

Mad-Hot Madrigals: Selections from the *Rime* (1601) of Late Sixteenth-Century Diva Isabella Andreini (1562–1604)

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Although the figure of the ‘diva’ is usually regarded as a nineteenth-century construct, Isabella Andreini (1562–1604), the revered actress, poet, and woman of letters who performed and wrote more than two centuries earlier, may claim the title of the first diva of the Italian stage and page. In this article I argue that a strong and, to date, unexplored, connection exists between Andreini’s lyric poetry and her stage work. The ‘mad-hotness’ for which Andreini became well known in her performances (especially her celebrated *Pazzia di Isabella*) permeates her madrigals as well. The lover in her madrigals, who may be a man, a woman or ambiguously gendered, feels hatred and madness, may have erotic fantasies, and is constantly burning with desire. Andreini’s poetic madrigals move beyond standard Petrarchan *topoi* such that the ethereal ‘Laura’ comes down to earth and corporal, sensual and erotic aspects of love and death are explored.

KEYWORDS Isabella Andreini, Early Modern Women Poets, Petrarchism, *Rime di Isabella Andreini, comica gelosa* (1601), Eroticism, Madrigals, Mad scenes, *Pazzia di Isabella*, Love and Death

lasciando l’Isabella tal mormorio, & meraviglia ne gli ascoltatori; che mentre durerà il mondo, sempre sarà lodata la sua bella eloquenza, e valore

Giuseppe Pavoni, 1589

Isabella Andreini, also known as Isabella da Padova, was a much-celebrated late sixteenth-century stage actress, playwright, poet, and member of the intellectual circle, the Accademia degli Accesi. While scholars have primarily focused on her theatrical work, her poetic compositions are attracting more academic interest of late and are worthy of further study, especially to the extent that the themes explored in her poetry relate to her stage performances. Her poetry, and in particular, her

madrigals, may be considered an experimental poetic zone that explores questions of self-representation, gender play, eroticism and gender flexibility that present themselves in her theatrical work, and particularly in her mad scenes. Indeed, her status as the first *prima donna innamorata*, ‘la prima grande attrice’¹ of the *commedia dell’arte* stage, may be linked not only to her *bravura* onstage, but also to the poetic ideas that informed her legendary performances. Andreini draws a parallel between her poetry and her work in the theatre: she is deeply conscious of the artifice of both the actor’s performance and the poet’s verse. There is an earthy, sensual quality to many of her madrigals that is significant both in strictly poetic terms as well as in terms of the repercussions of the exploration of these ideas on her performances, many of which would have been improvised. There is a nexus between Isabella Andreini’s writing and performance that merits closer examination.

Even though the figure of the *diva* is commonly regarded as originating in the nineteenth century, Isabella Andreini, who lived and performed and wrote more than two centuries earlier, may arguably claim the title of the first *diva* of the Italian stage and page. Her mastery of the ‘mad scene’ may be perceived as part of a longer tradition with roots in literary works such as Boccaccio’s *Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta* and Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso*. She and her representations of madness have been described in terms that suggest the divine. Her biography is entitled *La divina Isabella: Vita straordinaria di una donna del Cinquecento*² and Anne MacNeil has referred to how Andreini represented ‘divine madness’ in her stage work.³ A contemporary Italian women’s theatre organization, composed of prominent academics, journalists, and playwrights chose to name their association after her (Associazione Isabella Andreini Comica Gelosa) and referred, in their constituting documents, to how ‘la sua divina figura assomma in sé ogni forma espressiva del teatro’.⁴

The emerging discipline of ‘diva studies’, a field that has tended to focus primarily on opera and cinema stars, and that has been described as a site where ‘feminist theory and women’s history intersect’,⁵ needs to reach further back in the literary and theatrical history of Italy to establish the roots of this phenomenon. In the opera scholarship, the earliest documented use of the term ‘diva’ to refer to a singer of great talent can be traced to the 1820s. These early references have been described as ‘anything but neutral, attributing a goddess-like quality to women for whom mundane assignations such as “prima donna” would simply not suffice’.⁶ The definition of the term *diva* provided by Rachel Cowgill and Hilary Poriss pertains specifically to the

¹ Vito Pandolfi, *Isabella, comica gelosa, avventure di maschere* (Rome: Edizioni moderne, 1960), p. vi.

² Francesca Romana De’Angelis, *La divina Isabella. Vita straordinaria di una donna del Cinquecento* (Florence: Sansoni, 1991).

³ Anne MacNeil, ‘The Divine Madness of Isabella Andreini’, *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 120 (1995): pp. 195–215.

⁴ ‘Com’è nata l’idea dell’Associazione Isabella Andreini Comica Gelosa’ in *Le Isabella: Dal teatro della Maddalena alla Isabella Andreini*, ed. Marcila Boggio (Nardò LE: BESA, 2002), vol. 1, p. 43.

⁵ Heather Hadlock, ‘Opera and Gender Studies’ in *Cambridge Companion to Opera*, ed. Nicholas Till, pp. 257–75 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 270.

