“NOT AS ENEMIES, BUT AS FRIENDS”:
SANCTIONED SEX IN FRATE CHERUBINO’S
*REGOLA DELLA VITA MATRIMONIALE**

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Summary: During the 1470s, a Franciscan preacher named Cherubino composed a short treatise in nine parts entitled *Regola della vita matrimoniale* (Rule for Married Life), which describes in detail the mutual obligations of an ideal married couple. In this didactic work, Cherubino echoes the vocabulary of early Quattrocento writers who employed the concepts of friendship and companionship as framing devices for their discussions of the conjugal state. What is noteworthy in Cherubino’s approach to this common theme, however, is his conflation of friends and spouses in the midst of an explication of the conjugal debt (sexual intercourse between husband and wife). Informed by recent work on marriage, sex and friendship as well as research into homosocial, homoerotic and homosexual relationships during the Italian Renaissance, this article explores the slippage between sinless marriage, friendship and procreation; and sinful marriage, enmity and sodomy in Cherubino’s *Regola* and within the broad context of early fifteenth-century perspectives on the conjugal state.

The frequent appearance of *amicizia* in the wide variety of texts on marriage produced by Renaissance humanists, preachers, *novellisti*, playwrights and letter-writers (both married and unmarried) reveals a serious scholarly and social attempt on the part of Quattro- and Cinquecento thinkers to make sense of the close conceptual relationship between marriage and friendship that had been posited and defended by philosophers and clerics from ancient times through the Middle Ages. In Book VIII of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, for example, Aristotle categorizes marriage as a kind of friendship, a notion further developed by the young interlocutor Battista in Book II of Leon Battista Alberti’s (1404-1472) well-known dialogue on the family entitled *I libri della famiglia*, which was completed by the end of the 1430s.

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That spouses should pursue friend-like relations is also argued fervently by the renowned preacher Bernardino da Siena (1380-1444), whose vernacular sermons at Florence and Siena in 1425 and 1427 make a strong case for spousal friendship by drawing upon Scripture and upon *De bono coniugali*, the Augustinian treatise composed in the year 401 in defence of the conjugal state. During the later Quattrocento, the female humanist and wife Laura Cereta (1469-1499) wrote a series of Latin letters promoting friendship as the ideal bond between spouses,¹ while literary texts, from Boccaccio's tale of Tito and Gisippo to the plays of the early Cinquecento (including, for instance, the Siennese *commedia Gl'ingannati* of 1530), also critically examine the coincidence of marriage and friendship.

Whether promoting, critiquing or ignoring the notion of conjugal friendship, sixteenth-century prescriptive texts on marriage in particular have been studied extensively in recent years, and understandably so: as the Reformation movement, invigorated in no small way by the emerging publishing industry, gained strength over the course of the Cinquecento, the number of prescriptive and didactic writings on marriage and the family in Italy increased dramatically.² Debates on what constitutes an ideal marriage and questions about how one should think about (and enact) the relationship between husband and wife were of course by no means new to the sixteenth century, however. Though perhaps less well-studied than their later counterparts, prescriptive writings in both Latin and Italian (including treatises, sermons, popular and erudite handbooks) composed by both sacred and secular authors abound during the preceding century. Relatively familiar Quattrocento marriage treatises include Francesco Barbaro's *De re uxoria* (Concerning Wifely Things, 1415), which was composed at Venice for the Florentine wedding of Lorenzo de' Medici and Ginevra Cavalcanti;³

¹ On the letters of Laura Cereta in relation to conjugal friendship, see my article "Fraught Relations in the Letters of Laura Cereta: Marriage, Friendship and Humanist Epistolarity" forthcoming in *Renaissance Quarterly*.

² For a preliminary bibliography of sixteenth-century writings on marriage, see the notes to the sixth chapter (on marital relations) of Bell, *How to Do It*. See also Frigo, "Dal caos all'ordine"; Klapisch-Zuber, "An Ethnology of Marriage in the Age of Humanism." An important exception to this scholarly emphasis on the sixteenth century is the recent study on Quattrocento wedding orations by D'Elia, *The Renaissance of Marriage in Fifteenth-Century Italy*. See also the earlier article by King, "Caldiera and the Barbaros on Marriage and the Family."

