lo scandalo, si pensi alle nostre "stelle" o dive cinematografiche, le quali certamente non sono molto più caste e più sante delle cortigiane oneste del Cinquecento, se non altro per i frequenti matrimoni in cui esse si volteggiano come in una specie di sport. Orbene, le Veroniche Franco e le Tullie d'Aragona, cortigiane manifeste del Cinquecento, vanno giudicate su questo piano più sereno del costume storico.⁶

Being thus accepted by their society, as we accept the movie starlets of today, one can understand how a mother or a whole family would look favourably upon their relative's profession. The second answer, perhaps only slightly less important, is one of a pecuniary nature. Veronica's two wills clearly show her affection and concern for her family. After the welfare of her children, Veronica ensures the well-being of her mother, her father, and her brothers, and other relatives. And if her mother, and one would suppose, father, should die:
These documents give us an insight into Veronica's attitude, and her outlook on life at that time. It is quite clear from these documents, already, that Veronica, though young, is very individualistic and realistic, and, one might add, very matter of fact about her situation. She feels no qualms about her profession; on the contrary she seems to be taking it all in her stride, at the same time showing great concern and generosity for her family and needy friends. An interesting note on the consciousness of her individuality, on the knowledge of her integral being, a very human and proud being, is found again in her second will when, only twenty-four and perhaps at the height of her profession, she can sincerely and realistically dictate:

...Il restante veramente voglio vadi in li fioli di mio fratello Hier.mo, et occorrendo che sua moglie facesse una fiola, in questo caso tutto ditto restante vadi a detta puta, con questo che gli sii messo nome Veronica al batesismo...8

Obviously, our Veronica must feel that she is a lady. She
was certainly made to feel like a lady, like Della Casa's ladies of "belle maniere e costumi", by her many literary friends. Veronica knew she was admired and respected: she was a *cortigiana onorata*, and as such she could proudly request that her little niece be named after her.

Whether or not Veronica's mother brought up her daughter to exercise that *mal mestiere*, or whether Veronica's mother had been, in her prime, a *cortigiana* herself, one fact does remain, and that is the appearance of the mother's name as mediatress for her daughter's favours. This is documented in *Il Catalogo di tutte le principal et più honorate Cortigiane di Venetia*:

Veronica Franco, a Santa Maria Formosa, pieza so mare...scudi 2.10

Veronica was certainly one of the most beautiful and talented courtesans of Venice, and proof of this is offered by her many admirers and friends. Graf tells us that Veronica

...poteva competere per bellezza, per grazia, per ingegno e per coltura con quante erano cortigiane più reputate in Venezia, e, fors'anche, vincerele tutte. Della bellezza di lei si fanno lodi passionate e fiorite.11
In expressing the sense of individuality and learning as well as the cult for beauty and intellectualism which these cortigiane onorate possessed, Benedetto Croce in the introduction to his edition of Veronica's Letters offers as proof of these courtesans' social accomplishments the fact that the most honoured and famous ones all dedicated their literary works to important personages:

Una riprova della considerazione sociale e ufficiale ottenuta nel Rinascimento dalle "cortigiane onorate", è che quelle di esse che coltivarono poesia e letteratura dedicarono i loro libri ad alti personaggi, a principi sovrani e a preti...(...) Mancò la dedica a un papa, che forse un Alessandro sesto avrebbe sorridendo accettata.  

And as to Veronica's aristocratic and refined circle of friends, Dolci can only say:

Quando si pensa chi frequentava la sua casa si comprende come la sua fine personalità emanasse un fascino non volgare, ma signorile.

Proof of Veronica's great fascination is also found in the iconography of our poetess and courtesan. Although much confusion reigns on this point, it is clear that Veronica had her effigy made by many painters, including her close
friend Tintoretto.  

In the first reprinting of Franco's *Terze rime e sonetti*, Gilberto Beccari states that:

> Madre natura la dotò di bellezza singolare, di grazia, d'ingegno, e di cultura nelle lettere e nella musica; e fu molto ammirata, amata ed invidiata... La sua "magione" divenne il ritrovo geniale dei più belli ingegni del tempo,...dei quali...seppe cattivarsi la stima, l'affetto.

Veronica's beauty and culture were so renowned that in 1574, Henri III, en route from Poland to France to be crowned king, and during his much celebrated stop in Venice, did not neglect to honour Veronica with a visit. The young king to be was so thrilled with the courtesan's literary, and other, merits that he departed with Veronica's portrait, in token of her sweet memory. Another proof of Franco's renown is found in Montaigne's *Journal de Voyage en Italie*:

> Le lundi à souper, 7 de Novembre, la signora Veronica Franca, jantifame Venitiane, envoie vers lui pour lui presanter un petit livre de Lettres qu'elle a composé; il fit donner deus escus au dict home.

It becomes clear that Veronica utilized fully both her
beauty and her culture. One can only imagine what an enchanting presence she must have provided at those evening gatherings with her intellectual friends. The many admirers and lovers must have fought not only with their eyes but with their words as well in order to win an approving or promising glance from the lady who, radiant with beauty and ingegno, gracefully and with "misura" toyed with them. 19 Franco's house often provided the setting for these customary intellectual reunions in Venice. 20 Another house where these meetings were held, and where Veronica must have been one of the most welcome guests, was that of Domenico Venier who, besides being a famous and admired rimatore, was also interested in several fields of knowledge. His home was the setting for the Accademia Veniera where met

...uomini di varia dottrina, i ragionamenti dei quali erano di meno profitto al Venier che i ragionamenti di quest'ultimo erano a loro... 21

Michele Maylender, in speaking of the Venier Academy, quotes the abbot Serassi, who spoke of the Academy in these terms:

E quivi...discorrendosi di diverse
degne cose, ora si scoprivano le
più segrete bellezze della Poesia,
ora si rilevavano i più occulti
artifizi che abbia l'arte del dire;
alcuna volta vi si parlava della
natura e proprietà delle lingue...
e tutto con tanta grazia e leggian-
dria, e con tanta maestà e gravità,
che a niuno rimanea che poterne più
oltra desiderare. 

Domenico Venier no doubt influenced Franco, perhaps
even strongly. Graf tells us that

LaVeronica approfittava della bene-
volenza del Veniero per farsi rive-
dere da lui, e all'occorsenza correg-
gere, le prose e i versi. (...)Né
della correzione la Veronica aveva
da vergognarsi.

She had no need to feel ashamed because it was almost a way
of life in the literary milieu of the time. As Migliorini
observes:

Il desiderio di conformare la lingua
alle regole grammaticali che si stan-
no sempre più rigorosamente prescri-
vendo fa sì che qualche scrittore sot-
toponga un proprio scritto a un com-
petente...

But one should not go to the length of insinuating that
Veronica's works are not really hers but that someone, or
perhaps several people, wrote them for her, possibly with
the attitude that one favour deserves another. Toffanin,
in fact, seems to believe so far, in speaking of Tullia
d'Aragona's literary endeavours he writes:

Già: ma il dialogo non fu scritto
da lei; fu scritto dal Varchi, o da
qualcun altro dei suoi ammiratori,
che si compiacevano d'innalzarla e
di collocarla su di un trono di
spiritualità e di gentilezza. (...)
Di Veronica Franco, credetelo pure,
non ci sarebbe da dire molto di
diverso.  

Veronica's spirit was too independent, too free, and her
sense of individuality too strong for her to accept such
conditions. If "being a woman in Venice was a profession" then Veronica was a professional par excellence. Her sincerity lies in her freedom, in her individuality, her consciousness of being herself, what she really was, with nothing to hide. All these provide her with a human dignity which easily transcends her human condition. In no way could Franco even be suspected of submitting to such practises which would so drastically oppose her personality and temperament.

If Veronica Franco had won the affection and admiration, and love, of many, she had nonetheless, along the way, aroused much ill-feeling in the hearts of certain individuals.
Cruel and rude sonnets were directed against her, especially from the pen of Maffeo Venier, and others who either for favours refused, or to please one cherished courtesan by slighting another, anonymously attacked Veronica's position as a woman and as a prostitute. But the greatest threat to her life came in 1580 when Veronica had to defend herself before the Sant'Uffizio:

Even though her enemies demanded that Franco's many patrons not influence her impending condemnation, Veronica survived the trial, but not without considerable sufferings and preoccupations.

Even though Benedetto Croce does not readily accept the idea that Veronica Franco did leave her mal mestiere and return to God, Beccari, on the other hand notes that:

Già fino dal 1570 si trova un embrione della conversione della Franco e della sua idea di fondare un ricovero.
Tassini contemplates that:

Forse anche le avrà sorriso di quando in quando alla mente un pensiero di riabilitazione, ben naturale a donna non volgare, e dotata di splendido ingegno.33

Graf complements Tassini by adding that the Sant'Uffizio trial and its dangers, the insults and sufferings, undoubtedly had a great effect on Franco and provided an even greater stimulus to the desire which was perhaps always alive in her heart, a religious sentiment which seemed to satisfy her gentle soul:

Ma la prova più sicura della conversione...sta nel disegno che ella formò, l'anno 1580, appunto, di fondare un ricovero per le donne traviate che volessero lasciare il mal costume.34

To this end Veronica apparently composed a memoriale to be presented to the "Serenissimo Principe ed illustissima Signoria", and asking an annual sum of five hundred ducats, her excuse, if it was an excuse, being that she was then in a low state of finances and bore the responsibility of many of her relatives. In any case, there is no document of any answer to her project; perhaps it was never pres-
ented. However, in that same year, the Casa del Soccorso was indeed founded in Venice. This house received mainly women bent on conversion; it served as something of a modern rehabilitation centre where after some time these troubled persons would be assisted and their lives could prove fruitful to society.

Whether Veronica was directly responsible for this, whether she sincerely meant her proposal for the benefit of others like her or whether she simply sought financial security for herself cannot be confirmed by any documents or testimonies. It can only remain a point of conjecture, and perhaps only better illuminated in an analysis of her work. Her proposal to the Signoria, whether or not presented, and if so, whether or not accepted, could only help those who were like her, but of less fortune. Graf likes to think so:

Riconciliata con Dio; dimenticata forse dagli antichi amici, ma benedetta dalle sventurate cui aveva additata la via della salute, e aperto un asilo di perdono e di pace, la povera Veronica morì in età ancor fresca. Nei Necrologi del Magistrato alla Sanità si legge questo laconico ricordo: "1591, 22 luglio. La Sg. Veronica Franco d'anni 45 da febre già giorni 20. S. Moisè." E non se ne sa altro.

Considerably more, however, can be known about our
poetess and courtesan by looking at the works that she has left us, works, prose and poetry, which consistently bear the imprint of autobiography.37

Veronica Franco dedicated her Lettere famigliari a diversi to the "most illustrious and most reverend cardinal", Monsignor Luigi d'Este. The edition bore no indication of place or year, but the opening dedica to the cardinal bears the date of 1580.38 This date shows us that the Lettere were published at the peak of Veronica's popularity. By this time it had become very fashionable for men of letters to publish their correspondence. Croce on this point reminds us of what Montaigne had to say in his Essais about this Italian vogue:

Ce sont grands imprimeurs (de lettres) que les Italiani; j'en ay, ce crois-je, cent divers volumes: celles d'Annibal Caro me semblent les meilleures.39

So it is true that Claudio Tolomei, Luca Contile, Andrea Calmo, Parabosco, Annibal Caro as well as many others published their letters, but none of the cortigiane letterate did, except Veronica Franco, although some letters of other courtesans could be found in various collections of the time. Veronica's overt literary ambitions are expressed, as one can easily understand, by her desire and decision to
publish her correspondence in 1580. Did Veronica publish all of her correspondence up to 1580? This is indeed doubtful, especially considering her own words in Lettera XLI, and some other letters, in which Veronica's literary intentions are quite explicit. One notices that the letters do not demonstrate their destination, nor do they show a date. This is certainly not a common procedure. One would indeed venture to suspect that her collection of Lettere is not arranged in any historical or chronological order, but perhaps according to some principle of artistic or literary nature. What is this order? It is an extremely difficult question to answer and one which no doubt lends itself to various opinions. One possible, and we might hope, tenable, response could be in terms of verisimilitude. Veronica's Lettere could be looked at as a document of a vast, well arranged view of the private world of a dignified, intellectually sound, sincere and warm individual, who at the same time happens to be a cortigiana. She is fully and constantly aware of this fact and seems willing to accept it, openly and honestly, without masks, but with a personal consciousness and a dignity which easily transcend that fact. 40

However much literary artifice is to be found in the collection, Franco's letters also constitute a series of
documents which facilitate our entrance not only into Veronica's world, but also into the world and culture of her time. This is perhaps the major interest that one would have in her letters; they welcome us to the cultural Venetian world of the second half of the sixteenth century. But let us approach them in order, as they appear in the text, perhaps chronologically, or better, as Veronica arranged them herself. Her official letters present some prebaroque aspects:

Diremo subito che nella dedica al cardinale d'Este si nota già, in mezzo alle solite proteste di umiltà e di indegnità, una sovrabondanza baroccheggiante di immagini, che fa sentir vicino il Seicento.

But already in this dedica we can see a glimpse of Veronica's values when, for instance, she writes that God has respect for "prontezza dell'animo". And also in this dedica of her "lettere giovenili" Veronica hints at a later, more serious work:

Forse che a tempo di maggiore occasione e di più prospera fortuna e di più esercitato stile, ardirò col l'aiuto della vostra divina umanità tentar impresa di maggior espressione dell'animo e dell'obligo mio...
The first letter is one of immense gratitude to the "invittissimo e cristianissimo" king, Henri III. She makes reference to the fact that he visited her humble abode, but one would not really think it was humble, and upon leaving, the king took "seco il mio ritratto". In this letter Veronica includes two sonnets which praise the king's glory ad infinitum. In the sonnets she makes reference to the portrait which she gave to the king: "l'immagin mia di smalt'e di colore" (first sonnet), and "questo scolpito e colorato aspetto, in cui il mio vivo e natural s'intende". In the first letter Veronica also talks "nel proposito del libro, ch'io sono per dedicarle...". Croce thinks that Veronica certainly meant her Terze rime:

...dedica, dalla quale il re, pago del ritratto che aveva portato con sè e dei due sonetti che seguirono, dovè, pur benignamente e cortesemente, schermirsi; tanto che, l'anno dopo della visita, la Franco le dedicò al duca di Mantova.