⁶ Introduction to *The Arts of the Prima Donna in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Rachel Cowgill and Hilary Poriss (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. xxxiii.

world of opera, but could just as easily be applied to the world of the stage actress and is especially germane to the present study of Isabella Andreini:

‘Diva’ is still used in operatic discourse today to refer to someone who is or was not quite human — a magnificent creature able to transcend the mundane and in the process move those who listen to her through flights of rapture.⁷

The notion that Andreini might have had such an effect on her audiences and her admirers is unmistakable. Andreini’s reception in France, her civic funeral after her untimely and tragic death (miscarrying her eighth child en route back to Italy after two years at the French court of Henry IV) at the age of 42, the coin made to honour her, and the poetry dedicated to her by Torquato Tasso, Giambattista Marino, Gabriello Chiabrera and others have been well documented.⁸ Indeed, there is no shortage of commentary on Isabella Andreini and her contributions to the history of Italian theatre. However, much of the existing scholarship focuses on Andreini as an historical and cultural figure rather than on the relationship between her reception as a stage actress and her own writings. Her pastoral play *Mirtilla* (1588) and the *Rime di Isabella Andreini padovana comica gelosa* (1601) were published in her lifetime. A second edition of the *Rime* (including some new material)⁹ was published in 1605 and her *Lettere* and *Frammenti di alcune scritture* were arranged and published posthumously by her husband and fellow Gelosi troupe actor Francesco Andreini. These works are important resources. As Rosalind Kerr has pointed out, some of the discourses on love that can be found in Isabella Andreini’s *Lettere* and *Frammenti* were likely very similar to speeches in the improvised performances of the Gelosi troupe. She identifies these as evidence of Andreini’s erudition and virtuosity in Petrarchist forms, qualities for which she would have been admired by her audiences.¹⁰

A modern critical edition of *Mirtilla* and an English translation of the play have made Andreini’s written work more accessible, as has a bilingual English translation of a selection of her poetry from the *Rime*.¹¹ However, there is no complete modern critical annotated edition of her poetry available for consultation.¹² I hope

⁷ Cowgill and Poriss, p. xxxiii.

⁸ For a commentary on Tasso’s sonnet to Isabella Andreini, see Francesco Taviani, ‘La Bella d’Asia: Torquato Tasso, gli attori e l’immortalità’, *Paragone Letteratura* XXXV (1984): pp. 2–76. Also see Rosalind Kerr’s commentary on Taviani’s article, ‘Tasso’s Sonnet to Isabella Andreini. A Commentary on Ferdinando Taviani, ‘Bella d’Asia: Torquato Tasso, gli attori e l’immortalità’, *Quaderni d’Italianistica* 2001(2), pp. 81–96.

⁹ *Rime d’Isabella Andreini comica gelosa, accademica intenta detta l’Accesa* (Milan: G. Bordononi and P. Locarni, 1605).

¹⁰ ‘Isabella Andreini Comica Gelosa (1560–1604): Petrarchism for the Theatre Public’ *Quaderni d’italianistica* 27(2) 2006: pp. 71–92, esp. p. 82 and pp. 84–88. More recently, the fact that the *Lettere* are based on Andreini’s stage repertoire has been further supported by Richard Andrews, ‘Isabella Andreini’s Stage Repertoire: the *Lettere* and *Frammenti*’, in Donatella Fischer ed., *The Tradition of the Actor-Author in Italian Theatre*, pp. 33–40 (Oxford: Legenda, 2013).

¹¹ Isabella Andreini, *La Mirtilla*, ed. Maria Luisa Doglio (Lucca: Maria Pacini Fazzi, 1995); Isabella Andreini, *La Mirtilla: A Pastoral*, trans. by Julie D. Campbell (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2002); *Selected Poems of Isabella Andreini*, ed. Anne MacNeil and trans. by James Wyatt Cook (Toronto and Oxford: Scarecrow, 2005).

¹² The edition referred to in this paper is *Rime d’Isabella Andreini padovana comica gelosa* (Milan: G. Bordononi and P. Locarni, 1601). For a recent transcription, metric analysis and some discussion of the poetic themes treated in the *Rime*, see Katia Radaelli, *Temi, strutture e linguaggi nel Canzoniere di Isabella Andreini* (PhD Thesis, University of Toronto, 2012).

to relate Andreini the *diva* of the late sixteenth-century Italian stage to Andreini the poet by combining a study of her reception with a detailed analysis of a selection of some of her most innovative madrigals. More specifically, I will explore the relationship among 1) her most famous stage piece, *La pazzia d'Isabella*, and its reception as reported in a first-hand account of one of her performances, 2) her poetic self-portrayal as an alluring and elusive performer in the opening sonnet of the *Rime*, and 3) her employment of the poetic madrigal (a brief and arguably the most free form of lyric poetry in terms of both structure and thematic choice) to move beyond standard Petrarchan *topoi* such that earthly, corporeal, sensual, and erotic aspects of love and death are explored.