³ Excerpts from Barbaro's treatise are available in an early twentieth-century Latin/Italian edition by A. Gnesotto: Barbaro, "De re uxoria." For an English

Leon Battista Alberti's aforementioned *I libri della famiglia* (Books of the Family, 1430s), a vernacular dialogue exploring the intimate bond between husband and wife as well as their practical contributions to a smoothly-functioning household;⁴ and Giovanni Caldiera's *De veneta iconomia* (Concerning the Venetian Household, 1460s), the central volume in a three-part work of "moral philosophy" explicating, "in ideal terms the relations between individual, family, and state consonant with the real operation of aristocratic society in Venice."⁵

Approximately a decade after Caldiera's treatise was completed, a Franciscan preacher joined the lively fifteenth-century discussion about marriage by producing a concise handbook entitled *Regola della vita matrimoniale* (Rule for Married Life, 1470s), a work described rather optimistically by its author as "[un] trattatello nel quale insegneremo di vivere cristianamente a tutte le persone che sono in matrimonio" (4).⁶ There is abundant confusion about the author of the *Regola*, who was variously referred to as "Cherubino da Spoleto," "Cherubino da Napoli" and "Cherubino da Perugia" during his lifetime, if indeed these names allude to the same man.⁷ Nineteenth-century scholars, on the other hand, called the author of the *Regola* "Cherubino da Siena," but conflated this Cherubino with yet another: the late sixteenth-century Dominican friar Cherubino da Firenze. In any case, the current scholarly consensus is that the Cherubino who wrote the *Regola* was born in 1414 on the Greek island of Negroponte and may have taken minor orders at Spoleto. Most twentieth-century scholarship thus refers to him as "Cherubino da Spoleto,"

lation of the Preface and Book II, see Barbaro, "De re uxoria" in *The Earthly Republic*.

⁴ See Alberti, *I libri della famiglia*. Alberti's dialogue is also available in two English translations: Alberti, *The Albertis of Florence*; Alberti, *The Family in Renaissance Florence*.

⁵ King, "Caldiera and the Barbaros on Marriage and the Family", 22. On the extant versions of Caldiera's text, see *Ibid.*, 23 n. 9.

⁶ "A little treatise in which we will teach everyone who is married to live in a Christian manner." All quotations of Cherubino's text are from its most recent edition: Cherubino da Siena, *Regole della vita matrimoniale*. All translations, unless otherwise marked, are mine; I have sought to maintain Cherubino's idiomatic turns of phrase and his complex syntax wherever possible.

⁷ All biographical information on Cherubino mentioned here and below is from the concise summary by Rusconi, "Cherubino." For a recent hagiographical account of Cherubino's life and works, see Canonici, "Fra Cherubino da Spoleto."

though some scholars have continued the nineteenth-century tradition of naming him “Cherubino da Siena.”

Even if we assume that the *Regola* has been successfully linked by scholars with its historical author, we know few details about the life of Cherubino da Negroponte/Spoleto and even less about the circumstances under which he wrote his treatise. Nonetheless, it seems that Cherubino was a popular preacher as well as a respected ‘activist’ dedicated to encouraging town governments to establish policies aimed at stimulating virtue and controlling vice: his presence was requested by officials in many Tuscan and Umbrian towns between 1441 and his death at Assisi in 1484, and he appears to have effectively convinced some governments to reform local statutes governing charity for the poor as well as sumptuary laws. By the 1460s, in addition, Cherubino had begun to turn his hand to another kind of moral guidance: his first didactic composition, entitled *Regola della vita spirituale* (Rule for Spiritual Life), was completed by 1464; its companion piece, the *Regola della vita matrimoniale*, was finished before 1477, when both works appeared for the first time in print.⁸

Cherubino composed the *Regola*,⁹ he tells us in its opening lines, for a very specific reason. After enumerating the three principal states of being (*virginale*, or virginal; *viduale*, or previously “contaminata” but currently chaste; and *matrimoniale*, or married), he adds:

[D]el terzo stato, cioè matrimoniale, si truovano maggiore numero e maggiore moltitudine, cioè di quelle persone che vivono con compagnia di marito o di moglie. Essendo adunque tanta moltitudine e tanto numero di persone congiunte, pare che sia cosa conveniente e fruttifera e utile fare alcuno sermone e alcuno trattato, nel quale si dia dottrina a queste tali persone coniugate, come debbino vivere per non offendere Iddio, e per non dannarsi, anco si venghino a salvare. Faremo adunque mediante lo adiutorio di Dio questo trattatello; nel quale insegneremo di vivere cri-

⁸ Though there is, to my knowledge, no thorough study of Cherubino’s *Regola della vita matrimoniale*, the treatise is often referred to in the context of the history of domestic violence because of its advocacy, not uncommon in Quattrocento prescriptive texts, of wife-beating. See, for example, Goffen, *Titian’s Women*, 19, 21; Okun, *Woman Abuse*, 3. Scholars have also made brief mention of the *Regola della vita matrimoniale* in the context of popular advice manuals, patriarchal social systems and gender relations. See Bell, *How to Do It*, 37-39, 242-246; Goffen, *Titian’s Women*, 38; King, *Women of the Renaissance*, 40-43.

