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**Melanie Racette-Campbell**

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Gender and the Literary World of 16th Century Venice

## TEXT

1 The influence of Ovid on the authors of the Middle Ages, Renaissance, and beyond is well-known, but his outsized reputation can sometimes obscure the lasting impact of other Roman poets on later writers. With this in mind, this article assesses the sixteenth century poet-courtesan Veronica Franco's engagement with the elegiac love affair and mistress portrayed by the first century BCE Roman poet Propertius. Previous scholarship has rarely looked closely at Propertius' influence on Franco: when he is mentioned, his work is treated as essentially the same as Ovid's. But I argue that Franco's poetry shows signs of thoughtful engagement with Propertius' work as well as with Ovid's. This is particularly the case with Propertius' main female character, Cynthia, who is an important forerunner for Franco's poetic ego. Although she is an elegiac beloved, Cynthia's speeches consistently undermine the elegiac worldview, especially the characterization of the lover as suffering and faithful and the beloved as fickle and cruel: a similar type of undermining is also prominent in Franco's work. Cynthia is a character type that does not exist in Ovid's works and indeed her presence in the works of Propertius is one of the significant differences between the two poets. Closer attention to Franco's use of Propertius, for which I provide close reading of two poems, *Capitoli* 17 and 20, from her *Terze Rime* as examples, provides a richer understanding of the intertextual rela-

tionship between them. At the same time, Franco's work adds to our understanding of Propertius, as she is an early reader who takes his disruption of the gendered roles of love poetry seriously.

# Veronica Franco's life and career

2 I begin with this overview for those readers who may not be familiar with Veronica Franco or her world, before returning to the specific issues of concern for this article. She was born in Venice in 1546 to a family of *cittadini*, the rank of Venetians just below the ruling patricians.[1] We do not know the details of her childhood or her education, but a family like hers would have engaged private tutors for the sons and it seems likely that she studied alongside her brothers.[2] She married a doctor while still in her teens, but soon separated from him, as can be seen from details in her first will, dated August 10, 1564, when she was nearing the end of her first pregnancy. She declares that she believes the father of her child is a foreign merchant and nobleman and she asks for the return of her dowry from her husband, both of which point to a breakdown of her marriage.[3] Not long after, in 1565 she was listed in *Il Catalogo di tutte le principali et più honorate cortigiane di Venezia* (The Catalogue of All the Principal and Most Honoured Courtesans of Venice), which brings us to her professional title: she was a *cortigiana onesta*, which translates to honest or honoured courtesan. She worked in the general field of sex-work but specialized in providing men of high status with companionship and entertainment. A courtesan was expected to be sexually skilled, but also to be educated enough to converse on topics of interest to her clients, to be able to sing and play an instrument, and to dress and act in a more aristocratic manner, as she might be called upon to act as her clients's companion on social occasions with his peers.[4] Franco's particular success and prominence was demonstrated by the facts that she was painted by Titian and received a visit from the young King Henri III of France when he traveled through Venice on his way to claim his throne.[5] Franco's position as *cortigiana* was key to her other profession as poet, as it allowed her access to literary networks. In turn, as we see below, she used her published writing to advertise her success and prominence as a courtesan.

3 Legally, there was little difference between a *meretrice* (a general term for sex worker) and a *cortigiana*, but socially the higher status of courtesan was carefully guarded by these women who received honour, fame, wealth, and a measure of protection from their association with higher class men.[6] The importance of this status can also be inferred from the attacks made against courtesans by men who tried to deprive them of it: their enemies clearly believed it was worth enough to attempt to take it away. Franco endured verbal attacks from a Venetian nobleman, Maffio Venier, who targeted her in poems circulated in manuscript. Maffio Venier used her name (Veronica) as the basis for the play on words *ver unica puttana* (a truly unique whore) and suggesting she was infected with syphilis.[7] He may have been motivated in part by a belief that she was unjustly receiving favour that should have gone to him from her literary patron, his uncle Domenico Venier. Although she responded to these slanders in her own published writing and continued to thrive for many years, inevitably age and, less inevitably, theft, plague, and the Inquisition, stole away her prosperity and at the end of her life she lived in an area of Venice occupied by impoverished sex-workers.[8] The last we hear of her is in a letter written in 1591 by the poet Muzio Manfredi thanking her for her a sonnet she had written in praise of his work *Le Semiramis*. Manfredi was unaware that she had died three months earlier, but his letter brings us to the next topic, Franco's writing and the contemporary literary scene.

4 As a courtesan, Franco needed to be well-read and familiar with the tastes and interests of her clients, so it is possible that her own interest in poetry and prose may have had its roots in her professional development. She began attending the literary salon of the Venetian aristocrat Domenico Venier in the 1570s. There she could have improved her education, particularly with regard to poetry, as she became familiar with the literary and intellectual community of Venice.[9] As part of this community, she contributed poems to collected volumes and edited a memorial volume in honour of the Venetian nobleman Estor Martinengo.[10] Her literary participation in Venier's salon, however, was never acknowledged by any of her male contemporaries' writings about it.[11] She produced two major works, the *Terze Rime*, published in 1575, and *Lettere familiari a diversi*, published in 1580. *Terze Rime* is a collection made up of

poems written by Franco and poems written to her by anonymous male poets, which are presented in poetic dialogues with hers.[12] The *Lettere* is an assortment of letters on diverse topics, such as advice to a friend who wants to make her daughter into a courtesan and a request for advice on her poetry; she also advertised her connection to Venier (unnamed but recognizable to contemporaries) and his salon in this volume. And indeed, both books show her intensive engagement with the literary culture and controversies of Franco's time and earlier, including engagement with and access to Latin literature, which brings us back to the main concerns of this article.

# Veronica Franco and Latin Literacy and Literature

5 It can be difficult to remember that the works of Propertius were not always widely available, and certainly not in translation into the various vernaculars. Even though the earliest Venetian edition of Propertius dates to 1478, we still must ask how Veronica Franco would have accessed these poems and what she could have known about them.[13] The literary circle around Domenico Venier, which Franco was part of, had some overlapping membership with the earlier Accademia Veneziana della Fama, a learned society active in Venice in the mid sixteenth century.[14] The Accademia had been interested in the study of the elegists: included in a 1558 publication of Accademia members' works in progress was an analysis of the poetry of Propertius and Tibullus as well as an edition of Propertius' work.[15] In the same year, the Aldine Press produced the complete works of Catullus, Tibullus, and Propertius, edited and with commentaries by the French humanist Marcus Antonius Muretus. This edition includes all the poems and lines that Franco engages with in her poems, an important detail to confirm, given the complicated editorial history of Propertius' work. I have not been able to trace a specific vernacular translation of Propertius that she could have been familiar with, but I suspect that Franco, like some other educated women of her era, may have been able to read Latin.[16] Suggestive evidence for her Latin literacy appears in two places in Franco's published work.

