

**RECRUITING A VIRTUOSO SINGER IN EARLY SEVENTEENTH CENTURY  
ITALY: ADRIANA BASILE, «LA SIRENA DI POSILLIPO»**

Kathryn Bosi  
The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies (Emeritus)

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**ABSTRACT**

The article concerns one of most renowned women performers of the early Italian Baroque: the star of the musical establishment of the Gonzaga family from 1610 until 1624: Adriana Basile, «la Sirena di Posillipo». Adriana is employed at Naples when word of her extraordinary abilities as singer and harpist reaches the ears of Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga of Mantua. Vincenzo I, who maintained a fine musical establishment at his court, wished to employ her, and after prolonged and difficult negotiations, involving also Vincenzo's son, Cardinal Ferdinando Gonzaga in Rome, Adriana at last agrees to come to Mantua and enter the service of the Gonzaga. The article offers an epistolary account of Adriana's recruitment, her voyage north with brief residences in Rome and Florence, and her brilliant early career at Mantua, recounted through archival documents transcribed by the historian Alessandro Ademollo, supplemented by documents from the Gonzaga archives transcribed by the present writer and other scholars. These documents, translated here for the use of English readers, offer a unique picture of the recruitment of a famed musician by one of the most brilliant Italian courts.

*Keywords*

Adriana Basile, Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga I, Cardinal Ferdinando Gongaga, Baroque musicians, Recruitment of Baroque musicians

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My relationship with Barbara Sparti dates from my early years as Music Librarian of the Biblioteca Berenson, Villa I Tatti –the Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies– Florence. Barbara, an occasional visitor, would assist me in keeping the holdings of the section on the history of Renaissance dance up to date. She was delighted by our institute’s receiving the dance archive of Andrea Francalanci, now one of the «jewels in our crown». My professional relations with Barbara began some years afterwards, when I had the good fortune to identify a choreography of the *Balletti della duchessa di Ferrara*, dating from 1585 and signed by a certain Leone Tolosa hebreo. The discovery of this choreography, and along with it, the identification of a hitherto unknown Jewish dancing master at the court of Ferrara, resulted in a study which led to an article published in *Recercare* (Bosi 2005): *Leone Tolosa and Martel d’amore: a balletto della duchessa discovered*. I could not have published this article without the expertise of Barbara, who kindly saved me from many an error: as a musicologist, I was venturing into deep waters indeed! But Barbara’s collaboration did not finish here, for she reconstructed Leone Tolosa’s *balletto* and gave a most enchanting performance with the group *Rione S. Spirito* (with the collaboration of Laura Fusaroli Pedrielli, and with music written and directed by Silvia Rambaldi) in Ferrara on 19 June 2011. It was my privilege to be present for this delightful performance, which for me was an intensely moving experience.

I am unable to commemorate Barbara with a contribution on the history of dance for this volume, being a musicologist, and having boldly ventured into the field of dance history by pure chance and in complete ignorance, but I offer instead a contribution in her memory which is perhaps not inappropriate, since it concerns one of the most renowned women performers of the early Baroque: the star of the musical establishment of the Gonzaga family from 1610 until 1624, Adriana Basile, «la Sirena di Posillipo».

This is the story of Adriana Basile, a young woman of Naples who played the harp and sang so excellently that she became known as the Siren of Posillipo. She was married to a complacent doctor named Muzio Baroni of noble Calabrian family, in the service of the Prince of Stigliano. Word of Adriana’s extraordinary abilities as singer and harpist reached the ears of Duke Vincenzo I

Gonzaga of Mantua, who maintained a fine musical establishment at his court which included such brilliant musicians as Claudio Monteverdi (who needs no presentation here) and Francesco Rasi: the famed tenor and brutal murderer who had found refuge at Mantua, thanks to his outstanding musical and poetical skills. Vincenzo was immensely proud of his musical *cappella*, and is moreover known to have been easy prey for the alluring charms of women performers. Who could be more desirable for his establishment than the young Adriana, said to be as beautiful a woman as fine a musician? After prolonged and difficult negotiations, Adriana at last agrees to come to Mantua and enter the service of the Gonzaga. But here another protagonist enters our story: the young Cardinal Ferdinando Gonzaga, the first born of Duke Vincenzo, composer and poet, who will meet Adriana in Rome during her voyage north to Mantua. This meeting will have consequences not without interest for our gentle readers. For their entertainment, we offer here an epistolary account of Adriana's recruitment and brilliant early career at Mantua, recounted through archival documents transcribed by the historian Alessandro Ademollo, supplemented by documents transcribed by the present writer and other scholars<sup>1</sup>. Our story, which will cover just over two years, begins in the spring of 1609.

This contribution offers in English translation a selection of transcriptions of letters by Alessandro Ademollo, besides a number of other documents from the Gonzaga archives. Our aim is to make available in the English language the original early seventeenth century documents, which are sometimes difficult to understand even for Italian scholars. Since for the attentive reader, the story of Adriana's recruitment and her requirements –not least her reservations– is revealed through these documents in the most explicit manner, we consider that any commentary is unnecessary. From the beginning of the negotiations

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<sup>1</sup> All citations from Alessandro Ademollo are acknowledged: ADEMOLLO 1885a, ADEMOLLO 1885b, ADEMOLLO 1888. Documents in the Gonzaga Archive are identified by their archive sigla; those traced in the database Herla have been identified by number. Other sources of publication are given where relevant. Documents published in the collection of *Lettere di diversi principi alla signora Adriana Basile scritte per cui si vede la molta stima da essi degnamente fatte del valore di sì peregrina Donna* (Venice, reprinted Naples 1626), have been identified: this source, which is above all of interest for the letter written from Milan by an anonymous author describing the performance of Adriana Basile in that city, publishes missives written to or by members of the Gonzaga family as tributes to the singer in their employment. A number of documents from the Gonzaga Archive given in my paper have not been not cited or published elsewhere.

Adriana had requested a specific invitation from the Duchess of Mantua, Eleanora Gonzaga, to enter her service. Once obtained, all problems of recruitment will eventually vanish, although we note with which particular insistancy Adriana asks to be housed near her Excellency the Duchess, ostensibly to escape the unhealthy air of Mantua.

### **The recruitment**

Giuseppe Faccone from Rome, to Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga in Mantua, 9 May 1609

My brother says he has for a while been on the trail of an excellent singer of Naples, who has these abilities: she plays the harp most excellently and sings well to it; she has a good voice, and can sing any kind of madrigal reading from the book with such sureness that no-one can do better, and even better, she plays and sings to the Spanish guitar excellently, and of this repertoire, between Italian and Spanish, she has memorized more than three hundred works. She is young, around nineteen; she would have been snapped up by some important Cardinals, who were anxious to hire her, but she is too strikingly beautiful. She has a husband who is a doctor (ASMN 990, f. III/2, c. 280, Herla 4899; PARISI 1989, vol. 1, pp. 132-133; FURLOTTI 2003, pp. 533-534, n. 814).