⁹ For the sake of brevity, I refer herein to the *Regola della vita spirituale* by its full title, and to the *Regola della vita matrimoniale* simply as the *Regola*.

stianamente a tutte le persone che sono in matrimonio.” (4)¹⁰

In contrast with Cherubino’s lofty desire for his *trattatello* to bring important doctrinal knowledge and good behaviour to “all people who are married,” his text might seem rather uninspiring, at least at first glance: it lacks the fiery rhetoric of Bernardino da Siena’s sermons on the conjugal state; it chastely refrains from even hinting at the titillating marital anecdotes mentioned in other marriage treatises and amplified to great effect by the *novellisti* and *drammaturgi* of the late Quattro- and early Cinquecento. Relatively banal even with respect to structure, the *Regola* is divided into nine distinct parts, each of which describes, in fairly standard terms and in quite rigorous detail, the gendered and mutual obligations of an ideal married couple.

Despite this unremarkable approach, Cherubino’s *trattatello* participates in a unique way in Quattrocento discussions about marriage and friendship. As we shall see, by stressing the physical signs of friendship in the specific context of marital sex, the *Regola* permits (even as it seeks to control) a provocative slippage between, on the one hand, sinless marriage, friendship and procreation; and, on the other hand, sinful marriage, enmity and sodomy.

The *Regola della vita matrimoniale* begins by describing the three obligations all husbands have towards their wives: *istruzione* (doctrinal instruction), *correzione* (correction and chastisement—always gentle at first, the treatise advises, but violent if necessary), and *sostentazione* (providing for the basic needs—at minimum food and clothing—of one’s wife). Wives, the text continues, also owe their husbands three specific duties: *timorazione* (an ideally ever-present fear of disappointing one’s husband in thought, word or deed), *famulazione* (a responsibility to maintain the household), and *ammonizione* (unyielding yet gentle moral guidance). Finally, the *trattatello* addresses the three things husband and wife must mutually render each other: *cordiale dilezione* (heartfelt pleasure or love),

¹⁰ “In the third state, that is matrimonial, one finds a greater number and a greater multitude of those people who live with the companionship of husband or wife. There being, therefore, such a multitude and such a number of people joined [in marriage], it seems that it would be an advantageous and productive and useful thing to make any sermon and treatise in which one gives doctrine to these same people joined [in marriage]: how they should live so as not to offend God; and so as not to damn themselves; even [so as] to come to save themselves. We will therefore make this little treatise by means of divine assistance; in [it], we will teach everyone who is married to live in a Christian manner.”

individuale abitazione (cohabitation), and *del debito conjugale e matrimoniale pacifica reddizione* (appropriate payment of the conjugal debt).

The central message of Cherubino's text, framed in terms of these nine basic tenets, would hardly have been new to Renaissance spouses: preachers had been loudly exhorting married couples to behave in similar ways for centuries.¹¹ Nevertheless, the practical and didactic nature of the *Regola* proved particularly popular: the treatise was printed twenty-one times before 1494, making it and its companion piece fifth on Anne Jacobson Schutte's list of "vernacular religious bestsellers in Italy" (18). To explain the appeal of the *Regola*, Rudolph M. Bell hypothesizes that, while Cherubino's content may have been old, the private medium of the slim handbook designed specifically with spouses in mind was decidedly new (37). Indeed, by employing the privately written (rather than the publicly spoken) vernacular word as the medium for his advice, Cherubino may have been able to address more explicitly the precise behaviour of husband and wife in many settings: around town, at home and, crucially, in bed. This hypothesis is borne out by the text itself: while the first third of the *Regola* is dedicated to eight of the nine marital obligations, the ninth duty (marital sex, or the conjugal debt) fills the remaining two-thirds of the text. This extensive, detailed and, arguably, somewhat permissive account of church-sanctioned sexual behaviour amounts to what David Herlihy calls "an especially frank treatment of sex in marriage," (18 n. 14) one its author, perhaps precisely because of its frankness, felt he had to defend at length.