6 First, Franco claims that she is capable of writing in multiple styles and dialects at *Capitolo* 16.112-20 and 199-201, a poem in which she challenges a male poet to a literary duel:

> La spada, che ‘n man vostra rade e fóra,
> de la lingua volgar venezïana,
> s’s voi piace d’usar, piace a me ancora;
> e se volete entrar ne la toscana,
> scegliete voi la seria o la burlesca,
> ché l’una e l’altra è a me facile e piana.
> Io ho veduto in lingua selvaghesca
> certa fattura vostra molto bella,
> simile a la manierea pedantesca:
> […]
> o la favella giornalmente usata,
> o qual vi piace idïoma prendete,
> ché ‘n tutti quanti sono essercitata;

> The sword that strikes and stabs in your hand –
> the common language spoken in Venice –
> if that’s what you want to use, then so do I;
> and if you want to enter into Tuscan,
> I leave you the choice of high or comic strain,
> for one’s as easy and clear for me as the other.
> I’ve seen, in mock-heroic verse,
> a very fine work of yours that resembles
> the *manierea pedantesca*
> […]
> You may choose the language of every day,
> or whatever other idiom you please,
> for I have had practice in them all. [17]

7 After listing several styles, Franco states that she can write in any of them. Of interest for her potential Latin literacy, however, is *la manierea pedantesca*, a style of poetry that comically combines Italian and Latin words and endings and would require facility in both languages. [18] The second hints of Latin literacy are in her book of familiar letters, *Lettere familiari a diversi*. The letters are written in the vernacular, but in letter 13 she includes a Latin phrase: *sine fuco et* ***caerimoniis*** *more maiorum* (without pretense and ceremony in the manner of our ancestors). In letter 14 there is another: *ut sementem*

***facies***, *ita et metes* (as you shall sow, thus also shall you reap).[19] A Latin quotation in itself is no more a sign of Latin literacy than using the phrase *per se* or *quid pro quo* is today; however, Franco does more than simply quote the Latin author, as we can see by examining the quotations' sources: Cicero *ad Att.* 1.1.1: *sine fuco et* ***fallaciis*** *more maiorum* and Cicero *de Orat.* 2.261: *ut sementem* ***feceris***, *ita et metes.*[20] In both examples, she changes the quote to suit the context in which she uses it, altering the tense of *feceris* for the quote from De *Oratore* and for the other selecting a different, appropriate Latin word, *caerimonia*, and declining it to the ablative case of the word it replaces. Given these suggestions of familiarity with Latin and the definite traces of Propertius' influence in Franco's work, there can be no doubt that Franco had access to Propertius' text.

# Veronica Franco and the Latin Love Poets

8 Analysis of the influence of classical Latin poetry on the *Terze Rime* of Veronica Franco has largely concentrated on her reception of Ovid's works, particularly the *Heroides* and the *Amores.*[21] There is no doubt that the former, which features female speakers on amatory subjects, was among the sources of inspiration for Franco. Her work challenged the conventions of the Petrarchist poetry that was the primary idiom for love poetry in her time, in particular the silent, passive beloved who exists solely to receive the devotion of the poet.[22] Ovid's *Heroides* offers a model that portrays women's interior lives and takes their emotions seriously, especially their feelings of passion, betrayal, and regret. These poems can also be read from a position that pities rather than blames the women for their travails: for example, Ovid's portrayal of Dido is markedly sympathetic.[23] Ovid's *Heroides* were equally influential, however, on the male authors who wrote women as stereotypes of lust, venality, and greed.[24] For those poets, Ovid provides a model for women whose passions are the cause of their own misfortune and who deserve blame: a model that absolves the men involved.

9 Prime examples of this type of writing are Pietro Aretino's characters Nanna and Pippa, from his two courtesan dialogues, *Ragionamento della Nanna e della Antonia* (1534) and *Dialogo nella quale la Nanna*

*insegna alla Pippa l'arte puttanesca* (1536) and Lorenzo Venier's Elena Ballarina in his poem *La puttana errante* (ca. 1531).[25] In these works, women are portrayed as wicked and a source of danger to men: even when they are victimized, they are rarely innocent; even if they begin innocent and are corrupted, they soon become willing and eager participants in their corruption. The male authors, who present themselves as clever and critical truth-tellers, are unable to imagine women who possess as full and complex a humanity as their own. The women in their poems represent conventions that the authors do not question, nor do the authors consider how the restrictions on women's education, upbringing, lifestyles, and possibilities narrow their choices, disrupt their control over their own bodies, and stop them from expressing themselves.[26] But in her poetry and prose, Veronica Franco disrupts these conventions by writing in the voice that does not fit neatly into any of the stereotypical categories for women. Her poetic voice attempts to negotiate a space of mutual respect with her male lovers and a recognition of a shared goals for relationships. She rejects a model of woman that associates active sexuality with wickedness and depravity. She takes inspiration from the same classical models that justify the hegemonic misogyny of Aretino and L. Venier but uses them to create a character she calls Veronica and bases on her own life and experiences.

10 Previous scholarship on the influence of the Latin love poets on Veronica Franco has tended to treat them as a monolithic group without significant differences in their approach to the tropes of their genre. In her seminal monograph on Veronica Franco, Margaret Rosenthal reads Ovid and Propertius as both simply inverting the usual gendered hierarchy by making the woman a *domina*. She contrasts this with Franco, who, she writes, wants social equality between men and women "expecting the same kind of faithfulness and intellectual merit in men as she required of herself' and expressing a desire for "an '*amor mutuo*,' that is, a mutually satisfying and equally shared love."[27] Similarly, Diana Robin, writing on Gaspara Stampa rather than Franco, treats Catullus, Propertius, and Ovid as an undifferentiated group: "Stampa fashions herself uniformly throughout her 311 poems as a female Catullus, Propertius, or Ovid."[28]In treating it as essentially the same as Ovid's work, Renaissance literary scholars have underestimated Propertius' corpus.