At the marriage celebrations of Florentine Grand Duke Ferdinando de' Medici to his French bride, Christine de Lorraine, in May 1589, Giuseppe Pavoni was so impressed by Isabella Andreini's interpretation of the *innamorata pazza* in the Gelosi troupe's performance that he wrote of it at great length in the diary that chronicled all the events of the month-long festivities. This description is among the first accounts describing an Italian leading lady, and attests to Isabella Andreini's fame as one of the most celebrated *commedia dell'arte* actresses of her day. Pavoni also comments on the performance of Andreini's colleague and rival, Vittoria Pisimi, the evening before. Although Pavoni frames Pisimi's reception by the court in positive terms, his description of the event is brief and unremarkable in comparison to his lengthy account of Isabella's performance.

In Pavoni's reported version of the piece known as *La pazzia d'Isabella*, a betrayed Isabella is overcome with passion and becomes insane, speaking in several languages, pleasing the royal bride by speaking and singing in French, and delighting the audience with her interpretation of several dialects. After her dazzling display of madness, she drinks a potion that immediately brings her to her senses. She proceeds to exhibit her fine intellect and knowledge of literature with a completely rational discussion of the disappointments of love, thus heightening the impression she leaves on her noble audience with her versatility and virtuosity in acting the parts of multilingual madwoman on the one hand, and cultured intellectual who explains how one might be driven to madness by love, on the other.

The passage that describes Isabella's mad scene reads:

L'Isabella in tanto trovandosi ingannata dall'insidie di Flavio, ne sapendo pigliar rimedio al suo male, si diede del tutto in preda al dolore, & così vinta dalla passione e lasciandosi superare alla rabbia, & al furore uscì fuori di se stessa, & come pazza se n'andava scorrendo per la Cittade, fermando hor questo, & hora quello, e parlando hora in Spagnuolo, hora in Greco, hora in Italiano, & molti altri linguaggi, ma tutti fuor di proposito: & tra le altre cose si mise à parlar Francese, & à cantar certe canzonette pure alla Francese, che diedero tanto diletto alla Seriniss. Sposa, che maggiore non si potria esprimere. Si mise poi ad imitare li linguaggi di tutti li suoi Comici, come del Pantalone, del Gratiano, del Zanni, del Pedrolino, del Francatruppe, del Burattino, del Capitan Cardone, & della Franceschina tanto naturalmente, & con tanti dispropositi, che non è possibile il poter con lingua narrare il valore, & la virtù di questa Donna. Finalmente per finitione d'arte Magica, con certe acque, che le furono date à bere, ritornò nel suo primo essere, & quivi con elegante, & dotto stile esplicando le passioni d'amore, & i travagli, che provano

quelli, che si ritrovano in simil panie involti, si fece fine alla Commedia; mostrando nel recitar questa Pazzia il suo sano, e dotto intelletto, lasciando l'Isabella tal mormorio, & meraviglia ne gli ascoltatori, che mentre durerà il mondo, sempre sarà lodata la sua bella eloquenza, & valore.¹³

It is noteworthy that the plot devised for the Florentine nuptial performance differs significantly from the scenario entitled *La pazzia d'Isabella* as it was later recorded by Flaminio Scala. The piece prepared for the wedding is set in Padua and involves a love triangle among Isabella, her beloved Fileno, and Flavio, who impersonates Fileno and tricks her into stealing away with him, and culminates in her mad scene. In contrast, Scala's scenario casts Isabella as a Turkish woman who kills her husband and infant son so that she might flee with their Genoese slave, Orazio, with whom she is in love. They stop in Mallorca where she converts to Christianity before they proceed to his native Genoa. Once there, Isabella overhears Orazio proclaiming his love for another, his former lover Flaminia, and loses her mind: 'rimane come insensata, poi, rompendo in parole, essagera contra Orazio, contra Amore, contra Fortuna, contra se stessa, e per ultimo diventa pazza e furiosa'.¹⁴ Instead of being deceived by a rival suitor, in this scenario, Isabella is abandoned by her beloved in favour of another. The differences between the 1589 performance and Scala's scenario are a testament to the variety and unpredictability of Isabella's mad scenes. Scala documents another piece, *La finta pazza*, in which both Isabella and Orazio are described as acting out 'diverse pazzie' throughout the *canovaccio* but in this case no details are given as to the content or nature of the speeches.¹⁵ The improvisational opportunities afforded by the *commedia dell'arte* genre not only in terms of the actual words used by the actors but also in terms of the elasticity of the plot of any given scenario doubtless gave Andreini endless opportunities to interpret this role, and to fashion it into the 'signature piece' that it became. It also likely heightened the sense of anticipation in the audience, who would come to expect Isabella to present new and surprising material at every performance. It is important to note, however, that in other mad scenes, namely day XXXVIII, *La pazzia di Isabella*, and day XLI, *La forsegnata principessa*, Scala does transcribe some of the words the mad character is supposed to say. This is an unusual procedure for him and likely emphasizes his intention to give future generations of readers an idea of Isabella's improvised language.

