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"Io non ho mai levato da te gli occhi miei"

The Downcast Eyes of the Women of the Upper Class
in Francesco Barbaro's
DE RE UXORIA

Carole Collier Frick

In the year of 1416, Lorenzo de' Medici, younger brother of Cosimo "Pater Patriae" of Florence, married Ginevra Cavalcanti, the daughter of Giovanni, head of the old, aristocratic house of Calvacanti.¹ Ginevra's age at the time of her wedding is not known, but we can guess that she was perhaps fifteen or sixteen, to Lorenzo's age of twenty.²

On the occasion of this young man's marriage to his teenage bride, he was presented with a wedding gift from a friend and contemporary, the Venetian humanist, Francesco Barbaro. The gift was a manuscript— a *trattato* written in Latin, which Barbaro had entitled *De Re Uxoriam*, or *Concerning Things About a Wife*.³ The 26 year-old Barbaro had been in Florence in the previous year, and was acquainted with the circle of Florentine humanists which included Roberto de' Rossi, the young Medici's tutor. While there, Barbaro could have visited the Medici brothers, where the topic of Lorenzo's engagement to the Cavalcanti girl arose. Back in Venice, he then conceived the idea for his treatise on awife and marriage, and wrote *De Re Uxoriam* in not more than four or five months. It was presented to Lorenzo in Florence during the Carnival season, in February of 1416.⁴

Given the social and political importance of marriage in the upper class, a work outlining the best way for a man to train a young woman

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to become a good and virtuous wife was probably greeted with great interest and attention by all. The marriage bond in the Florentine *classe dirigente* was arguably the most crucial connection a man would make in his life. His marriage linked his family to the family of his bride, creating an alliance of on-going importance. A man's inclusion or exclusion in the social and political milieu of the Florentine oligarchy depended partially on how he was connected by marriage, for the fabric of the ruling class was woven by these ties of matrimony, joining one family to another in intricate patterns of kinship.⁵ Barbaro, being of the same social class and understanding this fact very well, addressed just this essential quality of marriage in the very first chapter of his book. He wrote that "marriage is the strictest bond and a perpetual union of the husband and wife legally, and for the creation of children..."⁶ Further on, he continued by saying that "I strongly desire that women behave with their husband, if it be possible, so as to join and unite their hearts and minds one with the other... the two forming one."⁷

In his vision of marriage then, with its goal of husband/wife singularity, the process for achieving such a harmonious closure between the two was presented by Barbaro in painstaking detail. Beginning within the *famiglia* and linking the family to life outside the *casa*, he elaborated the behavioral ideal to which a woman of the upper class should aspire. Lorenzo, using Barbaro's *trattato*, would now be able to effectively instruct his wife on her proper role in family life. In his manuscript, the author not only outlined such basic concerns as the ideal age for a wife and her desired physical characteristics, but also discussed her clothing, and even the personal bodily demeanor deemed suitable for her. In addition, Barbaro detailed a wife's domestic responsibilities in raising children and in servant management, and then focused on perhaps the most critical aspect of her duties; that is, the proper relationship to her husband, and the larger community outside the home.

In this study, I will use Barbaro's *De Re Uxoribus* to examine the behavior that a young, upper-class woman learned was appropriate and proper, both in public and in private. Through examples drawn from this treatise and from other writers and popular preachers in Florence at this time, I will show that a woman was taught that she could put herself and her family in peril by any personally improper behavior. From the strict management of her body and clothing, to her slow, measured speech, an upper-class woman was instructed to act out the closed nature of her

class. Her eyes and ears were seen as vulnerable— conduits by which she could be influenced and corrupted, or ultimately, could corrupt herself. She was taught especially to limit eye contact, and to avert her gaze from people and things outside of home and family by focussing inwardly instead. In order to preserve her bond of marriage, she was to refuse to meet outsiders eye-to-eye, keeping her own secrets and the secrets of her family from public scrutiny. As long as a woman was diligent, prudent, and frugal at home, while being modest, dignified and serious in public, the reputation of her family would remain beyond reproach. In this way, the virtue of the family, which Renaissance culture invested in the reputation of its women, would remain secure, and the family would endure and prosper.

Early in the Trecento, Giotto had portrayed the power of the eyes for good or evil in his unforgettable frescoes in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua. Joachim and Anna, husband and wife reunited at the Golden Gate, present a riveting example of open-eyed conjugal embrace. (Figs. 1 and 2) In this scene, the power of the eyes to communicate physical and spiritual reunion is dramatized with the eyes of the couple almost touching as they kiss. In another scene from the chapel walls, however, Giotto shows another potent gaze— here used for a most deadly purpose. (Figs. 3 and 4) In this late medieval interpretation of a Biblical passage, Giotto painted the betrayal of Christ occurring with Judas and Christ staring into one another's eyes, in an excruciating interplay of good and evil. Giotto evidently saw eyes as the source of one's own internal power, and the possibility that they could be used, at will, for noble or wicked ends. Their management then, was of utmost concern. But turning now to Barbaro's *trattato*, let us look at how he lays the basis for the necessity of virtuous eyes in the women of his class.