But it is with another letter, Russo tells us, that "...cominciano le consonanze più precise con le Terze rime". Veronica appears very philosophical in her letter to a friend whom the previous evening she found very disturbed and depressed. She confesses that she too has been "assai
travagliata" and has found comfort in this friend. So now she reiterates what he once told her:

\[
\text{Vano e sciocco è colui il quale si crede poter trapassar questa vita mortale senza noie...} \quad 47
\]

The world is filled with sorrow and sadness, Veronica writes, so be at least comforted by the fact that you were born male, and not, like me, female. What is Veronica saying? What she is expressing is, one would think, the misery of her own condition, that of the cortigiana. But perhaps now that she is beyond that condition, in retrospect a nightmare of damnation, she can placidly contemplate:

\[
\ldots\text{la vera ricchezza consiste nella tranquillità della mente e nel contentarsi, e il contentarsi dell'anima nostra non è altro che il possesso della virtù.} \quad 48
\]

With a letter written to one of her friends and, possibly, literary advisers, whom she calls "reverenda persona", Veronica sends "una di quelle operine" which she prays this person to look over. She is also sorry because of her "viver intricato negli errori e macchiato nel fango mondano"\quad 49 and asks him to pray for her.
Veronica's desire and interest for learning, together with her candid confession on the bitter destiny of courtiers, form the recurring theme and perhaps the major fill conducteur of her life in the Lettere. She is very flattered by people who praise her beauty and intelligence, sometimes unable to hide her pride at having received laudatory poems in her honour. She gives us a touch of the belle maniere of Della Casa's epoch by reminding her benign correspondent of the "...soddisfazione che prende ogni cuor veramente nobile del far cortesia, massimamente alle donne..." In return she will send this "cuor nobile" two sonnets of her own, which

...se non valeranno per un solo di tutti i vostri versi, valeranno in farmi conoscere desiderosa d'imparare, poiché tanto in ciò m'affatico...  

And then ends by showing us that even her relationship with her aunt who was a nun was not hampered by her profession, for Veronica had planned to visit her when a certain unexpected accident occurred. In another letter Veronica gives us an insight into the personal world of cortigiane like her when she firmly scolds a man for the injuries and insults she suffered through him. In order to make him stop casting these infamous slanders at her, Veronica gallantly tries
to convince him (and perhaps herself) that although she can pity him, she cannot forgive him. Veronica reminds him that it is indeed

...sogno d'uom che è desto il voler
dopo lunga repulsa acquistar merito
nella grazia e nell'amore con l'in-
giurie e con le villanie.

Who was this malignant thorn in her side? Could it have been Maffeo Venier, the Venier, who unlike his wise uncle Domenico who helped and taught and respected Veronica, only sought ways to injure and ridicule her? The affinity between the *Terze rime* and the *Lettere*, pointed out by Russo, gives plausibility to the supposition that this man and the slanderer in the *Rime* might be the same. This is only one example, of course, of the comparison between her two works. To speak of another instance one would readily perceive, no doubt, the similarity between the reverend person in the *Lettere*, and the one in the *Terze rime*.

The ninth letter provides us again with a closer look at the Venetian culture of that time, particularly concerning the meetings or *cenacoli* which Veronica used to attend. In this case the 'party' is to take place at her home, and she asks someone:

...per alquanti giorni accomodarmi
del suo stromento da penna, e se può mai far ch'io l'abbia domani dalle venti ore in poi, nel qual tempo io la priego a degnarsi a venir a onorar con la sua presenza questa mia casa, in occasione ch'io faccio musica, e menar seco messer Vincenzo.

Veronica occasionally in her correspondence also laments a reticence on the part of others to continue corresponding with her. One of her correspondents not only did not write but also did not return some writings which Veronica had sent him so that he could look over them. And Veronica very lucidly rationalizes:

Di molte cose incontratemi nella vita posso ragionevolmente doleermi della contraria sorte...

The thirteenth letter strongly holds our attention. Veronica invites a friend to dinner:

Vedete che il tempo tutto volto alla pioggia invita ogni buona persona a provvedersi di dolce trattenimento al coperto e al fuoco almen fino a sera. Se vi degnerete di venir, potremo desinar caritevolmente insieme, 'sine fuco et caerimoniiis more maiorum' di quella grazia che ci sarà. E se vorrete aggiungervi un fiaschino di quella vostra buona malvasia, di tanto mi contento e di più non vi condanno. Questa sera poi essequirò il vostro a me dolcissimo commandamento d'andare a casa dell'amico, e comunque siate per fare dal canto vostro, dal mio vi sarò sempre amorevolissima.
This is indeed the cortigiana letterata at her best: urging and teasing her friends, or should one say customers, to her purpose, but doing so with such substantial wit and savoir-faire as not to appear vulgar or base, but on the contrary, gentle and refined. At the same time Veronica continues praising and promoting the cause of learning, which becomes almost an obsession with her. Writing to one of her lovers, who, inflamed with passion for her, sought exile from Venice in order to escape the torturing darts of love, Veronica suggests that he dedicate his life to letters, if he truly desires that she repay his love:

Voi sapete benissimo che tra tutti coloro che pretendono di poter insinuarsi nel mio amore a me sono estremamente cari quei che s'affatican nell'essercizio delle discipline e dell'arti ingeneuse, delle quali (se ben donna di poco sapere, rispetto massimamente alla mia inclinazione e al mio desiderio) io sono tanta vaga e con tanto mio diletto converso con coloro che sanno, per aver occasione ancora d'imparare, che, se la mia fortuna il comportasse, io farei tutta la mia vita e spenderei tutto il mio tempo dolcemente nell'academie degli uomini virtuosi.57

Letter XVIII is probably another of those addressed to Maffeo. Veronica, like most other cortigiane, is accused of avarice in her profession, but she knows that accusa-
tions directed at her derive only from advances she has refused. But she is an honest and sincere person and feels obliged to tell him so:

...non ho voluto mancare a quest'offizio di lealtà, nella quale io sono assuefatta per natura e per costume.

Commenting on this eighteenth letter in which Franco also states that she is not a venal woman, Graf points out:

...la Veronica sapeva conciliare, nelle parole e negli atti, l'interesse, ch'era una triste necessità della sua condizione, con la bontà, ch'era una gentile virtù del suo animo...(...)ella doveva esser donna di un pensar risoluto, di un sentir vivo, di un procedere franco, e di parole e di modi, per quanto la professione gliel consentiva, semplici e schietti; una natura gioconda, impulsiva, spontaneamente affettuosa.

Veronica had many loves and lovers; many had their love for her satisfied, others were refused. But Veronica was no doubt flattered by them all. To a gentleman who, having just seen her, falls violently in love with her, Veronica declares that she is willing to assure him in every manner "...ciascun segno di benevole corrispondenza." And meanwhile she sends him a copy of a collection of sonnets. In
another letter to "signor Tentoretto" Veronica expresses her great admiration for the painter:

Vi prometto che, quando ho veduto il mio ritratto, opera della vostra divina mano, io sono stata un pezzo forse se ei fosse pittura o pur fantasima innanzi a me comparita per diabolico inganno. 61

This astonishment suggests the admiration that Veronica holds for a work of art that fascinates her. Veronica is capable of conveying the sense of awe before a superior work of art, which comes naturally to a person who is intelligent, sensitive, but at the same time somewhat naive. This sense of awe roused by a work of Tintoretto is particularly appropriate if one remembers the peculiarly dramatic and forceful connotations of his pictorial world. Russo makes an interestingly different observation about the preceding letter:

La curiosa disposizione della Veronica è questa, che nella lettera, dove c'è, in fondo, un invito all'amore, e un rimprovero per la vita vana che fa l'amante, si conclude con la formula, "che Nostro Signore v'abbia in protezione". Nella lettera XXI, al Tintoretto, che le aveva mandato un ritratto profondamente lusinghiero per lei, nel lodare il sommo artista, Veronica prende parte in un certo modo all'ormai avviata querelle des anciens et
Pietro Pancrazi believes that in Franco's letters there is little literature,

But, little literature or not, Lettera XXII, one of the most often cited, remains as perhaps the most candid portrayal that Veronica gives us of herself. Here the dignity, the honesty, the human compassion and the generosity of Veronica Franco appear in their best light. Her style becomes very concise and direct; nothing of the superficial and stylistic preoccupations of other letters. Russo ascribes to this letter a "...tono piuttosto apocalittico". In this letter Veronica is speaking of something she feels with great intensity. She is deeply involved, and the directness of her expression shows it. Veronica Franco is desperately trying to convince a mother to save her daughter from becoming a cortigiana. One cannot help feeling that the letter is a mirror of Veronica's own destiny,
a destiny that she now bears with as much dignity as she can, a destiny, though, that, in her lucid consciousness, can become a bitter nightmare to her naturally gentle and free spirit:

E...se ben primieramente si tratta l'interesse di vostra figliola, io parlo della vostra persona, perché la rovina di lei non può esser separata dalla vostra, e perché le siete madre, e perché, s'ella diventasse femina del mondo, voi diventeste sua messaggiera col mondo, e sareste da punir acerbamente...

No more the artifice of "stile epistolare" in this letter:

...qui la solennità compassata e artificiosa dello stile epistolare si scioglie in un tono familiare e affettuosamente preoccupato, che a tratti ricorda alcuni passi di lettere di predicatori...

Scrivano is willing to agree with this, and not only as with regards to letter XXII:

È chiaro che una dimensione autenticamente oratoria è il risultato più brillante che possa raggiungere in questa prosa la Franco...

Veronica in the said letter tries every possible method to
discourage the poor girl's mother, and then can only conclude:

Credete a me: tra tutte le sciagure mondane questa è l'estrema; ma poi, se s'aggiungeranno ai rispetti del mondo quei dell'anima, che perdizione e che certezza di dannazione è questa? ...Rivolgetevi con le speranze a Iddio...

And we must believe her, just as she asks that mother to do. Here Veronica does not argue under the influence of external and established codes of behaviour, be they religious or social. She argues in the name of motherhood and human dignity, two qualities which, even in her base condition, she did not lack. Is she thinking of her own destiny, a destiny manoeuvred by her own mother? Perhaps! Is she desperately trying to give some poor child the chance that possibly she herself, as a child, had never been given? As we have shown before, especially with regard to the courtesans' catalogo, these are questions which as yet cannot be answered with any certainty. Veronica, speaking from a position in which she is hopelessly trapped and in which she must play out her role, (there is no way of knowing the year the letter was written) forcefully protests in the name of innocence in a profoundly Christian manner. In her anxiety to save a soul for the sake of
human dignity, a dignity which she viscerally feels in herself, Veronica lashes out at the absurd and cruel aspects of her world. No more the sound of music, or the splendor of royal visitors, however thin their Valois blood may have been. Here Veronica speaks as the woman who has suffered in her flesh the insult of strangers (faceless males) possessing for the sake of possession, the mother who wants to spare a child (does it matter if she is not her own?) from such insults and dangers, the Christian who is quite capable of loving others as herself. Veronica's style, following as it does in its merciless clarity the folds of a suffering and indignant soul, acquires suddenly the power of that of Guicciardini bent upon himself in his relentless analysis, or we might even say of Machiavelli's. In scene 9, act III of La Mandragola, Lucrezia protests:

"Ma di tutte le cose che si son tentate, questa mi pare la più strana, di avere a sottomettere il corpo mio a questo vituperio."

Scene 8, act IV:

"Io non voglio!...Come farò io?... Che mi fate voi fare?...Oh me! mamma mia!..."
Sottomettere el corpo mio a questo vituperio...! Machiavelli, the artist, is capable of uttering cogently the cry of a decent woman who refuses to prostitute herself. Veronica Franco, the _cortegiana_, the professional of love, is capable of rendering in such profound and universally human, and therefore artistic, terms some of the aspects of her life. Secret aspects, of course. But in the name of humanity she can unfold them. Is Veronica a virtuous woman? She herself says: "...desidero di possedere quel valore e quella virtù di che sono priva, se ben cortesemente tanto celebrata da voi." She desperately wants to be virtuous, not through the subterfuge of a veil of hypocrisy, but by openly considering what she is and adorning this consideration by the acquisition and ennoblement of other virtuous aspects, of which these same _Lettere_ of hers might be one.