The descriptions in Scala's documentation of how Isabella's madness builds up to a crescendo are as important to consider as Pavoni's description of her performance, and contributes to a better understanding of Andreini's stage diva status. Her descent to a state of madness is gradual and subtle; as she slowly goes mad from the pain of Orazio's infidelity, there are moments of lucidity. By the third act, she is completely insane. When Isabella hears that Flaminia has killed Orazio, the stage directions indicate:

Isabella, ancor che pazza avendo alquanto di lucido intervallo, le fa replicare più e più volte la morte d'Orazio; alla fine dicendo che l'anima sua vuol quella di quel traditore,

¹³ Flaminio Scala, *Il teatro delle favole rappresentative*, ed. Feruccio Marotti (Milan: Polifilo, 1976) vol. 1, app. 2, p. lxxv. (1611).

¹⁴ Scala, *Il teatro*, p. 393.

¹⁵ Scala, *Il teatro*, pp. 93–99.

diventa pazza affatto, si straccia tutte le vestimenta d'attorno, e come forsennata se ne corre per strada.¹⁶

In the third act, she is 'vestita da pazza' and utters sophisticated nonsense:

Io mi ricordo l'anno non me lo ricordo, che un Arpicordo pose d'accordo una Pavaniglia spagnola con una Gagliarda di Santin da Parma, per la qual cosa poi le lasagne, i maccheroni e la polenta si vestirono a bruno, non potendo comportare che la gatta fura fusse amica delle belle fanciulle d'Algieri; pure, come piacque al califfo d'Egitto, fu concluso che domattina sarete tutti duo messi in berlino.¹⁷

Once Orazio finds Isabella, she delivers a comical and clever interpretation of Aristotle's thoughts on the nature of the soul, one that surely would have delighted her audience:

Anima secondo Aristotele è spirito, che si diffonde per le botte del moscatello di Monte Fiascone, e che per ciò fu veduto l'arco baleno far un serviziale all'Isola d'Inghilterra, che non poteva pisciare.¹⁸

In these mad scenes, the extreme liberties she takes with language have been described as 'una sorta di surrealismo [...] in cui l'immaginario esce fuori detto con estrema libertà'.¹⁹ Together, Pavoni's description of Andreini's performance at the Medici wedding and Scala's loosely scripted scenario form an impression that she is doing something surprising, innovative, and charged. The focus on the body of the actress in Scala's stage directions should also be stressed. The tearing off of clothing ('si straccia tutte le vestimenta d'attorno'), for example, suggests at least partial disrobing, and an eroticization of Isabella's madness. Her ability to speak in various languages, which has been described as a 'disarmonia nel parlare', might also be understood as associating her mad state with dark powers if one considers, as one critic has, that il grande poliglotta, il grande maestro di Babele è il diavolo'.²⁰ The ease with which she

¹⁶ Scala, *Il teatro*, p. 393.

¹⁷ Scala, *Il teatro*, pp. 394–95. To enhance appreciation for Andreini's rant in this note and the following, we have elected to include an English translation, as well as the translator's commentary. 'I remember, in the year I don't remember, the honourable member tried to dismember the membrane from a vain Jane from Spain; and so the lasagne, the macaroni and the polenta all dressed in black because they couldn't stand that the sly puss should befriend the pretty girls in Algiers; all the same, on the orders of the Caliph of Egypt, it was decreed that tomorrow morn you'll both be publicly shorn'. Andrews, trans., p. 232. Note that in this case the translator is careful to include a remark on the non-equivalences between the Italian and his English translation and notes that the non-literal translation here and elsewhere is deliberate: 'In translating Isabella's nonsense, I have given more importance to the insistent rhymes, near-rhymes, and assonances of the Italian original than to the meaning (such as it is) of the words'. Andrews, trans., p. 236, n. 3.

¹⁸ Scala, *Il teatro*, p. 396. 'The soul, according to Aristotle, is a spirit diffused throughout the barrels of muscatel wine from Monte Fiascone, and that's why the rainbow was seen giving a purgative to the Island of England because it [she] couldn't manage to pee'. Andrews, trans., p. 233. Louise George Clubb has noted that in this mad speech, the choice of the word 'isola' is likely intended to pun on the variant names for Elizabeth like Isobel and Isabella, and that this mad speech is 'probably an echo of Catholic, anti-Tudor calumny attributing by rumor various physical abnormalities to the Virgin Queen, and a hint at the marriage, politically menacing to Protestant England, of Henri IV with the Austro-Spanish powers represented by Maria de' Medici, whose symbolic association with the rainbow began during her wedding festivities in 1600 and continued for decades'. *Italian Drama in Shakespeare's Time* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 265.

¹⁹ Franca Angelini, 'Isabella Andreini' in *Le Isabelle: Dal teatro della Maddalena alla Isabella Andreini*, vol. 2, p. 127.

²⁰ Cesare Molinari, 'L'altra faccia del 1589' in *Firenze e la Toscana dei Medici nell'Europa del 500*, vol. 2 (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1983), p. 569.

impersonates the other characters in the drama, both male and female, as described in Pavoni's account, are also a testament to her versatility.