In the first chapter of *De Re Uxoriam*, beginning with marriage in general, Barbaro establishes the need for this institution as a means by which man can elevate himself above other animals with which he shares the same carnal instincts. The marriage bond, in legitimizing these instincts, will produce better children, he writes, and ultimately, better "citizens" than those conceived outside of the formality of the marriage bond. A man's virtue (*virtù*) in undertaking a marriage, according to Barbaro, also makes him dearer and more just in the eyes of his friends, and more intimidating in the eyes of his enemies.⁸ A man's reputation in the eyes of his enemies is of utmost importance here, and his duty to

*Fig. 1*



Fig. 2

*Fig. 3*



Fig. 4

marry and to produce future "citizens" of outstanding quality (for the *classe dirigente*) is also of primary concern for the good of the community.⁹ A marriage then, especially in the upper class, carried with it a social dimension which Barbaro explicitly states at the beginning of his text, in a classic framing of one of the basic duties of civic humanism—namely, to produce good citizens.

From the onset of this text, we can see that the way in which Barbaro conceives of marriage extends far beyond the basic conjugal unit. It includes one's circle of friends (*amici*) and enemies (*nemici*), and reaches into the community (*cittadini*) at large. Similarly, the intimate tie between family, friends, and neighbors, (*parenti, amici, e vicini*) used almost as formulaic phrase in diaries, wills, and other documents in fifteenth-century Florence to designate one's own personal loyalties, has been noted by many historians, notably Dale Kent and Christiane Klapisch.¹⁰ Indisputably, a man's natal family formed the first sphere of this group. His affines by marriage, however, could play almost as central a role in his life. In Barbaro's text, his consciousness of the family and its affines as part of the larger social whole, informs his rationale for undertaking the initial marriage union. His treatment of the role of women in this treatise reflects his expanded definition of family group. The author is not only concerned about domestic duties, but also the demeanor of the wife outside the home, in the larger social milieu of which her family was a part.

Certainly the discussion of the proper role of married women, can be located within a larger discourse.¹¹ Stemming from at least the early Trecento, there was a tradition of writing, both religious and secular, which addressed the role of women and the family in the culture. Francesco da Barberino's *Reggimento e costumi di donna* is the first manuscript known expressly to detail the proper social behavior for females who were neither at court, nor restricted to the convent. Giovanni Dominici's *Regola del governo di cura familiare*, written at the turn of the century for Bartolomea Alberti, advised this young woman on how to govern her family and raise her children alone, in the years of her husband's political banishment. Leon Battista Alberti's well known *Della Famiglia* was written later, around 1433, for the elucidation and edification of the males of the exiled Alberti clan on the proper management of the family and the role of the women therein. We could also include in this general tradition, the *Decor Puellarum* published by Nicolas Jensen in

Venice in the early 1470's, and even Baldesare Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*, written at the court of Urbino in the early Cinquecento, which set out correct behavior for both females and males within a court setting.¹²

What is especially interesting about Barbaro's *De Re Uxoriam* however is that the advice given to Lorenzo and his wife, Ginevra, is a blend of humanist thought and late medieval religious ideas specifically tailored to service the upper class. Although Barbaro employs paradigms from antiquity, using Greek and Roman sources which value marriage for its role in producing good "citizens," he also still embraces the ideas of simplicity, honesty and modesty held by the late medieval Church, and even stresses repeatedly the need for true friendship between a husband and wife. This was the partnership of a sort which the Franciscan, Bernardino da Siena, taught in his sermons, saying, "I speak...of the true friendship which husband and wife must have." He goes on to say that friendship can be small or great, depending on the reason for the friendship and the usefulness of it. A friendship will be the greatest between husband and wife, he says, if beyond the utilitarian aspects of it, there is also pleasure, great honesty between them, and also virtuous behavior on both of their parts.¹³ Likewise, Barbaro's vision of the relationship between husband and wife is firmly rooted within the social complexities of time, place and class obligations. Each partner in the marriage must know his or her appropriate role, and carry it out in a diligent manner for the union to succeed. While the husband is to carry out humanist ideals of social participation however, his wife is bound to the home and family by traditional religious values.

Barbaro's next concern in his treatise, after establishing the necessity of marriage, is to define the role of the wife in the socially-embedded union of marriage. Here he invests the wife with the responsibility of the family virtue. By her personal qualities and her exemplary behavior, the family honor will be upheld, and then perpetuated by her children. Since the wife sets the personal example for the rest of the family members, her virtue must be demonstrated by certain qualities which will then enable her to shine as a clear lamp, offering her light to all the others.¹⁴ Interestingly enough, Barbaro does not emphasize the personal qualities a husband should have but rather stresses the *duties* he should undertake, such as educating his wife. The desirable female qualities which Barbaro expounds upon throughout his text are prudence, diligence,

frugality, humility, and modesty. He does not concern himself with any corresponding male qualities.

The wife then, is to demonstrate in her quotidian activities, the first three qualities (prudence, diligence, and frugality), which Barbaro refers to as her "virtues." It is the wife's discretion in overseeing the business of the household, in caring for the possessions of the family, and in dealing with the servants and her children, which will either create or destroy a family's happiness and well-being. Barbaro even compares the mother's role in running the house to a prince's role in running a city. If the prince does not keep in mind the laws and customs of the republic when he is ruler, Barbaro writes, he cannot hope to govern well. Similarly, the mother cannot run the house properly unless she possesses the qualities which will preserve and enhance the family's possessions and status.¹⁵