Aurelio Recordati from Rome, to Annibale Chieppio in Mantua, 20 June 1609

Faccone has just left, and his brother Paolo has been given orders to go to Naples to contact a beautiful young woman, a very fine singer, the wife of a doctor, to take her to Mantua. For this purpose he has been given three hundred scudi (ASMN AG 988, f. III/2, cc. 259-260, Herla 4906; FURLOTTI 2003, p. 539, n. 821).

Adriana Basile from Naples, to Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga in Mantua [undated document, but since drawn up by Paolo Faccone, presumably dating from the summer of 1609].

Since Signor Paolo Faccone came to ask Andreana Basile to enter the service of Her Highness of Mantua, and that of the *Infanta* Princess of Mantua [Margherita of Savoy, the wife of Francesco, brother of Vincenzo, whom he had married in 1608], offering the conditions which she had requested, the said Andreana replies on behalf of herself, her husband and her relatives, that she will be particularly pleased to enter the service of their Highnesses. But she desires to specify the following conditions:

Firstly, that she does not deem it seemly to depart for the said service without the particular request of their Highnesses the Duchess and the hereditary Princess; so that they recognize

and understand that her aim is to serve them as a lowly servant amongst their own, and nothing else, and that their Highnesses will deign to write to the *Vice Regina* of Naples, to attest that the same ladies call and command her, so that she can serve them preserving her reputation and respecting her relatives, and that it be known that her departure is on the particular request of Their Highnesses, so that she is greatly honoured.

Secondly, it is requested that His Highness the Duke will employ Signor Muzio Baroni her husband, along with Giovanni Battista her brother, who are able persons, as Signor Paolo will explain to His Highness.

I, Andriana Basile, agree to that written above

I, Mutio Baroni, agree to that written above (ASMN AG 826; ADEMOLLO 1888, pp. 89-90)<sup>2</sup>.

**Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga from Mantua, to the *Vice Regina* of Naples, 21 August  
1609**

My wife the Duchess and I wish to have in our service a young woman called Adriana, who must be known to you, for her ability to perform many kinds of music. To persuade her to transfer to Mantua I have decided to appeal to your courtesy, so that you might persuade her to undertake this voyage with the knowledge that she will be well received and well treated, both by my wife and by myself; she will be happy [...] I beg you to take this work of persuasion upon yourself, which will increase the many obligations I have towards your person [...] Praying that God will grant you a long, happy life (ASMN AG 2271, Herla 4909).

**Aurelio Recordati from Rome, to Annibale Chieppio in Mantua, 11 September  
1609**

Paolo Faccone has gone to Naples for negotiations with Adriana Basile, an excellent singer, the wife of a doctor. For now, the singer, who is pregnant, does not wish to depart because of the heat. Faccone has received 300 scudi for the purpose and is not sure how to use them (ASMN AG 988, f. III/2, c. 280; PARISI 1989, vol. 1, p. 182; FURLOTTI 2003, pp. 540-541, n. 824).

**Padre Gregorio Carbonelli from Naples, to Eleonora Duchess of Mantua, 6  
February 1610**

Having arrived in Naples, I went without losing time to find the Signora Andreana wife of Muzio Barone, and with both I acted as ambassador as requested by Your Highness, and they replied that never having known the wishes of Your Highness, the Signora Adriana thought that it was the wish of His Highness unbeknownst to yourself; as a woman she cares for her

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<sup>2</sup> This document will be included with the letter of Orazio Gentili from Naples to Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga in Mantua, 3 April 1610.

honesty and has not wished to please her husband by coming [...] She excuses herself and says that had she known Your Highness's wishes she would certainly have come (ASMN AG 826).

**Muzio Baroni, husband of Adriana Basile, from Naples, to Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga in Mantua, 6 February 1610**

There is no doubt that when fortune comes, one must not only be able to recognize it, but also be in a position to be able to receive it. I could not consider anything more fortunate and happy for myself than the proposal to come into the service of Your Highness, in which I could hope to find the betterment of my lowly state. But because this regards the person of my wife as well as myself, I am impeded from being able to meet the desires of your Highness, since for my misfortune I have not been able to agree to receive such a fortune descended from the heavens. She finds herself happy and satisfied in the service where she is, and where I am as well, of the Prince of Stigliano, and even if being called by such a high Prince as yourself is an extraordinary and rare occasion, nonetheless, as she is a woman of little spirit and initiative she sees it as a misfortune to have to leave her native city so as to change her life and her world [...] I beg Your Highness who is no less generous than discreet to pity me, who has the great fortune of being called but is not able to obey, and I excuse myself with you as a man who is not dependent only on his own will (ASMN, AG 826).

**Duke Vincenzo from Mantua, to Muzio Baroni, husband of Adriana Basile, in Naples, 5 March 1610**

I have seen on what pretext of an excuse you wish to remove from me every hope of your wife entering my service, which inevitably seems strange to me, and leaves me regretful, since I have thought of everything that could give satisfaction, as those who know my sincerity can imagine [...] I will hear of your intentions through Padre Gregorio Carbonelli and Don Ottavio Gentili, in the conviction that you will judge well that which you must do (ASMN AG 2272, Herla 3687; ADEMOLLO 1888, pp. 95-96).

**Duke Vincenzo from Mantua, to Ottavio Gentili in Rome, 5 March 1610**

Muzio Baroni, husband of Adriana, wrote to me (as you will see from the copy enclosed), leaving me resentful, my having understood that other persons wish to obstruct that which was already decided, and by doing so will damage our reputation, so that after having come to agreement on many matters, we still remain without Adriana [...] and so, to remove every obstacle, so that we do not look ridiculous, we will write to the Cardinal, our son, to ask him to let you go to Naples to resolve this problem, which, in all sincerity, we believe to have been created by the Princess of Stigliano who is happy to displease us [...] go with diligence to see

to this matter; speak with the same Baroni, mentioning all the reasons for our dissatisfaction which will make us angry, seeing that after having negotiated his arrival, and that of his wife, with many conditions, at the last minute everything goes up in smoke with idle excuses which do not stand up to scrutiny. Using every way, whether friendly persuasion, or resentful speech, make him go back to his word and to confirm his intention to come. We do not believe that his wife would resist his determined will (ASMN AG 2272, Herla 3685; ADEMOLLO 1888, pp. 92-93; FURLOTTI 2003, p. 567).