In the theatre, she transgresses the boundaries of the predictable role of *la prima donna innamorata* not just by playing mad roles that doubled as showcases for her erudition, but also quite likely by playing male roles and certainly by playing female roles that required her to disguise herself as a man. In fact, she refers to her gender versatility in the theatre in the opening sonnet of the *Rime*:

S'alcun sia mai, che i versi miei negletti
 Legga, non creda à questi finti ardori;
 Che ne le Scene imaginati amori
 Usa à trattar con non leali affetti:
 Con bugiardi non men con finti detti
 De le Muse spiegai gli alti furori:
 Talhor piangendo i falsi miei dolori,
 Talhor cantando i falsi miei dilette;
 E come ne'Teatri hor Donna, ed hora
 Huom fei rappresentando in vario stile
 Quanto volle insegnar Natura, ed Arte.
 Così la stella mia seguendo ancora
 Di fuggitiva età nel verde Aprile
 Vergai con vario stil ben mille carte²¹

Andreini draws a parallel between her poetry and her work in the theatre: she is deeply conscious of the artifice of both the actor's performance and the poet's verse. In the first tercet, Andreini directly refers to her second home, the theatre, as a way of explaining the presence of both male and female poetic voices in the *Rime*: 'E come ne' Teatri hor Donna, ed hora/ Huom fe' rappresentando in vario stile/ Quanto volle insegnar Natura, ed Arte'. The variously gendered poetic voices in the *Rime* can be likened to her shifting roles of the theatre: and as in the theatre, everything in her poetry is a lie, a fiction. Addressing her readers directly, she advises them not to believe in the feigned ardours of her poetry: 'Legga, non creda à questi finti ardori/ Che ne le Scene imaginati amori/ Usa a trattar con non leali affetti'. The idea of 'fiction', or 'artifice' of her poetry links well to 'il concetto ingegnoso' and 'l'elocuzione artificiosa',²² concepts which were used by Isabella Andreini's contemporary, the poet and literary scholar Filippo Massini, to characterize the poetic madrigals of the time. Indeed, through a study of the madrigals in Andreini's *Rime*, we get a better sense of how her innovative theatrical and poetic abilities may have influenced each other.

Andreini composed her *Rime* at a time when Petrarchism would soon be eclipsed by Mannerist and Baroque poetry, the ultimate expression of which can be found in the work of Marino, an admirer and contemporary of Andreini. Thematic possibilities were expanding because Petrarchan *topoi* came to be presented in ways that

²¹ *Rime*, Sonnet 1, p. 1.

²² See Alessandro Martini, 'Ritratto del madrigale poetico fra cinque e seicento', *Lettere italiane* 33:4 (1981), 529–48 (p. 542). See also Giulio Ferroni and Amedeo Quodnum, *La "locuzione artificiosa": teoria ed esperienza della lirica a Napoli nell'età del manierismo* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1973).

were at the very least novel or clever, or even earthly and sensual. Andreini's work is best considered in the context of this general atmosphere of experimentation and as part of a poetic conversation that included the work of Marino and Chiabrera. The madrigal form in particular may be understood as a genre that lent itself well to the exploration of these new themes, because of its brevity and because of its lack of structure relative to other poetic genres. Furthermore, at this time of transition for Petrarchism, the madrigal as a poetic form was also at a turning point, with the poetic madrigal gaining precedence over the musical madrigal. Earlier in the Cinquecento, more emphasis had been placed on the musical composition of the madrigal than on the poetic composition. Towards the end of the century, because of a growing predilection for monodic madrigals written for a single voice, and because of the trend of writing and sharing madrigals at court, the words themselves came to take on as much if not more importance than the accompanying music.²³

Despite the limited bibliography on the poetic madrigal as a genre of lyric poetry, it can be established that this is one of the most free and most experimental poetic forms in terms of distribution of rhymes and in terms of the permissibility of any combination of seven and eleven syllable lines, as well as in terms of the range of themes the poet may choose to explore. Perhaps the single most important defining aspect of the madrigal of the period is its brevity, usually being somewhere between 8 and 12 lines in length, but in any event not to exceed twenty lines.²⁴

It is also accepted as a matter of course, by historians of Italian metrics, that what was called a poetic 'madrigal' in Petrarch's time has little in common with a sixteenth-century 'madrigal'.²⁵ A madrigal from this period generally presents one thought by announcing a discrete theme and then reflecting on it. It will often take a Petrarchan *topos* as its starting point (for example fire and ice, the light from the lady's eyes, the wounded lover). It can be divided into three distinct and very brief moments: the presentation of a traditional love theme, an expression of doubt about its relevance, and a response to the question of doubt.²⁶ Meter, rhyme, scheme, ratio of seven- to eleven- syllable lines, the choices for thematic material, and the relative space devoted to the enunciation and reflection of the theme in question were all relatively open and

²³ Alessandro Martini, 'Marino e il madrigale attorno al 1602' in *The Sense of Marino: Literature, Fine Arts and Music of the Italian Baroque*, ed. by Francesco Guardiani (Toronto: Legas, 1991), pp. 361–93. For a discussion of the sixteenth-century madrigal as both poetry and music, see Janie Cole, *A Muse of Music in Early Baroque Florence: the Poetry of Buonarroti il Giovane* (Florence: Olschki, 2007), pp. 107–72 and esp. pp. 107–11.