The other two qualities (or virtues) necessary for a woman to have are of a more personal nature, and seem to be the most important to Barbaro, given the amount of space he allows them in his *trattato*. These are the virtues of humility and modesty. Whereas the first three virtues were to be demonstrated a *casa* and should even be made manifest by a certain shrewdness ("accortezza") toward the servants and the work concerning the house, the other two should be apparent in the public eye outside of the *casa* and also in the woman's private relationship with her husband, (who was, after all, part of that larger, public world). Barbaro writes that modesty is the foundation which preserves and maintains the innate charity between the husband and wife. In the wife, the virtue of modesty is made apparent by her face, gestures, words, clothing, the way in which she eats, and how she goes about her everyday affairs.¹⁶ He says that a woman out in public view should remain covered and hidden ("coperta e nascosta"), not only by concealing her arms and other parts of her body, but her voice as well. He writes further that a woman should realize that she has two ears to hear with, one tongue with to speak with (only a little), and that she should, "with highest mystery, keep her tongue hidden behind the hedge of her teeth and the circle of her lips."¹⁷ In this way, a woman can move about circumspectly in the public sphere without fear of attracting undue attention, and without compromising her modesty, and by extension, the reputation of her family. Addressing women in general, Barbaro says that modesty is easily achieved,

"if in their repose, activities, speech, eyes, faces and

finally, in all the movements of their bodies, there is always a certain gentle seriousness, accompanied by that meekness which is suitable to the place, time and people with whom they find themselves."¹⁸

Careful body management is necessary if women are to avoid being considered fickle or thoughtless. Barbaro writes that women should not bustle about ("andar veloce"), nor allow their eyes the vanity of wandering, nor move their hands often without purpose, nor shake their heads, nor indulge in any other distortions of their bodies ("distorcimenti della persona").¹⁹ They should, instead, in each of their gestures and in their behavior, observe the proper seriousness, and be very careful in what they say or do. Such conduct will make them feel "extraordinary dignity and contentment with themselves," says Barbaro, and "will elicit great praise from men."²⁰

In cultivating modesty, women should also guard against laughing too much. Barbaro notes that while unrestrained laughter is ugly ("brutto") in anyone, it is especially ugly in women. Elsewhere in his text, he speaks of silence as a virtue for both sexes, but in both cases, he makes a strong point of saying that it is especially important for women to heed his advice. In regard to the virtue of silence, he writes that

"we ordain that everywhere the suspicion of vanity, fickleness or imprudence can fall on women and that they must keep silent continually. When they are called by one of their relatives, they should respond wisely; when greeted, return the greeting with grace and modesty. In sum, they should consider maturely what is required by the place, people, and the occasion..."²¹

Just how women actually behaved, having to have been told all this at such great length and in such exquisite detail, is not known.

But going on, Barbaro then comes to the heart of the matter, in his discussion on a woman's delicate sensory apparatus, which must be at the same time protected and controlled. For a woman to be thought modest, she must consciously restrain her facial expressions, and especially beware of her ears and eyes, no matter what the place or the occasion. Barbaro writes that in his opinion, it is often necessary to cover the ears of the

wife so that she cannot receive "by way of her ears, envy, suspicion, or jealousy," and can be spared from those "who would infect her mind and heart with their iniquity ('le infettarebbero l'animo con la loro iniquitate')".²² A woman's ears then, are perceived as a source of vulnerability for herself and her family, and must be protected by herself and even her husband, especially out in public.

Her eyes, however are not a conduit *to* the woman, as her ears are, but rather are her communicators. Barbaro seems to consider the eyes as senders, while the ears are receivers. While a woman's modesty can be compromised by the things she hears, a woman's modesty (or lack thereof) can be read by looking into her eyes. Barbaro says that a person's face is the most telling feature of their innate virtuosity.

"The face is that feature which one can truly take as a certain sign of the image of the heart and mind ("animo"). In the face then, the secrets of the heart which nature has concealed (within the body), many times can be revealed, even without talking, and (thereby) one can understand many things."²³

A woman's face can give away the secrets of a less than virtuous heart and mind. The author goes on to say that just as in the irrational animals, anger, fear, happiness, and other similar emotions can be read from looking at their eyes and bodily movements, so can one read these things in human beings. Therefore, he desires that women demonstrate modesty "in every place, at all times, and in all of their actions."²⁴ This physical restraint will serve to intervene between the beholder and the woman, and keep the secrets of her mind and heart internalized.

In illustrating these female virtues, Barbaro often employs examples from antiquity, in the humanist style. Citing Demosthenes, Barbaro advises women to develop a self-consciousness about their physical appearance at all times. He writes that Demosthenes recommended the use of a mirror to better arrange and correct the gestures of one's actions ("gesti de attioni"), so that with one's own eyes, those things could be seen which might not be remembered from his words alone.²⁵ Barbaro adds that he wishes that "women would, every day, and always, with total diligence, consider what is suitable to their position, dignity, sex, and to

the honesty of their integrity."²⁶ By using their own eyes to view themselves, they should attempt to better adjust their outside physical demeanor. He uses the citation from Demosthenes to suggest that women turn the power of their eyes on their own faces, in an inward meditation on their outward appearance—a kind of internalized dialogue with their external form.