In other letters she again thanks people for favours received, possibly other corrections on her writings, and wonders if she should write to another person, if only "per buona creanza..." thus echoing in us the voices of the age, especially the voice of Della Casa. And throughout her letters she calls out to the authority of virtue, when all else seems to fail. Such is also the case when she severely reprimands a person for "...quel vilissimo mancamento...ch'avete fatto in casa mia." In _Lettera_
XXXII she is promoting her collection of poems in memory of Count Estor Martinengo:

...Vostra Signoria scriva a faccia scrivere da quei suoi academicì secondo le piacerà...\textsuperscript{74}

Veronica, it seems, in her quest to become or at least appear virtuous, never makes the mistake of saying that she hates someone. Even though she may be given just cause to hate, Veronica insists that it is more pity than anything else that she feels.\textsuperscript{75} And as in the preceding letter Veronica succeeds in coming directly to her point, in a following letter she feels obliged to express her opinion on "lettere familiari", perhaps an opinion on her own work:

...Dovendosi attender nelle lettere familiari al vero affetto con che si scrive più che alle molte parole...\textsuperscript{76}

And, continues Croce, on Franco's \textit{Lettere}:

...in generale sono limpide e semplici. Senza dubbio c'era in lei anche l'amor proprio letterario, sicché, dopo aver dato prova di sé con un volume di versi, volle darne uno di epistole, come usavano i letterati italiani di quel tempo.\textsuperscript{77}
And again, after giving us a picture of her family life and her great preoccupations for her two children's "febbre con vaiuole e con altri accidenti..." Veronica takes up the Martinengo cause. She asks another gentle spirit to write so that she can finish and have the collection published.\(^7\) The next letter was almost certainly written to Domenico Venier. She promises that as soon as she is finished with the work at hand, "...verrò alla censura e al giudizio di lei..."\(^8\) With the following letter, perhaps also destined to her friend and patron Domenico Venier, Veronica also includes more written work, this time a volume of letters, to be corrected:

\[
\ldots \text{le mando da leggere il presente} \\
\text{volume di mie lettere raccolte il} \\
\text{meglio ch'ho potuto...} \]

These words seem to imply that Veronica had collected and chosen many of her letters, and had perhaps even arranged them, possibly in a chronological order. However, she sends them on to this erudite friend. Could it be that Veronica's Lettere were eventually not only corrected and amended, but also re-arranged by Domenico Venier? Such an assumption, however, should not tend to minimize Veronica's learning, especially when one couples Veronica's great hunger for
culture with Venier's intellectual status. Graf can well understand Franco's literary talent:

Se certe buone qualità morali sono nella Veronica più che probabili, certissime sono certe qualità intellettuali, buone e non volgari. Tutti gli scritti suoi ci mostrano in lei uno spirito vivo ed accorto, un giudizio assennato, una fantasia colorita, un gusto spesso delicato.81

Veronica's cult for etiquette, for "buona creanza", for good manners is ever present in her letters. In an age where Castiglione's evocation of an elegantly aristocratic world and Della Casa's manual on etiquette were on everybody's mind, our Veronica, desperately needing a house to rent, does not hesitate to remind a gentleman that:

...quando Vostra Signoria avesse promessa la casa ad alcun uomo, la promessa non pregiudica alle ragioni della donna, ma il promettitore può, mentre che si tratta da uomo a donna, mancare all'uomo per compiacere alla donna.82

Veronica's close friendship with Domenico Venier is perhaps better exemplified by Lettera XLIV, obviously written to the latter, in which she, having injured her knee, asks him for
...una di quelle sue sedie da stroppiato..." while in another, she calls him

...il più bello e il più risplendente lume che tra molte scienze oggidì si vegga nella professione delle lettere gentili...".

To another Venier, Marco, she apologizes for having thought that he was responsible for the cruel and slanderous verses against her. Therefore, she stops her undertakings of "...duello e del cartello" which she had begun against him, and hunts the true offender.

It is difficult to think of what book Veronica may talk about to a person to whom she sends the "secondo quinterno..." to be revised. The last letter in the collection, probably arranged to be last, epitomizes that cult for learning and that desire for "virtù" which were always so representative of Veronica's spirit and age. The mention of the "...eccelso Enrigo" lends to it an even more fitting ending, for it unifies the collection by reminding the reader of that letter and sonnet to the king, a letter which stood at the head of the list, separated from the others, honoris causa.

Veronica Franco's Lettere, if not the best expression of her literary talent, are no doubt an expression of her
soul. Collected in 1580, these letters give a mature image of a woman who, weary and possibly on the verge of leaving her profession, seeks to be judged for what she was, in her condition as a cortigiana, but also as a sensitive human being. Most of all, perhaps, Veronica asks to be judged in an aesthetic world. Her "...ostinata aspirazione alla 'virtù'..." asks us not to be too severe in her judgement. Veronica knows her vulnerability as a cortigiana, but she adheres to culture, almost with an obsession, to elevate herself, and not only ideally, from the base lot fate has partitioned her. Her strong allegiance to culture allows her to transcend the mire which stains her daily life. Beauty is above everything, above good and evil, and Veronica transcends her vile domain through culture into the realm of beauty which is, very often, for her, "virtù". Very conscious of her negative life, Veronica Franco, in these "lettere giovenili", idealizing culture, cortesia, and human dignity, not only shows the literary exercise, lo sfogo, and l'amour propre which were customary among men of letters, but also an easily attainable ideal which could serve as the only relief from her deplorable state.
FOOTNOTES

1E.L. Cattelani, "Venezia e le sue letterate nei secoli XV e XVI", in Rivista Europea, N.S. XV, iii (1879), p.491.

2The information, but not the date of her birth, is given by Franco herself in her first will, dated August 10th, 1564 in which..."considerando...li pericoli de q.sha n.a. fragile vita, retrovandomi maxime graveda, ma sana de mente e intelletto, et anche del corpo..." Veronica goes on to say that she is not pregnant by her husband, but by a certain m.Jacomo de'Baballi. This first will is published by Tassini, in op.cit., p.107. Tassini thus rightly refutes other suggestions that our poetess was born in 1553 or 1554. If this were true, argues Tassini, then it would have been impossible for her to be pregnant at the time of this testament. Furthermore, Tassini tells us that at her death, her age is documented, a fact which validates her birthdate as 1546. Ginevra Canonici-Facchini, in Prospetto Biografico delle donne illustri italiane (Venezia, 1824), p.113., is not only erroneous in establishing Franco's birthdate but also the date of her death. She has our Veronica born in 1554, and dead in 1599. Canonici-Facchini's book is often clearly apologetic in nature in that in it the author also enters "una risposta a Lady Morgan risguardante alcune accuse da lei date alle donne italiane nella sua opera L'Italie". For instance, Veronica is not called a courtesan but, instead, a "...bella, eloquente e brillantissima donna..." who was admired and courted by many "...uomini d'altissimo rango, e nell'età sua giovanile fatta avea la propria casa ricetto dell'amore, del piacere e della cultura dello spirito. Rimasta vedova in età fresca tutta si diede al ritiro ed alle lettere; e fu per lei che, mediante l'ajuto di alcuni doviziosi, istituito venne in Venezia il luogo pio del Soccorso a ricovero di tante vittime della seduzione e del disordine.."

3Although both Tassini and Graf agree on the family degree, they create some confusion as to the number of stars in the family coat-of-arms.

Graf, op.cit., p. 295.


7From her first will, as already noted, in Tassini, op.cit., p.109. In her second will, dated November 1, 1570, and also published by Tassini, we are told of a second son whom she had with messer Andrea Tron, and whose name is Enea. The first-born was called Achille. We also learn in the second will that her mother is dead.

8Tassini, p. 112.

9Graf, p. 296. This is a very doubtful point. See the following footnote.

10Tassini, p.76. This catalogue, anonymous, was published, Tassini tells us, in Venice in the sixteenth century, but "...in 8. senza indicazione di luogo, anno e stampatore...". Tassini continues: "Oltre che in parrocchia di S. Maria Formosa, Veronica abitò nel corso della sua vita in varie altre parrocchie, trovandosi che nel 1564 era domiciliata a S. Marziale, nel 1570 a S. Tomà, nel 1574 a S. Giovanni Grisostomo, nel 1580 a S. Giovanni Nuovo, nel 1582 a S. Samuele, e finalmente nel 1591, epoca della sua morte, a S. Moisè". The catalogue, one would think, had to be prepared before 1570 since by this date (her second will) her mother had died. Graf (p.305) questions the authenticity of the fee attributed to Veronica but accepts the fact that it was indeed our Veronica Franco. Furthermore, he strongly refutes the theory forwarded by another scholar: "Ultimamente il signor A. Borzelli in un articolo intitolato Per Veronica Franco, e inserito nella Polemica di Napoli, anno I, numero 4, sostenne che la Veronica Franco del Catalogo non può essere quella stessa delle terze rime e delle lettere; ma in sostener ciò prese
alcuni solennissimi granchi." Frugoni, op.cit., p.45, cannot seem to conceive, and justifiably so, how a cortigiana onorata of Veronica Franco's status could possibly be represented by only "scudi 2": "...è notizia davvero imbarazzante se confrontiamo tale onorario coi 25 scudi guadagnati da Livia Azalina, cui è dedicato il catalogo. Ma può essere errore o malignità, e ci è facile crederlo solo pensando che proprio alla casa di Veronica si recò il re Enrico III di Francia di passaggio per Venezia." Russo (op.cit., p.43) indirectly agrees with Frugoni's suggestion by referring to Manlio Dazzi's work, "Il libro chiuso di Maffeo Venier", in: Il fiore della lirica veneziana, (Venezia: Neri-Pozza, 1956),p.9. Dazzi reminds us that Veronica is remembered by Maffeo Venier for, to speak of only one quality, her high prices: "Veronica la Franca dal Proemio/che col so rasonar, che e tanto af-fabile,/svoda la borsa speso a qualche Boêmio...," and with the most obscene verses Maffeo goes on to say how Veronica would ask five or six scudi only to kiss, and fifty to render her best favours. A point of significant interest is raised by Ettore Bonora, Critica e Letteratura nel Cinquecento (Torino, 1964). Bonora points out that in the same catalogue appears the name of Veronica's mother: "Paula Franca, a Santa Maria Formosa, pieza lei medema, scudi 2." Why then are Franco's major critics so uncertain as to her mother's profession? One cannot understand their silence about Paula's appearance in the catalogue. Tassini published the catalogue himself, but not a word on this matter! Can it be that he did not even notice? Or could it be that he obviously thought Paula was someone else? Yet Paula Franca is there, on the list, with the same amount of money, and living in the same "place of business" as that of Veronica. The only difference is, Franca (with a final 'a') as opposed to Franco (in Veronica's case). And this could be explained as a consequence of the Venetian custom to have the family name agree with the first name. It should be noted that Veronica Franco herself sometimes wrote her last name - FRANCA. But another question then comes to mind: Why does Paula, supposing she is Veronica's mother, use her husband's last name while Veronica uses her own? After all, Veronica had married Panizza, and even if not with him any longer (as we know she was not as of 1564) could she not still use his name? Frugoni, in op.eit., as we have noticed, also thinks Franco's mother was a courtesan, and so does Croce, in op.cit. There is a modern edition of Il Catalogo etc., namely: Il Catalogo delle principali e onorate cortigiane
This volume has an important bibliography and a relevant study entitled: *Il libertinaggio sotto la Dominante*.

11 Graf, p.296

12 Veronica Franco, *Lettere*, (Napoli, 1949), p.XI, Croce mentions a few famous courtesans and the alti personaggi to whom the works were dedicated. Our Veronica, of course, is included.


15 Tintoretto's portrait of Veronica is, unfortunately, lost. Croce, in *op.cit.*, along with his erudite friend Angelo Tursi, gives a very convincing account of the iconographical situation, and finally presents the portrait prepared for Veronica's *Terze rime*, but later tells us that this portrait was prepared in 1576 "...inciso in rame e contornato dalla scritta: Veronica Franca ann. XXIII. MDLXXVI, che recava nell'alto l'impresa di una fiaccola ardente col motto Agitata crescit e, nella parte inferiore, uno stemma con quattro stelle in una fascia e tre piccoli monti". (p.79). Croce accuses Bartolomeo Gamba for having misled many scholars after him (including Graf and Tassini) by publishing in 1826 a portrait erroneously presented as that of Veronica Franco. Indeed, Graf judged it to be "il più sincero forse..." (Graf, *op.cit.*, p.296). Croce also clarifies that if in 1576 (the time of the portrait) Veronica is said to be twenty-three years of age, that is not to be taken literally. Veronica, of course, was at this time thirty, and not twenty-three. This might explain, Croce suggests, the reason why this frontispiece was eventually suppressed; that is, because of the insults, adverse comments, and mockeries which her false age plus her verbal boasts must have produced from Veronica's enemies. And to strengthen this possibility Croce emphasizes the two sonnets which were cruelly written against Veronica a propos of the 1576 portrait. On p. 87, Croce writes: "Il ritratto del 1576 non ha niente della cortigiana, che traspare, o par che traspaia, dall'altro del Gamba, ma presenta una gentile e seria giovane donna, senza ghiribizzose pettinature della moda d'allora, senza doppi ciuffi e chiome svolazzanti né sovrapposta corona, senza veste lussuosa e gran colletto ricamato e rialzato, col petto non scoperto troppo in giù."
Incidentally, on the iconography see also Emanuele Antonio Cicogna, Inscrizioni Veneziane, V (Venezia, 1842), pp.421-422. An interesting statement is forwarded by Adolfo Venturi, Storia dell'arte italiana, IX, iv (Milano, 1929), p.421: "1574 - Ritratto di Veronica Franco, eseguito probabilmente subito dopo la partenza di Enrico III di Francia, che conobbe la cortigiana durante la sua permanenza veneziana: l'opera fu inviata al Re, a Parigi, e non è oggi rintracciata." Venturi is referring to Tintoretto, but does not say how he acquired the information; that is, it is known that the king took a portrait with him on leaving Veronica's house, but only received a letter and two sonnets from her following his departure.

16 (Lanciano, 1912), p.5.

This is a point emphasized by all who wrote on Veronica Franco, or even on the general phenomenon of courtiership in the Cinquecento, as it, of course, demonstrates the enormous popularity and renown which these courtesans possessed. It must have been an especially memorable occasion for and a great tribute to Franco.

17 Michel de Montaigne, Journal de Voyage en Italie (Paris, 1946), p. 173. It is interesting to note the following reference to this event in "Véronique Franco, Henri III et Montaigne", Bulletin du Bibliophile et du Bibliothécaire (Paris, 1886), p.445: "Elle devait être instruite exactement de l'arrivée des étrangers de distinction, et connaître au moins de réputation Montaigne dont le grand ouvrage avait déjà eu deux éditions. Mais Montaigne, souffrant de la gravelle, ne se soucia pas de faire l'Essai auquel on semblait le convier, et se contenta de donner deux écus au messager de la 'gentilfemme'. This comment is very penetrating, especially that "...auquel on semblait le convier...", in that Veronica's purpose seems to be demonstrated. It is indeed no great risk to assume that Veronica sent Montaigne her Letters probably hoping that the famous French essayist would write a chapter on her as well.