²⁴ During the Cinquecento there was some debate over the proscribed length of the poetic madrigal. Minturno argued that a madrigal should be between 8 and 11 lines in length, Ruscelli suggested a limit of 13 lines, Bembo established no limits on length and Filippo Massini, in his 1588 study on the madrigal recommended a limit of twenty lines based on his extensive empirical research in the form, and called form 'una vera canzone non-vestita', or a single stanza of a *canzone*. Massini is arguably the authority in terms of guidelines for structure (or rather, lack thereof) and length given the large group of madrigals he studied to establish his recommendations. Filippo Massini, *Del madrigale in Lettioni dell'estatico insensato* (Perugia: Pietroiacomo Petrucci, 1588), pp. 153–85, and esp. p. 182.

²⁵ See, for example, W. Theodor Elwert, *Versificazione italiana dalle origini ai giorni nostri* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1973), p. 135. It follows that the four madrigals in Petrarch's *Canzoniere* have little in common with the madrigals of the Petrarchists and Mannerists, and cannot be analysed on the same terms. While Petrarch's madrigals are somewhat more free in their thematic nature and are more pastoral and sensual than his other poetic works, the Petrarchist madrigal is a different species altogether.

²⁶ Martini, 'Ritratto del madrigale', p. 543.

free. It can be understood as an experimental poetic zone where the poet can compose a sketch or a study for themes that may be expanded at more length in other, longer lyric forms. It might be likened to a poetic *amuse bouche*: its digestibility is what makes it so appealing, and its compactness is its defining feature: new poetic ideas may be presented but suddenly dropped when the madrigal abruptly ends. The form allows for the exploration of a more sensual approach to these themes, one that places more emphasis on the body of the beloved, and this is certainly reflected in Andreini's madrigals. It may be argued that Andreini's madrigals are in many ways the poetic counterpoint to her theatrical work in her mad scenes: just as the startling new twists on standard Petrarchan themes of her poetic presentation vanish as quickly as they are presented, so too in *La pazzia* are the transgressive moments of her madness short-lived, quickly to be replaced by the poised, rational, erudite Isabella. The madness of Isabella is revealed to the audience but is not permitted to develop at great length because order must be restored. Both her mad scenes and her madrigals may be understood as 'experimental zones', on the stage and on the page, where Isabella Andreini was able to express both the creativity and the erudition that made her famous.

Andreini's madrigals are brief (ranging in length from 6 to 10 lines) and have a broad thematic range, although what they all have in common is the underlying theme of love. Fire and ice, hot and cold, desire, the cruelty of the beloved, unrequited love, the heart's destruction, death, the hand, and the breast are all present as themes in her madrigals. None of these themes is original in itself, but in some of her madrigals, her departure from standard Petrarchist themes is notable. As a result, we can sometimes see a binary relationship develop between the enunciation of the theme presented at the beginning of the madrigal and the reflection that closes the composition.

The first 'chain' of four madrigals in Isabella Andreini's *Rime* are all in the male voice and explore the sensation of heat and the lover's burning desire for the beloved in increasingly tortured terms, to the point of 'pazzia', or what I call 'mad-hotness'. A comparison between the first madrigal in this chain, which is quite conventional, and the last, which is more sensual, demonstrates the slow burn of love.

Meraviglia non è Donna se voi
Qualhor' à me volgete
Gli occhi sereni, ma giurate poi,
Che d'amoroso ardor vi distruggete.
Fatto son' io di voi specchio verace;
E come i raggi suoi rifletter suole,
Se specchio tocca in se medesimo il Sole:
Cosi di voi la Face
In voi ritorna, e voi medesima sface.²⁷

In this first madrigal of the *Rime*, the male lover describes how the light from his beloved's eyes has the power to destroy them both. It begins with the standard Petrarchan theme of the transformative effects of the light from the lover's eyes. The theme is announced in the first five lines. The reflection on the theme, which invokes the mirror that reflects

²⁷ *Rime*, Madrigal 1, p. 8.

the destructive power of love, is a common Petrarchist metaphor. The poem ends with a 'rima baciata', or a rhyming couplet, which is typical of this form.

The last madrigal in the chain, in contrast, is much more intense:

Se non temprate un poco
 Madonna il mio gran foco con quel gielo,
 Che'n voi nascose il Cielo,
 O se picciola dramma
 Non ricevete in voi
 De la mia immensa fiamma
 Temo, che Morte havrà di noi la palma:
 Di voi per troppo ghiaccio, e di me poi
 Perche foco soverchio hò dentro à l'alma.²⁸

The poetic 'I' is extremely agitated and refers to both his death and that of his beloved if she does not help him to cool off or to at least accept some of his fire. The typical fire/ice tension is blended with the ideas of insatiability and death. Although there is no touching, caressing or overt sexual content, there is certainly the expression of intense desire that the object of the lover's affection accept even the smallest portion of his immense flame.