11 Veronica Franco complicates the character of the female beloved and makes her(self) an active and valued participant in amatory relationships.[29] Moreover, her poetry was set in her contemporary world, not in the world of mythology. But when Ovid chooses to give women a voice, they are women of history and myth, both in the *Heroides* and in his later *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti*, whereas when he writes women in his *Amores*, love poetry he set in his contemporary Rome, they barely speak at all. The mistress character in Ovid's *Amores*, Corinna, is widely considered to be the most colourless, least individual of the beloveds of Latin elegy and is mostly silent.[30] Corinna exists only as a blank slate on which the lover-poet projects his interests and affections, more like Petrarch's Laura than Franco's Veronica. Propertius' Cynthia, on the other hand, is the most fleshed out of the elegiac beloveds; although she too can at times be nothing more than the medium for the poet's musings, she is also a speaking character whose story about her relationship with the lover-poet character conflicts with his.[31] Franco's reception of Propertius' unique take on the elegiac mistress is what this article seeks to add to the scholarly conversation.

# Veronica and Cynthia

12 Although there is no question that Franco was inspired by and in dialogue with Ovid's poetry, including his *Heroides*, I argue that in addition her poems show clear intertextual engagement with Propertius' portrayal of his mistress Cynthia. At first, the presence of a speaking female character in Propertius' poetry may make his poetic practice appear to be just another forerunner of men like Aretino and Lorenzo Venier, who ventriloquize female characters to present their own, very conventional, views of women. But Propertius is unusual among the Latin elegists not only in the number of direct speeches he gives his mistress, but also because in them she clearly opposes the male lover-poet character's opinion about their romantic relationship and judgements concerning the behaviour of lover and beloved. Propertius writes Cynthia as a challenge to the male lover-poet's perspective and the gendered characterization of the male as faithful and downtrodden and the female as faithless and cruel.[32] When Cynthia appears with her side of the story, it is consistently one in which she offers fidelity and loyalty in turn for the same.[33] At

the same time, she presents the lover-poet as treacherous and untrustworthy: he betrays her with other women, leaving her abandoned and alone. From Cynthia's viewpoint, she offers what the lover-poet claims to want from her but does not return and she refutes his claims on her even after death.[34] Propertius' Cynthia is interested in ethics and values in the amatory relationship and in controlling the story the poet is telling about her and them. These are concerns that are also evident in Franco's love poetry.

13 To demonstrate the intertextual verbal and thematic resonances between Franco and Propertius, I provide close readings of two of Franco's poems. The first, *Capitolo* 17, begins with a denunciation of an unfaithful lover, a topic also of concern to Cynthia (1-6):

> Questa la tua Veronica ti scrive,
> signor ingrato e disleale amante,
> di cui sempre in sospetto ella ne vive.
> A te, perfido, noto è bene in quante
> maniere del mio amor ti feci certo,
> da me non mai espresse altrui davante.

> This letter your Veronica writes to you,
> ungrateful lord and disloyal lover,
> she who lives in constant mistrust of you.
> Faithless man, you know full well
> how many ways I've assured you of my love,
> ways I never revealed to anyone else.

14 Franco identifies herself in the first line, and then proceeds to contrast her behaviour with that of her lover. The lover is described as *ingrato* (ungrateful), *disleale* (disloyal), a cause of *sospetto* (suspicion), and *perfido* (faithless), in contrast to Veronica, who reminds him that *del mio amor ti feci certo* (I have made you certain of my love). This opening is strongly reminiscent of the speeches of Cynthia. Particularly significant is the word *perfido*, from the Latin *perfide*, used by Cynthia to describe the lover-poet at the beginning of her posthumous denunciation of him at 4.7.13: *perfide nec cuiquam melior sperande puellae* (faithless man, not better than any girl should expect).[35] The word *perfide* connects Cynthia to a line of betrayed women in epic, most significantly to Catullus' Ariadne and

Vergil's Dido.[36] While Ovid draws on this same tradition in his *Heroides*, Cynthia, as a non-mythological courtesan-type, is a far more compelling analogue for Franco's words in *Capitolo* 17, especially when we consider the content of her speeches.

15 Like Veronica, Cynthia is concerned with her lover's infidelity, but not only in elegy 4.7: her critique of the lover-poet's faithlessness in the line quoted above is consistent with her words in other speeches in the corpus (e.g. 1.3.25-46, 2.29.31-8, and 3.6.19-34).[37] In poem 1.3, for example, Cynthia accuses the lover-poet of returning to her after sexually exhausting himself (she calls him *languidus* at 1.3.38)[38] with another woman.[39] In 2.29, she suggests that his morals are not as elevated as hers (32, 34), when he returns to her in circumstances similar to those in 1.3.[40] In 3.6, Cynthia interweaves accusations about the lover-poet's infidelity with statements about her own blamelessness (3.6.21-4):[41]

> ille potest nullo miseram me linquere facto
> et qualem nolo dicere habere domi!
> gaudet me uacuo solam tabescere lecto:
> si placet, insultet, Lygdame, morte mea!

> That man can abandon wretched me, although I did nothing, and he can have at home the sort of woman I do not want to mention! He rejoices that I pine for him alone, on an empty bed: if he wants, Lygdamus, let him dance at my death!

16 Cynthia's claims here about her own behaviour accentuate her innocence: she has done nothing (21: *nullo facto*) and her bed is empty (23: *uacuo lecto*). In contrast, she accuses the lover-poet of keeping another woman in her place (22): she gives him her fidelity despite the wrongs he has done.[42] Throughout the corpus, without exception, Propertius has Cynthia claim sexual fidelity; unlike the lover-poet, Cynthia never acknowledges that she has been unfaithful. She is like Franco, who lives in constant distrust of her lover (17.3: *di cui sempre in sospetto ella ne vive*), despite having proved her own love (17.4-5: A *te, perfido, noto è bene in quante/ maniere del mio amor ti feci certo*).