18 Scipione Bargagli, I trattenimenti di Scipion Bargagli (Venezia, 1587). For Bargagli, it seems, the trattenimenti are more or less social games where the most civilized (and this reminds one of Della Casa's aim) show off, in good manner as well as in good words; the courtier must outdo his rivals in order to win the lady's favours: "Et quanto più in esse maggior dichiara la bellezza, la
gratia e la virtù di sì fatta donna; più si confessa vero debitore, e fedel soggetto di quella..." (p.51). And the ladies and courtesans, too, were called upon not only to appreciate silently, as perhaps a Beatrice would do, their lovers' verbally elongated sighs but to express themselves liberally and with good taste. Marco Foscarini, in op.cit., p.46, expresses his undaunted belief that many women "...fiorissero nella facoltà poetica e negli studi liberali, ma per solo fine di riuscir gentili, pregiate nel conversare, senza curarsi di acquistarne perpetua fama." One, however, would not think that Franco could fall in this category. On the contrary, her strong spirit of individualism and her profession seem to push her beyond that end.

20Frugoni, op.cit., pp.44-45, "...là la grazia della Signora suggerisce tra i suoi ammiratori conversazioni briosse, che vanno facili dalle questioni linguistiche alla casistica amorosa. Oppure Veronica legge poesie o invita al gioco o al racconto, o canta o toca qualche strumento. Poi la brigata si scioglie e la bella Veronica rimane col suo preferito o con chi quella volta ha richiesto maggiori intimità."

21Foscarini, op.cit., p.40. The author also writes: "So bene che il Muzio nella sua Arte poetica nomina per maestri del buon parlare il Bembo, il Gabriele, ed il Veniero...". Foscarini also informs us that four Veniers, namely Luigi, Domenico, Maffeo, and Lorenzo were mainly responsible for perfecting the Venetian dialect, and that particularly Domenico and Maffeo were excellent translators of Latin. We know Franco was very close to the Venier family, hence we can see how she would profit from their vast and varied knowledge. For more accurate information on the Veniers, see Bodo L.O. Richter, "Petrarchism and Anti-Petrarchism among the Veniers", Forum Italicum, vol. III, no. 1, 1969.

22Op.cit., p.446. Amongst all the literary foreigners in Venice who frequented this Academy, the following men of letters were also regular members or frequent visitors: Federigo Badoaro, Girolamo Molino, Jacopo Zane, Giorgio Gradenigo, Celio Magno, Bernardo Tasso, Dionigi Atanagi, Speron Speroni, Girolamo Ruscelli, Girolamo Muzio, Anton Giacomo Corso, Gio Batt. Amalteo, Girolamo Parabosco. No doubt, our Veronica was very often amongst such talented figures.

24 Bruno Migliorini, Storia della lingua italiana (Firenze, 1960), p.378. Richter, in op. cit., reminds us that Bernardo Tasso, acknowledging Domenico Venier's greatness and at the same time misfortune, once wrote in a sonnet: "VENIERO giaci, a tua forte ventura/Assai utile altrui, poco a te stesso;/Ahi fato iniquo e rio...". Incidentally, Venier was confined almost always to bed as he suffered from gout.


26 Rowdon, op. cit., p.92.

27 Cfr. Dazzi, op. cit.

28 There exists an apocryphal will (1573) of Lodovico Ramberti which is not very pleasant in regards to Franco. It cannot have been really Ramberti who wrote this, since in an earlier will (1570) he had shown his true affection for Veronica. Both Tassini, in op. cit., pp.119-123, and Cicogna, in op. cit., vol. VI, pp.884-885, publish the second will, although Cicogna has only parts of it. Tassini also publishes Ramberti's first will, that of 1570 (pp.115-116). In this second and false will, Veronica is cruelly ridiculed, to put it mildly. Ramberti, really the impostor, is "...con qualche pericolo del corpo sì per l'ettà mia, come per li molti dissordini che fasso con la mia dilett.ma Mad.na Veronica Franco...(...) El mio buon letto de piuma...el lasso a Mad.na Veronica perché a quel tempo la ghe ne porave haver gran bisogno, con patto che la nel possa né vender, né impegnar, né dar a Zudai...". Cesareo, in op. cit., p.9: "In un tempo che così libero era il costume, così sboccato il linguaggio, e così furibonda l'invidia de'godimenti, si può credere bene che la mordacia d'un qualunque figuro a cui fosse stato ricusato un favore o qualche zecchino, non risparmiasse né uomini, né gentil-donne né fanciulle...".

29 Cfr. Tassini, op. cit., and Graf, op. cit. The accusations against her, publica meretrice, include all sorts of illegal and sacrilegious doings, from diabolical invocations to prohibited games and happenings at her home. She was also accused of saying that she was now married, now widowed, hiding thus her true profession, so
that she could wear jewels which were by law prohibited to women of her condition. It is interesting to note that her accusers were her son's preceptor and two other persons, apparently Franco's servants. This gives an indication of the style of life Veronica enjoyed.


32 Beccari, op.cit., p.7. This is evident in the poetess's second will (Tassini, p.113) where she says: "...in questo caso voglio che il mio residuo sii dato a due donzelle da bon per il suo maritar, che se si ritroverà due meretrice, che volessero lassar la cativa vita e maritarsi, o monacharsi, in questo caso sii abrazado dette due meretrice, et non le donzelle.". But Veronica's gentle spirit is also already evident in her first will of 1564 (Tassini, p.109): "...et sia maridade tante fie donzelle per l'anima mia a venticinque ducati per una...".


34 Graf, op.cit., p.343. Graf and Tassini, as well as others after them, following Cicogna's conjecture (op.cit., vol. VI,p.884) cite, as a major document of Franco's conversion, a poem which evidently belonged to Veronica Gambara. The sonnet begins: "Ite, pensier fallaci, evana speme...". Croce, in op.cit., p.XXX, and Bonora, in op.cit., p.172, rightly remind us of this mistake. Riccardo Scrivano, however, in Cultura e Letteratura nel Cinquecento (Roma, 1966), p.220, actually cites the sonnet in question as Veronica's "...mutata sostanza umana...". He does enter Croce's edition of the Letters in his bibliography; thus, one would suppose, he certainly did not agree with Croce's interpretation. The same mistake is repeated in Lirici del Cinquecento, ed. Daniele Ponchiroli (Torino, 1958), pp. 502-503. However, even on this point there still remains some doubt. For instance Francesco Flora, Storia della letteratura italiana, III (Verona, 1956), pp.49-50, is not about to give in to Croce's correction by suggesting that the sonnet was erroneously attributed to Gambara. One has the impression that Flora is unable to concede his mistake in the earlier edition of his work. However,
Dolci, in *op.cit.*. p. 1404, also enters the sonnet in question as one of Franco's examples of reconciliation with God. He does not however express any pros or cons as to the authenticity of the sonnet. Of course, both Beccari, *op.cit.*, and Abdelkader Salza, in his edition of the *RIME* (Bari, 1913), enter the sonnet in their editions of Franco's *Rime* and sonnets.

35 Cfr. Cicogna, *op.cit.*, V, pp.409-417; Tassini, and Graf. In her Memoriale, published by Cicogna,*op.cit.*, pp.414-415, Franco writes: "Molte donne sono, le quali o per povertà o per senso o per altra causa, tenendo vita disonestà, componte alcune volte dal Spirito di sua Divina Maestà, e pensando al misero fine, al qual per tal via sogliono il più pervenire, rispetto così al corpo, come all'anima loro si ritrarebbero facilmente dal mal fare, se avessero luoco onesto, dove potessero ripararsi e con sui figlioli sostentarsi...". Later Franco continues; "...le propie madre ridutte in bisogno vendeno secretamente la verginità de le proprie innocenti figliole, incaminandole per la medesima via del peccato, che esse hanno tenuto con perdita di tante anime, scandalo del mondo, a grande offesa della Maestà de Dio...".

36 *op.cit.*, p.344.

37 On Franco's works, fortune, as well as bibliography, see Dolci, *op.cit.*, p.1412; Cicogna, *op.cit.*, vol. 5, pp.245, 422-425, 655, vol.6, p.884 (this last one concerning that doubtful and discussed sonnet); Scrivano, *op.cit.*, pp.223-228; Beccari, *op.cit.*, pp.11-13.

38 Cfr. Croce's preface, *op.cit.*, p.XXXVIII. All subsequent quotations from Franco's *Letters* will derive from this edition. It is interesting to note that Luigi d'Este was the brother of the Duke Alfonso II, and he was a neurotic, a troublemaker, a dissolute and possibly worse. Actually Veronica Franco might have calculated all this, being the intelligent and resourceful woman she was. As Croce says a propos of Alexander VI and a possible tribute of Tullia d'Aragona, Luigi d'Este was the last person to be shocked, while others might have been, by the fact that a cortegiana, however onorata, was dedicating to him her collection of letters. One must remember also that in the 1580's the position of Ferrara towards Rome and the
Inquisition was quite different from what it was in Venice. However, Veronica might have chosen Luigi d'Este, since he was illustissimo indeed, according to his birth rights, while reverendissimo he was not, according to his actions.

39 Croce, p. XXIV.

40 There exists, no doubt a paradox in Veronica's life. She seems willing to accept her condition; perhaps she has no choice but to accept it. The mere fact that she is a cortigiana onesta or onorata implies that paradox.

41 Dolci, op.cit., p. 1404.

42 Russo, op.cit., p.47. Dolci, op.cit., and Scrivano op.cit., would also very strongly subscribe to this.

43 Croce, op.cit., p. 4. In the dedicatory letter, by her allusion to the "...impresa di maggior espressione...", Veronica might possibly be indicating her desire to begin writing an epic poem, a poem of which nothing is known, except for a word by Muzio Manfredi. In 1591, Manfredi, ignorant of Veronica's death of that same year, in expressing gratitude for Franco's opinion of his Semiramis, mentions Veronica's undertaking and wishes her success, urging her to completion.


47 Lett. IV, p.11.


49 Lett. V, p.15.

50 Lett. VI, p.16.
Despite the praises of many, during the XVI century the cortigiane in general and therefore even the cortigiane letterate or onorate, were frequently attacked. As we mentioned before, Aretino satirizes the cortegiane, and the same Sperone Speroni does not hesitate to expose them. This is easily documented by Speroni's Orazione contra le cortigiane, in: Sperone Speroni, Opere (Venezia, 1740) III, pp.191-244. Avarice is one of the more frequent charges against the cortigiane. One might remember also the ferocious, but still quite witty, couplets written by Speroni against Gaspara Stampa and her sister Cassandra: "Chi è più divina/ Cassandra o Gasparina?/ Chi è più landra/ Gaspara o Cassandra?".

Graf, op. cit., p.348.

Lett. XIX, p.32.

Lett. XXI, p.35.


"Lettere di cortigiana onesta", Nel giardino di Candido (Firenze, 1950), pp.110-111.
65 Lett. XXII, p.38.


70 *Ibid*, p.596.

71 Lett. XXXV, p.53.

72 Lett. XXV, XXVII.

73 Lett. XXX, pp.48-49.

74 Lett. XXXII, p.51.

75 Lett. XXXVI, p.54.

76 Lett. XXXVIII, p.56.

77 *Op.cit.*, pp.XXIII-XXIV.

78 Lett. XXXIX, pp.56-57.

79 Lett. XL, p.58.

80 Lett. XLI, p.59.


82 Lett. XLIII, p.61.

83 Lett. XLIV, p.62.

84 Lett. XLVIII, p.66.
85 Lett. XLVII, pp. 64-65.

86 Lett. XLIX, p.67. The work could be the one mentioned by Muzio Manfredi (Cfr. footnote 43).

87 Lett. L, p.68.

88 Croce, op.cit., p.69.

89 Scrivano, op.cit., p.218.
Veronica Franco dedicated her Terze rime to the “serenissimo prencipe signor e padron mio colendissimo il signor Duca di Mantova e di Monferrato.”¹ The edition, "...elegante, in formato di quarto e con bei caratteri corsivi..." presents no indication of time.² But at the end of the dedicatory letter Veronica writes:

Di Venezia, a' 15 di novembre MDLXXV.³

Franco's Terze rime are composed of twenty-five capitoli, or chapters, of which seven are directed to the poetess by an unknown author or authors.⁴ It is interesting to note the arrangement of these seven capitoli in the ensemble of the work. They are the first, the fourth, the sixth, the seventh, the ninth, the eleventh, and the fourteenth. They all invariably form a laudatory choir that exalts the beauty of our poetess. They all long for her love, a love which is often nothing but a desire for her favours.

There is no doubt that Veronica arranged, or had
someone else arrange for her, her *Terze rime* in a calculated manner, as with her *Lettere*, to satisfy her literary ambitions and abide by the literary canons of her time. What was this arrangement? If we look at the poems by the other authors in her volume we notice that they all justify their numerical as well as their thematic position. Veronica's *canzoniere* begins with a work by an author whose love for her is not returned. It is almost as if Veronica wished to be introduced to her readers. The first capitolo serves not only as an introduction but it forms an integral part of her history. It describes the setting, the situation, and it prepares the reader for the grand entrance of the protagonist. But when the sensuous heroine appears, the reader already knows what to expect. In fact, the reader is already made conscious that the heroine, not fictitious but real in every respect is

...donna di vera ed unica beltade,  
ed di costumi adorna e di virtude,  
con senil senno in giovenil etade! 5

And her beauty can only be matched by her intelligence:

E così 'l vanto avete tra le belle  
di dotta, e tra le dotte di bellezza,  
e d'ambo superate e queste e quelle... 6
Also in the introductory capitolo one finds the theme of the canzoniere: the world of a cortigiana letterata. In this realistic situation of a cortigiana, our poetess must see written, in the following verses, the truth of her destiny:

A Febo è degno che si sodisfaccia dal vostro ingegno; ma da la beltate a Venere non meno si compiaccia: le tante da lei grazie a voi donate spendere devete in buon uso, sì come di quelle, che vi diede Apollo, fate: con queste eternerete il vostro nome, non men che con gli inchiostri; e lenjo e infermo farete il tempo, e le sue forze dome.

Thus the curtain is opened. Our poetess, in answer to this admirer, as we shall see later, makes her appearance in medias res.