**Duke Vincenzo from Mantua, to Cardinal Ferdinando Gonzaga in Rome, 5 March 1610**

I have given orders to Don Ottavio that he go to Naples with all diligence for urgent business on my behalf; please be willing to give him absence since it is for a little time, and for something which is close to my heart, for reasons of my reputation rather than anything else (ASMN AG 2272; ADEMOLLO 1888, p. 91).

**Duke Vincenzo from Mantua, to *frate* Gregorio da Paola, 5 March 1610**

[...] it gave me no little irritation to read that the Baroni are putting me off with very improbable excuses, since we believe that the real reason is due to the Princess of Stigliano (ASMN AG 2272, Herla 3686).

**Vincenzo Gonzaga from Mantua, to the Princess of Stigliano in Naples, 5 March 1610**

I desire, together with my wife, to have in my service this woman that sings called Adriana, as I think Your Highness knows, having invited her with [the promise] of every satisfaction of her requests to come here, and I have always had positive replies from the said singer and from her husband (ASMN AG 2272, Herla 3688; ADEMOLLO 1888, p. 95; FURLOTTI 2003, p. 567, n.870).

**Duke Vincenzo from Mantua, to the *Vice Re* of Naples, 5 March 1610**

I am sending Don Ottavio Gentili to Naples, for the reason that he will explain to you [...] I beg with all my heart that you will take the matter into your hands, and use your authority as you see necessary [...] since it is close to my heart, by reason of my reputation ((ASMN AG 2272, ADEMOLLO 1888, p. 96).

Ottavio Gentili from Rome, to Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga in Mantua, 13 March  
1610

I have seen, through your letter of 5 March, the negative turn that the negotiations with the Signora Adriana have taken, thanks to the malice of others, so I will set out for Naples in the morning, and use all possible diligence and arts, as you have requested [...] I shall overcome the difficulties, which will be infinite, using now kindness, now angry words, as I see need (ASMN AG 994, f. I/3, c. 246, Herla 3689).

Ottavio Gentili from Naples, to Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga in Mantua, 22 March  
1610

Having arrived in Naples, I presented Your Highness's letters to Their Excellencies the *Vice Re*, the *Vice Regina* and Signor Don Giovanni, who all showed themselves ready to serve your Highness. And because the husband of Signora Adriana is out of Naples in a place belonging to the Prince of Stigliano, I cannot yet give you any conclusion, except to say that the *Vice Re* has sent for Baroni to come here, and that he will do everything he can to serve you [...] in order to resolve everything. I think it would not be a bad thing if Her Highness *Madama Serenissima* were to write a letter giving her consent to her coming, since then there can be no opposition (ASMN AG 826; ADEMOLLO 1888, pp. 97-98).

Muzio Baroni, husband of Adriana, from Naples, to Padre Carbonelli, 22 March  
1610

[...] obliged by me, my wife agreed [that...] Her Highness the Duchess of Mantua would deign to write to the Signora *Vice Regina di Napoli*, who would appeal to her in the name of *Madama*, so that the world would know that she [Adriana] as a woman were to serve such a high lady, and not meaning absolutely to go into the service of the His Highness the Duke [...] we wrote her promise and mine on a paper which was sent to Mantua, and that was the agreement, and in that way and no other would she be content to come, and in short, the letter from *Madama* to the *Vice Regina* never arrived, and even if I am honoured by the letter from his Highness the Duke, I could not get her to agree, and since I twice used my authority as her husband, she became ill for many days, in danger of her life, and all the Lords of Naples were contrary to this, and accused me of wishing to kill her. The Lord gave her back her health, and after a few days it all began again, and she said she would shut herself up in a monastery rather than leave Naples [...] Now I ask your Paternity what I am to do, since women are made like this. I recognise my debt to His Highness [...] but there is no remedy for my wife (ASMN AG 826; ADEMOLLO 1888, pp. 98-100).



The Princess of Stigliano from Naples, to Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga in Mantua, 29  
March 1610

Having no greater desire in this life to be able to serve Your Highness in some matter, my unhappy fortune dictates that I cannot serve you, since my husband is no less enamoured than Your Highness of the music of Signora Adriana [...] I risk the charge of jealousy, or that of a wife who does not take care of the interests of her husband (ASMN AG 826).

Ottavio Gentili from Naples, to Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga in Mantua, 30 March  
1610

So far I have not been able to achieve anything in the negotiations with Signora Adriana, because her husband has not come to Naples, and as far as I can perceive, I believe that we will have fine words and little action from the Palace gang, and this I believe is because they have not seen letters from her Highness [...] and moreover Adriana says that if it were Her Highness that wanted her, she would have written to the Lady Vice Regina or to the Princess of Stigliano [...] I am resolved to try again and I am persuaded that if I had a letter from Her Highness, as I have already written to you, and another from the *Vice Regina* or another lady, then we would overcome all these difficulties (ASMN AG 826; ADEMOLLO 1888, pp. 100-101).

Orazio Gentili from Naples, to Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga in Mantua, 3 April 1610

[The copy of the agreement enclosed in this letter (undated, but presumably drafted some time before the date of consignment here) sent from Adriana Basile from Naples, to Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga in Mantua, is given in this paper following the letter of Recordati, June 20, 1609. ASMN AG 826, ADEMOLLO 1888, pp. 89-90].

Finally, after having striven for fifteen days, Don Giovanni tells me that Madam Her Highness will write to the Lady *Vice Regina* as agreed in the agreement with Signora Adriana drafted by Paolo Faccone (a copy of which I send to Your Highness) [...] Her husband has come to Naples and is very well disposed, but he does not want to violate the wishes of his wife [...] the Prince of Stigliano [...] has let me understand that he does not wish to have problems (ASMN AG 826).

Ottavio Gentile from Naples, to Giovanni Magno in Mantua, 3 April 1610

I do not think to be able to overcome the difficulties [...] in this negotiation, if Madam Her Highness does not write a letter to the Lady *Vice Regina* [...] because [Signora Adriana]

defends herself by saying that the promised conditions have not been fulfilled (ASMN AG 826).

**Eleonora, Duchess of Mantua, to the *Vice Regina* of Naples, 9 April 1610**

Desiring [in our service], as does the Duke, this young woman called Adriana, for her virtues and honorable qualities, which we understand to be remarkable, we wish to make known [...] to both the *Vice Regina* and the same young woman, that [...] we will be happy if she comes [...] and she will be dear to us, always (ADEMOLLO 1888, pp. 101-102).

**Muzio Baroni from Naples, to Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga in Mantua, 12 April 1610**

[...] Even if I assure you that I am a most humble servant of your House [...] my wife does not wish to leave her birthplace and the vicinity of her relatives [...] I will try to remove the impediment so as to be able to quickly satisfy you, which would be the greatest benefit and honour that I could acquire in this life (ASMN AG 826).