17 At times in response to his infidelity, Cynthia threatens violence against the lover poet, often focusing on his eyes.[43] One example is at 4.8.66: *praecipueque oculos, qui meruere, ferit* (she especially attacks my eyes, which deserved it). The words *qui meruere* (which deserved it) point to the circumstances of the poem: Cynthia has returned from a trip to the country to find the lover-poet with two other women and he says that his eyes deserve their punishment for wandering. It is established long before this that Cynthia does not tolerate infidelity (for instance in 1.4, discussed below with *Capitolo* 20) and that Cynthia frequently suspects the lover-poet of faithless behaviour. It is no surprise that in this poem, when she finally catches him in the act, she attacks him.[44] In *Capitolo* 17, Veronica Franco echoes the language of 4.8 with the threat she makes to her own straying lover, at line 44: *ed io gli occhi devea con mie man trarti* (and I should have torn out your eyes with my hands), in a poem whose circumstances are similar, if not identical: both contain a male lover who has betrayed his beloved extra-marital partner.

# Veronica Franco, Propertius, and the Trope of the Locked-out Lover

18 To further illustrate the connections between Franco and Propertius, I examine *Capitolo* 20, which elaborates on the themes of betrayal and vengeance seen in *Capitolo* 17. *Capitolo* 20 is influenced by the *paraclausithyron* (from outside a closed door)*/exclusus amator* (locked-out lover) poems found in Greek and Roman literature.[45] This sub-type of love poem features a lover, almost always male, who has been excluded from the home and bed of his beloved. In these poems, he has been supplanted by a wealthier lover (or imagines he has been) and often the poem features his complaints outside of his beloved's locked door. *Capitolo* 20 features a woman's address to her male lover's door and is primarily concerned with his infidelity: she assumes that the door is closed to her because he is with another woman. The poem has justly been compared to Ovid's *Amores* 1.6, which unquestionably provided much of the frame for the situation explored in it. I argue, however, that the focus on Ovid has allowed

other intertexts with Propertius' poems to be overlooked. Some of these poems feature the male speaker complaining about ill-treatment by his mistress but also, significantly, others show the mistress, Cynthia, lamenting the lover-poet's infidelity.

19 But before we turn to Cynthia's complaints, let us first establish that *Capitolo* 20 is in dialogue with Propertius as well as with Ovid by examining Propertius' use of the *exclusus amator* trope. Early in the poem, Franco's poetic persona takes a nighttime journey through the streets of Venice to the home of her beloved. When she arrives, Veronica addresses the door of the house as she begins the lament of the locked-out lover (*Cap*. 20. 27-9):

> e poi ch'al terren vostro uscio pervengo,
> porgo i miei preghi a l'ostinate porte,
> né di basciar il limitar m'astengo.

> And as soon as I reach the entrance to your house,
> I make my appeals to the stubborn doors,
> and do not refrain from kissing the threshold.

20 Her appeal to the door is what makes this poem different from Ovid's poem, which is addressed primarily to the *ianitor*, the door keeper. But in Propertius 1.16 a locked-out lover appeals to the door itself: (Prop 1.16.42): *osculaque innixus pressa dedi gradibus* (I, on my knees, have given kisses pressed on your steps), with the door itself, a speaking character, complaining in turn about these constant laments (Prop. 1.16.15-16): *ille meos numquam patitur requiescere postes,/arguta referens carmina blanditia* (that man never suffers my posts to rest, repeating his noisy songs of flattery). As in *Capitolo* 20, these appeals, made to the door as much as to the person behind it, take up much of the remainder of the poem.

21 In Propertius 1.16, the door is not the only witness to the lover's complaint: he claims that the stars themselves pity him (Prop. 1.16.23-4): *me sidera prona iacentem/...dolet* (The setting stars pity me, lying here).[46] In contrast, before Franco's speaker begins her address to the doors, she laments that she has no stars to complain to (*Cap*. 20. 25): *senza veder con cui dolermi stella* (seeing no stars to which I might complain). The stars thus provide both a connection and a

significant difference, as Propertius' stars offer pity while Franco's are only notable for their absence. There is also a similarity in the verbs used by the two poets. Franco's *doler(mi)* is descended from the Latin *dolere*, seen conjugated as *dolet* in the line from Propertius, but again there is a difference: in Propertius the verb suggests pity coming from outside, whereas in Franco there is only self-pity.

22 I pass over the next sections of the poem, including Franco's address to the doorkeeper and the noise of the door (34-52), as these find their parallels only in Ovid's *paraclausithyron*. At line 128, however, Franco uses a term, *querele*, from the Latin *querelae*, a word that appears in Propertius' elegies at 1.6.11, 1.16.13, 1.16.39 (notably, twice in a *paraclausithyron*), 1.17.9, 1.18.29, 2.13.20, 2.18.1, 2.20.5, 3.7.21, 3.10.9, 4.8.79, and 4.11.57, and has been identified as a technical term for "lover's laments" in his corpus. [47] In Franco's poem, the lines in which this word appears focus on the complaints as an expression of the wretchedness of her poetic ego (20.127-9): *Il mio continuo e misero languire, l'amorose querele ond'io vi prego, vi faccian del mio duol pietà sentire* (May my unceasing misery and grief, the loving complaints by which I appeal, make you feel compassion for my pain), a theme also omnipresent in the use of the term in Propertius.

23 A further connection to Propertius can be found in one of the causes of Veronica's complaints: her lover has written praises of another woman. At lines 220-5 she imagines the two of them delighting in each other and mocking her pain:

> altra ei fa del suo amor lieta e contenta,
> e del mio mal con lei fors'ancor ride,
> che vana gloriosa ne diventa.
> Quanto per me si lagrima e si stride,
> dolce concento è de le loro orecchie,
> da cui 'l mio amor negletto si deride.

> He delights in another woman, happy in his love,
> and perhaps, with her, he jeers at my pain,
> so that she feels overweening pride.
> Whatever weeping and wailing I do
> is sweet harmony to both their ears,
> who make fun of my neglected love.