The relevancy and the continuity between the poems of the unknown author or authors, and those of Veronica, are maintained as the collection progresses. The fourth capitolo, anonymous, is in response to Veronica's third. Equally, the sixth is also in response to Veronica's fifth. Then the process is again reversed with capitoli VII, IX, and XI, to which Veronica answers with VIII, X, and XII respectively. Finally, the method is once more reversed with capitolo XIV by an unknown author serving as
an answer to Veronica's XIII. This poetic correspondence, seven poems by admirers and seven by Veronica, takes up well over half of Veronica's collection. This is an important aspect because it seems that Veronica desired to have her situation, as a cortigiana as well as a poetess, well established before she could proceed safely on her own (capitoli XV to XXV). And what could establish this real situation, and one that she was proud of in her individuality, more effectively than a presentation of poetic praises by her admirers? Yes, admirers, in the plural. It would seem indeed logical that our Veronica would resort to presenting poetic "love letters" of more than one of her lovers if she was to make her point well. Was her old friend and counselor Domenico Venier involved in the poetic scheme, after having corrected her poetry? In an article on Domenico Venier, Edoardo Taddeo informs us that:

Il Venier non raccolse mai in volume le sue rime. Ciò comporta non solo l'assenza di un sonetto introduttivo-ricapitolativo rivolto ai lettori, modulo largamente diffuso, sull'esempio del "Voi ch'ascoltate" e del bembiano "Piansi e cantai", fra i rimatori cinquecenteschi; ma anche l'abbandono dell'idea stessa di 'canzoniere', cioè di un libro calcolato nelle sue parti e ordinato in vista di un vicenda esemplare o comunque coerente, idea che era stata rimessa in onore dal Bembo e che trovava ancora numerosi adepti.
This gives us a specific indication of the literary custom of that time. No doubt, our Veronica, with her great literary ambitions, was one of the "adepti". And even though Venier never collected his poems in a volume, he certainly did not refrain from ever giving advice to the friends who had need of his remarkable literary talents. One must only remember the previously cited praise by Bernardo Tasso, as well as praise by people such as Parabosco, Varchi, Manuzio, Aretino, Caro and Molino to understand the honour and esteem with which Domenico Venier was regarded. Veronica was undoubtedly aware of Domenico's intellectual prowess for she, as we have noted before, was one of the regular members of his academy, a fact which added considerably to her literary stature. As we can conjecture from some of her letters, as well as from one or two of her capitoli, Veronica no doubt had captured the attention and sympathy of Domenico Venier who imparted to her a considerable degree of time and knowledge. With this relationship existing we could perhaps even conceive of how Veronica's capitoli, how her literary undertakings, could have possibly been for her little more than homework to be handed in to her teacher. Daniele Ponchiroli in speaking of the rimatrici of the sixteenth century believes that:
nessuna...è completamente comprensibile senza l'"antefatto" bembiano, e alcune di esse senza la presenza di una specie di 'partner' o collocutore. Così Vittoria Colonna si spiega meglio se messa di fronte alla poesia di Michelangelo e di Galeazzo di Tarsia; Tullia d'Aragona e la Battiferri se messe a confronto con Benedetto Varchi; Veronica Franco se non ci si dimentica di Domenico Veniero.

However much Venier might have helped, and he undoubtedly did to some degree, our poetess still remains an original and refreshing personality in a setting predominantly petrarchista-bembiano. One should note at this point that Domenico Venier's cenacoli consisted mainly of petrarchists and bembisti. Even so Veronica's originality is not diminished for in her is present the coexistence of two elements, mastery of the poetic techniques and sentiment. What do they imply? Simply the energy of Veronica's passionate individuality within the necessity of an artificial frame. In broader terms, they imply the coexistence of an artistic expression and at the same time a literary one. In Veronica, her autobiography dictates the spontaneity, the alternative being conventional themes already in Petrarch. Her autobiography is the setting of her own experience. Criticism has invariably emphasized this spontaneity in Veronica Franco, a spontaneity which seems to flow naturally from an energetic
individuality which, not only her profession, but her age as well provided her with. Along with this passionate vivacity, criticism has rightly seen a certain lack of literary polish in our poetess. She is perhaps the one female figure who does not fully respond to petrarchism. On the other hand, there is a definite attempt on her part to appear to respond to that literary tradition. Was this attempt completely hers? Or was her teacher, immersed as he was in petrarchism, of help in this attempt? Luigi Baldacci insists on the originality of Veronica Franco who, according to him:

...dal petrarchismo fu lontanissima non solo di spirito, ma nella stessa forma metrica che preferì.

Of course, Baldacci is correct in a sense for, not only Veronica but perhaps all the so-called petrarchists, including Bembo, were not always faithful to the petrarchan spirit as we have explained in the introduction. It was through the imitation of Petrarch's language that they achieved their art, and it is perhaps here, in her ability to absorb that language and recast it in a personal manner, that Veronica's originality best comes to the fore. Ferruccio Ulivi finds it necessary to distinguish
between:

l'imitazione intesa come lezione dedotta da autori precedenti (che solo col Bembo assurge al grado di vera e propria dottrina), e l'imitazione come concetto teoretico attinto da Platone e Aristotele. 13

It is highly improbable however that Veronica adhered to either one of these precepts. It seems very clear from reading her poetry that our poetess had only one doctrine to follow, and that was her individuality, as a woman of letters and as a courtesan. This is the reason why her Terze rime, as her Lettere, bear the heavy imprint of autobiography; especially the former:

...le quali, se non travagliate ed eleganti, sono certo spontanee e vivaci ed efficaci. 14

It is Veronica's taste for direct truth and honesty in her verses that convinces Baldacci of our poetess' distance from Venier's help:

Comunque sia, che in essi si debba riconoscere la presenza in qualche modo determinante del Venier è da escludere quando si raffronti il gelo letterario del primo col vigore e la verità della Franco. 15
And one would have to agree with this statement, for Venier undoubtedly helped Franco, but he was not a determining factor in her *rime*. One cannot help forming the impression that Venier would agree, out of friendship, to correct Veronica's verses only as regards outstanding errors. Like a kind and understanding teacher he would always know how far he could go with his pupil. He would realize that Veronica's forte was not in her form but in her sentiment, but he would perhaps do enough to bring the mastery of the form up to the acceptable level of his time. In Venier's own poetic works:

Il testo petrarchesco, se non è per Domenico Venier oggetto di un culto e di un'imitazione 'assoluta', è costantemente assunto come paradigma di linguaggio e d'altra parte sottoposto ad un sottile lavoro di appropriazione ed elaborazione, che si può rivolgere agli argomenti, ma che mira soprattutto a certi moduli formali.16

One can perhaps see a glimpse of this preoccupation with form in Veronica's work. The unabridged song of her spontaneous sensuality, which is inherent in her individuality, is precariously placed in that need for formal literary appearance which was still dominant in perpetuating Bembo's doctrines. This is actually the main issue, and it may be
here that Franco's originality again shines; our poetess is only herself in her spontaneous and sensual individuality.

We noted before that there was no shame at that time in having one's literary output looked over by a known literary authority. We have also noted that Veronica's character and personality provided her with an ethical standard which, even taking into account her profession, would not allow her to accept any irregular procedures that would substantially alter her work.

We are almost certain that Veronica sent her poetry to Venier to be corrected. What could a man of letters of Venier's status do? He had to work with what he had in front of him. He had to be forever discreet so as to ascertain that Veronica's poetry remained, not only essentially, but almost totally, hers. He could obviously not alter Veronica's sentiments or situations. All he could do was perhaps advance improvements from a linguistic point of view, or from the point of view of style. But much as he could change Veronica's poetry in its formal aspect, Venier could only go so far, perhaps not far enough. Baldacci makes an extremely interesting point which might indirectly complement this theory:

Bisogna dire che il Salza vide bene e la
precarietà dell'aspetto formale di questa poesia e d'altra parte la forza del sentimento quasi in un'ostentazione di antipetrarchismo: sicché per la Franco resulterà decisamente invertita una formula di troppo facile e indiscriminata applicazione per la lirica del Cinquecento, che pone a riscontro la compiutezza formale e l'inanità di un giuoco privo di reale partecipazione.  

Veronica's powerful feelings tell us that very often in her poetry the poetess' participation is real, and not superimposed. If she failed to attain this "compiutezza formale", perhaps it is not all her fault. Scrivano tells us that:

La poesia della Franco ha chiaramente come fondamento una doppia dimensione di sfogo e di esercizio...

She gave vent to her sentiments and feelings with a force unequalled by her female contemporaries. Her exercise in rhetoric was not as forceful or convincing. Her friend and teacher, Venier, pleased with the poetess' powers of expression and feeling, must have given her good marks. His artificial manner must have yielded to the reality and spontaneity of Veronica's passionate sighs and sorrows, even though his duty and taste impelled him to make some formal corrections. All this, no doubt, falls under the category of conjectures. But one sincerely wonders whether Venier
helped or not, and assuming he did, whether Veronica's poetry would have still remained poetry had he not. The truth of the matter is that, ambitious as she might have been, her fame as a poetess was quite well established:

Veniva richiesta di componimenti da ammiratori; suoi sonetti comparivano in raccolte diverse; il suo giudizio era accolto con grata devozione.²⁰

With such a reputation it becomes even more clear why Veronica would be preoccupied with her literary status and would thus concur with her noble and esteemed patron and friend, Domenico Venier.

We have already mentioned the fact that Franco's Terze rime are essentially autobiographical, and to this purpose Russo contemplates:

Veronica Franco è una cortigiana dichiarata, ed essa stessa nella sua poesia non cerca nemmeno di dissimulare tale suo stato...²¹

In answer to Marco Venier's praises for her beauty and intelligence and to his longing for her charms, Veronica wittily writes that only after he demonstrates virtuous qualities will she concede her amorous gifts:
...e, s'a Febo sì grata mi tenete
per lo compor, ne l'opere amorose
grata a Venere più mi troverete.
Certe proprietati in me nascose
vi scovrirò d'infinita dolcezza,
che prosa o verso altrui mai non espose,
con questo, che mi diate la certezza
del vostro amor con altro che con lodi,
ch'esser da tai delusa io sona avezza...

Strangely enough, Graf fails to see what Veronica wants of messer Marco. By affinity with her Lettere, it seems probable that the poetess seeks virtuous qualities in her admirers: "De le virtuti il mio cor s'innamora". Given her great desire for culture Veronica could likely imply that the admirer produce some tangible proof of his culture. Already in capitolo II which is, of course, her own opening poem, Veronica declares her profession of cortigiana:

Così dolce e gustevole divento,
quando mi trovo con persona in letto,
da cui amata e gradita mi sento,
che quel mio piacer vince ogni diletto

... ... ...

e 'l mio cantar e 'l mio scriver in carte
s'oblia da chi mi prova in quella guisa,
ch'a'suoi seguaci Venere comparte.

This declaration prompts Frugoni to note:
In the third capitolo, far from her loved one and from her dear Venice, Veronica sighs, longing to return:

Questa la tua fedel Franca ti scrive, dolce, gentil, suo valoroso amante, la qual, lunge da te, misera vive.

The following terzine must have pleased Venier for in them the allusions to Petrarchism are evident. These terzine reveal a close dependence upon the type of imagery and verbal expressions more typical of the Petrarchan tradition:

...e Progne e Filomena il tristo canto accompagnaron de le mie parole, facendomi tenor dì e notte intanto. Le fresche rose, i gigli e le viole arse ha 'l vento de' caldi miei sospiri, e impallidir pietoso ho visto il sole...

One question must of necessity be raised again. Was Domenico Venier involved in these verses or was Veronica totally responsible for them, especially if these, in particular, were directed to Venier? This tone does not last for any
considerable length, for even though Veronica can continue to see "...del mio duol fin le pietre lagrimare" she readily returns to her real situation and, well aware of this, she can promise her lover the joys of sexual pleasure in which she is so adept.

One would think that in most cases Veronica is sincere. Her love and desire for "virtù", as we have seen from her letters, surely point to this sincerity. "Virtù" is indeed the theme in her capitolo to the loved one who is "...pien di virtù infinita ed immortale...". The word "virtù" is in fact used no less than five times in this relatively short capitolo. As Graf points out, capitolo VII reminds us of the prestigious status which the cortigiana, such as Franco, held at that time. Veronica is worshipped with hyperboles and superlatives:

Se vinta da costei Venere è in prova
e se Minerva in scienza e in virtute
a costei molto inferior si trova...

... ... ...

Per l'universo l'ali stendi, e vola
di cerchio in cerchio, Amor, e sì vedrai
che questa il pregio a tutte l'altre invola...  

But she can easily handle such extravagant praises. Her great beauty must have taught her at an early age how to
manoeuvre such flattering remarks. No doubt she fell victim to them at one time, but now as an accomplished courtesan, she can accept them in a different perspective. She can utilize them to supplement her literary ambitions, as she is indeed doing by purposely including them in her canzoniere. Her answer tries to placate her lover: he can only hope in the future since she is presently in love with an unworthy man whose love can only make her suffer. But can our Veronica really fall in love? The manner in which she can rationalize these loves of hers certainly points to a negative answer. There is always that certain realism of her situation, a realism that proceeds:

...a volte temperato da liriche effusioni di malinconia o di gioia quasi infantili, a creare l'interesse per questa poesia, che, pur rimanendo estranea alla più tipica tradizione petrarchistica, tuttavia conserva di essa la dignità formale.34

Speaking of the dual aspect of love, platonic and carnal, so prominent in the Cinquecento, Luigi Tonelli concludes that:

Naturamente, gli uomini retti sapevano far differenza tra una Vittoria Colonna e una Tullia...35
But, Tonelli continues, when these men had to demonstrate their base passions for Tullia d'Aragona, for instance, they would dissimulate them through subterfuge, under platonic masks:

E, naturalmente, l'etèra faceva di tutto per rendere possibili tali coonestamenti e dissimulazioni.36

But with Veronica one cannot help having the impression that she is sincere in her poetry.37 Even though she is flattered by her numerous admirers, Veronica can wittily keep them at bay, with flattery, with promises, with cortesia. To a man whose love for her she cannot at the moment return, our poetess can so elegantly write:

Ben sarebbe compita la mia gioia, s'io potessi cangiar nel vostro amore quel ch'in altrui con diletto m'annoia.