**Ottavio Gentili from Naples, to Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga in Mantua, 13 April 1610**

I will not write again about Adriana because I am awaiting letters from *Madama* [...] to see whether with the authority of the *Vice Regina* something can be done, but I doubt it very much because I heard today that she is very much in love with a handsome and rich youth (ASMN AG 826).

**Adriana Basile from Naples, to Eleonora Duchess of Mantua, 13 April 1610**

I prostrate myself before your feet praying that you will pacify His Highness the Duke, and that he will agree, given my poor health, to relinquish his desire to have me come into his service since I could give him no pleasure, given that I have been ill since my delivery. So I beg that he deign to write to Don Ottavio that he stop tormenting me, since the ever-lasting punishments of my husband, who does not cease to torment me continually, are quite enough (ASMN AG 826; ADEMOLLO 1888, p. 106).

**Ottavio Gentili from Naples, to Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga in Mantua, 16 April 1610**

You will have received a number of letters from Adriana, that she did not want to give to me [...] for which reason I have not yet understood, and nor do I know what she said, except that her husband told me that she excuses herself on account of ill health after her delivery, which is absolutely false [...] Muzio husband of the said Adrianna told me that the Prince of Stigliano spoke very resentfully with him to the effect that they must come to serve Your

Highness, and to his wife who is obstinate he has promised to do the same, together with the Lady Princess, this week at Torre del Greco, where Adriana will be present for the occasion of the passage of His Highness the Vice Re on his return to Naples (ASMN AG 826; ADEMOLLO 1888, p. 107).

**Eleonora, Duchess of Mantua, to the *Vice Regina* of Naples, 16 April 1610**

Since this young woman that sings called Adriana has promised to enter my service and that of this House, and desiring that this happen as soon as possible, I beg Your Excellence to hurry matters along (ADEMOLLO 1888, p. 104).

**Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga from Mantua, to Ottavio Gentili in Naples, 16 April 1610**

Having seen from your letter the terms of negotiation regarding the arrival of the Signora Adriana, and since we do not wish to be accused of any lack on our behalf, we have wished to send the letter by Her Highness as requested [...] I ask [...] that the Signora *Vice Regina* assure Signora Adriana that Madam and I care very much that she come, so she must leave off every pretext of not entering our service and creating new obstacles [...] our daughter-in-law has not written, as Signora Adriana asked, because she is not here, but in Casale [...] With regard to our conditions for her husband and brother-in-law [sic], we assure Signora Adriana that we will treat them well, as their merits deserve, when we can judge their talents here (ADEMOLLO 1888, p. 105).

**Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga from Mantua, to Adriana Basile in Naples, 23 April 1610**

Lady Adriana. If from the beginning you had given the excuse of not being able, or not wishing to come to serve our house by reason of poor health, as you do now, neither would you have been so molested, nor would my wife and I have disturbed the *Vice Re* and *Vice Regina* by flooding them with our requests, as we have done, supposing that you wished that for your reputation, and to satisfy your relatives and the world together, but since the negotiation is reduced to this term, I do not know how my wife can be satisfied with your resolution, nor am I happy to have received this offense, perhaps also to some detriment of your reputation. I shall not speak of myself because from my birth I resolved not take offense from any woman whatsoever. I broach the matter with you, because Don Ottavio will speak once more at length about my order: thus think well about everything, and make the resolution that your prudence will dictate, putting passion aside. And so I will await your final resolution (ADEMOLLO 1888, p. 109).

**Eleonora Duchess of Mantua, to Adriana Basile in Naples, 23 April 1610**

Illustrious Lady. With great desire to see and know your Ladyship as a person who is [already] known to us through fame, my husband and I have written to the Signor *Vice Re* and *Vice Regina* of Naples, requesting warmly that they concede you license to come to console us. We do not wish that this request pass without any result, and we are pleased to send you with the present letter the assurance of our good will, assuring you that you will find in this House that great affection that your many virtues merit (LETTERE 1626, p. 6; ADEMOLLO 1888, p. 110; ADEMOLLO 1885a, p. 419 [gives the date as 30 May 1610]).

**Ottavio Gentili from Naples, to Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga in Mantua, 27 April 1610**

I received her Highness's letter, as I had desired, and with it I made one last effort, but in vain, because this woman is more obstinate than ever in not wanting to leave Naples, and the persuasion of the *Vice Re* and *Vice Regina* and the Princess and Prince of Stigliano have had no effect [...] after much thought I decided to go to see her this morning at her house, and after a long argument I showed the letter from Her Highness, signed by her own hand, and she said only that she knows she is obliged to come, but she does not wish to do so, if only for the fact that she will die because of the air, which has always been presented to her as pestiferous, and especially so this last year [...] given her obstination I changed tone and said that His Highness does not want to be made a fool of by anyone, and as she caught the meaning at once, she broke into a tremendous storm of tears, saying that if the Duke wishes me dead or maimed he can do that to me, I know, but I'd rather undergo all those ills than to serve someone, and saying thus she gave way to a frightful fainting fit, and when she came around she prayed me to go away, for the love of God, otherwise I would be the cause of her death (ASMN AG 826; ADEMOLLO 1888, pp. 111-112).

**Ottavio Gentili from Naples, to the court secretary Giovanni Magni in Mantua, 4 May 1610**

[...] to have to deal with a woman who is more obstinate than a Spanish mule, and a husband who carries no weight with his wife, is driving me crazy, and I swear [...] that never in all my days have I had anything harder to do, because neither reason, nor fine words, nor promises nor threats, nor anything at all, will work [...] I beg you to protect me with His Highness, and let me know if he is in any case pleased with my diligence, and I swear I would cut her heart out for this beastly obstinancy. I will make one more try this week, and if it does not work, as I anticipate, I will return to Rome, in desperate condition. Please help me, and make my case known (ASMN AG 826; ADEMOLLO 1888, p. 113).

**Ottavio Gentili from Naples, to Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga in Mantua, 11 May 1610**

I received Your Highness's letter, and that of Madam Her Highness, for Adriana Basile, but I will not give them to her before this evening because I wish that these Lords speak to her beforehand [...] Sr Francesco her brother and Sr Muzio her husband, realizing what trouble she is in, have resolved to come with good will (ASMN AG 826).

**Ottavio Gentili from Naples, to Duchess Eleonora Gonzaga in Mantua, 11 May 1610**

This evening I gave your letter to Signora Adriana, and spoke to her as requested by His Highness, and all had effect [...] She has resolved to come to the service of His Highness and this Serene House (ASMN AG 826).