In a later madrigal in the male voice, a specifically male erotic sensibility is suggested:

O lagrime, ch'ad arte
 Hò tante volte sparse in questo Rio,
 Lagrime in cui s'asconde il foco, ond'io
 Mi struggo à parte, à parte
 Quando talhor bagnate
 Le delicate membra
 Di colei, che del Ciel Diva rassembra
 Dite lagrime ingrante
 Perche de l'amor mio non l'infiammate?²⁹

In this composition, Andreini uses what Giovanni Pozzi has called the 'canone lungo' when she refers to 'le delicate membra/ Di colei, che del Ciel Diva rassembra'. This is typical of late Petrarchist and early Baroque poetry where erotic content is suggested or described and involves poetic descriptions of the body of the beloved: the neck, breasts, belly, feet, hands, lap, and legs. More conventional Petrarchan and Petrarchist poetry, by contrast, limits physical references to the 'canone breve', or to the face, lips, teeth, ears, eyes, and hair of the beloved.³⁰ There is also contact between the lover and the beloved, another defining feature of late Petrarchist as well as Mannerist and Baroque poetry, where new love situations may be explored in more concrete terms. The tears of the male lover fall onto the limbs of the beloved ('Lagrime in cui s'asconde il foco, ond'io/ Mi struggo à parte, à parte/ Quando talhor

²⁸ *Rime*, Madrigal 4, p. 9.

²⁹ *Rime*, Madrigal 18, p. 48.

³⁰ Giovanni Pozzi, 'Il ritratto della donna nella poesia d'inizio Cinquecento e la pittura del Giorgione', *Lettere italiane* 31 (1979), 3-30. See also Martini, 'Ritratto del madrigale', p. 534.

bagnate/ Le delicate membra/ Di colei, che del Ciel Diva rassembra') and then he asks the question 'Dite lagrime ingrato/ Perche de l'amor mio non l'infiammate?'. This madrigal refers to the lover's own self-destruction and a desire to burn his beloved with his tears. Corporeal sensations seep into the text, and unrequited love creates a 'hell on earth' scenario that can lead to cruelty on the part of the shunned lover.

In madrigal 5, there is an interesting twist on the theme of burning desire that was presented with increasing intensity in the first four madrigals in the male voice. Here, the female lover describes herself as both desirous and insane with longing when the male object of her affection looks at her. This is the first madrigal in the *Rime* that is presented in an unequivocally feminine voice:

Il mio vago homicida
Al ferir pronto, ed al sanarmi tardo
Dopo un sospir vano
Un desiar, un vaneggiar insano
Più che mai bello volge à me lo sguardo:
Poi come lampo fugge
Così gli occhi m'abbaglia, e'l cor mi strugge.³¹

In this poem, the representation of the male object of desire as a murderer alludes to the theme of a living death, which, when coupled with the woman's 'sospir vano', 'desiar', and 'vaneggiar insano', indicates an intense female fantasy. The enunciation of the theme of abandonment is developed over six lines, but the fantasy abruptly ends with a rare one-line reflection: 'Così gli occhi m'abbaglia, e il cor mi strugge'. Even more quickly than she conceives of her fantasy, it vanishes.

Madrigal 6 is also expressed in the female voice, and the novelty of this composition lies in the fact that the woman is actively pursuing her male object of desire:

Se per pietà del mi' angoscioso male
M'havesse dato Amore
Così le sue bell'ale
Come mi diede il foco:
L'empio, che fugge, e mi nasconde il core
N'andrei cercando à volo in ogni loco;
Ma forse à poco, à poco
Poiche 'ncendio son tutta in lieve fiamma
Conversa, andrò seguendo
Lui, che fuggendo ogni mio spirito infiamma.³²

She is on fire and tells herself she must slow down to escape self-destruction. The theme of the poem is the elusive yet consuming nature of love. The enunciation suggests that if love had given the woman wings, she would have flown everywhere looking for her beloved. Then, on reflection, she decides, using a complex elliptical structure, that it would be better to go looking for him in a calmer manner and so avoid burning her wings. The reconsideration of the first more brash decision on the part of the lover is

³¹ *Rime*, Madrigal 5, p. 14.

³² *Rime*, Madrigal 6, pp. 14-15.

a notable poetic conceit. It also echoes the structure of *La pazzia d'Isabella*, in which Isabella's sanity and rationality is restored after a period of frenzied madness.