... ... ...

che v'acquietiate meco è ben dovere: forse ch'a tempo di miglior ventura ve ne farò buon effetto vedere.38

There is no doubt that Veronica could pass from one love to another with much ease. Her sincerity seems to emanate not from true love but from an affection which is implicit in her nature. She is an affectionate soul who
happens to be a cortigiana. We are reminded that in her poetry:

...Veronica Franco non esce dalla sua vera vita... (...)Le sue parole non s'impegnano per la vita, ma per un attimo, come in un volo le effimere farfalle...pure è sincera in quell'attimo, come comporta la memoria puramente sensitiva di una donna che non può dare ai suoi atti il peso di un passato che lega il futuro.  

In a capitolo directed to one of her saddened lovers, Veronica, "...invaghita d'un uomo a lei caro su tutti..." tells him that the reason for her absence from her beloved Venice is the following:

So che la lontananza il suo furore mitiga; e quando tu, del viver sazio, pur vogli amando uscir di vita fuore, te, con quest'occhi, e me insieme non strazio.  

To a rebuked lover who is aware that she is in Verona with another man and who passionately longs for her return:

Invero una tu sei, Verona bella, poi che la mia Veronica gentile con l'unica bellezza sua t'abbella...

Veronica suggests that he write the praises of Venice, "...d'Adria il felice almo ricetto...", and with civiltà
scolds him, for

Senza discorrer poeticamente,
se nza usar l'iperbolica figura,
ch'è pur troppo bugiarda apertamente,
si poteva impiegare la vostra cura
in lodando Vinegia, singolare
meraviglia e stupor de la natura. 43

Veronica's spontaneity can also be seen in her violent moods. For a moment, in a singular episode in the thirteenth capitolo, her spontaneous response to a lover's injuries endangers her consistent cortesia:

Non più parole: ai fatti, in campo, a l'armi,
ch'io voglio, risoluta di morire
da sì grave molestia liberarmi. 44

And with a move that would no doubt earn her a medal of honour from today's advocates of women's liberation, Veronica challenges the malefactor to a duel. But a cortigiana is a cortigiana, and Veronica is quite willing to end this insult by a different battle, one of a voluptuous nature:

Forse nel letto ancor ti seguirei,
e quivi, teco guerreggiando stesa,
in alcun modo non ti cederei:
per soverchiar la tua sì indegna offesa
ti verrei sopra, e nel contrasto ardita,
scaldandoti ancor tu ne la difesa,
teco morrei d'egual colpo ferita. 45
How can her lover refuse such a sweet challenge? He will do battle with her, but he is so overjoyed that he is not sure of her real intentions:

Aspetterò che voi me n'accertiate.46

With capitolo XV, as we have noted, Veronica feels that her canzoniere has had sufficient preamble for her to proceed solely on her own talents. She herself and her admirers have demonstrated her great beauty and learning. Her inclination for "virtù", as well as, paradoxically, her profession, have become very evident. Her individuality, free spirit, and spontaneity have appeared equally clear. And now, her credentials well established, she can venture the rest of the way on her own in order to achieve that literary status which would transcend her condition.

Veronica's loves are many but some seem to require particular attention. Even though not constant in her passion, Veronica nevertheless appears at times engulfed in its flames:

...che l'amore,
ch'io porto ad uom gentile a maraviglia
mi confonde la vita e toglie il core...47
And perhaps it is the Petrarchan "...e pietra morta in viva pietra seggio..." that forces Graf to comment:

La descrizione di queste pene amorose è fatta con molta vivezza, e, salvo le esagerazioni di rigore, non senza accento di verità.

From such passionate moments Veronica can pass to very lucid preoccupations concerning her injured condition and in defense of womanhood as a whole where she appears as a "...donna esperta e ardimentosa e variamente colta." In turn injuring her malefactor by recognizing his "mal uso" Veronica goes on to celebrate the beauty of the feminine love:

Data è dal ciel la feminil bellezza, perch'ella sia felicitate in terra di qualunque uom conosce gentilezza.

And then she prepares to fight him, perhaps on behalf of all women, in any manner he may desire:

La spada, che 'n man vostra rade e fora, de la lingua volgar veneziana, s'a voi piace d'usar, piace a me ancora: e, se volete entrar ne la toscana, scegliete voi la seria o la burlesca, che l'una e l'altra è a me facile e piana.
No doubt the preceding was directed at Maffeo Venier, who, as we have already seen, was responsible for many cruel verses against our poetess. Speaking of Veronica's false passions, Frugoni reminds us that:

Anche a una amatrice serena e facile come lei poteva sempre capitare che un amore non si concludesse per così dir al punto giusto.

In fact, having surprised her lover praising another woman, Veronica, even as an accomplished courtesan, cannot refrain from giving vent to jealousy. It is her spontaneous and sensuous nature, her real situation, which, although expressed in a form strung together with some of the more frequent commonplaces in the Petrarchan phraseology, epitomizes her poetry:

Di gelosia non ho 'l pensier mai scemo; tal ch'avampando in freddo verno al ghiaccio, nel mezzo de le fiamme aggelo e tremo...

Capitolo XIX remains one of Franco's most memorable. Her undeclared love for a religious person, now, after many years, turns into mere affection. But she cannot help wondering how it would have been:
Forse sarei stata lieta e felice,
nel potervi goder a mio talento,
e forse in ciò sarei stata infelice.  

And she placidly reminisces that once, perhaps in church
during one of his sermons, he enjoyed looking at her:

...e, nel contar il ben del ciel sovrano,
v'affisaste a guardarmi, e mi stendeste,
or larghe or giunte, l'una e l'altra mano...

Graf readily moves to see in this another sign of Veronica's
much discussed, but not proven, conversion. One would
think that Graf drew the parallel of Christ and Mary
Magdalene:

Egli, che è salito tant'alto, le porga
la mano, ajuti a salire anche lei. Re-
spira e sospiro in tutto il capitolo un'
anima bisognosa di guida e di conforto...

Out of this lost love Veronica now seeks a relationship
based on "cortesia" and "buona civiltà", another of her
consistent attempts at cherishing "virtù". But, again, she
falls victim to the momentary fires of passion and jealousy
when she learns of her lover's nocturnal absences.

Her love, "...che essa non sentiva di certo petrar-
chevolmente..." forces her to leave Venice in search of
peace of mind. But "...augelli, vento, boschi, sassi, pietra, pianta..." all lament with her. Her love is not diminished in the solitude; on the contrary, it is augmented. If she sees two little birds sing together "...in лиeta dilettanza", if

...là due rondinette unirsi anch'elle veggo in un ramo verde...

then her unreturned love tortures her even more, and she longs to return to Venice, "...patria mia celebre e magna". Regardless of what most critics think, as best exemplified by Flora who thinks that Veronica's love does not have the force to make her suffer, one would have to believe that Veronica did suffer in some instances. We have noted what a fine sensitivity she possessed. Her profession as a courtesan should not be considered as a deterrent to this sensitivity for as far as we know, she could have never become a cortigiana of her own accord, but could have well been thrown into that base lot when it was impossible for her to do much about it. Nevertheless, she is a cortigiana, and whether she likes it or not, she is willing to accept it. And she must accept the risks inherent in her profession. Being slighted by "un uom da nulla" Veronica asks advice on how to avenge her honour ("le forme
del duello e de l'onore") for this scoundrel who dared injure her certainly deserves to "cancellarsi del libro
de' viventi...". And again she desires to symbolize woman-
hood when she scolds someone for maltreating a woman. She
does it with a delicacy that is a direct result of the
buone maniere of her time:

Nè in forza corporal sta la virtute,
ma nel vigor de l'alma e de l'ingegno,
da cui tutte le cose son sapute:
e certa son che in ciò loco men degno
non hàn le donne, ma d'esser maggiori
degli uomini dato hanno più d'un segno.

One cannot help getting the impression from these verses that Veronica was talking about herself; about her great pride in her literary stature. Her distinction between body and soul is clear, and the latter's undisputed authority seems to imply Veronica's belief in herself as virtuous. Her "alma" and "ingegno" transcend her "forza corporal", "corporal" here not even possessing enough force to be a substantive.

The last capitolo (XXV) in Veronica's collection is easily considered to be her best. Bonora very acutely notes that this poem, arranged to end the poetess' history,

...pur mettendo in luce ambizioni di
decoro letterario, conferma l'idea della
fondamentale schiettezza e di quella tendenza al concreto...della rimatrice. Dove infatti l'idillico avrebbe potuto facilmente tingersi di note convenzionali, secondo la moda corrente, si osserva invece una schietta vena realistica, e la descrizione della campagna... si ispira anch'essa alla serena sensualità che traspare dalle confessioni della sua vita amorosa.65

And even in this description of nature, Veronica's spontaneity is most evident:

Dai freschi rivi e da le fonti liete, quasi scherzando, l'acque in vario corso declinan verso 'l pian soavi e quete...66

From the poetess' sensitive and sensuous contemplation of nature, as demonstrated by her last capitolo, Dolci can understand how Veronica

...sia stata non soltanto donna di liberi costumi, ma di squisita sensibilità artistica...67

Veronica's sensuous sensitivity and taste give life to the spontaneous description of this wonderful natural setting, which is the villa of Fumane where she is the guest of count Marcantonio della Torre. The songs of the birds become for Veronica almost sensuous reminders of passionate
moments:

...da le fontane ad ascoltar venia
questo e quel ruscelletto, e mormorando
quasi con lor piangeva in compagna.

Ben poscia a quel tenor dolce cantando
givan gli augelli per li verdi rami,
del loro amor le passion mostrando.

Oh che liete querele, oh che richiami
formavan contro il ciel, sì come suole
chi, benchè ridamato, altrui forte ami!

Con voce più che d'umane parole
par che sappian parlar quelli augelletti,
sì ch'ad udirli ancor fermano il sole.

Talor narrano poi gli alti diletti,
che spesso dagli amati abbracciamenti
prendon, de le lor vaghe al fianco stretti.

Such is our Veronica at her best in her Terze rime, expressing her cult for beauty, a beauty that is expressed through a sensual vein. Her spontaneous sensuality pervades her lyric. Sensual woman in life, she remains so in art. Her cult for sensual beauty is matched only by her cult for intellectualism. This twofold theme becomes the fil conducteur of her Terze rime. But her sensuality and her intellectuality are, on a larger scale, products of a greater aspect, her realism, a realism which, Baldacci believes, is "...nei sentimenti o nella visione, il dato fondamentale della sua poesia". Any effort to consider Veronica Franco as a major exponent of the poetical literature of the Italian sixteenth century would be vain indeed. On the other hand too much emphasis perhaps has
been placed on the particular circumstances of her life, on
the place she occupied in the society of her time, and not
enough has been said about the particular nature of her
poetry in relation to the changes in taste which occurred
during the period of her activity as a writer. Even a
rapid examination conducted along these lines is bound to
reveal that the poems of Veronica Franco are not only a
kind of historical curiosity, as products of a cortigiana
letterata, but they are relevant also for their intrinsic
aesthetic value and as one of the documentations of the
movement of lyrical forms and expressions, towards the
novelties epitomized in Tasso's lyrical production.

Let us study for instance the two following tercets
of Capitolo XV:

Sovra le piume al mio posare rubelle
Non ritrovando quiete nel martire,
D'amor, di lui doleami, e de le stelle:

Standomi senza lui volea morire:
Spesso levai e ricorsi a gli inchiostri,
Nè confusa sapea che poi mi dire.*

The literary antecedents of the situation here described,
the sleeplessness of the tormented lover, are easily
traceable in Petrarch's Canzoniere. A reference to sonnet
CCXXXIV is sufficient to illustrate this point:
O letticciol, che requie eri e conforto
in tanti affanni, di che dogliose urne
ti bagna Amor con quelle mani eburne,
solo ver me crudeli a si gran torto.

We may observe that traces of Petrarchan language remain in
the texture of Veronica's expression. Her "piume rubelle"
make us think immediately of Petrarch's "oziose piume";
the antithesis "quiete nel martire" is another commonplace
of the Petrarchan tradition. Yet it is also immediately
evident that the Petrarchan language is extremely simplified.
Veronica avoids the lofty classical elegance of images like
"mani eburne", "dogliose urne", the personification of love
as the classical god performing a modern and melancholy
rite. Equally simplified is the inner structure of the
versification. Petrarch, in the quatrain here discussed
and frequently elsewhere makes ample use of the enjambement.
Although Franco is perfectly familiar with that poetical
device, in the two tercets now studied she shuns the flowing
of the sense of one line into the following. In doing so
she shows an acute intelligence of the traditional nature
of the capitolo, a poetical form long established in
Italian literature as narrative in character and rather
popular in tone. The closeness of the rhythm, which is ob-
tained by preserving a strong rhyme effect, underscores
these two traditional characteristics of the capitolo.
And yet another subtle artistic effect is attained. En-
closed as they are within a music almost mathematical in its precision, the lines acquire a kind of epigraphic resonance that they would not have otherwise. It might be observed that in the first two lines of the first tercet by oversimplifying her language Veronica becomes discursive; that is to say, she runs the risk of losing poetical condensation. The same objection may be raised so far as the first two lines of the following tercet are concerned:

Standomi senza lui volea morire:  
Spesso leval e ricorsi a gli inchiostri.

We might even add at this point that there is nothing terribly rare about the first of these lines and that the "ricorsi a gli inchiostri" is not a highly polished poetical locution. One might answer these observations by repeating again that the language of the initial lines of the tercet is in keeping with the rather demure nature of the capitolo. And we may observe that the lines constitute the connective tissue which leads to the two conclusive verses of each tercet: and these undisputably are small poetical gems.

D'amor, di lui doleami, e de le stelle.