Immediately preceding his prolonged description of sanctioned and unsanctioned sex, Cherubino inserted an aside entitled "Excusatione,"

¹¹ For instance, Bernardino da Siena's sermon "Del Matrimonio" (Concerning Marriage), which was presented to the Florentines on 5 March 1425, addresses the eight obligations a husband owes his wife: *amare* (to love), *amaestrare* (to teach), *correggere* (to correct), *con lei abitare* (to live with her), *onorare* (to honour), *sopportare* (to provide for), *rendere il debito* (to pay the conjugal debt) and *governare* (to rule). The obligations of wives toward their husbands, on the other hand, were enumerated as *amore* (love), *fede* (faith), *temerlo* (to fear him), *istargli suggetta* (to be subject to him), *ubidirlo* (to obey him), *riverirlo nelle parole* (to honour him in speech), *istare in sua compagnia* (to remain in his company) and *aiutarlo* (to help him). See *Predica XXX* in Bernardino da Siena, *Le prediche volgari*, 173-190. Though not at issue here, Bernardino's choice of these particular obligations (love and co-habitation as the only reciprocal obligations of husband and wife; the odd one-way payment of the conjugal debt, which implies a marital situation in which the wife controls, at least to some extent, the couple's sexual relations) is worthy of further analysis.

which enumerates the many reasons why it is vital that such an intimate, shameful and secretive thing as the conjugal debt (to use Cherubino's own words) should be discussed in his *trattatello*. He freely admits that, since the "atto matrimoniale" (the "marital act," that is, sexual intercourse between husband and wife) is rightfully imbued with a certain "pudenzia e vergogna" (modesty and shame), it could seem rather "impudente, vergognosa e alquanto scostumata, predicarne e ragionarne."¹² Nevertheless, he writes, even Bonaventure (a Doctor of the Church and therefore an excellent authority to whom an author undertaking a morally dubious task might appeal), would agree that "ogni persona cristiana, la quale è in questo stato di matrimonio, è tenuta di sapere come debbe esercitare tale atto."¹³ In fact, Cherubino continues, "penso che lo predicatore è tenuto insegnare e ammaestrare ogni persona, come debbe vivere per salvarsi l'anima [. . .] ed essendo io predicatore, *licet* indegnamente, parmi che sia cosa utile, anzi necessaria, trattare di queste cose tanto chiaro e ordinatamente, che ogni persona intenda [. . .]. Parlerò adunque queste cose per modo sì chiaro e onesto, che ogni persona intenda" (44-45).¹⁴

As mentioned above, aside from the meticulous description of appropriate sexual practice following this exceptional "Excusatione," the *Regola* is not particularly unusual. Instead, Cherubino's *trattatello* clearly echoes the ideas and vocabulary employed in early and mid-Quattrocento Italy by sacred and secular thinkers dedicated to teaching men and women about the onerous demands and great joys of the conjugal state. In the early fifteenth century, for instance, Cherubino's fellow Franciscan, Bernardino da Siena, described marriage as a primary means of restricting 'unnatural' sex-

¹² "Over-bold, shameful and somewhat ill-mannered to preach about and discuss it."

¹³ "Every Christian person who is in the state of matrimony is required to know how to practise this act."

¹⁴ "I think that a preacher is required to teach and train every person how he or she should live in order to save his or her soul [. . .]; and being myself a preacher, albeit unworthily, it seems to me that it is a useful, or rather a necessary thing, to deal with these topics so clearly and in such an orderly manner, that every person understands [. . .]. I will therefore speak [of] these things in such a clear and honourable way, that every person will understand." I employ the anachronistic structures "he or she" and "his or her" to convey Cherubino's continued emphasis throughout the *Regola* on the importance of doctrinal knowledge for both men and women.

ual behaviour,¹⁵ while the Florentine humanist Leon Battista Alberti wrote at length about the procreative power of matrimony.¹⁶ Although Cherubino was decidedly more interested in “empiere alcuna sedia dello Paradiso” (filling the seats of heaven, 47) than in benefiting the earthly family or the city-state (Bernardino’s and Alberti’s principal concerns), his stress on children and the control of lust, like that of his contemporaries, participates in an ancient discussion about the goods of married life.¹⁷

Cherubino also reproduces the ideas of his immediate predecessors by linking specific kinds of human relationships, namely companionship and friendship, to the social and emotional bond between husband and wife.¹⁸ Nowhere is this more evident than in his frequent use of the term *compagnia* (companion or companionship) to discuss the spousal relationship. The term *compagnia* is significant for several reasons. The literal meaning of the word originates from the Latin *companio*, *cum panis* (in Italian *con pane*), or ‘one with whom bread is shared.’ Indeed, in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (the most influential source—both directly and through medieval reinterpretations—for Renaissance accounts of friendly, companionable marriage), Aristotle emphasizes the importance of eating together as a

¹⁵ See *Predica XIX*, lines 121–122, in Bernardino da Siena, *Prediche volgari sul Campo di Siena*, 568.

