



## THE PAGAN WORLD OF LAURA BATTIFERRA THROUGH EGLOGA TERZA

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### **Abstract:**

In this article the Third Eclogue (Egloga Terza) of the work of Laura Battiferra *Il primo libro dell'opere toscane* (1560) is examined. In this poem the Renaissance poet assimilates traditional elements of the genre of eclogue from the ancient times until Renaissance, through an original personal view of the world and the gods. More specifically, humans are involved directly with gods, Christian and paganistic contexts get a new meaning, while different spiritual traditions coexist within a poetic universe which reveals a new worldview.

**Keywords:** Italian Renaissance poetry, Laura Battiferra, eclogue, Renaissance

Eclogue is the poetic genre developed by the Greek and Latin writers, with bucolic themes: these works show the peaceful life of the countryside and the happy life of the shepherds. Thus, Theocritus (315-260 BC) writes the *Idylls*, and then Virgil (70-19 BC), according to the exemplar of Theocritus, composes his ten eclogues in the *Bucolics*. Following the exemplar of Virgil, Dante and Petrarca make up their latin eclogues: the former composed two eclogues<sup>i</sup> and the latter the work *Bucolicum carmen*<sup>ii</sup>. At the same time, Boccaccio, describing in the works of *Ninfale d'Ameto* (1341) and *Ninfale fiesolano* (about the same period) the suffering of love within the bucolic environment, gives an important literary example for the later development of romanzo<sup>iii</sup>.

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<sup>i</sup> These are two poems written in hexameter, the first in 68 verses (*Vidimus in nigris albo patiente lituris*) and the second in 97 verses (*Velleribus Colchis prepes detectus Eus*). They were compiled between 1319 and 1320 in Ravenna, but were published in Florence in 1719.

<sup>ii</sup> The work was written between 1346 and 1347 and published a few years later, in 1357.

<sup>iii</sup> See *Arcadia* (1480? -1504) by Iacobo Sannazzaro, which (beyond the foreword and closure) consists of a composition of narrative parts and eclogues (this mixed genre is called prosimetro), under the influence of Virgil, Longus, Achilles Tatius, and Boccaccio. It seems that the writer initially had written the eclogue and then decided to insert the prose parts and create a single narrative set [Marina Riccucci, *Il neghittoso e il fier connubio. Storia e filologia nell'Arcadia di Jacopo Sannazaro* (Napoli: Liguori 2001) 5]. Thus, the project is a transition from the eclogue to romanzo.

The Italian eclogue was developed initially at Quattrocento<sup>iv</sup>: a milestone for the development of the genre is year 1482, when a volume called *Bucoliche elegantissime* was printed in Florence, containing Virgil's *Bucolics* and other bucolic compositions of literary artists of that time (Arsochi, Benivieni, Boninsegni, Pulci), while the publication of the Theocritus' *Idylls*<sup>v</sup> occurs in the same year. In the next century, Annibal Caro's translation of the work of Longus *Daphne and Chloe* in 1537 led to the significant bloom of the eclogue, offering rich motifs about pastoral life and bucolic love. The rebirth of the genre of eclogue has gradually led to works in dialogue form, sometimes with a variety of musical investments, as the Castiglione's work *Tirsi* presented at Urbino in 1506 or the works *I due pellegrini* of Tansillo (1526) and Giraldi Cinzio's *Egle* (1545)<sup>vi</sup>. Thus, a transition is gradually done from eclogue to pastoral drama and the complex musical-poetical genre, which later constituted the opera lirica<sup>vii</sup>. The lyrics of the Italian eclogue to a great extent is based on the proparoxytone terchins (versi sdruccioli) and unrhymed endecasyllables (endecasillabi sciolti).

Battiferra writes her own eclogues, studying the widespread in the 16th century classic bucolic sources, but also creating in the climate of revival of the genre in Italy. As in the case of all poems belonging to the poetic genre of eclogue, in Battiferra's Egloga Terza, which is included in her work *Il primo libro dell'opere toscane di M. Laura Battiferra degli Ammannati* (Firenze: Giunti, 1560) the environment in which the persons act is the countryside, with all the plants, animals and shepherds who constitute the landscape. In the poem's verses five persons are presented who have been gathered on a country trip, in an idyllic location near the river Arno and the city Greve. According to Kirkham<sup>viii</sup>, it is probably a gathering in the villa Le Rose, which was acquired by Giovan Battista Cini, a playwright of Medici's court in 1551, in which the following people are present: Giovan Battista Cini<sup>ix</sup> and his wife<sup>x</sup>, with the names Alfeo<sup>xi</sup> and