By way of contrast, another type of discourse with one's own eyes was envisioned by Petrarch, who wrote over twenty sonnets in which the first line dwells on the power of Laura's eyes. In Sonnet LXIII, he even has a dialogue with his own eyes in which he tells them to weep, and thereby make manifest the inward sorrow which is in his heart from being spurned by the one whose eyes had held him captive from the first time he saw her. In this dialogue, the poet tells his eyes to show what is in his heart, not to mask it. He addresses his eyes in an internal dialogue, but with the desire to make the internal external. His eyes also answer back, and agree to his desire, thereby unifying the two speakers of the sonnet.²⁷ Barbaro however, uses Demosthenes to suggest that a woman use a mirror to objectify herself—to deliberately make her own outward self foreign to her inward self, and thereby to achieve a calculated split between her true interiority and an artificially-manufactured exteriority, conceived to mask her real self. She will then be able to achieve the proper closed and protected demeanor so important for upper-class women in the public sphere.

The power of a person's eyes that this implies is a force not unrecognized by other early Renaissance writers. Bernadino da Siena, with whom Barbaro kept up a correspondence, preached that a woman's eyes were the messenger of her heart. In a sermon given in Florence, he said "and I tell you, oh woman, that you project the message of your heart ("cuore") when your eye delights in seeing creatures other than your husband...", and further, "Oh, the eye is the worst procurer" ("il mal ruffiano") in bringing illicit and carnal relationships into being.²⁸ Although Barbaro was apparently interested in this popular itinerant preacher, and had invited him to speak in Treviso in 1423 when he was *Podesta* there for a time, it seems that other humanists contemporary to Barbaro did not appreciate Bernardino's railings against the new vogue among the upper class for things classical.²⁹ For example, the Florentine humanists could not have been pleased with Bernardino, when in 1424, after delivering a successful series of evangelistic Lenten sermons there, he also

personally directed the kindling of an enormous bonfire of "vanities" in the piazza in front of the Church of Santa Croce, (prefiguring Savanarola's celebrated actions some seventy years later.)³⁰

Bernardino and Barbaro were further apart in style and audience however, than in any difference in their belief in the power of the eyes. Bernardino delivered his message in the vulgar Tuscan tongue to the masses in outdoor church *piazze*, and called the eye a "procurer," which incited lascivious behavior. Barbaro, by contrast, cited Xenophon to show how to prevent such a travesty from occurring. In his *trattato* he quotes Xenophon's story of Tigranes, King of Armenia. The tale goes like this. Tigranes had met Cyrus, the magnificent King of Persia, in the company of his father, mother and his consort (also called Armenia). After they had left the king's presence, everyone was praising Cyrus,—commenting on his looks, charm, manners, and graceful body. Tigranes, upon hearing these words about King Cyrus, turned to his "la carissima" consort, Armenia, who had remained silent, and asked how Cyrus had appeared to her. She replied, taking immortal God as her witness, "I have never taken my eyes from you, Oh Tigranes, ("Io non ho mai levato da te gli occhi miei, O Tigranes"), and so I cannot know what kind or how much beauty Cyrus could possess."³¹ This instance of exemplary female loyalty and devotion under the most tempting of circumstances is cited by the young Barbaro with evident relish, for he comments, "Oh, reply full of rare honesty. Oh, words of a prudent woman, full of the greatest self-restraint." He then goes on to say that the women of his day should also learn to be as modest as Armenia, and "to restrain the lasciviousness of their licentious eyes, from which more and more scandals proceed every day."³² The eye is blamed for leading all astray. It will fall to the neo-Platonists, led by Ficino later in the century, to rescue the eye from its role as a powerful tool of temptation, and to place the sense of sight along with sound, at the apex of the hierarchy of senses through which one can be led to the perception of God through the experience of divine and transcendent Beauty.³³

Still early in the fifteenth century however, Barbaro's concern over the correct management and resulting modesty of the eyes resounds with the influence of Church teaching. In Florence, Giovanni Dominici, the Dominican friar made cardinal at Santa Maria Novella in 1408, also wrote in his *Regola del governo di cura familiare* about the proper disposition of the eye. This manuscript, written prior to *De Re Uxoriam* in ca. 1400-

1405, was a protest which appeared in reaction to the growing popularity of humanist thought. It subsequently influenced Dominican writing throughout the Quattrocento.³⁴ In this evangelistic *trattato* dedicated to Bartolomea Alberti, Dominici reminds her that her entire body is a gift from God, and therefore she must give all credit to Him. In fact, she must remember that everything comes from God. Realizing this heavenly gift, Bartolomea is told that she should avert her eyes from vanity, and realize that her eyes can scandalize her. She should render her eyes to God, and use them to see the nobility of creation and to contemplate the sublime and marvelous things He has created. She should keep her eyes open on "the sky, the woods, the forest, and on the flowers and the things of the Creator that they can illumine ('infiammare')." ³⁵ In the city, where there are sinners or sinful things, she should keep her eyes down, and fixed on (God's) earth.

Dominici then, conceives of the eyes as a source of temptation when they are not looking on God's creations. If Bartolomea finds herself among the things which God has made, she should feast her eyes. But in the city, surrounded by the false vanities of man, she is to keep her eyes resolutely on the ground. For Dominici, eyes are not only the senders of a woman's personal thoughts, (as they apparently are in Barbaro), but receivers as well, vulnerable conduits by which she can be corrupted by observing the sins of man.³⁶ Dominici's rationale for a woman keeping her eyes downcast out in the public streets has to do primarily with avoiding worldly influences, and can apply equally to men *or* women. Barbaro's thinking however, is much more socially dictated. It would not do for a Florentine merchant to keep his eyes continuously down. At the same time, his wife's downcast eyes were seen as an essential indicator of modesty and a desire to protect the secrets of her own heart. By consciously controlling her potentially destructive glance, she attempts to preserve her good reputation, and the reputation of her family. The eye for Dominici can also be a source of scandal however, and although he does not preach to Bartolomea on the consequences of a lascivious gaze, (as Barbaro does to Lorenzo and his wife Ginevra), a basic fear of the power of a female's imprudent glance is still evident in his writing.