¹⁶ See the elder Adovardo’s attempts to convince the young bachelor Lionardo to marry throughout Book I of Alberti’s *I libri*.

¹⁷ See, for instance, the opening lines of Augustine’s *De bono coniugali*, which emphasize both the fruitfulness of marriage and its perfect reflection of ‘natural’ human behaviour. Augustine, *Augustine: De bono coniugali and De sancta uirginitate*, I.

¹⁸ In full recognition of the dangers inherent in loosely employing terms such as “emotion” when discussing the fifteenth century, I use both terms (“social” and “emotional”) here in order to attend specifically to two principal features of Quattrocento marriage, which is described by contemporary marriage theorists simultaneously as a locus of larger social forces (the coming together of families and hence the strengthening of society by means of marriage, a notion that comes to the fore in Barbaro’s *De re uxoria* and in Alberti’s *I libri della famiglia*) and of intimate mind-to-mind relations between husband and wife (mutual spousal love, compassion and consolation; the calming of troubles and the assuaging of fears, all of which are ideas central to Bernardino’s philosophy of the conjugal state). A third feature of marriage, the “physical,” is equally fundamental to Quattrocento discussions of spousal relations though, as far as I know, only in the case of Cherubino’s *Regola* is sexual intercourse linked strongly with the physical attributes of friendship.

means of coming to perfect friendship (VIII.iii). The Italian term *compagno* further implies co-habitation, familiarity, and alliance, the latter being particularly important in terms of cementing kinship relations through marriage. The medieval *compagna*, moreover, was an association of citizens for the purpose of defence and mutual protection; *compagn(i)a* also had the sense of *corporazione* or *consorteria*, meanings which once again stress the larger social joinings which Quattrocento marriages were designed to initiate, maintain and solidify.

Cherubino's use of the term *compagnia*, in conjunction with his frequent quotation of other, earlier authorities on marriage (including Aristotle, Paul, Augustine and Bernardino), demonstrates his awareness of a standard rhetoric on marriage in fifteenth-century Tuscany. With respect to the specific issue of friendship, however, the *Regola* ceases to rehearse normative conjugal discourse and radically departs from convention. Rather than forming the basis of Cherubino's theory of marriage, as occurs frequently in secular and sacred accounts of conjugal ideals before and during the Quattrocento,¹⁹ *amici* (friends) do not appear in the *trattatello* until Cherubino's detailed discussion of the conjugal debt: in an unusual (if not unique) conceptual move, friendship thus becomes explicitly linked, in the *Regola*, with the physical act of marriage (sexual intercourse) and with payment of the conjugal debt.

In the ninth section of Cherubino's *trattatello*, the word *amico* is first used, rather conventionally, in a brief aside about the ways in which kisses, a marker of friendship, can be considered an appropriate "segno d'amore e carità" (sign of love and charity, 95). More surprisingly, it is also employed in a detailed discussion of *modo*, namely the appropriate (and

¹⁹ To refer once again to our two early-Quattrocento marriage authorities, Bernardino frequently exhorts spouses to cultivate "vera amicizia, che dieno avere moglie e marito" (true friendship, which husband and wife must have, *Predica XIX*, line 4), while the young interlocutor Battista, in Book II of Alberti's *I libri della famiglia*, sings the praises of conjugal friendship: "A quella unione [matrimonio] la quale si dice essere vera amicizia. Non mi stendo in raccontare quanta utilità si tragga da questa coniugale amicizia e sodalità, in conservare la cosa domestica, in contenere la famiglia, in reggere e governare tutta la masserizia." ("This is a union, indeed, which one may well call true friendship. I will not lengthen my discourse by describing all the advantages stemming from this conjugal friendship and solidarity. After all, it preserves the home, maintains the family, rules and governs the whole economy.") See Bernardino da Siena, *Prediche volgari sul Campo di Siena*, 539; Alberti, *I libri della famiglia*, 93-94; Alberti, *The Family in Renaissance Florence*, 98.

inappropriate) ways in which a husband and wife may consummate their marriage:

Lo quarto modo, per lo quale le persone conjugate esercitano lo atto matrimoniale con peccato, si chiama *delle faccie adversione*; cioè, non stanno le faccie come dovrebbero, e come sono tenute di stare. [. . .] Lo marito e la moglie si debbono cordialmente amare insieme, e nello atto matrimoniale stare come stanno duo amici, e non come inimici. L'inimici, per lo cordiale odio che insieme si portano, non si possono in volto o in faccia vedere; ma si voltano alcuna fiata la schiena e le spalle l'uno l'altro. Ma li amici, per lo cordiale amore che insieme si portano, l'uno con piacere guarda la faccia dell'altro; e stanno l'uno volto con la faccia voltata verso dell'altro. Nello atto matrimoniale adunque debbono stare le persone conjugate, come duo amici, l'uno voltando la faccia verso della sua compagna; non come inimici, ma come amici.²⁰ (90-92)

This passage is remarkable not because it links friendship and marriage (which as we have seen is a commonplace association in the fifteenth century), but because it does so by means (and in the midst of a detailed explication) of the sexual act. While other Quattrocento treatises model the social and emotional characteristics of the ideal conjugal bond on *amicizia*, Cherubino's *Regola* instead emphasizes the similarities among the *physical* attributes of friendly and marital relations.