**Ottavio Gentili from Naples, to Giovanni Magni in Mantua, 11 May 1610**

Finally, my suffering, vigilance and perseverance have won [...] Signora Adriana will come, and I think we will leave within ten or twelve days [...] Be the first to give the news to His Highness (ASMN AG 826; ADEMOLLO 1888, pp. 114-115).

**Ottavio Gentili from Naples, to Cardinal Ferdinando Gonzaga in Rome, 14 May 1610**

I have finally resolved all the difficulties in the arrangements with Signora Adriana who will leave on Sunday next week, the 23<sup>rd</sup> of this month, to go to Mantua (ASMN AG 826; ADEMOLLO 1888, p. 115).

**Adriana Basile from Naples, to Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga in Mantua, 17 May 1610**

I think you have formed a bad opinion of me, having been so reluctant to accept the grace of being elected to your service, but my only reluctance was the need to know that it was the desire of Madam Her Highness. Now that she has conceded me the grace (beyond my every merit) of not only writing to the Signora *Vice Regina*, but showing every kindness to me, her devoted servant, which I judged the greatest possible blessing in this world, I felt that I should no longer delay in obeying you. I have already agreed to come as soon as possible and to comply with your every wish (ASMN AG 826; ADEMOLLO 1888, p. 115).

**Ottavio Gentili from Naples, to Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga in Mantua, 18 May 1610**

As much as Signora Adriana had obstinately refused to come to you, before she had received the letter of Her Highness, now she is similarly saying no to all this nobility which does not want her to leave, at least for the entire summer [...] without doubt we will be in Rome either Wednesday evening or Thursday (ASMN AG 826; ADEMOLLO 1888, p. 116).

Ottavio Gentili from Naples, to Giovanni Magni in Mantua, 18 May 1610

Since I have managed until now the negotiations with Signora Adriana, and have concluded them, I still have the duty of assuring that the house prepared for them be conform with that promised, so that they are satisfied when they arrive, and that I can conclude with good repute that which I achieved with travail and menaces [...] and I believe that when Your Highness hears all about my negotiation, he will say that it would be a very fine subject for a *tragicomedia*. But I hope that these *Signori* will be satisfied, and that for my part I do not bring useless people (ASMN AG 826; ADEMOLLO 1888, p. 117).

### **The voyage**

#### **Il rapimento di Virgilio vendicato**

*Tolse al Mincio il Sebeto*

*candido augel canoro:*

*per cui crebbe a le Stelle il verde alloro.*

*Toglie al Sebeto il Mincio*

*leggiadra Cantatrice*

*ond' era il lito suo chiaro e felice:*

*gloriosa vendetta al mondo sola*

*se perde un Cigno, una Sirena invola*

(BASILE 1628, p. 131).

### **Rome**

Cardinal Ferdinando Gonzaga from Rome, to Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga in Mantua, 29 May 1610

Adriana finally arrived from Naples last night; she sings very well and is most able in sight reading; she has an excellent touch on the harp and the Spanish guitar; she is very well mannered, and knows her place, and is rather more beautiful than otherwise. I think after the three days of Easter she will leave for Mantua; she has been very tired by the voyage, since it is the first she has made in her life (ASMN AG 993, f. I/2, c. 255, Herla 3692; ADEMOLLO 1888, pp. 122-123; CHAMBERS 1987, pp. 113-147; FURLOTTI 2003, p. 573, n. 883).

Ottavio Gentili from Rome, to Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga in Mantua, 29 May 1610

We arrived in Rome last night with Signora Adriana, all in good health, and I believe that *Signor Cardinale* [Ferdinando] will let her leave once these three days of festivity have past. She is merry, in very good spirits, since I have reassured her about many matters that

worried her, as I will tell you in person when I see you (ASMN AG 994, f. I/4, c. 384, Herla 3693; ADEMOLLO 1888, p. 122).

**Ottavio Gentili from Rome, to Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga in Mantua, 4 June 1610**

I thought that tomorrow, the 5<sup>th</sup>, I would be in Florence with Signora Adriana, but since Cardinal Borghese has been at Frascati all this week, he prevented her departure, having insisted to the Cardinal that he should hear her. Nonetheless I believe that we will leave next Monday, the 7<sup>th</sup>. She comes willingly but is afraid of the air of Mantua and would be glad to be housed outside the city (ASMN AG 994, f. I/4, c. 390, Herla 3695; ADEMOLLO 1888, pp. 123-125; FURLOTTI 2003, p. 573, n. 884)

**Ottavio Gentili from Rome, to Giovanni Magni, secretary at Mantua, 4 June 1610**

If I find the same resistance everywhere that I have found in Rome, which I think will last through Sunday, I will never bring this boat into harbour [...] everyone says that she is a veritable Armida [...] she has asked to stay in the country so as to flee the evil air of Mantua in the hot season (ASMN AG 994, f. I/4, c. 391, Herla 3639; ADEMOLLO 1888, p. 125).

**Ottavio Gentili from Rome, to Annibale Chieppo in Mantua, 4 June 1610**

In two days I will set off, this time to accompany Signora Adriana, and I will tell you in person about that which happened in Naples with Stigliano, which had nothing to do with Rome, and I don't know what to say except that I am a foreigner here (ASMN AG 994, f. I/4, c. 389, Herla 3694).

**Virginio Orsini Duke of Bracciano from Rome, to Duchess Eleonora in Mantua, 5 June 1610**

Since Signora Andriana is on her way, I accompany her with this letter, as a guest of my own house, so that you may consider her to be more greatly recommended, besides that which Your Highness will find she merits for her own qualities, in the light of her virtue and her good name [...] as I can assure you, she is worthy of being particularly protected, and favoured by Your Highness as a very devoted servant, who in her coming hence cares above all for living under your most particular protection (ASMN AG 994, f. I/4, c. 392, Herla 3697).

**The Marchesa Bentivolio from Rome, to Duchess Eleonora in Mantua, 5 June 1610**

The great regard with which I hold the good grace of Your Highness encourages me to take up my pen [...] I compliment Your Highness on the beautiful and exceptional singer, with whom you have already begun to show your favour by having given her a beautiful jewel: in short, one does not find a similarly excellent patron amongst many [... and later, on 19 July 1610], having revered you in a letter of mine of many days ago, in which time departed Signora Adrianella, in which I congratulated your Highness on the beautiful acquisition that you have made [...] of that sweet, indeed, angelic, harmony. If I have not had the fortune to be able to hear and see such a beautiful woman, patience! I hope through the benignity of Your Highness to enjoy her desirable presence if God will concede me enough life, and then I will enjoy that angelic voice. I will not speak again of the beauty of which I wrote Your Highness (ASMN AG 994, f. I/4, c. 393, Herla 3698; ASMN AG 995, f. V/1, c. 24, Herla 3705; FURLOTTI 2003, p. 577, n. 891).