Another dimension of Dominici's *trattato* reinforces his view of the eye as a powerful receiver. He devotes a chapter of his *Regola* to the proper raising of children, in which he stresses the importance of the visual environment for them. (This work was written for a wife who was

handling the task without her husband's advice because he had been politically exiled from Florence.) In this chapter, Dominici explains that the children's eyes will receive the images with which they are surrounded. He thus advises Bartolomea to

"have paintings in the house of youthful saints or young virgins, with which your child, still in swaddling bands ('nelle fascie'), can entertain him or herself from the time of infancy, by imitating what they see in the pictures."³⁷

He continues by encouraging the young mother to have a statue of the Virgin Mary with the baby Jesus in her arms, the baby holding a little bird or a pomegranate in his hands. Or, she should have a statue of Mary with Jesus nursing, or sleeping in the arms of his mother. These images, along with child-size altars adorned with flowers, are appropriate, he writes, as a first learning experience for children, so that as they open their eyes ("come aprono gli occhi"), they can see things which will nourish them and guide their development. Children's first influences according to Dominici, come through their eyes, followed next by their mother's words, and then from reading the Scriptures.³⁸ Through these first impressions, a child's character is molded from infancy. Whether or not this suggests a greater vulnerability through the eyes than Barbaro sees is an interesting question. Barbaro's more socially-embedded, humanistic approach seems to put a person in control of his or her own eyes. For him, the management of eyes is within the power of the individual. In contrast, Dominici's spiritually-grounded ideas tend to stress a basic vulnerability to visual influences from childhood on.

In Barbaro's treatise, he too addresses the task of raising children, but his approach again is more specifically designed for the upper class. He discusses in great detail, for instance, what to look for in a wet nurse or *balia*, which any family of means would have employed to nurse their children until they were weaned, (usually by the age of two). While the folklore of medieval Italy was rich with the belief in the power of the *malocchio*, or evil eye, Barbaro does not seem to be worried about this possibility in a *balia*.³⁹ Other writers of the time however, *had* addressed the topic of the eyes of the wet nurse as one of the problems of ensuring the quality of a *balia*. Her physical characteristics, and especially her

eyes, had traditionally been sources of concern to her prospective employers. Margherita Datini, a late Trecento woman from Prato (in the countryside near Florence), had been given the job of obtaining wet-nurses for the families of business associates of her husband, the merchant Francesco Datini. She complained in a letter to him that one nurse she had found would not do, for "the longer she stays, the more evil she becomes-- and besides, she has only one eye."⁴⁰ One-eyed or squint-eyed people were commonly looked on with suspicion and thought to possess the evil eye.

Barbaro, however, does not explicitly deal with this old folkloric belief in the *malocchio*. His more informed, humanistic approach advises the wife to nurse the baby herself, (such motherly activity undoubtedly seen as virtuous in the current romanticism for things of the Roman Republic). But if the mother is *unable* to nurse her own child, then:

at least the husband and wife should take the greatest care in making a good and diligent choice in a nurse. She must be of honest lineage, not a fool, nor drunken, nor impudent. She must be experienced, discreet, well-mannered and good, so that the tender baby will not be infected by corrupt habits, or take into his or her body, heart and mind (*animo*) certain evil impressions, which are then difficult to get rid of.⁴¹

It is obvious here that the habits and even physical characteristics of the nurse are thought to affect a child. Barbaro even writes that the nurse should also be pleasant-looking, for she can transmit her physical qualities to the nursing child through her milk. The conduits for corruption then, are not simply through the eyes!

The child is not only affected by close contact with the nurse, however, but also naturally, by its own mother. Barbaro, like Dominici, emphasizes the importance of the mother's careful guidance of her offspring, the task falling mainly to her because she is more suited by nature" and because "with greatest tenderness she always loves the fruits which have come from herself" ("i frutti da se stessa prodotti").⁴² But the duty of both parents to provide the personal examples which their children will imitate is also stressed. For a successful life in the ruling

class of Florence, parental paradigms of appropriate behavior were seen as essential to a child's development.⁴³

Barbaro's primary goal in training a woman to correctly raise her children and perform her wifely duties then, differs from that of Dominici or Bernardino da Siena. While still recognizing the place of God as important in his *trattato*, he reorients the purpose of marriage and children away from spiritual concerns and toward the strengthening and cohesion of the ruling class. He is not concerned that the wife be a virtuous Christian per se, but rather that she and her husband use his informed paradigms of behavior to instruct the children who will one day claim their birthright as members of the ruling class. Barbaro's secular vision is surely that of a young, upper-class humanist, engaged in the social and political concerns of his class. For his wealthy Florentine friend, this emphasis on the necessity of producing a strong new generation of offspring was personally resonant. Lorenzo's only living brother, Cosimo, had married a few years earlier, and his wife Contessina di' Bardi, had given birth in 1416, the same year in which Barbaro wrote his *trattato*, to the first of their two sons, namely Piero, (who was to become father to Lorenzo "Il Magnifico"). For these young Medici brothers then, a strength in numbers of children was probably a matter of timely concern. Without a strong, and preferably large familial base, social and political power was almost impossible to obtain or hold onto in fifteenth-century Florence. In addition, the position of the wife was crucial to the realization of a family's social and political program. Her disposition, demeanor, personal restraint and bearing all became topics for grave and reasoned discussion among her male kin.