A closer look at the text will enable at least a preliminary exploration of the wider implications of this shift from the social and emotional to the physical. Earlier in his treatise, Cherubino had more clearly defined the "cordiale amore" (heartfelt love) that, he claims, must be shared by both friends and spouses ("lo marito e la moglie si debbono cordialmente amare insieme"). In section six of the *Regola*, we learn that the first mutual obligation which should be exchanged between husband and wife is *cordiale*

20 "The fourth way in which married people sinfully carry out the marital act is called *with faces opposed*; that is, their faces are not as they should be, and as they must be. [. . .] Husband and wife must love together in a heartfelt manner, and during the marital act be as two friends are, and not as enemies. Enemies, because of the heartfelt hatred that they feel for each other, cannot look each other in the face, but turn their backs and shoulders to each other at every opportunity. But friends, because of the heartfelt love they feel for each other, the one with pleasure looks into the face of the other, and they position themselves one turned with his face towards the face of the other. During the marital act, therefore, married people should be like two friends, the one turning his face towards that of his companion: not like enemies, but like friends."

dilezione: “Cordialmente vi dovete insieme amare,” Cherubino writes (You must love each other in a heartfelt manner, 26). Paraphrasing Paul’s wisdom on marriage at Ephesians 5:25, Cherubino adds that husbands must love their wives just as Christ loved the Church and as each man loves himself. These scriptural commandments inspire further demands: husbands must love their wives even if they make mistakes, and both spouses must be prepared to sacrifice their own life in order to save the soul of their companion. Most importantly, Cherubino concludes, it is vital that the love between husband and wife be *perfetto* (perfect or complete). Imperfect love, he explains, is one-sided: it occurs when one person loves another, but the love is not returned. To avoid imperfect spousal love, he informs his readers, “tu, [. . .] moglie, debbi amare lo tuo marito, e tu, marito, la tua moglie; e così con questa mutua reciprocazione, amandovi insieme, lo amore sarà perfetto” (27-28).²¹ *Amore perfetto* (perfect or complete love), which Cherubino elsewhere describes as *cordiale dilezione* or *cordiale amore* (heartfelt pleasure or love), is not a bond appropriate only to spouses, however. It is also, we are told, an indication of a solid friendship: “Li amici, *per lo cordiale amore che insieme si portano*, l’uno con piacere guarda la faccia dell’altro” (my emphasis).

From the perspective that husbands and wives should love each other as do friends, it is worth noting once more that this particular use of friendship as a model for the conjugal state is entirely conventional. In striking contrast, however, when Cherubino writes that precisely “*nello atto matrimoniale* debbono stare le persone conjugate, come duo amici” (my emphasis), his words radically rewrite the standard socially- and emotionally-oriented relationship between friendship and marriage common to prescriptive texts in the Quattrocento. By including—indeed emphasizing—the physical act of sexual intercourse in his account of the resemblances between friendship and marriage, Cherubino’s text intimates that ideal friends and spouses are similar in two ways rather than only in one. First, they experience similar feelings: both good spouses and good friends cultivate and enjoy mutual *cordiale amore*. Second, this shared *cordiale amore* manifests itself in both friends and spouses by means of certain recognizable physical signs: *amici* and *le persone conjugate* kiss and turn their faces towards one another.²²

²¹ “You, [. . .] wife, must love your husband, and you, husband, your wife; and thus with this mutual reciprocation, loving each other together, [your] love will be perfect.”

²² That an individual could make his or her particular intimate bond (friendship,

The *Regola's* equations first of friendly love with marital love, and second of the physical acts of friends with the physical acts of married couples, sets up an intriguing, if potentially disconcerting, parallel between *amici* and *persone conjugate*. By encouraging spouses to have sex *come amici* (like friends), in other words, the *trattatello* also suggests the possibility of friends having sex. Just as the language of friendship invades Cherubino's account of the conjugal state, the language of marriage (and specifically of marital sex) contaminates his brief aside on friends: indeed, precisely as we might envision husband and wife experiencing erotic pleasure while gazing into each other's faces during sex, a friend "con piacere guarda la faccia dell'altro."