24 This specific image of the beloved and a rival enjoying each other's company and mocking the abandoned lover-poet does not appear in Ovid's *paraclausithyron*. But there is a notable instance of this image in Propertius 2.9 (21-2): *quin etiam multo duxistis pocula risu:/ forsitan et de me uerba fuere mala*. (But you even have raised your glasses amid much laughter/Perhaps there were even nasty words about me). In this poem, the lover-poet unfavourably compares an unnamed woman to faithful women of myth and laments that she is spending a night with another lover. [48] Neither poem's speaker claims to have witnessed the behaviour at first hand: both signal their suppositions about what they cannot see with essentially the same word, *forse* (221) in Franco and *forsitan* (22) in Propertius, and both are concerned about the laughing mockery they may be subjected to, again using related words, with Franco concerned that her lover laughs (*ride*) at her pain, and Propertius imagining the laughter (*risus*) that accompanies their drinking. Near the end of Propertius' poem, the stars and door of elegy 1.16 reappear, but with a twist: (2.9.41-2): *sidera sunt testes et matutina pruina/ et furtim misero ianua aperta mihi* (The stars are witnesses and the morning frost and the door, opened secretly for wretched me). The stars of 2.9, rather than pitying the unhappiness of the locked-out lover, are witnesses and along with an opened door can affirm that in the past he was allowed access to his beloved. Yet the adjective *misero* suggests that past access is not enough for lasting happiness. These repeated verbal and thematic connections underline the connection between Propertius and Franco, even if in Franco, the genders of the participants are transposed, with Veronica playing the role of the Propertian lover-poet, an abandoned and derided locked-out lover. But her gender provides a further link between the two poets' works when we turn to examine other poems.

25 Although he often draws on the conventional image of the betrayed male lover, Propertius' poetry also includes in Cynthia the voice of a woman who has been abandoned and deceived. Ovid picks up this theme in the *Heroides*, but its fullest expression in elegiac love poetry comes in Propertius. Propertius 2.21's Cynthia provides an intriguing point of comparison for Franco's Veronica. In this poem, Propertius writes a Cynthia whose lover (a rival of the lover-poet) has abandoned her to get married. The first ten lines of the poem present a situation

that has some remarkable similarities with the mockery that Veronica fears in *Capitolo* 20.220-5 (Propertius 2.21.1-10):

> A quantum de me Panthi tibi pagina finxit,
> tantum illi Pantho ne sit amica Venus!
> sed tibi iam videor Dodona verior augur.
> uxorem ille tuus pulcher amator habet!
> tot noctes periere: nihil pudet? aspice, cantat
> liber: tu nimium credula, sola iaces.
> et nunc inter eos tu sermo es, te ille superbus
> dicit se invito saepe fuisse domi.
> dispeream, si quicquam aliud quam gloria de te
> quaeritur: has laudes ille maritus habet.

> Ah, as much as the report of Panthus about me to you was fabricated, so much may Venus be not a friend to that Panthus! But do I not seem to be more truthful an augur than Dodona? That pretty lover of yours has a wife! So many nights have been wasted: is it not shameful? Look, he is free, and sings: you, too trusting, lie alone. And now you are the topic of conversation between them, that scornful man says that you were often at his home with him unwilling. May I perish, if anything other than glory over you is sought: that husband has these honours.

26 There is a certain amount of self-righteous schadenfreude in this poem, drawing on the stance of the Propertian lover-poet that he is faithful, long-suffering, and truly deserves Cynthia. But it also highlights a more subtle theme of the Propertian corpus: the betrayal of a woman by her lover. This is an important theme for Franco as well, and one that she gave voice to not only in *Capitolo* 20.[49] But when Cynthia has been betrayed, she generally reacts with a potent fury that is in stark contrast to the passivity of the frustrated lover-poet. For example, Propertius 1.4 includes the lover-poet's warning to another man about the consequences of arousing Cynthia's wrath (17-22):

> non impune feres: sciet haec insana puella
> et tibi non tacitis uocibus hostis erit;
> nec tibi me post haec committet Cynthia nec te
> quaeret; erit tanti criminis illa memor,

> et te circum omnis alias irata puellas
> differet: heu nullo limine carus eris.

> You will not act with impunity: This insane girl will know, and she will be your enemy with a voice not silent; and not after this will Cynthia entrust me to you nor will she seek you out; she will be mindful of so great a crime, and, angered she will discredit you with all the other girls: alas, you will be dear to no doorstep.

27 Cynthia reacts to betrayal with jealous, vengeful fury. She will punish a man who offends her by making him an *exclusus amator* with other girls (21-2). And in *Capitolo* 20, Franco makes very similar threats (20.244-52):

> Ben sapete, crudel, che 'l mondo udràllo,
> e con mia dolce ed amara vendetta
> d'ogn'intorno la fama porteràllo.
> Né cosí vola fuor d'arco saetta,
> com'al mio essempio mosse fuggiranno
> d'amarvi a gara l'altre donne in fretta;
> e quanto del mio mal pietate avranno,
> tanto, dal vostro orgoglio empio a schivarsi,
> caute a l'esperïenzia mia saranno.

> Know well, cruel man, the world will hear of it,
> and, along with my sweet and bitter revenge,
> will carry the news of it to every place on earth.
> And no arrow takes flight from the bow
> as fast as women, warned by my example,
> vying with one another, will flee from loving you;
> and the more pity they feel for my pain,
> the more eagerly will they avoid your cruel pride,
> made cautious by my experience with you.

28 The idea that women's speech is a danger to men is another thematic connection between Propertius and Franco's poems.[50] The content of Cynthia's speech in Propertius 1.4 intersects with Veronica's in *Capitolo* 20: Cynthia and Veronica will tell other women about their experiences and by telling them they will ensure that no other women are willing to entertain the men who have wronged them. The

women of Rome will exclude the addressee of Prop. 1.4 from their doors after Cynthia dissuades them from accepting him. Franco's other women are, if anything, more active in their revulsion; they will flee from and avoid Veronica's traitorous lover. This change suits the different circumstances of Franco's poem: unlike Cynthia, Veronica herself is the locked-out lover, so having the other women lock out her former man would make them like him, rather than allied with her. Instead, they will do what she wishes she were doing: flee him. But Propertius' Cynthia presents another danger: she is a threat to the conventions of the elegiac genre. When she speaks directly, she has a rather different tale to tell about the lover-poet's fidelity or lack thereof, about her behaviour, and about their relationship. Cynthia is, in a sense, a speaking courtesan and even claims artistic mastery when she writes her own epitaph and wrests control of her memory from the lover-poet at 4.7.77-86.[51] This alternative voice, I argue, is part of what may have drawn Franco to Propertius' poetry as an inspiration for her own.