It was from politically-savvy position that Barbaro set out his program of model behavior. The treatise, written to a husband, was framed in a discourse supposedly for the female, with only indirect references to her male counterpart. Whether or not Lorenzo actually instructed his wife Ginevra, according to the dicta set out here is unknown, but certainly the paradigms Barbaro developed were a powerful part of the upper-class male discourse of the civic humanists. In his discussion, Barbaro made the virtues of the wife identical with familial virtues. He required the wife's total cooperation in maintaining the closure of the family, especially when she was outside the home, so that its social and political aims could be realized. Since a woman's most important role was in maintaining an appearance of familial virtue, thereby ensuring public approval for all of

its members, a woman's face and eyes had to be trained to exude modesty, and to refuse to give away the secrets of her heart. She was not to compromise her family by making herself vulnerable to outside contact.

The eyes of the wife, in Barbaro's *De Re Uxoriam*, were a powerful instrument of social manipulation which could be used to project the standing of the entire family. Their gaze was to be consciously controlled and manipulated by training. Being educated of the power of their eyes, the correctly-trained wife was then in a position to be their mistress, and to use her glance at her discretion, considering the proper time, place, and people she was with. These women were trained to play out a passive, yet crucial role within the families of the upper class, that is, to be the bearer of family virtue, while refusing to meet you eye to eye.

NOTES

¹Lorenzo (1396-1440) was the great-uncle of Lorenzo "Il Magnifico" (1449-1492), his namesake who was born nine years after his death. Ginevra's family was an ancient Florentine magnate house from medieval times. By virtue of its aristocratic past, the Cavalcanti's were barred from the priorate and other high political office, in spite of the fact that the family had passed its prime and was in decline financially. See Gene Brucker, *Renaissance Florence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 1983 edition, pp. 90, 157. For an idea of Ginevra's social position, see also Raymond de Roover, *The Rise and Decline of the Medici Bank* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 19.

²The age difference between these two young people of the upper class was somewhat unusual. In the Quattrocento, men increasingly waited to establish themselves financially before beginning a family. By 1427, the year of the *Catasto*, it was more typical for the husband to be around ten to twelve years his wife's senior. Lorenzo then, was marrying at a young age. His older brother Cosimo had married around the age of twenty-four, closer to the average for the upper-class male, which was from twenty-four to thirty, in the years between 1351 and 1427. The average female age for a first marriage was seventeen. See Christiane Klapisch-Zuber and David Herlihy, *Tuscans and Their Families* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 87.

³*De Re Uxoriam* was apparently an influential work which was subsequently readied for circulation in manuscript form in the house of Barbaro's teacher, the humanist scholar, Guarino Veronese, in Verona in 1428. It was first printed in 1513 from a transcription made of the document in Verona by Andre Tiraqueau, and issued by his heirs. The second Latin printing occurred in Paris in the following year (1514) by Badius Ascensius, and carried his printer's mark. In 1537 it was translated into French by Martin DuPin, and in 1548 appeared in Italian from a translation made from the Latin manuscript by Alberto Lollio of Ferrara for Venetian patron, Federico Barboero.

The Italian translation is entitled *Prudentissimi et Gravi Documenti circa la Elettion della Moglie* (Most Prudent and Serious Things concerning the Selection of a Wife). It is this Italian version, printed in Venice at the press of Gabriel Giolito de Ferrari that I have used in this study. See William Harrison Woodward, *Vittorino da Feltre and Other Humanist Educators* (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1897. Reprint edition 1963, second printing 1970), p. 180. See also the *Dizionario Biografico Degli Italiani*, Vol. six, pp. 102-03.

⁴Sabbadini writes that in addition to making new friends and inspecting new

humanist manuscripts that were known to be in Florence at this time, this trip was also profitable for Barbaro's literary production. Besides inspiring his *De Re Uxoribus*, Barbaro also then carried on a lively correspondence with his circle of Florentine friends, who now included Lorenzo de' Medici, for at least the next four years. Sabbadini goes on to say that *De Re Uxoribus* was not a political work, but rather was a "happy and luxuriant early fruit" of Barbaro's labor, inspired by the young Lorenzo's wedding. See Remigio Sabbadini, *La Gita di Francesco Barbaro a Firenze nel 1415* (Trieste: Stabilimento Artistico Tipografico G. Caprin, 1910), pp. 616, 618.

⁵ See Lauro Martino's seminal work, *The Social World of the Florentine Humanists 1390-1460*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), especially pp. 57ff for a discussion of the social importance of marriage in the oligarchy.