This surprisingly close association between friendship and conjugal sex raises at least three possibilities for readers of the *Regola*. If we are to take his pious, didactic aims at face value, Cherubino's intent must surely have been for his readers to read with an eye to sinless modes of sexual conduct. Whatever its author's original desire, however, the language of the *trattatello* hints in addition at two decidedly sinful alternatives. On the one hand, unmarried male-female friends having sex might be defined more exactly as fornication: indeed, the words *amico* and *amica* are frequently employed as euphemisms for 'lover' and 'mistress,' particularly in Renaissance comedic literature from Boccaccio's *Decameron* to the plays of the early Cinquecento. If we consider Cherubino's use of the term *amici* in the context of this euphemistic meaning, his advice to married couples remains troublesome, or at the very least remarkably permissive. Such a reading of the *Regola* would seem to suggest that, rather than refraining from passionate love-making, *persone conjugate* should enjoy each other as though they were lovers (*amici*), advice that directly contradicts the injunction against *disordinato amore* common to other Quattrocento marriage treatises. In his nineteenth sermon, for example, Bernardino stresses time and again the vital importance of orderly husband-wife relations (*ordinato amore*), particularly in bed, and that the *Regola* should hint at contradictory advice is noteworthy.

kinship, love, marriage) with another person explicitly visible to onlookers via specific, ritual-like physical signs or actions is demonstrated by other examples – both literary and historical – from the Tre- and Quattrocento. As Vittore Branca explains in his notes on the tale of Tito and Gisippo (the ninety-eighth *novella* of Boccaccio's *Decameron*), the gesture of a man taking another man's hand can signal friendship (Boccaccio, *Decameron*, 1198 n. 9). Between a woman and a man, the same gesture might indicate marital affection: in the fifteenth century, it was one of the signs which courts sought from witnesses as proof (or lack thereof) that a couple was married. See Brucker, *Giovanni and Lusanna*, 22.

On the other hand, Renaissance friendship outside the context of marriage is most often associated exclusively with men.²³ Cherubino's text thus raises the possibility of a sex act much more problematic than fornication, namely male-male friends having sexual intercourse. As noted above, the vast majority of the *Regola* is aimed at making a clear distinction between appropriate, sanctioned, and 'natural' sex acts; and inappropriate, unsanctioned and 'unnatural' sex acts. With this organizing principle as its defining impetus, Cherubino's text seeks throughout to make absolutely discrete the categories of sinless and sinful sex, and to address as many practical situations (and extenuating circumstances) as possible, making unmistakable to potentially misguided spouses precisely how and when mortal sins are easily committed and avoided.

The *atto matrimoniale* is central to these distinctions because the two main objectives of Christian marriage in the Quattrocento, namely the production of children and the containment of lust, rely directly upon finely regulated sexual behaviour that underscores, above all, the risk of sodomy, broadly defined, to the institution of marriage and to society as a whole. As Guido Ruggiero indicates in his study of sex crime in Venice during the second half of the fifteenth century, sodomy was a term reserved for any 'unnatural' sex act, and could take place between men and men, men and women, or men and beasts (114); the social and moral problem of sodomy is thus of central concern to the *Regola*, especially with regard to its stated quest to inform spouses of unambiguously ideal Christian behaviour.

When it comes to procreation, Cherubino discourages his readers from committing 'sodomitical' acts with each other by insisting that couples have sex such that:

1. The wife faces the sky, and the husband faces the earth;²⁴
2. The chest and stomach of the husband must touch the same parts of his wife;²⁵
3. Husband and wife are positioned "like two friends, the one turning his face

²³ Male-male friendship has been studied extensively in recent years. See, for instance, Najemy, *Between Friends*; Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships*; Schachter, *Voluntary Servitude and the Erotics of Friendship*. More general studies of friendship include Haseldine, ed., *Friendship in Medieval Europe*; Hyatte, *The Arts of Friendship*; Kelly and Rosemann, eds., *Amor amicitiae*; Langer, *Perfect Friendship*.

²⁴ "Nello atto matrimoniale la moglie, secondo li dottori, debbe stare con la faccia verso lo cielo, e lo marito verso la terra" (88).

²⁵ "Lo petto e lo ventre del marito debbe toccare queste medesime parti della moglie" (88).

towards that of his companion" (these first three rules in essence describing what we might today call 'missionary position');

4. Each part of each spouse's body is used for the specific purpose for which God intended it to be used, and none other; and
5. The husband does not waste his seed outside or in a non-fertile region of his wife's body.