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<sup>iv</sup> For an exhaustive presentation of the development of the genre of eclogue during this period see M. Pieri, "La pastorale" in *Manuale di letteratura italiana, Storia per generi e problemi, Volume secondo: Dal cinquecento allameta del Settecento*, ed. Franco Brioschi, Costanzo Di Girolamo (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1994) 273 – 292

<sup>v</sup> Theocritus, *Idyllia* (Milano: B. & J. A. de Honate 1482)

<sup>vi</sup> See the pastoral dramas with a certain number of persons and according to the aristotelian principles, such as *Pastor Fido* (1590) by Guarini and *Aminta* (1573) by Tasso.

<sup>vii</sup> See *Dafne* (1595) work by Ottavio Rinuccini, who then composes the *Euridice* (1600), which is considered the first opera.

<sup>viii</sup> Victoria Kirkham, *Laura Battiferra and Her Literary Circle: An Anthology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2006) 424

<sup>ix</sup> Cini (1525 - 1586) was known in the court of Medici for his religious representations (sacre rappresentazioni), but also for his processing of ancient themes through intermezzi, such as the myth of Love and Soul based on the Apuleius, the music of which was written by the musician of the courtyard of Medici Alessandro Striggio (1536/1537 – 1592).

<sup>x</sup> Cini had two spouses, Maria Berardi and Alessandra di Luigi d' Alberto Altoviti, but dates of marriage are missing. He has with Berardi at least two sons: Cosimo and Francesco. So, since in the poem there is a reference to the descendant of Galatea, she is likely to be identified with Maria Berardi. In addition, Battiferra at *Primo Libro* has written a sonnet dedicated to the death of Maria Berardi: (102) A Messer Giovan Battista Cini, in morte di Madonna Maria Berardi sua Consorte (the enumeration of the poems is in accordance with Kirkham's edition).

Galatea<sup>xii</sup>, Battiferra and her husband Bartolomeo Ammannati, with the names Dafne and Fidia<sup>xiii</sup> and Luca Martini<sup>xiv</sup>, an officer in charge of the Medici with administrative duties in the Pisa, with the name Tirsi. The poet in this poem seems to follow elements from the bucolic literary tradition of antiquity, but also of the modern times. Thus, the name Tirsi refers to Theocritus<sup>xv</sup>, but also to Castiglione's work *Tirsi*, Galatea echoes the eleventh idyll of Theocritus, as well as the *Bucolics* of Petrarca<sup>xvi</sup>, Dafne the idylls 6, 8 and 9 of Theocritus<sup>xvii</sup>. Also, as Dante and Petrarca in their eclogues inserted, within the bucolic environment original themes, such as references to poetic creation<sup>xviii</sup>, the poet's personal stance in life<sup>xix</sup> or contemporary historical events<sup>xx</sup>, so Battiferra refers to her poetic work (verses 64 et seq.), declares her attitude towards life (verses 44-46), and makes indirect historical references (verses 28-29). In addition, she seems to follow Boccaccio, who in *Ninfale d'Ameto* and *Ninfale fiesolano* emphasizes the presence of the

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<sup>xi</sup> The Alpheus, a god - river of the Peloponnese is related to the Italian area, since, according to the myth, its waters after their estuary in the Ionian Sea meet the waters of their beloved Arethousa, who was transformed into a spring of Sicily (see Strab. *Geogr.* 6: 270). Also, Alpheus refers to the origin of Cini from Pisa: according to Virgil (*Aen.* X), the city has Greek roots: *Alphea ab origine Pisae*, that is, originated from Alpheus. According to this version, the foundation of Pisa is attributed to some inhabitants who lived next to the Alpheus river in the Greek city of Pissa, where Pelops and his son Tantalos reigned. Thus, often in prose and poetry, Pisa is called Alfea and the inhabitant of Pisa is called Alfeo.

<sup>xii</sup> The name echoes the myth of Galatea: Nereus' daughter loved Acis, but he was murdered by his rival Polyphemos. Then Galatea converts the blood of her beloved to a spring to keep her love alive (Theocr. *Cycl.* 6: 11, and Ov. *Met.* 10, 243 cf.). But there is also the legend of Pygmalion who fell in love with the statue he created with the name Galatea (Ov. *Met.* 10, 243 cf.).