⁶ *Prudentissimi et Gravi Documenti circa la Elettion della Moglie*—dello Eccellente et Dottissimo M. Francesco Barbaro, Gentilomo Venetiano, Al Molto Magnifico Et Magnanimo M. Lorenzo de Medici, cittadino Fiorentino: nuovamento dal Latino tradotti per M. Alberto Lollo, Ferrarese (Venegia: Apresso Gabriel Giolioto de Ferrari, 1548), p.8.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

⁹ It must be said here that although Barbaro was a Venetian, not Florentine, the social milieu of the oligarchies in both cities had much in common, and their political aims were much the same. While the Venetian upper class had closed its ranks to newcomers in the Serrata of 1292, and Florence was still accepting *nuovi huomini* (new men) into its ruling class in 1416, the way in which the web of marriage alliances held the *classe dirigente* together within each city was very similar. See F.W. Kent, *Household and Lineage in Renaissance Florence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977) for Florence. For Venice, see Stanley Chojnacki, "Kinship Ties and Young Patricians in Fifteenth-Century Venice" *Renaissance Quarterly* 38 (1985): 240-70.

¹⁰ Dale Kent, *The Rise of the Medici* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), see especially pp. 16-19, 72. See also Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, " 'Parenti, amici e vicini': Il territorio urbano d'una famiglia mercantile nel XV secolo" *Quaderni Storici* 33 (1976): 953-982.

¹¹ Over 97 percent of all women were married, and those who were not, were almost all behind convent walls and considered to be "legally dead" for inheritance purposes. Of this married 97%, only the women of the upper class were of concern to the educated men, who, by and large, carried on this discourse, for in Florence, as in Venice, the upper class held tight oligarchical control of the city both politically and socially. Its women then, were important actors in the familial maneuvering for power. See Christiane Klapisch-Zuber and David Herlihy, *Tuscans*, p. 215.

¹² Francesco da Barberino, *Il Reggimento e costumi di donna* (Bologna: Presso Gaetano Romagnoli, 1875); Giovanni Dominici, *Regola del governo di cura familiare*, ed. D. Salvi, (Firenze: Presso Angiolo Garinei Libraio, 1860); Leon Battista Alberti, *I Libri Della Famiglia*, ed. Ruggiero Romano and Alberto Tenenti, (Torino: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1969); *Decor Puellarum* (author unknown) (Venice: Nicolas Jensen, ca. 1471); and Baldesar Castiglione, *Il Libro del Cortegiano* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1947).

¹³ San Bernadino da Siena, *La Fonte Della Vita* (Firenze: Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, 1964). This passage on friendship was taken from a sermon entitled "Come Il Marito Die Amare La Donna e La Donna Il Suo Marito," pp. 238-9.

¹⁴ Barbaro, *Prudentissimi*, p. 14. "Cosi a punto le cose nostre di casa mai non potranno andar bene, se l'accortezza della madre di famiglia non sara come una chiara lampa, che porga col suo essemplio la luce a tutti gli altri."

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14. The state of virginity, central to any consideration of a woman's expected virtues in the Renaissance, is not discussed at any great length by Barbaro here, other than at the outset of his treatise, when he takes up the initial choice of a bride. He does say that a young virgin is infinitely to be desired over a widowed woman, for she is easier to train in the man's ways of doing things (*uzanze*), not already having learned other customs and habits from a previous marriage. (Barbaro, pp. 15-16.)

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 44. "Habbiamo hora a trattare della modestia. laquale è come il fondamento che conserva e mantiene la innata charità fra il marito e la moglie. . . Questa virtù nel la moglie dal volto, da i gesti, dalle parole, da i vestimenti, dal mangiare, e dal

procedere del quotidiano commercio si comprende."

¹⁷Ibid., p. 47. "ci concesse due orecchie per udire assai; e una lingua solar per parlar poco: e quella ancho con piu alto misterio tra la siepe de i denti e il cerchio delle labra rinchise."

¹⁸Ibid., p. 44 "se nello stare, nello andare, nel parlare, ne gli occhi, nel volto, e finalmente in tutti gli movimenti del corpo, servaranno sempre una certa gentil gravitate, accompagnata da quella mansuetudine, che si conviene al decoro de i luoghi, de i tempi, e delle persone, con lequali si troveranno."

¹⁹Ibid., p. 44.

²⁰Ibid., p. 44.

²¹Ibid., p. 47. "Noi ovunque il sospetto di vanità, di leggerezza, ò d'imprudenza possa cadere, alle donne ordiniamo, che il continuo silentio debbano custodire. Quando saranno chiamate da qualche lor parente, rispondano saviamente: saltutate, rendano il saluto con gratia e con modestia. In somma considerando maturamente quel che richiede il luogo, le persone, e la occasione: . . ."

²²Ibid., p. 37.

²³Ibid., p. 44. "il volto è quello che tiene in se piu, veri, e piu certi segni della effigie dell animo nostro. In quello adunque i secreti del core, che la natura ha nascosto, spesse volte si scoprono: facendo anchora senza parlare, intendere di molte cose."

²⁴Ibid., p. 44.

²⁵Ibid., p. 44. "Usava Demosthene con lo aiuto dello specchio di concertare e correggere i gesti de l'attioni, per potere meglio con li occhi proprii discernere quello, che orando fuggire,..."

²⁶Ibid., p. 44. "le donne ogni giorno, e sempre, con somma diligenza considerassero quello che al grado, alla dignitate, al sesso, e al candore della lor integritade si convenga:..."

²⁷Petrarch, *The Sonnets, Triumphs, and other Poems* (New York: Hurst & Co., Publishers, 1800), p. 100. Translated by Macgregor.

²⁸A.G. Ferrers Howell, *San Bernadino of Siena* (London: Menthuen & Co., Ltd. 1913), p. 130. For the quotation from his sermon, see San Bernardino *La Fonte*, p. 255. This excerpt is also from the sermon previously cited, entitled, "Come Il Marito Die Amare La Donna e La Donna il Suo Marito" (How the Husband must love the Woman and the Woman her Husband).