29 The scenario Franco writes in *Capitolo* 20 is comparable to Ovid *Amores* 1.6, but also to Propertius 1.16, written at least a decade earlier. Both these ancient poems feature a male lover who has been locked out by his female beloved, with Franco reversing the gender roles in her poem.[52] And the connections with Propertius' corpus expand when we consider that it includes poems that address a faithless man in the voice of his betrayed female beloved, a scenario that is not included in Ovid's *Amores*. More strikingly, some of the terms Franco uses to address her faithless love are familiar to readers of Propertius, when, for example at *Capitolo* 20.5 she calls him *uom ingrato, crudel* (thankless, cruel man). As we have seen in the discussion of *Capitolo* 17, Cynthia frequently addresses the Propertian lover-poet in similar terms. This is unusual for an elegiac mistress and draws on an epic tradition of abandoned heroines. Ovid picks up on this tradition in his *Heroides*, but there the laments return to the mouths of the forsaken women of the epic and tragic tradition, leaving Propertius unique in placing them in the speech of an elegiac mistress, a contemporary Roman character rather than a legendary or mythological one. Franco's poetic persona is far more similar to that of an elegiac mistress than an epic heroine, and certainly the author's professional position is similar to that assumed for the

elegiac mistresses, who are either high-status sex workers, adulterous noblewomen, or a combination of both.[53] Franco's own status, as a technically-married *cittadina* and *cortigiana onesta*, is not unlike the socially indistinct status of the elegiac mistresses and the luxury sex-worker/companion in general in antiquity.[54] This similarity in status strengthens the possibility that Franco would be inspired by the laments of Cynthia in addition to the Ovidian works whose influence has already been examined.

# Gender and the Literary World of 16th Century Venice

30 I conclude by contextualizing Franco's work in the conventional literary tropes about women, men, fidelity, and relationships which can be seen, for example, in poems written in Venice a few decades before Franco began her own writing career. In the 1540s, the Venetian patricians Benetto Corner and Domenico Venier wrote a series of poems that used as a character a real woman, Elena Artusi, who was Corner's current and Venier's former lover. Venier, who had been forced by illness to end his affair with Artusi, opens the collection by asking Corner to write a poem for him every time he sees her, detailing the encounter.[55] In one of these poems, "Elena" is given a speech that confirms men's beliefs about women's lust and greed: she agrees to hasty intercourse with one man in a storeroom while another lover unknowingly waits for her in a different room.[56] The poems are in the Venetian dialect, treat Artusi as a whore, and were circulated in manuscript rather than in print. In contrast, in a volume of *Rime di diversi* by the same Domenico Venier, published in 1553, the same woman is presented as a remote and chaste beauty whom Venier mourns after her premature death.[57] Regardless of how she is characterized, however, Artusi appears as an object that men can write about in order to bring them, the men, closer together. The fact that one of the authors was Domenico Venier, a man that Franco knew and admired and who would support her poetic endeavours, underscores the dominance of these ideas about women as a group even in the work of a man who could recognize artistic merit in individual women.

31 Venier and Corner's poems provide a succinct illustration of the specific literary world into which Veronica Franco inserted herself in the 1570s and 1580s. It is a world influenced by long-standing tropes about "good" women that are modeled on Petrarch's silent, passive beloved Laura, but also participate in a conversation about the evils of "whorish" women. Literary treatments of women cement the bonds between men at the expense of women's ability to be anything other than objects of their admiration, desire, or scorn. In this context, when a woman has talent in art, music, or poetry, at best the male establishment tends to view her as an exception to the general rule about women and treat her as a goddess or an honorary male: as essentially un-woman-like and subject to restrictions that excluded a working courtesan like Franco from ever fitting into such a role.[58] At worst, and sometimes at the same time, her talents are seen as evidence of her transgressions of the bounds of good womanhood: in order to possess talent in an area normally reserved for men, she must have abandoned her womanly virtue, leaving her open to accusations of promiscuity regardless of her actual personal or professional activities.[59] That these accusations were thrown at women who were not engaged in sex work is clear from a poem directed at the poet and singer-musician Gaspara Stampa which charges her with promiscuity and plagiarism: the male poet claims Stampa has dishonestly passed off as her own poems that she commissioned one of her lovers write in exchange for sexual favours.[60] There is no evidence that this is true, but the combination of sexual and literary attacks are something that Veronica Franco also had to contend with.

32 Understanding the misogynist atmosphere of 16$^{th}$ century Venice makes Franco's successful negotiation of it more impressive. While the scholarship about her at the end of the twentieth century tended to celebrate her as an outspoken proto-feminist and champion of women, more recently she has been reassessed as also cautiously concerned about managing the feelings and actions of the men she writes to and about.[61] Given the circumstances, however, this is hardly surprising, nor does it undermine her bravery when she makes bolder statements: both views of her work can be true. She had to be careful and clever, to know when to be outspoken and when to cajole in order to survive and thrive (for a time) in the world into which she was born. Her use of classical models was one part of her strategy. By

referencing Cicero in her letters and Ovid in her poetry, she showed the men around her that she shared their classical education and facility with ancient Roman literature. And this is even more true when she interacts with a less well-known classical precedent, Propertius, in whose work she may have seen a woman whose example could help her as she wrestled with how to express her concerns and interests in a context that had few models for women like her.

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## NOTES

1 Most women writers from Renaissance Venice were *cittadina*, which gave them access to education without the requirements of seclusion placed on patrician women (Cox 2008, 146).

2 Rosenthal 1992, 85. Cox (2008, 5) states that in the sub-elite strata, the conspicuous luxury of educating women could raise a family's profile; in this discussion, she refers to Cassandra Fedele, who, like Franco, was a Venetian *cittadina* married to a physician.

3 For marriage dissolutions in 16$^{th}$ century Venice, see Ferraro 2001.

4 Women's education in general was meant to make them better companions to men, in whatever way best suited their roles in life (Shemek 1998, 46).

5 See the dedicatory poem to Henri III at the beginning of her *Lettere*; on the types of named dedicatees for Franco's works, see Quaintance 2015, 156.

6 For discussion of the lack of distinction under Venetian law, see Robin 2003, 38. Franco herself does not entirely shy away from the term *meretrice*, although she attempts to remove the negative implications from the word

(Wojciehowski 2006, 380-3). For useful overviews of the different types of work in the Renaissance sex trade, see Quaintance 2015, 12-21 and Ray 2009, 127-8. Quaintance (2015, 20) also provides a succinct explanation of the life-style and privileges of the courtesan: "At the height of her career, a successful courtesan lived in relative luxury, employing household servants and tutors for her children and dressing in rich fabrics. In her dress, manner, and clientele, she was careful to distinguish herself from the common prostitutes who could be found on the streets and in the taverns and brothels of most Renaissance cities. But what really set the *cortigiana onesta* apart was the fact that she was available only to the most worthy of men, at least as she was fantasized." Brown 2004 includes a chapter on the domestic spaces of courtesans.