When it comes to the control of lust and the prevention of fornication, Cherubino explains to his readers how appropriate payment of the conjugal debt can forestall a husband from committing damning sodomitical acts, either with women who do not want to become pregnant (and who therefore encourage 'unnatural' sexual behaviour along the lines of rules four and five above), or with other men.

Though prescriptive (and therefore somewhat wishful—as well as explicitly didactic—in tone, rather than indicative of a transparent historical reality), the *Regola's* careful distinctions between 'unnatural' sex acts and appropriate payment of the conjugal debt do not represent ideals far removed from the real experience of fifteenth-century Sienese couples. Instead, Cherubino's self-declared attempt at separating out 'normative' behaviour from sinful acts is reminiscent of the legal approach taken by officials in Tuscan towns to control what was apparently rampant male-male sodomy. As Michael Rocke has shown, male-male sexual relations were so common in Florence during the fifteenth century that "homosexual behaviour [...] constituted a pervasive and integral aspect of male sexual experience, of the construction of masculine gender identity, and of forms of sociability." (6)²⁶ If the anti-sodomy laws of Tuscan towns and Bernardino's frank sermons against sodomitical acts at Siena in 1427 are any indication, the situation was similar outside Florence as well, where Cherubino spent much time preaching good behaviour to his flock as well as tighter moral statutes to its governing bodies.

What is significant about the social situation in these Tuscan towns with respect to the slippage between the language of friendship, marriage and sex in Cherubino's treatise is that a similar slippage also occurred in common Quattrocento parlance. Around the middle of the fifteenth century, passive partners in homosexual acts were often referred to as *donne* (women, or wives) rather than as boys by Florentine informers. A boy was often said to be kept *a uso di donna* (for use as a woman or wife), *come*

²⁶ The presence of Rocke's important study of male-male (sexual) relationships makes all the more conspicuous the gap in evidence for (and studies on) female-female (sexual) relationships during the Quattrocento.

donna (like a woman or wife) and even *per moglie* (as a wife). Male-male sexual relationships during this period were thus often referred to as though they were modeled on 'normative' male-female marriage. As Roche notes, "sometimes informers implied a practical equivalence between homoerotic relations and male-female marriages when, for instance, they specified that a man substituted a boy for his legitimate spouse or that a boy was, in effect, a man's wife." (108-109) But marriage was not the only euphemism employed to discuss illicit and illegal male-male sexual relations: Roche demonstrates that networks of friends were often involved in the creation of a homosexual or homoerotic subculture in which partners engaged in male-male sex acts were also called *amici*, just as the title of his book, *Forbidden Friendships*, implies (182).

With this broader social context in mind, then, perhaps it comes as no surprise that Cherubino's treatise, so conscious of and concerned with the problems of illicit sexuality (both in the bedroom and the town hall), nonetheless cannot avoid the problematic elision of 'normative' and 'unnatural' sex acts. Due to the uncontrollable slipperiness of terms like *amici*, rather than avoiding the delicate question of inappropriate sexual behaviour, the *Regola* instead points all the more insistently to it, as well as to an implicit symmetry between licit, sinless and legal; as well as illicit, sinful and illegal acts in Quattrocento Tuscany. By focusing his readers' attention on procreation, the control of lust, mutual love, companionship and friendship, Cherubino demonstrates his awareness of a standard rhetoric on marriage that began before the birth of Christ and had become convention by the fifteenth century in Italy. By extending the similarities between marriage and friendship to include their social, emotional *and physical* attributes, however, his *trattatello* fleetingly opens marriage and marital sex to a momentary coincidence of licit and illicit sexuality.

These problematic contradictions and shifting interpretations notwithstanding, the *Regola* simultaneously attempts to close down the possibility of non-normative sexual behaviour by re-inscribing male-male sex acts within the bounds of the sinful, distinguishing spouses and friends from *inimici* (enemies), who "non si possono in volto o in faccia vedere; ma si voltano alcuna fiata la schiena e le spalle l'uno l'altro." Sinless marriage, procreation and friendship are thus joined together by means of a specific sexual position in which each participant lovingly faces the other. In contrast, sinful marriage, sodomy and enmity are united by means of a sexual position defined by *cordiale odio* (heartfelt hatred), in which one partner turns away from the other. Cherubino's *Regola della vita matrimoniale* thus participates not only in humanistic discussions about matrimo-

ny and in theological discourses on the practical salvation of wedded souls, but also in the civic debates that circulated among secular officials invested deeply in controlling and manipulating sexual activity, a moral and legal quagmire, in fifteenth-century Tuscany.

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