The poet's voice in Madrigals 9 and 10 is ambiguously gendered, and so these poems can be read as expressions of female, male, or possibly transgendered or hermaphroditic, desire. They appear consecutively in the *Rime*, and are linked both thematically and by voice. Madrigal 9 deals with the themes of burning, abandonment, and death:

Per lo soverchio affanno
 Gli miei spiriti dolenti
 Abbandonato m'hanno;
 E i sensi, che già fur di fiamma ardenti
 Freddo ghiaccio si fanno;
 Ond'io chiudo le luci e mi scoloro,
 E crede Amor, ch'io dorma, & io pur moro.³³

The reference to sensory experiences and to death in the poem indicates an erotic undertone. It is important to recall that while death is often associated with parting, distance or absence in the poetry of this period, it is also commonly eroticized and connected with orgasm in late sixteenth and seventeenth-century art and literature.³⁴

Madrigal 10 describes the unyielding burning sensation felt by the ambiguously gendered absent lover:

Spuntando fuor de l'onde
 Il Sol consente pur, ch'altri lo garde;
 Poscia al meriggio infonde
 Quà giù tanto calore,
 Che'l Mondo tutto n'arde;
 Giunto a l'Oceano poi cessa l'ardore.
 Il mio, ch'io'l miri in fronte non consente;
 E m'arde à l'Oriente,
 E al meriggio; e più m'incende alhora
 Ch'altrove il chiama la vermiglia Aurora.

The lover burns hotter and more continuously even than the sun; the lover burns morning, noon, and even more at night for his, or her, beloved. The four-line extended reflection that describes the lover's burning emphasizes the intensity of desire and indicates an erotic undertone. When read as an extension of the metaphor of burning introduced in Madrigal 9, the two poems together offer a more developed elaboration of intense desire in the face of abandonment. The phonetic linking of the last line of Madrigal 9 with the first of Madrigal 10 indicates that they should be read together,

³³ *Rime*, Madrigal 9, p. 27.

³⁴ Stefania Buccini, 'Marino e la morte erotica dell'età barocca', in *The Sense of Marino*, ed. Francesco Guardiani (New York: Legas, 1994) 289–97. Buccini locates the roots of the eroticization of death in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century depictions of ecstasy of the saints in painting (p. 291). She further argues that 'la "piccola morte" o lo spasimo finale del piacere si confonde con la "grande morte" del corpo', creating a confusion between pleasure and death (p. 291). Applying these concepts to her reading of Marino's poetry, she notes, 'Nell'intero corpus mariano la morte è rappresentata sostanzialmente come esperienza sensuale' (p. 294).

strengthening the argument that they are both ambiguously gendered. Madrigal 9 ends with 'E crede Amor, ch'io dorma, & io pur moro', which bleeds nicely into 'Spuntando fuor de l'onde'. The 'or' sounds from 'dorma' and 'moro' at the end of Madrigal 9 are echoed in 'fuor' from the first line of Madrigal 10. There is an intense physicality to the desire expressed in this pair of madrigals, and the gender of the lover is arguably left ambiguous on purpose.

The ease with which Andreini shifts from male to female to an ambiguous voice in her poetry is remarkable and unique, as is the very fact that she freely writes material that explores female fantasy and desire. While some of Andreini's madrigals conform to a more typical Petrarchist approach, others bump up against the limits of Petrarchism and take us by surprise, as do some of Marino and Chiabrera's works from the same period. Some of the madrigals certainly indicate that the love object has come down to earth. Not only is she no longer an ethereal Petrarchan Laura, but 'she' is sometimes a 'he'. In Andreini's love poetry, the lover can be a man, a woman, or may be ambiguously gendered. The lover at times can feel hatred and madness, may have erotic fantasies and seems always to be burning with desire. Andreini's poetic madrigals offer a tiny and perfect poetic space to experiment with new situations, scenarios that may be interpreted as erotic in nature and which stretch Petrarchism beyond its usual boundaries. It may be argued that the heightened erotic content in Andreini's poetry is not in itself novel, given the general atmosphere of experimentation at the turn of the seventeenth century in not just her work, but also in that of others in her poetic community.³⁵ What is interesting, however, is Andreini's specifically female perspective on erotic content as well as the ambiguous gendering of some of the lovers in her madrigals. Antithetical to the broadening of thematic possibilities and gendering of voices are the limits intrinsic to the madrigal form. The brevity, fragmentary quality, and sharp focus of these madrigals rein in the ambiguously erotic content, controlling and limiting it to no more than a taste. This drives the poetic 'I' in Andreini's madrigals to a state of mad-hotness, always left wanting more from the object of desire. The poet develops transgressive themes as far as she can, and when the lover (whether a man, a woman, or ambiguously gendered) expresses a desire for more of the beloved, Andreini is constrained by the limits of the genre.

Finally, there is no doubt that the reported spirit, versatility, and erudition of Andreini's performances are echoed in her poetry. Her status as the first diva of the Italian stage has as much to do with her identity and talents as writer as with her legendary performances. Both her *Pazzia* and the madrigals from her *Rime* indicate that the 'erotically charged dynamics between spectators and all performers'³⁶ were equally present in her performances and in her poetry.

³⁵ For a discussion of late Italian Renaissance female poets, Petrarchism and the question of imitation versus innovation, see Giovanna Rabitti (trans. Abigail Brundin) 'Lyric Poetry 1500–1650' in *A History of Women's Writing in Italy*, ed. by Letizia Panizza and Sharon Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 37–52.

³⁶ Heather Hadlock, 'Opera and Gender', p. 271.