**Aurelio Recordati from Rome, to Giovanni Magni, secretary at Mantua, 5 June 1610**

This Signora Adriana, to my mind is a veritable monster of nature, because she is most chaste, beautiful, and incredibly talented. Montalto [Cardinal Peretti] told me about these things while she was in Naples: her beauty, which is evident, and her excellent singing [...] That which I find extraordinary in her, is that she wishes to do nothing beyond singing; nor can she cannot go from one room to another without engaging in counterpoint. Her brother, her sister (as ugly as the devil), and her child all sing. I believe that even the grass that she treads knows the notes that she sings (ASMN AG 991, f. I/3, cc. 322-323, Herla 3700).

**Cardinal Ferdinando Gonzaga from Rome, to Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga in Mantua, 6 June 1610**

I will say only that Signora Adriana has acquired mortal fame [in Rome]; she has amazed everyone in this city, being first in the world for her singing, but also for her modesty and honesty (ASMN AG 993, f. I/3, c. 262, Herla 3701; ADEMOLLO 1888, p. 127).

**Fra Gregorio da Paola from Rome, to Duchess Eleonora of Mantua, 6 June 1610**

Adriana comes to serve Your Highness, and she comes well trained. She is a good woman, and if not beautiful, not as ugly as they gave me to believe [... she is] a siren both enticing and marvellously flattering; she is an Armida *napolitana*. I have become a little bit shy of her. The best remedy would be to honour her with your kindness, and show your pleasure in listening to her [...] she is anxious to gain your good graces, and to triumph, and to seem a



good Christian, but she is vain, as she is young, and as a musician, and to conclude, I think [...] she likes gifts (ASMN AG 993, f. I/4, cc. 401-42, Herla 3699; ADEMOLLO 1888, p. 126; FURLOTTI 2003, p. 574, n. 885).

## **Bracciano**

Ottavio Gentili from Bracciano, to Cardinal Ferdinando Gonzaga in Rome, 7 June 1610

Marc'Antonio arrived just when we were at dinner. Signora Adriana had previously retired to write to your Highness, since today she has done nothing but praise the courtesy and beauty of Your Highness. I did not manage to speak to her confidentially, as she wished, because all the doctors were present when Marc'Antonio arrived, and Signor Muzio showed great annoyance that they wished to be present when she read it [ie. a letter from Cardinal Ferdinando], to observe her reactions. But her husband, giving me a kick, indicated that I should take it from her, which I did in a humorous manner, saying that I have to convey letters but without knowing what they contain (which pleased her greatly). Her reply to your Illustrious self will be included with this [...] Seeing today the rooms where Your Excellency were housed, Signora Adriana asked me confidentially which was the bed in which Your Excellency slept when you were here: I told her, and she replied "I want to sleep in it, so that I might perhaps acquire some cardinal virtue, or give birth to a little cardinal" [...] In short, inasmuch as I can judge whether others wear hoods, I believe that nor is she without a hood: to the contrary, I believe that she has a good cloak of Spanish cloth which keeps her very warm. I shall not fail to do as Your Highness asks and I will send you news from every place that we arrive at [...] We have been very well treated, as suited Cardinale Montalto, and as was the request of His Lordship Duke Virginio [Orsini]. Signor Francesco, Signor Muzio and Signor Lelio send their reverence, as I do myself (ASMN AG 994, f. I/4, cc. 404-405, Herla 3702; ADEMOLLO 1888, pp. 133-134; CHAMBERS 1987, p. 130; FURLOTTI 2003, pp. 574-575, n. 886).

## **Florence**

Ottavio Gentili from Florence, to Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga in Mantua, 14 June 1610

We arrived in Florence last night in good health, although Signora Adriana is a little stunned by the heat she has felt these last two days, so for this reason, and also because the Grand Duke wished it, we are staying in the house of Giulio Romano [Caccini] and we will all remain today and tomorrow [...] I will not say more, since you will hear it, except that Your Highness is admired and envied for possessing such a jewel [...] In the meanwhile the said lady begs your Highness to do her the favour of letting her stay outside Mantua in a well-

aired location, for fear of falling ill, on account of the many tales that people have told her, who all talk for their own reasons, all wanting to keep her in all the places that we pass; it would be wise to give her satisfaction, and she would be all the better pleased if she could be with Madama Duchessa, or near her (ASMN AG 1127, f. XII, c. 536, Herla 4398; ADEMOLLO 1888, p. 134; PICCINELLI 2000, pp. 251-255).

**Ottavio Gentili from Florence, to Giovanni Magno in Mantua, 14 June 1610**

I arrived in Florence with my companions all in good condition, if a little tired, and for this reason, and also having been invited by the Grand Duke, we will remain all today and tomorrow. I write [...] on behalf of Signora Adriana, who having heard described these days the air of Mantua as being pestiferous, would be glad to receive the grace of being able to be immediately housed outside Mantua, and she would be most grateful if that could be near Madam [the Duchess] (ASMN AG 1127, f. XII, c. 537; ADEMOLLO 1888, p. 135).

**Ottavio Gentili from Florence, to Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga in Mantua, 14 June 1610**

To my mind we will be in Mantua on Sunday at the latest, and I have often wished to try to start out, but the fear of making her ill makes me delay, so that she can rest when necessary (ASMN AG 1127, f. XII, c. 538).

**Francesco Basile from Florence, to Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga in Mantua, 15 June 1610**

With the present I supplicate Your Highness that you will deign to keep me amongst your humble servants [...] considering this to be amongst the greatest honours that I have ever received in my life. We are all in good health, and our only desire is to serve Your Highnesses. The Grand Duke kept my sister two days, and he heard her with great pleasure and bestowed great favours (ASMN AG 1127, f. XII, c. 539).

**Ottavio Gentili from Florence, to Cardinal Ferdinando Gonzaga in Rome, 16 June 1610**

After having written the enclosed letters [...] Signora Adriana has been to see the *guardarobba*, the Gallery and Tribune [...] and on her departure she was given a necklace of four strings with a very fine jewel as a pendant, to the total value of 300 gold *scudi* [...] after lunch Signor Paolo Giordano, Monsignor Nunzio, the Abbot as well, and Count [Alfonso] Fontanelli with a group of gentlemen, and Signor Giovanni de Bardi with his group of virtuosi came to Signor Giulio [Caccini]'s house, and some madrigals written by the Count [Fontanelli] were sung. The singers were Signora Adriana, Signor Lelio Grilenzoni, Signor

Zazzerino [Jacopo Peri], Brandini and Gio[vanni] Gualberto, and some of them made mistakes, but not Signora Adriana, to the great wonder of the Count; and then every one of them agreed that she has no peer. Signora Vittoria did not want to be heard, since Signora Adriana was present. Signor Paolo Giordano [...] gave her four cups of silver containing *confetture*, to the value of seventy *scudi* (ASMN AG 1127, f. XII, c. 540, Herla 4399; ADEMOLLO 1888, pp. 135-136; PICCINELLI 2000, p. 252, n. 580).