Here the poetess synthesizes her distress in an elegiac
utterance, which can well be considered as a prelude, however far, to the sentimental complexity of some of the famous laments of Tasso's heroines:

L'innamorata donna iva col cielo
Le sue fiamme sfogando ad una ad una;
E secretarii del suo amore antico
Fea i muti campi e quel silenzio amico.72

Indeed Tasso is Tasso! And here we see him at one of the highest points of his poetical power. To try to shorten the distance between him and Veronica Franco would be absurd. Nevertheless, Veronica has every right to be proud of her magnificent line, 'di lui doleami'. Here the poetess creates a type of poetical ambiguity, which is already Tassian in its character. Towards whom is Veronica's lament aimed? Is she crying because of her lover, or because of love itself? Is her torture seen as imputable to an individual, or to the fatal force of an inescapable passion? The reader has no way to decide with certainty. The syntactical structure (D'amor, di lui...) does not permit him to decide in one sense or the other, while the poet also remains uncertain (and here it would not be out of order to remember Tasso's celebrated "non-so-che"). The sensation that the sentiment of the poetess begins to transcend her specific case, the immediate circumstances, is heightened
by the last part of the line:

Doleami e de le stelle.

Such a reading may be fragmentary, but it is not unjustified by the syntactical sequence. Without overemphasizing, we can see the sorrow of the poet acquire a cosmic dimension. This is again achieved through intentional ambiguity. The expression 'le stelle' may be taken to signify the celestial bodies, shining from far away in the darkness of night. Their brightness, their distance and stillness contrast with the restlessness, the uncertainty, the sorrow of Veronica. At the same time the locution 'le stelle' may be taken as a well known metaphorical allusion to destiny. In this manner the image expands further, as the association stars-destiny evokes the mysteries of astrology, the anguish of man desirous to know his own future and at the same time condemned to his own unforeseeable fate.

On a different key the last line of the second tercet is equally replete with poetical effectiveness:

Nè confusa sapea che poi mi dire.

This is a soft line. The tonal strength of the initial accented monosyllable progressively dissolves in the milder
tones of flowing syllables, till the murmur of the final and embarrassingly pleonastic "mi dire". With remarkable skill Veronica reduces the expressive force of all the terms included in the line, except for the initial and almost brutal "Nè", retaining them almost exclusively for their sound, in order to isolate the key word of the line: "confusa".

The entire verse takes its light, its strength and its sentimental appeal from that "confusa". The adjective is far from elegant and rare: it belongs to popular speech. But because of its placement, because of the manner it is counterbalanced musically by the other constituents of the line it is almost renewed, it acquires a new expressive force. Shortly after the times of Veronica, Tasso will shine for his ability to charge familiar terms with intense poetical magnetism. And this especially in the Aminta and in his lyrics. The sensitive reader cannot help being touched by the image of Veronica Franco contradictory and sentimental, restless and passionate, and finally "confusa", unable to say what she so much wishes to say. There is a peculiar tenderness to this image of submissive and shy femininity, appealing even to our time of liberated females.

The sentimental strain, which contributes so strongly to the poetical magic of Tasso's heroines, can be found with
considerable abundance in the *Rime* of Veronica Franco. Our desire to underscore it derives from the fact that Veronica, even when the initial impulse comes to her from Petrarch, does not develop it in the manner peculiar to the author of the *Canzoniere*, but rather according to the modes which become prevalent among some of her contemporaries (Giovanni della Casa for instance, or Angelo di Costanzo). Another exemplification of this fact may be provided by Capitolo XXI. The subject of the poem is again the misery and the melancholy of love. Veronica says:

\begin{verbatim}
E, se ridir potessi le parole,
Che volgendomi indietro al caro suolo
Dissi, qual chi lasciar ciò ch'ama suole,

Vedrei gli augelli ancor con lento volo
Seguirmi ed ascoltare il mio lamento,
Alternando in pia voce il mio gran duolo;

Vedrei qual già fermarsi a udirmi il vento,
E quetar le procelle, e i boschi, e i sassi
Moversi a la pietà del mio tormento. 
\end{verbatim}

The first of these three tercets is rather pale: it is dignified versification, devoid however of particular aesthetical interest. The two following tercets though are little masterpieces of poetical vivacity. We can observe again that the search for consolation of some inner passion among the inhabitants of the animal world, or the
quest for sympathy in the solitude of the world of nature, is a theme widely developed in Petrarch's *Canzoniere*. Despite this the voice of Veronica Franco is able to introduce highly personal notes. The image of the birds controlling their naturally rapid flight to follow the beautiful sad lady in her lament through the forest is utterly charming. The contrapuntal song of the inhabitants of the air is a delicate and highly original invention. The line used to express it again reveals the skill and the literary intelligence of Veronica Franco:

Alternando in pia voce il mio gran duolo.

The key word (the *parola-mito*, as Mario Fubini would say) is not *gran duolo* but again an adjective: *pia*. Already in the tradition of Stilnovistic poetry we find the verb *piare* to indicate the chirping or singing of birds. 74 Obviously it is an onomatopeic verb. Veronica Franco exhumes the verb, but with a linguistic daring of notable relevance, recasts, and ambiguously so, its expressive power with the adjective "pia". Thus the idea of the bird singing and the religious and humane feeling, conceived by the adjective *pia* in its more current meaning, are united. Possibly this last deduction may appear too subtle, and
even far fetched, to some who are not familiar with Veronica Franco's linguistic dexterity. It is undeniable however that the second tercet is a splendid example of that combination of sentimentality, musicality, melodramatic movement, which Tasso again brilliantly epitomizes in pieces as famous as the song of Aminta at the beginning of the second scene of the first act of his tragicomedy:

Ho visto al pianto mio  
Risponder per pietate i sassi e l'onde  
e sospirar le fronde  
Ho visto al pianto mio.  

Veronica concludes her representation of the participation of the elements of nature and the objects of the inanimate world to her sorrow with the line:

...e i boschi e i sassi  
moversi alla pietà del mio tormento.

First of all here we can see how effectively Veronica can use the technique of the *enjambement*. The reader is for a moment suspended by the image of the stone, its hardness, its indifference, and then he is swept into the unrestrained sentimentality and fantasy of the conclusive and unrealistic image.
The tendency to render, or transform, sentiment into music so basic in the poetry of Tasso is testified again and again in Veronica Franco's *Rime*. In *Capitolo XXII* we can find this intriguing tercet:

\[
\begin{align*}
E, & \text{ poi che'1 mio dolor ti giova tanto,} \\
Io & \text{ mi vivrò, tra queste selve ombrose,} \\
& \text{ Sol de la tua memoria e del mio pianto.}
\end{align*}
\]

The first line is not particularly beautiful. As a matter of fact it contains an element of pettiness and petulance that makes it sound rather prosaic. The following two lines, however, place again Veronica in the poetical atmosphere of the best precursors of Tasso. The sentimental contrast of the last line (*tua memoria/mio pianto*) has a definite Tassian flavor. In a small, reduced manner, it anticipates the poetical atmosphere in which Erminia lives, after her unfortunate flight from Jerusalem, in the pursuit of the unattainable Tancredi, and her musical and melancholy refuge among the shepherds.

To conclude we may say that sixteenth century lyrical poetry in Italy undergoes during the time of Veronica Franco's life a subtle, but very deep transformation. The Petrarchan tradition is never entirely repudiated. But, by the same token as the great commentaries to the *Canzoniere* (the works
of Vellutello and Gesualdo) codify Petrarch's masterpiece as a classic, distant in time and spirit, the poets tend more and more to express their personal world in a manner progressively removed from the Petrarchan models. Towards the beginning of the century, owing to the influence of Bembo, lyrical production was patterned on the structure of the Canzoniere. As the century advances poets more distinctly rely on their personal experience as the main source of inspiration. Indeed, the Petrarchan models retain their relevance: but as unparalleled examples of poetical technique, as inexhaustable storehouses of images to be developed according to personal impulses. In this sense, regardless of their intrinsic poetical value, the Rime of Veronica Franco are exemplary and more so perhaps than the Canzoniere of Gaspara Stampa. Veronica's collection of poems can indeed be considered a Canzoniere, carefully arranged in its components as Petrarch's was. But it is a Canzoniere exclusively inspired by the actual experience of the author. The analysis of the content of Franco's Canzoniere reveals in detail the influence of Petrarch, but at the same time it shows the effort to overcome and adapt that impulse to the demands of a highly personalized poetical expression. On the basis of this Veronica Franco justly deserves to be considered as one of
the more significant among minor poets of the sixteenth century. Veronica, the elegant cortigiana, the rather questionable ornament of the late sixteenth century Venice, died long ago. Veronica the poetess is still alive: her contribution may not be of primary importance, but in the history of a great literature very seldom major figures can be fully understood without taking into consideration the ambience from which they arise, the tendencies and the impulses they are capable to crystallize in the forms of their superior art.
1Abdelkader Salza, op.cit., p. 380.

2Ibid.

3As we noted before Croce in his "nota iconografica" (op.cit., p.84) insisted on 1576 as the year of publication... He did so, of course, to complement his theory, or his discovery, of Veronica's authentic portrait. Croce stated that it is not unusual for authors to write letters of dedication long before their work is published. This is indeed possible, but however convincing Croce appears, there is one sentence in Veronica's letter which would seem to at least slightly offset Croce's theory. Veronica writes to the duke: "E per più distinta significazion della mia devozione le porgo questo mio volume per man d'un mio ancor fanciullo figliuolo, quivi per adempier quest'officio da me mandato..." (Salza, p.381). If the publication occurred in 1576 why did Veronica not change the date of her letter? It would seem to have been a simple operation. For further information on this point see Dazzi, op.cit., p.12.

4Except for the first capitolo, which is directed to Veronica by Marco Venier, the other six remain anonymous. There reigns much confusion on this point. Whether or not Marco Venier was the author of the other six is a moot question. Salza, in op.cit., has gathered all of Franco's poetry; that is, not only the faithful adaptation of Veronica's rime as they were first published, but also the poetess' many sonnets which had appeared in diverse collections. Salza also informs us that all of Franco's sonnets are directly traceable, except for "Ite pensier fallaci, e vana speme." (p.382). See also Frugoni, op. cit., pp.45-46.

5Salza, op.cit., p. 234, All subsequent excerpts from Franco's capitoli will be taken from this edition.


7Ibid.


10 de Blasi, op.cit., p.98.


12 Lirici del Cinquecento (Firenze, 1957), p.XXVII. Veronica wrote in third rhymes; that is, the first line rhymes with the third, while the second dictates the rhyme with which the following terzina begins. Bonora, op.cit., p.174, notes that Veronica's verses are "...nel metro dei capitoli e delle satire, con l'andamento di lettere in versi..." and also in Franco's rime: "...Il fondo realistico fa pensare più che alle rimatrici di scuola petrarquesca, a certe figure di donne innamorate delle commedie cinquecentesche."


14 Croce, op.cit., p.XVIII.


16 Taddeo, op.cit., p.43. For the only collection of Domenico Venier's verses, see Rime di Domenico Venier senatore vicino, raccolte dall'ab. Pierantonio Serassi (Bergamo); Cfr. Taddeo, op.cit., p.34.

17 Scrivano, op.cit., p.227, would not be so certain.

18 Op.cit., p.166. Comparing Veronica to Gaspara Stampa, Salza, in op.cit., pp.366-367, writes of the former: "Più trascurata e sciatta nella forma, diffusa e donnesca mente loquace, stentata a volte e spesso contorta... Ella ci si mostra nelle sue poesie, quasi con ostentazione, la femmina da conio che fu nella vita... essa prende un posto tra i nostri elegiaci del Cinquecento, non ultima per vivacità scapigliata e per forza di sentimento."
Furthermore (p. 40) Russo observes that our poetess "...si serve dei suoi capitoli soltanto per un lustro, si direbbe quasi giornalistico, o per uno snob di società."

Capitolo II, p. 238.

"Se il povero messer Marco riuscì a capire che diamine di negozio fosse il fatto che tanto premeva alla Veronica fu bravo davvero; a me, dico schietto, non riesce di capirlo, e temo che i miei lettori non lo capiranno meglio di me."

Capitolo II, p. 240. Frugoni, op. cit., p. 48, writes on this point: "...le piaceva che i suoi amanti, almeno quelli meno occasionali, avessero, più che oro in borsa, una personalità, la quale allora si misurava assai dalla coltura...".

Luigi Malagoli, op. cit., p. 61, believes that this answer of Veronica represents in broad terms her singular personality: "Veronica è diversa dai consueti rimatori per il suo distacco nella considerazione dell'amore e per il suo discorrere fatto di buon senso, di spregiudicatezza e di scherzo in un tono conversevole e piano...".


Capitolo III, p. 243; Baldacci, op. cit., p. 171, observes that "...per il motivo e per il tono, si potrebbe ricordare il capitolo dell'Ariosto 'Meritamente ora punir mi veglio'". Frugoni, op. cit., p. 49, notes that this capitolo was written to Domenico Venier since the next capitolo, the fourth, which is in answer to the one in question, seems to denote Domenico's style: "Domenico Venier, che, fra la cerchia della conoscenza della Franco, per quel che noi sappiamo, è il gentiluomo cui meglio si adatta il capitolo."

Capitolo III, pp. 243-244. F. Petrarca, Rime (Torino,
1953): CCCX, 3: "E garrir Progne e pianger Filomena"; III, 1-2: "...al sol si scoloraro/per la pietà del suo fattore i rai"; XVII, 2: "...un vento angoscioso di sospiri".

30 *Ibid*, p. 244.

31 *Capitolo* V, p. 249.


33 *Capitolo* VII, p. 252.

34 Ponchioli, *op. cit.*, p. 479.

35 *L'amore nella poesia e nel pensiero del Rinascimento* (Firenze, 1933), p. 93.

36 *Ibid*.


38 *Capitolo* VIII, p. 260.


41 *Capitolo* X, p. 266.

42 *Capitolo* XI, p. 267.