²⁹Howell, *Bernardino*, p. 129.

³⁰Ibid., p. 132, 135, 225.

³¹Barbaro, *Prudentissimi*, pp. 45-46. "Io non ho mai (disse) o Tigrane, levato da te gli occhi miei, e però conto alcuno rendere non ti posso, quale, o quanta sia la bellezza di Ciro."

³²Ibid., p. 46. "Ò risposta piena di rara honestade: o parole di donna prudente, colme di grandissima continenza. Imparino le donne de nostri tempi d'essa modeste, e di rifrenar la lascivia de gli occhi licentiosi: dalli quali molti e molti scandoli tutto il giorno si veggono procedere."

³³See Michael J.B. Allen, *The Platonism of Marsilio Ficino* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 56-57, where he discusses the sense of sight, as expressed in Ficino's commentary on Plato's *Phaedrus*, as the last of the "knowing" faculties to be used for spiritual enlightenment by mankind. As Allen elucidates, Ficino's neo-Platonist idea of sight becomes "identical with the very highest act of the intellect, the intuitive and unitive vision of the Ideas." Sight ceases to be the lowest of faculties, (the "il mal ruffiano" of Bernardino's sermons), but is instead "the supremely intellectual act." Literal sight becomes "the ideal seeing of figurative sight, the purest understanding of the mind's eye as it gazes on absolute beauty and concomitantly on absolute truth." (p. 57)

³⁴Giovanni Dominici, *Regola del governo di cura familiare*, ed. D. Salvi, (Firenze: Presso Angiolo Garinei Libraio, 1860). On Dominici, see Howell, *Bernardino*, p. 105; and also Woodward, *Vittorino da Feltre*, p. 120.

³⁵Dominici, *Regola*, p. 47. "Abbi aperti gli occhi al cielo, alla selve, alla foresta, a'fiori e a tutte cose ti possono infiammare del Creatore; nelle città, e dove sono chi può peccare o far peccare, gli occhi bassi e fissi nella terra."

³⁶In Plato's *Timaeus*, his discussion on the eyes and the mechanism of vision speaks of the eyes as giving out "a gentle light." He says that the gods have caused "the

pure fire within us" to flow through the eyes. This stream which emanates from us through the eyes, is a two-way stret, however. Plato goes on to say that objects coming into contact with this ocular stream then "penetrate right through the body and produce in the soul the sensation which we call sight". We are able to see because the object in our line of vision has penetrated all the way to our soul. Plato's idea of the power of sight then is profound, for in seeing something, we are made vulnerable to our very core. Plato, *Timaeus and Criticas* (New York: Penguin Books, 1965; reprint edition, 1986), p. 62.

³⁷Dominici, *Regola*, p. 131. "La prima si è d'avere dipinture in casa di santi fanciulli o vergine giovanette, nelle quali il tuo figliuolo, ancor nelle fascie, si diletta come simile e dal simile rapito, con atti e segni grati all'infanzia."

³⁸Ibid., pp. 131-32. "E come dico di pinture, così dico di sculture. Bene sta la Vergine Maria col fanciullo in braccio, e l'uccellino o la melagrana in pugno. Sarà buona figure Iesu che poppa, Iesu che dorme in grembo della Madre; . . . Nel primo specchio fa' specchiare i tuoi figliuoli, come aprono gli occhi, nel secondo come sanno parlare, e nel terzo come son disposti alla scrittua." "farai uno altaruzzo o due in casa, sotto titolo del Salvatore, del quale è la festa ogni domenica: abbivi tre o quattro dossaluzzi variati, ed egli, o più, ne sieno sacrestani; mostrando loro come ogni festa debbano variatamente adornare quella cappelluzza. Alcuna volta saranno occupati in fare grillande di fiori o d'erbe, e incoronare Iesu, adornare la Vergine Maria dipinta, fare candeluzze, accendere e spegnere, . . ." p. 146.

³⁹Zeno Zanetti, *La Medicina delle Nostre Donne*, (Studi Folklorico. Castello: S. Lapi Tipografo-Editore, 1892), p. 121.

⁴⁰Iris Origo, *The Merchant of Prato* (Boston: Nonpareil Books, 1986, first printing 1957), p. 216.

⁴¹Barbaro, *Prudentissimi*, p. 60. "debbono almeno havere grandissima avvertenza, in far buona e diligente elettion della balia. la quale deve esser di honesto legnaggio, non sciocca, non ebbriaca, non impudica: ma savia, discreta, costumata, e da bene, affin che il tenero fanciullo non habbia da infettarsi di corrotti costumi, e apigliare nel corpo e nell'animo certe maligne impressioni, le quali poi difficillamente si possono estirpare."

⁴²Ibid., p. 59. "Vero e, se noi attentamente, vogliamo considerare, che la nature in un certo modo ha principalmente dato questo ufficio alla madre. Pero che con grandissima tenerezza ella ama sempre i frutti da se stessa prodotti."

⁴³Ibid., p. 62. "ambe due nelle buone qualita de matrimonio perfettissimi; supplicano la gran bonta di Dio incessantemente, che a voi figliuoli ottimi, alla Republica cittadini honestissimi possiate produrre. Per tanto se la gioventu vorra con gli occhi del giudicio, voltarsi alla vostra imitatione. . ."

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