## Mantua

Antonio Pavesi in Mantua, to Cardinal Ferdinando Gonzaga in Rome, 23 June  
1610

[Adriana] sang wonderfully, and everyone was admiring, in particular Monteverdi, who was present. Madam showed her great affection and she told me that she would hold it dear in her memory (ADEMOLLO 1888, pp. 155-156).

Cardinal Ferdinando Gonzaga in Rome, to Adriana Basile in Mantua, 3 July  
1610

I thank you for the news you deigned to give me regarding your arrival in Mantua, which was all as I had hoped and prayed for. I am not at all surprised that Madam my mother heard you with particular pleasure, since it is enough for me to know that my mother has good taste: but who would not have, on such an occasion? I am sorry not to be able to send you the aria that you request; for now I send you *Vita della mia vita*, and a new one, that perhaps you will not dislike, and when I see that my compositions satisfy you, I will incite *la Vena e la Musa* so as to serve you as I should. I am waiting to hear how you like Mantua, and whether the city pleases you, even if Naples is the most delightful place in the world (LETTERE 1626, pp. 8-9; ADEMOLLO 1888, p. 156; ADEMOLLO 1885a, p. 421)

Giovanni Battista Sacchi from Mantua, to Cardinal Ferdinando Gonzaga in  
Rome, 15 July 1610

I received a most welcome letter from you, requesting news, and in particular, about Adriana Basile [...] from that which I have heard say, and what I have heard of her myself, although just once when she sang in an ensemble of six, she gives great satisfaction to those who see and hear her, and she is justly accompanied by good fortune, because she is appreciated and rewarded in an extraordinary manner by His Highness the Duke and Madam the Duchess, and all the lords and ladies (ASMN AG 2718, f. XVII, c. 530).

Adriana Basile from Mantua, to Cardinal Ferdinando Gonzaga in Rome, 15 July

1610

I try from day to day to be a better servant than I am, even if I cannot do more, and I am delighted to have acquired such a fine patron as Your Excellency. The Duke and Madam continue to favour me, and continually give me ever more satisfaction, and Madam holds me in such esteem and grace that [...] I cannot but be amazed by such kindness. I like the city, but to be honest I like Naples better. But to serve patrons of such merit I will forget all my preferences [...] Some days ago I received through Signor Claudio Gonzaga a letter from you, and a box, for which I kiss your hands a thousand times. *Vita della mia vita* I did not receive, only an aria with the text *Care pupille amate*, and it is very beautiful. I kiss the hands of Signor Cardinale Borghese and I beg him to send me a little piece of wood from the Holy Cross, which would be the greatest treasure that I could have in this life. I would have written to him but did not dare. To conclude, I ask Your Excellency to forgive me if I have gone on too long, begging the Lord to keep you in health [...] your most indebted servant and slave (ASMN AG 2718, f. IV, cc. 170-171; Herla 1244; ADEMOLLO 1888, pp. 157-158; ADEMOLLO 1885, p. 422).

Bassano Casola from Mantua, to Cardinal Ferdinando Gonzaga in Rome, 16

July 1610

Signora Adriana who has justly gained reputation of being a singular woman, sings so well from the book that I dare to ask your Illustrious Self to give us the pleasure of some work by you (ASMN AG 2718, f. XVII, c. 532).

Adriana Basile from Mantua, to Cardinal Ferdinando Gonzaga in Rome, 9

August 1610

If I did not write, it seems to me that I would be lacking in my role as your true servant [...] I must thank you for all the *corone et medaglie* and infinite indulgences, for which I kiss your hands a thousand times, and if God is willing, kiss your feet, so that I will be ever more happy. Madam [Duchess Eleonora] likes merry music. Since I have not had the fortune to have from Signor Giosepe heroic things, might you deign to send me some *frottole*, or merry *canzonette*, so that I can make my lady happy: I receive from her infinite favours every day [...] begging the Lord a thousand years of health for you (ASMN AG 2718, f. IV/2, cc. 172-173, Herla 1245).

**Adriana Basile from Mantua, to Cardinal Ferdinando Gonzaga in Rome, 25  
September 1610**

Your Illustrious self had to go to Marino to remember me, because in Rome, in the midst of harmonious song, indeed, the meetings of those fair sirens, it must be difficult for you to remember those who do not sing, as is my case [...] in any case I am that affectionate servant that I always was, nor will it be possible for me to separate myself from you, having many obligations, and having received a great many favours from your Illustrious Self [...] Please the Lord that I may be able to serve you in some way favourable to you. I have heard that those *signori virtuosi* [presumably Roman composers] do not wish to favour me with their arias, and they are right, since I would sing them badly. Patience! I was glad to hear that the aria *Care pupille* is your composition, for I will sing it with all the greater pleasure, and I beg you to send me some others, assuring you that they will always be dear to me: both by reason of their being your own, and because of their being in the best style I have ever heard in my life. I hope to see you this winter so that I can serve you better, and I shall not sing anything but your compositions (ASMN AG 2718, f. IV/3, cc. 174-175, Herla 1246; ADEMOLLO 1888, pp. 160-161; ADEMOLLO 1885, p. 423).

**Claudio Monteverdi from Mantua, to Cardinal Ferdinando Gonzaga in Rome,  
28 December 1610**

Before leaving Rome I heard Signora Hippolita [Marotta] sing very well; at Florence the daughter of Giulio Romano [Francesca Caccini], who sang very well and played the archlute and the harpsichord; but at Mantua I have heard Signora Adriana sing exceedingly well, play exceedingly well, and recite exceedingly well [...] I strove to assure her how much the Cardinals Montalto and Perretti honour and esteem her, and even more so Your Highness, but in reply she said that [...] Signora Hippolita is more valued by His Highness than I am, since I have heard infinite praises of her, and I had to work hard to convince her to the contrary, and I do not think that I was successful, for she said that if Signor Cardinale considered me as much as you say he does, he would have deigned to send me some of his fine arias so that I could sing them (ASMN AG Autografi 6, cc. 108-109, Herla 2670; DE PAOLI 1973, pp. 50-53).