43 *Capitolo* XII, p. 271. In this capitolo, line twenty-seven, Veronica calls Venice her birthplace. In an interesting terzina in this capitolo, ll. 40-42, Franco, after many hyperbolic references to Venice, writes: "...in questa il Re del cielo si compiacque/di fondar il sicuro, eterno nido/de la sua fè, ch'altrove oppressa giacque...". One wonders if there are any genuine political or religious preoccupations involved, or if Veronica is, on this occasion, merely simulating her sentiments.

44 *Capitolo* XIII, p. 274.

Capitolo XIV, p.281.

Capitolo XV, p. 283. This poem was probably meant for Domenico Venier, for in a terzina, ll. 97-99, p.285, Franco writes: "In quel vostro si celebre concorso d'uomini dotti e di giudizio eletto/...". Also see Dazzi, op.cit., p.44.

Ibid, p. 286.

Graf, op.cit., p.315.

Russo, op.cit., p. 44.

Capitolo XVI, p.291.


Dazzi, op.cit., is an indispensable reading in order to fully comprehend Veronica's reaction to Maffeo's cruelties. Dazzi also explains the possibility of how Veronica could have been confused at first as to the authorship of these injurious poems. The confusion was of course between Maffeo and Marco Venier. Dazzi also indirectly touches on the affinity between Franco's Lettere and her Terze rime. For the capitolo in question see pp.46-47.


Capitolo XVII, p.297. The following capitolo, XVIII, undoubtedly written to Domenico Venier has, for our purposes, no more than incidental importance in that it shows the affinity between Franco's prose and poetry. See Graf, op.cit., p.326. Salza, op.cit., p.382, makes a list of the principal links between Franco's Lettere and her Terze rime.

F. Petrarca, op.cit., XXXV, 8: "com'io dentro avvampi"; CL, 5-6: "Che pro, se con quelli occhi ella ne face/di state un ghiaccio, un foco quando inverna?"; CLXXXIII, 9: ".i' tremo e vo col cor gelato"; CLXXXV, 8: "Foco che m'arde a la più algente bruma".
Capitolo XIX, p.302.

Ibid, p.303.

Op cit., p.318, Graf continues: "la Veronica non doveva essere più ormai troppo giovane, e s'accostava passo passo al ravvedimento."

Capitolo XX, p.308. The lover in this poem is most likely the same as in Capitolo XVII.

Croce, op. cit., p.XV.

Capitolo XXI, p.316.

Capitolo XXII, pp.319-325.

Capitolo XXIII, pp.326-327.

Capitolo XXIV, pp. 333-334.

Bonora, Aspetti della letteratura del Cinquecento, p.177; Scrivano, op. cit., p.216, says on this point: "Non si può stabilire con sicurezza una progressione cronologica dei capitoli della Franco: ma certo è che nella disposizione che diede ad essi nello stamparli mostrava di comprendere la maggior finitezza letteraria degli ultimi (coscienza che è assai difficile attribuirle pienamente, per cui è più legittimo pensare ad una naturale distribuzione cronologica di essi). Scrivano seems to forget about the Venier family, Domenico in particular, and their relationship with Veronica.


Capitolo XXV, pp. 343-344.

Lirici del Cinquecento, p.190. The critics agree that Franco's literary talents are much superior in her poetry than in her prose. By her poetry, critics insist
only on her Terze rime. On the few of her sonnets that we have, (also collected by Salza, *op. cit.*, pp.353-361), Dolci, *op. cit.*, p. 1406, says that they are written "...sul comune modello e non hanno vita di vera alta bellezza. Sono testimonianze di momenti della vita, di relazioni amichevoli, di stati d'animo, non trasformati in arte originale. Invece nelle Terze rime troviamo momenti d'arte vera." Scrivano, *op. cit.*, p.216, calls Franco's poetry "sostanzialmente apetrarchistica." And on p.228 (ftnt.33) he offers a list of many "modi petrarcheschi" to be found in the poetess's poetry. Baldacci does this as well. The sonnets that Salza collects, which had appeared in many and varied collections of Veronica's own time and afterwards, are sixteen. The first two are directed to King Henri III of France, and, as we have seen, they were included in the letter to that king. The third sonnet is in honour of the doctorate of Giuseppe Spinelli. Following these, Salza presents the nine sonnets which Veronica had inserted in the collection of poems which she prepared in 1575 in memory of Estor Martinengo (p.383). Some of the "Eccellentissimi Autori" who offered their verses for this cause were a "clariss. sig. D.V. (undoubtedly Domenico Venier), Marco Venier, Orsatto Giustinian, Bartolomeo Zacco, Celio Magno, Orazio Toscanella. Two other sonnets, one to Bartolomeo Zacco, in memory of his daughter Daria, and the other to Muzio Manfredi in praise of his *Semiramis*, leave the stage to perhaps the remaining two sonnets, the only ones that could possibly have shed some more light on Franco's biography (p.360). The first of these remaining two is directed to Zacco again. In it Veronica writes: "D'alzarmi al ciel da questo stato indegno, in ch'io mi trovo...". Some people have seen in these lines another sign of her alleged conversion. In reality, Veronica is only expressing gratitude for Zacco's praises. The other sonnet which Salza labels "Elevazione e conversione" (*Ite, pensier fallaci e vana speme") is, as we have seen, not even traceable to our poetess and therefore cannot be considered a valid source. In her poetry, then, Franco does not show any religious sentiments, apart from, of course, some minor allusions such as the ones in *Capitolo XII* (Cfr. Footnote 43) and also in *Capitolo XIX* (Cfr. Footnote 58) in which, at the most, it is implied that she attends church.

70 *Capitolo XV*, pp. 283-284.

71 Petrarca, *op. cit.*, CCXXXIV, 5-8, p.337.
72 Torquato Tasso, *Gerusalemme Liberata*: VI, ciii, 5-8, p.160.

73 **Capitolo XXI**, p.316.


76 **Capitolo XX**, p.322.
CONCLUSION

The critical literature on Veronica Franco as a whole constitutes a rather small body, compared to the number of studies devoted to other minor writers of the Italian sixteenth century, like Della Casa, Giraldi, Sperone Speroni, Tansillo, or even Gaspara Stampa. In actuality it may be legitimate to say that Veronica Franco as an artist is a discovery of contemporary criticism. Aside from the passing and frequently incorrect references to the Venetian cortigiana, scattered through the critical literature of the XVIII century, Franco begins to be taken into serious consideration only towards the end of the XIX century with the rise of the historical and positivistic school. Given their particular orientation, the writers of this school insisted most of all on the historical aspects of Veronica's life. They investigated the environment to which Veronica belonged, the social and cultural background of her work; they discovered and illustrated the documents of historical importance for the reconstruction of her life. In short the contribution of the positivistic school is relevant above all for the understanding of Vero-
nica Franco as a singular historical figure: the cortigiana letterata who gained the admiration of the elegant intellectuals in the Venice of her time as well as abroad. However exceptional from a sociological point of view, this image was still that of a prostitute, an extremely refined prostitute, possibly a prostitute who could be regarded with forgiving eyes because of her grace, her charm, her intelligence. But the attitude of the positivistic critics was in essence a patronizing one. We may see in their approach some relics of the moralistic tendencies so relevant among the Romantic critics of the earlier generations.

It is a well known fact that these positions are no longer acceptable from the standpoint of contemporary aesthetics. Here the newest critics of the socialist school might have some objections. To this we can answer that the study of Veronica Franco from a sociological point of view could certainly be continued. But this should not be directed to establish Veronica Franco as a symbol, or personification, of the elegant decadence in Venice during the age of the Counter-Reformation. Nor should Veronica Franco be seen as a rather ambiguous heroine, fit for a popular novel in the taste of the late Romantics, as she appears at times even in the recent monographic study by Rita Casagrande. Such themes have been explored in their broader aspects by
critics like P.O. Kristeller, E. Garin, F. Chabod, R. Scrivano, C. Greyson, A. Chastel and recently in Canada by Stilman Drake, Pamela Stewart and Antonio D'Andrea. From a sociological viewpoint Veronica Franco might provide interesting material for the study of the historical antecedents of the great courtesans of the French siècle d'or. For instance, once we pay due consideration to the differences in their social and historical backgrounds, we can see striking analogies between the life and the activity of personalities such as Veronica Franco and Ninon de Lanclos. Like Veronica, Ninon fully accepted her condition as a courtesan. Like the charming Venetian, Ninon found a refuge in the world of culture and refined behaviour. As a poetess Ninon is certainly inferior to Veronica Franco and her contributions to French literature are minor indeed. Her poetical compositions, nevertheless, those charming notes in poetical form she used to send to her suitors to discourage them, to flatter them, or simply to get rid of them have some of the connotations of Veronica's capitoli, while they never reach the lyrical intensity one can find in the latter. Just as Veronica Franco found a congenial atmosphere in the circle of Domenico Venier, or of the painter Tintoretto, Ninon de Lanclos mingled with various intellectuals, and her house was a favourite meeting place.
of some of the members of the group of libertins who, like Cyrano de Bergerac, were closely connected with the philosopher Pierre Gassendi. And the importance of the contributions of the libertins to the development of French literature during the XVII century is a well known fact. Moreover Ninon was a friend of the great Molière (whose libertine tendencies are well illustrated by his Dom Juan), and during the last part of her very long life she cultivated a highly significant relationship with Saint-Evremond and she apparently met also the young Voltaire.

Even the cultural background of some of Molière's comedies might be enlarged (and we present this idea only as a possibility) through the study of the possible impact of Veronica Franco, Tullia d'Aragona, Gaspara Stampa on French seventeenth century intellectual circles. More specifically, this could be done possibly in relation to Les précieuses ridicules. The concession to the new pre-baroque forms of expression, which one can find in a particularly studied and "precious" manner in the prose of Veronica Franco, are already manifestations of that form of "preciosity" lampooned by Molière in his comedy. Still along those lines one might remember that the circle of the Hôtel de Rambouillet was strongly influenced by Italian elements.

However valid the outcome of this kind of investigation, it is a moot question here. In order to conclude our out-
line of the intellectual profile of Veronica Franco, it may be more relevant at this point to indicate the fact that Arturo Graf, despite the elements of positivistic nature still present in his work, was the first scholar who went beyond the positions of the positivistic school and paved the way to the contemporary interpretation of the work of Veronica Franco. Even from a moralistic viewpoint the definition *cortigiana onesta*, which usually accompanies the name of Veronica, may be considered in essence a contradictory qualification. This attitude begins to be visible in the pages dedicated by Benedetto Croce to Veronica Franco. Critics of the post-Crocian period have largely developed the intuitions of the Neapolitan philosopher. The aim of contemporary students is to find the proper balance between what is implied by the term *cortigiana* and the term *onesta* within the context of Cinquecento culture. We are now striving to see how the *cortigiana* contributes to the originality of the poetess or the letter writer. And this is a kind of originality in some aspects difficult, or impossible, to achieve by someone who did not have the actual "professional" experiences of Veronica Franco. Finally, the conclusive goal of contemporary critics is to determine Veronica's contribution to the development of poetical forms during the late Renaissance.

As we have tried to illustrate during the course of the
present work, Veronica Franco is extremely sensitive to the cultural impulses of the intellectual circles close to her. Although it is rather difficult to define with precision the limits, or the extent, of her cultural preparation, it is legitimate to say that she acquired great familiarity with the Petrarchan and Bembian tradition so popular at her time. Veronica never tried, though, to pattern her personal experiences according to the models provided by the Canzoniere, or in a broader sense to assume attitudes so much in contrast with the reality of her daily "professional" life as to expose herself to the risk of being ridiculed, as it happens to her colleague Tullia d'Aragona. Like the more original among the Cinquecento Petrarchans, Veronica Franco was interested above all in the study of the inner structure of Petrarch's poetical language, in the technical elaboration of the imagery. To her the Canzoniere was indeed the subject of imitation, but this in the sense that the study of that work could refine the skill of an individual in order to express his or her own personal world and sentiment.

Quite correctly, therefore, contemporary critics emphasize the element of sincerity in Veronica's poetry and in some of her letters. In art sincerity can be a meaningless term, since every poet is artistically sincere when he adequately treats even the most fantastic of all themes, as
did Ariosto. But sincerity may also be considered as the capacity to transform in artistic terms facts of a biographical or personal nature and make them convincing and acceptable at the aesthetic level. Dante provides some supreme examples of this capacity. The prose and the poetry of Veronica Franco are mostly of a biographical nature. The Venetian poetess is capable of speaking of the sorrows and joys she experiences in the exercise of her profession, and in doing so she redeems herself - from a moral point of view. Her confessions impress the reader for their utter candor, for the elegant control over details which may acquire an offensively obscene connotation, and for the fluidity and the vivacity of the form of expression. Just as Veronica is quite clear in stating that the nature of her love is far from Petrarchan, she is also able to show her sincerity in the powerful prose of Lettera XXII, where she exposes unrelentlessly and passionately the horrors of prostitution, and violently condemns a cynical and amoral mother.

We have tried to stress in the preceding pages another new element in the poetry of Veronica Franco: namely, sentimentality. This feeling tends to be transformed into highly musical terms. Applying her musical talent to the poetic expression, Veronica, in some felicitous moments, attains some very significant musical effects through a novel and skilful arrangement of the words, through the mastery of
metrical techniques.

To conclude we may state again that it would be indeed incorrect to extend out of the proper limits the relevance of Veronica Franco in the development of Italian literature in the late Renaissance. Veronica must be considered as a minor poet. But is the poetry of Michangelo Buonarroti, the revered artist, superior to the poetry of Veronica Franco, the *cortigiana*? With much greater spontaneity than Gaspara Stampa, if not with equal poetic intensity, Veronica Franco contributed to the evolution of lyrical poetry in the Italian Cinquecento, especially to the phenomenon known in critical terms as the crisis of the Petrarchan tradition. Thus in some of their most felicitous passages, the poems of Veronica Franco anticipate themes, sentimental attitudes, and technical innovations which were bound to appear again and brought to their ultimate artistic perfection in the lyrical production of Torquato Tasso.
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