<sup>xiii</sup> It implies the particular art of Battiferra's husband in sculpture, but also his references to classical antiquity, of which he exploited techniques and themes [L. Biagi, "Di Bartolomeo Ammannati e di alcune sue opere" in *L'Arte* XXVI (1923) 49-66].

<sup>xiv</sup> Since Martini dies in 1561 and if we admit that verses 28-29 of the poem are a reference to the end of the war with Siena in 1555 [Victoria Kirkham, *Laura Battiferra and Her Literary Circle: An Anthology* (n. 8 above) 424], we can assume that the poem was written between 1555 and 1561.

<sup>xv</sup> Theocritus' *Thyrsis* or *Ode* (*Θύρσις ἢ Ωιδή*), idyll 1, where the heroes are two shepherds: the shepherd of sheep Thyrsis, and an anonymous goat shepherd, who met each other in an ideal place. Thyrsis praises the shepherd for playing the syrinx and he in turn praises Thyrsis for his performances in the song and convinces him to sing Daphnis' passions, promising to give him a prize of a wood-carved glass (*kissyvion*- *κισσύβιον*), that is adorned with wonderful performances. The goat shepherd describes in detail the *kissyvion* with the elaborate decoration and Thyrsis sings the passions of the enamored Daphnis (verses 64-145). The poem closes with the prize giving.

<sup>xvi</sup> See XI, Galathea in *Bucolicum Carmen* of Petrarca.

<sup>xvii</sup> See *Idyll 6 Voukoliastai: Damitias and Daphnis*; *Idyll 8 Voukoliastai: Daphnis and Menalkas*; *Idyll 9 Voukoliastai: Daphnis and Menalkas*. In these three idylls, the name Daphnis becomes typical of a pastoral world, beyond the mythological context of Apollo's love for the nymph Daphne, which are also exploited by Battiferra, trying in the poem to show herself, as the chosen of the ancient god due to her poetic art.

<sup>xviii</sup> See also: Dante, *Ecloga I*, where the poet refers to his choice of lingua *volgare* in *Divina Commedia*.

<sup>xix</sup> Petrarca in his bucolic compositions, in the *Bucolicum carmen*, oscillates between religious life and secular glory.

<sup>xx</sup> Petrarca, in the second eclogue of *Bucolicum Carmen*, titled *Argus*, refers to the death of Roberto d'Angiò; in the eclogues 9-11 (*Querulo*, *Laurea occidens*, *Galathea*) known as *Ecloghe del dolore* [F. Petrarca, *Bucolicum Carmen*, ed. L. Canali, (Lecce: Pietro Manni Editori 2005) 145]he refers to the plague and in the 12th eclogue (*Conflictatio*) refers to the English-French War.

shepherds and the Nymphs, as she also does through the escalating presence of shepherds until the final climax and their involvement with Nymphs (verses 173 et seq.) A convergence is also observed concerning the involvement of the gods in the life of mortals between the poem of Battiferra and the work *Pastorale* by Matteo Maria Boiardo, which was written between 1482 and 1483. Indeed in *Pastrorale*, which includes ten eclogues (following even the number of poems of Virgil), the involvement of mythical beings in contemporary events is recorded<sup>xxi</sup>. On the other hand, Battiferra's poem emphasizes the power of love and the key role it has for the human, the world and nature, as it appears through the invocation of Aphrodite (verses 99-110), also through the choice of a vocabulary concerning the particular love affair between a couple (*stretto e santo nodo, od in nodo maggiore*) and finally through the reference to related myths<sup>xxii</sup> and symbols<sup>xxiii</sup>: in this way it implies the main motif of the bucolic works, which is the adventures of a couple<sup>xxiv</sup>. Despite the influences and reflections or the convergences of the themes and motifs taken from the works of the main representatives of the bucolic genre from antiquity until Renaissance, it should be emphasized the originality of the composition of Laura Battiferra, who transforms her poem from an initial recording of the natural landscape to an escalating invocation of divine entities. This invocation combined with the epiphany of these forces, leads to an amazing paganistic poem, a pandemonium of a joined celebration of gods and humans, in a flawless, as it will be seen below, structure and composition of the individual components.

In this eclogue, therefore, the poet records with excellent detail the persons that constitute the company, the natural landscape, but also the contact with the divine entities, coming from the ancient Greek and Roman religions. It is noteworthy that in the verses of the poem there is a polymorphic contact - association of people with the divine, which can be shaped as follows:

- a) comparisons of the properties of the gods with the mortals, which often imply a divine favor of a god towards a particular mortal
- b) divine invocations
- c) divine epiphanies, that is, direct engagement - coexistence of gods with humans.