**Adriana Basile from Mantua, to Cardinal Ferdinando Gonzaga in Rome, 11  
January 1611**

If I am such your servant, if Your Illustrious Self allows me to be accused of discourtesy saying that I have received two of your [letters] and not replied to them [...] I do not confess to having received them [...] I should be ill mannered indeed to receive such signs of favour without replying to them: but with power you hold over me, you may say that which you wish. On the other hand, you do well not to write to me, but be assured that I could not be

your greater servant than I am now, and so if you write or do not write, as a joke or with some reason, that which I was I will always be, and nether departure or distance can dissolve the obligations I hold towards you, since they are indissoluble knots. Live therefore happy and content; I shall be constantly praying for your health [...] and to not disturb you further I conclude with a deep curtesy (ASMN AG 2721, f. XII/1, c. 245, Herla 1276; ADEMOLLO 1888, p. 162).

Claudio Monteverdi from Mantua [to Cardinal Ferdinando Gonzaga in Rome],  
22 January 1611

Every Friday evening music is made in the Hall of Mirrors. Signora Adriana comes to sing in ensemble music and gives such power and striking beauty to the compositions as to delight the senses, so that the room almost becomes a new theatre [...] and I believe that before we come to the end of this *carnevale* of concerts His Highness the Duke will have to stand guards at the entrance [...] In the audience there were [...] knights and ladies from all parts of the court, but also more than a hundred people from the city [...] On another such splendid occasion [...] Signora Adriana and Don Giovanni Battista [Marinoni] will sing the very beautiful madrigal *Ah, che morir mi sento*<sup>3</sup> [to the *chitarroni* and wooden organ...] the other madrigal, to the organ alone. Tomorrow I shall go and give the two pieces to Signora Adriana, and I know how much she will like them. I do not want to tell her the composer's name until she has sung them; I shall describe for Your Excellency the success of everything (ASMN AG Autografi 6, cc. 118-119, Herla 2671; DE PAOLI 1973, pp. 57-59)<sup>4</sup>.

## Milan

Unknown writer from Milan to the court of Mantua, 29 August 1611

In the meantime they delayed, as did Signor Giulio and I, to hear the music of an Angel, guest in the house of Signor Balthassar da Rho, the resident ambassador here for his Highness of Mantua, who before the Duchess of Frias and many other women for two hours held the souls of all enchanted - indeed taken up to Heaven. She was the lady Adriana Basile, a Neapolitan gentlewoman, called to his court some two months back by the said Highness [of Mantua], with a provision of two thousand *scudi* a year, besides a thousand other commodities, from furniture to clothes to jewels of great value, which now the Duke, now the Duchess, give her daily; the Duchess in particular being so charmed, that she cannot live without her, as being the only element of cheer in her infirmity. And this lady is as beautiful as a goddess, adorned with so much grace, and a figure so fetching and alluring, that neither the eye nor the heart can resist, and that which makes her all the more

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<sup>3</sup> One of the two madrigals composed and sent by Cardinal Ferdinando Gonzaga.

<sup>4</sup> For an English translation, see ARNOLD 1968, pp. 34-36.

invincible is her *onestà* [virtue]: for this reason her beauty is all the more prized and appreciated.

When this new Siren sang, as I said, it was a miracle that I, and the others who listened to her intently, were not petrified, or indeed did not give up our living breath: it was impossible to hear her without risking death from an excess of appreciation of the spirit, the *affetti* [ornaments] the grace, the *vezzi* [playful effects] and the enchantment produced by that blessed voice. She began by singing, accompanying herself on the harp, whose imposing size rendered the sound wonderfully sweet, and whose strings obeyed so well those masterful hands, that their delightful resounding did not overwhelm, respecting the mastery of the voice which commanded them: the most noble, sweet, and the most worthy that one could hear, which bound the senses, indeed, destroyed them, and the souls of those who heard her. The sweet sighs, the discreet accentuation, the moderated trills, the happy emphasis, the daring falls, the high elevations, the interrupted phrases, the compelling phrases, the dying away of a voice, from whence came rebirth and the life of another, which rose to the stars to still those spheres; they were heavenly marvels. And those breaths came forth from the most beautiful bow of two vivid corals and from alabaster stones of the most beautiful teeth that Nature ever formed, and that face was a Heaven, and those eyes Suns, and the sigh of that breath all too fetching, and the listeners were Goddesses, and similarly the other listeners were Gods. They were left wondering whether this was taking place in an earthly place or the most fortunate seat of Paradise. Finally she left off the harp, with which divine voice she had slain us, and as if piteous of our death she took up an instrument less weighty, a Spanish guitar, and passed to *scherzi* and playful pieces, now alone, now accompanied by another voice which seemed no less worthy, that of her sister, who assisted her, entertaining us first with verses and songs in Italian, and then in Spanish, moreover, so that all seemed fire like that Heaven, and at the finish all the listeners sighed in ecstasy (LETTERE 1626, pp. 33-35; ADEMOLLO 1888, pp. 174-177; ADEMOLLO 1885b, pp. 10-14).

Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga from Mantua, to Adriana Basile in Milan, 31 August 1611 [Adriana Basile returned to Mantua, where, just before his death in 1612, Duke Vincenzo would name her Baroness and concede her a feud at Piancerreto in the Monferrato. She remained a prized member of the musical establishment of the Mantuan court, also serving Dukes Francesco and Ferdinando (this latter the former Cardinal), until 1624. She died in Naples ca. 1640, after spending some years in Rome where she and her daughters – also renowned singers and instrumentalists– won acclaim as virtuoso musicians within academic circles]<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> On her daughter Eleonora Basile, see BROSIUS 2008; GALASSI 2009.

Signora Adriana, I confess that I have a constant nagging jealousy: seeing you stay away so long, I wonder whether the gifts of the *Signori Condestabili* and the Duchess of Frias are not such as to make you forget us: we who await you so anxiously [...] I commend myself to Fine Speech, who will be my Ambassador, and raising a toast to you, I kiss your hands, recommending me to Signor Muzio, Tolla and Lelio. From home, on 31 August (at one in the morning, so that dinner is on the table). LETTERE 1626, p. 3; ADEMOLLO 1888, p. 178; ADEMOLLO 1885a, p. 425; ADEMOLLO 1885b, p. 14.

***L'Armonia del Cielo Echo della voce della sig. ADRIANA Basile. Del Duca di Mantova, Ferdinando Gonzaga***

*Non è musico il Cielo  
dove spiega ADRIANA il dolce Canto  
ma fermo tace in tanto;  
e se pur l'alte Rote  
forman soavi armoniose note  
no'l creder nò, che sia  
del Ciel proprio armonia,  
ma di questa gentil Sirena eterna  
echo fatto ai bel Canto il Canto alterna*  
(BASILE 1628, p. 15).

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