7 Wojciehowski 2006 and Quaintance 2015, 158 see also 163. These attacks support the argument made by Ray (2009, 124) that, despite her advantages, even the *cortigiana onesta* could not escape being "defined first and foremost by her sexual function."

8 Jones and Rosenthal 1998, 4.

9 Rosenthal 1992, 178. For the difficulty of achieving full acceptance in such a salon as a woman, see Quaintance 2015, 28.

10 It is unclear how far she got with this memorial volume, but she certainly contributed a poem to the *Panegirico nel felice dottorato dell'illustre, et eccell.mo sig. Gioseppe Spinelli digniss. rettor de legisti, et caualier splendidissimo. Raccolto da Giovanni Fratta gentil'huomo veronese, et Academico Animoso*, a collection in honour of an Italian noblemen and edited by Giovanni Fratta, a Veronese poet. See Rosenthal 1992, 91-7 and Ray 2009, 128. Cox (2008, 153) remarks that Franco's editorial role was unusual for a woman, far more so than the role of author. Quaintance (2015, 135, also 157-8) suggests that Franco may have taken on this role to resist "tropes that cast [her] as object[s] of exchange."

11 Quaintance 2015, 136.

12 Although some copies were printed that identify the first male author, of *Capitolo* 1, as Marco Venier, a Venetian patrician and relative of Domenico Venier (Migiel 2022, 15-16). A woman's volume of poetry almost always contained poems written to her by men which positioned her in a social network (Cox 2008, 108); it is worth noting, however, that in this respect women were not unlike men, whose work was also frequently published in anthologies and in dialogue with other (male) poets. Franco's arrangement

of her book is reminiscent of these books, in which male authors could create the impression of fellowship and shared identity with paired poems addressing each other, preserving in print an image of their interactions (Quaintance 2015, 61).

13 See Gavinelli (2011, 411) on editions.

14 Rosenthal 1992, 212, Bolzoni 1995, 3-22. Rosenthal (1992, 177) also notes that Domenico Venier could have had access to Bessarion's collection of Greek and Latin texts held at the Biblioteca Marciana, from which I infer that Franco may also have been able to access them.

15 "Tutte le elegie di Properzio con una breve, e vera interpretatione, dalla qual saranno fatti facili tutti i luoghi difficili di questo poeta." The volume is the *Somma delle opere of the Accademia della Fama* (1558), held in the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana in Venice; see Bolzoni 1995, 7-8, Rosenthal 1992, 210.

16 See Rosenthal 1992, 298 n. 67 for extensive bibliography on the educational possibilities for women in 16$^{th}$ century Italy. Robin (2003, 56 n. 34) provides bibliography for the education of Gaspara Stampa, a generation older than Franco, including reference to a curriculum for girls prescribed by a Venetian writer and editor, Lodovico Dolce, in his 1545 *Dialogo della institution delle donne*, which included a number of authors to be read in Latin. Carlsmith (2010, 247) says that private tutors occasionally took female students.

17 Text and translations of the *Terze Rime* are from Jones and Rosenthal, 1998.

18 Jones and Rosenthal 1998, 127 n. 26.

19 See Rosenthal 1992, 143-6 for discussion of these quotations in the context of the letters.

20 Quotations from Cicero, in Latin and in the vernacular, were available in books of sententiae or commonplace books throughout the Renaissance (Ago 2013, 130, 191-2), but facility in using and adapting them would still require some measure of Latin literacy. In general, Franco's familiar letters "pay homage to classical models" (Ray 2009, 3, also 126), while also showing evidence of her familiarity with the discourse around proper letter writing found in manuals and handbooks of her time (Ray 2009, 136, 142).

21 E.g. Phillipy 1992. I would argue that the near-exclusive focus on Ovid's *Heroides* as model has tended to limit the arguments that scholars have

been able to make about Franco's writing. For example, Migiel (2022, 147) considers how Franco's reception of Ovidian heroines allows her to access and play with their different communication styles, but the restriction to mythological characters in Ovid's works closes off further avenues of investigation.

22 Adler 1988. For other women's engagement with Petrarch and Petrarchism, see Feng 2016, ch. 3.

23 I quote Peter Knox (1995, 23), who in his commentary on the *Heroides* says "The so-called 'negative' reading of the *Aeneid* associated with modern criticism began almost simultaneously with the release of the poem."

24 Cox (2008, 49) states that Ovid's *Heroides* were important for the Renaissance Italian writers' interest in the female voice in love poetry and that by the late 15th century some poets were writing "new *Heroides*" using identifiable contemporaries for the characters.

25 In an interesting example of the interweaving of poets and patronage networks, L. Venier's poem is dedicated to Federico II, duke of Mantua and Monferrato, the father of the man to whom, much later, Veronica Franco dedicated her *Terze Rime*; cf. Quaintance 2015, 154. L. Venier himself was a distant relative of Franco's mentor and patron Domenico Venier. Ray (2009, 130) argues that Aretino's work shows the antagonism that some male writers felt towards courtesans specifically, whose combination of sexual and intellectual gifts was construed by them as a threat to their own access to patronage; in this respect he may have inspired Maffio Venier's poetic attacks on Franco.

26 Even texts that defended women did not generally question gender roles (Benson 1992, 40).

27 Rosenthal 1992, 207; cf. Quaintance 2015, 165. More recently, Migiel (2022, 32-3) sees Franco as using a gendered rhetorical strategy that emphasizes connection and reciprocity in contrast to a masculine rhetoric of conquest and aggression.

28 Robin 2003, 44.

29 E.g. Robin (2003, 47) notes that Franco also and, unlike other women's writing of her time or earlier, "casts herself" in roles that are active. Ray (2009, 132) argues that Franco appropriates male literary traditions to create a voice of female authority in her *Lettere familiari*; I suggest that she does the same thing in her *Terze Rime*.