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<sup>xxi</sup> In his 10th eclogue, Orpheus appears to praise Alfonso di Calabria for his operations during the war between Modena and Venice.

<sup>xxii</sup> The central role of the myth of Apollon's love for Daphne is evident, while indirect references to erotic narratives (the myth of Galatea and Acis or Pygmalion, myth of Alpheus and Arethousa, myth of Daphnis through the singer of the tortures of love Thyrsis) are exploited throughout the poem.

<sup>xxiii</sup> The roses are a basic structural element of the poem and a symbol of Aphrodite in the myth of Adonis, as well as in rituals and folk traditions [Monica S. Cyrino, *Aphrodite, Gods and Heroes of the Ancient World* (New York City: New York and London, England: Routledge 2010) 63, 96].

<sup>xxiv</sup> The convergence of Battiferra's poem with Tasso's *Aminta* is noteworthy (the work is written after Battiferra's work, in 1573, and is published in about 1580): in this, love is presented as a force of nature that embraces the universe and rules human (στ. 152, 726-733, 850). Tasso's work, however, "meets" Battiferra's eclogue also through the fact that she presents a courtly world (Battiferra's friends, like her husband, belong to the Medici's circle, while in the case of Tasso there are references to Ferrara's Estensi) combined with pastoral life, the ancient gods, and the poet's identification with one of the heroes (*Aminta*, στ. 572-575, 634-637, 1006).

The poet describes initially the location of the company's excursion (verses 1-9): it is noteworthy that this introductory description of the place closes with the reference to Flora, which can be identified with Florence<sup>xxv</sup> or with the homonymous Roman goddess of vegetation and fertility<sup>xxvi</sup>. During the Renaissance, Flora acquires a special significance, as it can be seen in the multitude of her depictions in Italian Renaissance art, for example in the works of Botticelli and Tiziano<sup>xxvii</sup>. So, from the very beginning of the poem, a goddess appears, who belongs to the ancient past and is characterized by a distinct anthropomorphism, since she is presented with a human emotion, that is, to pride on those who are under her authority (*a quei, per cui Flora si vanta e pregiata*)<sup>xxviii</sup>, as a king who is proud of his loyal citizens. Then the couple of Alfeus and Galatea are presented (verses 10-19). Galatea is portrayed as a woman with a divine fate, since she can compete not only with mortals but also with goddesses in their basic characteristics: their beauty and their value (*beltà, valor*). But also the descendant of the couple, who is characterized by a multitude of virtues, is the result of the favor of heaven, that is, the supreme forces that influence the life of mortals (στ. 20-22).

After the place and its owners, the poet passes on the identification of time: the excursion takes place in the month which is the King of the Months. It is August, which was named after Caesar Augustus, while the 2nd of August was proclaimed celebration in all the lands of Medici in honor of the victory of Cosimo in Montemurlo in 1537<sup>xxix</sup>. After the poet has defined the two basic components of the description (place and time), she proceeds to human actions. The companion that enjoys the countryside is not an ordinary group of people: the poet with the repetition of the *chi* (verses 26, 28) emphasizes a snapshot in which all the participating people, perfectly matched with the natural landscape in which they are located, feel the need to praise the gods with freedom, as individuals who differentiate to each other: each one turns to another divine entity, and also with a consensus in their need to come in contact with the supreme powers and to appreciate them for the cosmic harmony within which they are integrated<sup>xxx</sup>. In this way one worships Jupiter, another Mars (verses 26-29), while Tirsi

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<sup>xxv</sup> Victoria Kirkham, *Laura Battiferra and Her Literary Circle: An Anthology* (n.8 above) 424

<sup>xxvi</sup> In honor of this goddess there was a celebration named Floralia during the ancient times, dominated by an atmosphere of orgiastic enthusiasm [H.H. Scullard, *Festivals and Ceremonies of the Roman Republic* (Cornell University Press 1981) 110].

<sup>xxvii</sup> In Botticelli's *Allegoria della Primavera* (1478-1482), Flora is presented along with Zephyrus, while in Tiziano's *Flora* (c. 1515), the goddess keeps the flowers that symbolize the regeneration of nature. Flora is also presented in musical works, as in a series of madrigals at the end of the 16th century by the composers Leon Leoni and Luca Marenzio.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Obviously, here the shepherds are meant, who will present themselves more remarkable in the process of the poem, appearing at this point in contrast to the people of the higher classes who have spiritual culture and wealth (*risplendon per ingegno e per ricchezza*).