30 Corinna speaks at *Am.* 1.11.24, 1.14.48-50, 2.2.6, 2.11.30, 3.14.48, a total of less than seven lines out of the three books of *Amores*. In comparison, Cynthia's nine direct speeches take up all or part of one hundred and thirty-seven lines of Propertius' four books of elegies. Cf. Buchan 1995.

31 These characteristics of Cynthia could be part of the reason why there appears to be little direct influence of Propertius in Petrarch: Propertius' version of a love story is not one that Petrarch wished to re-tell (Gavinelli 2011, 402).

32 For the destabilization of the women's role in Propertius, see Gold 2007, 66. Given that Cynthia's portrayal is bound up in his (for which see Wyke 2002, 46-77) any destabilization of one affects the other.

33 From the beginning of her poetic collection (*Capitolo* 2), Franco fore-fronts her similar desire for a reciprocal love and fidelity (Quaintance 2015, 155).

34 Racette-Campbell 2016, 110-4.

35 All quotations of Propertius are from Fedeli, translations of Propertius are my own.

36 Racette-Campbell 2013, 74.

37 Her consistency speaks against the views of those who do not believe her, notably Lyne (1980, 118-19).

38 Cf. Ov. *Am.* 3.7.3-4: *hanc tamen in nullos tenui male languidus usus, / sed iacui pigro crimen onusque toro* (nevertheless I held her, terribly languid, to no effect, but I lay, a crime and a burden on the sluggish couch) for an example of *languidus* associated with sexual impotence but also sexual betrayal. Adams (1982, 46) catalogues examples of *languidus/langueo* suggesting impotence.

39 For interpretations of Cynthia's speech and the gendered dynamics in Propertius 1.3, see Greene 1995 and Valladares 2005.

40 On Cynthia's assertions about her own and the lover-poet's fidelity in Prop. 2.29, see Racette-Campbell 2019, 50-4. Similarly, Jones (1990, 197) has argued that Franco, writing in response to Maffio Venier's attacks, claims to have more virtues, both feminine and masculine, than he.

41 The circumstances of 3.6 are linked to 4.7 by the presence of the slave Lygdamus and by Cynthia's description of the woman with whom she believes the lover-poet has replaced her (*qualem nolo dicere*), suggesting a

woman of lower status than she rather than another elegiac mistress; she will make a similar accusation about Chloris, the woman who has replaced her in 4.7.

42 The lover-poet makes similar claims for himself at 2.9.43-4, 2.24.35-40, and 2.32, but unlike Cynthia he is not consistent about them.

43 Although the eyes are perhaps an obvious target, due to their delicacy, they are also poetically and romantically significant in the context of the Propertian corpus, which opens with the line (1.1.1): *Cynthia prima suis miserum me cepit ocellis* (Cynthia first captured wretched me with her eyes).

44 Referring both to her eyes as the source of her power over him, but also to the context of the poem, in which the lover-poet obliquely refers to his own impotence, despite the enticements on offer from the two girls he has hired. He has only strayed with his eyes, but that is enough.

45 For the *paraclausithyron* in elegy, see Copley 1956 and Cairns 1972, 6.

46 The word *sidera* does appear in Ovid *Am.* 1.6.44: *peruigil in mediae sidera noctis eras* (you were watchful until the stars of midnight). In Ovid, though, the stars are used as a marker of time and not as witnesses or sympathizers, as in both Propertius and Franco.

47 Saylor 1969 is the source of this identification, which James (2003, 108-21) and McCarthy (2019, 62-5) have built upon.

48 Racette-Campbell 2019, 43-4.

49 See also *Capitoli* 13 and 17; cf. Rogers 2000, 98.

50 On the "unsettling presence" of a woman who represents herself in her writing, see Quaintance 2015, 136.

51 Dufallo 2005, 116. Franco builds on the idea of the danger of women's words when she portrays her writing as a weapon she can use in a duel against a man who has wronged her, in two other poems, Capitoli 16 and 23, turning her speech into something more permanent and more dangerous.

52 Adler (1988, 217) succinctly suggests why this reversal works "Veronica is very similar to her lover: miserable, melodramatic, unreasonable, confused, and pretentiously conventional-not his indifferent superior but his anguished equal."

53 Wyke 2002, 18; James 2003, 35.

54 Wyke 2002, 29; Greene 2005, 62; Skinner 2005, 222.

55 Thus these poems are meant to celebrate the connection of the two men, rather than the woman. Cf. Quaintance 2015, 8.

56 MS Add. 12.197, fol. 18r–18v. "Sonetti e poema in italiano di Benedetto Corner e di Domenico Venier di Venezia – Corretti da altra mano più tardi." held in the British Library. See also Quaintance 2015, 138.

57 Besides these texts on Artusi, Quaintance (2015, 57) notes that Venier's circle produced "an astonishing number and variety of texts on women and sexuality" over more than thirty years.

58 Feng 2016, ch. 2.

59 See, e.g., Feng 2016, 209.

60 "Sonetto sopra Mad. Gaspara Stampa di autore incerto," in MS *Vaticano latino* 9948, f. 211r, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, quoted and discussed by Quaintance (2015, 145-6). Like Franco, Stampa shows evidence of classical education and attended Domenico Venier's salon (Robin 2003, 43). Although she was not a courtesan, as far as is known, she led "an irregular life by the standards of her day" (Cox 2008, 85).

61 For 20th century scholarship, see Adler 1988, Jones 1990, and Rosenthal 1992. For more recent reassessments, see Migiel 2022 and Samà 2023.

## ABSTRACT

**English**

The elegiac love affair and mistress portrayed by the first century BCE Roman poet Propertius was a more important influence on the sixteenth century poet-courtesan Veronica Franco than has previously been credited. Scholarship has tended to focus on Franco's reception of Ovid's works, particularly the *Heroides*, but Propertius provides an important forerunner for Franco's speaking subject in his main female character, Cynthia. Although she is an elegiac beloved, Cynthia's speeches consistently undermine the elegiac worldview, especially the characterization of the lover as suffering and faithful and the beloved as fickle and cruel. Closer attention to Franco's use of Propertius, through the example of two of her poems, *Capitoli* 17 and 20, provides a richer understanding of the intertextual relationship between them. At the same time, Franco's work can add to our understanding of Propertius, as she is one of the earliest readers of Propertius to take his disruption of gender politics and fidelity seriously.

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**Keywords**
Propertius, Veronica Franco, early modern, Venice, elegy, intertextuality

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