<sup>xxix</sup> Victoria Kirkham, *Laura Battiferra and Her Literary Circle: An Anthology* (n.8 above) 424-425

<sup>xxx</sup> The same expressive option with the use of the *chi* pronoun combined with the repetition of *altri* is found in verses 52-63: in this way the poet gives emphasis again on the variety of preferences of the companion, the members of which admire the different elements of nature, but always in a common framework of worship of the cosmic miracle.

and Fidia are presented as priests of the orgiastic forces of nature, Pan and Bacchus (verse 30).

The references to the supplication to Jupiter and Mars are indeed original and they surprise the reader: Jupiter as if he were the Christian God will give forgiveness (*impetrando per noi venia*)<sup>xxxi</sup>, while the god of war is called to give peace (*dare al mondo poi tranquilla Pace*)<sup>xxxii</sup>. The same paradox appears in the reference to Tirsi and Fidia, who, like the priests of Pan and Bacchus, serve the life of mortals (*il viver ministrando a noi mortali*)<sup>xxxiii</sup>, while they are also called shepherds (*due valorosi e saggi / pastor*)<sup>xxxiv</sup>: these two expressive choices suggest the poet's mood to assimilate the Christian terms within a universe of purely paganistic nature. Then the two men are described with more details: Tirsi is a favourite of Apollo and with his music he may overthrow the natural laws by stopping the flow of Arno (verses 34- 36)<sup>xxxv</sup>. Fidia is also a small god, who can reproduce natural patterns through his art: it is characteristic that he can make a living human from inanimate material (verses 37-40). At this point, both the Old Testament, where God created man from clay, and the ancient Greek myths of creation of humans<sup>xxxvi</sup> are recalled: Battiferrara selects an image that brings together Christian and paganistic motifs, putting Bartolomeo to the position of the artist - small god who gives life to the inanimate, while in an indirect way and in connection with the reference within the poem to Galatea, there is a hint in Greek mythology, where Pygmalion, coming into contact with the goddess Aphrodite, managed to realize his desire beyond every physical order: it is implied that Bartolomeo with the favour of the gods can overcome the limitations imposed by the nature of any art. The fact that the forces of love can go beyond the natural laws is also visible in the sonnet 22<sup>xxxvii</sup> of *Rime*, where

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<sup>xxxi</sup> See Sannazzaro, *Arcadia, Dedic.* 23. 34

<sup>xxxii</sup> During the Renaissance, the concept of homeopathic use of things is widespread, and it has been convinced that what causes evil is the same that can cure it. Antonio Clericuzio records through impressive examples this consideration: the most characteristic is the function of the weapon-ointment, which was applied on the weapon that caused the wound to cure the injured. In the case of Battiferra's poem, Mars, who is causing the plight of war, is the same who will heal the people from his evil [Antonio Clericuzio "Η μαγνητική θεραπεία των πληγών: φυσική ή διαβολική μαγεία" in *Η μαγεία της φιλοσοφίας, η φιλοσοφία της μαγείας*, ed. Θ.Πελεγρίνης (Αθήνα: Ελλ. Γράμματα 1994) 103-115].

<sup>xxxiii</sup> The verb *ministrare* is found in the Gospel of Matthew (20,26-28), where it is stated that the followers of Jesus ought to minister, to serve their fellow human beings, as did the very Son of God (*Filius hominis non venit ministrari, sed ministari*).

<sup>xxxiv</sup> At this point the shepherds recall, besides the context of the bucolic works, the Christian parable of the good shepherd (*John* 10: 1-21).

<sup>xxxv</sup> The overthrow of the natural order due to the special art of a gifted man echoes the myth of Orpheus, who, according to mythological traditions, could reverse the flow of rivers, enchant the plants and the animals (Ps.-Apoll. *Biblioth.* 1.3.2; Euripid. *Iphig. in Aul.* 1212 and *Bach.* 562; Ov. *Met.* 11). The myth of Orpheus, along with the aforementioned magical aspects of the hero, enjoys wide dissemination during the Renaissance, as shown by a number of literary and musical works of the time [see Laura Rietveld, *Il trionfo di Orfeo. La fortuna di Orfeo in Italia da Dante a Monteverdi*, PhD thesis, (FGw: Instituut voor Cultuur en Geschiedenis) 2007].

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Xenoph. D.K. 29, Euripid. *Trag. Frag.* 182A1.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> The poem is dedicated to Isabella de' Medici (1542 - 1576), daughter of Cosimo I de' Medici and Eleonora di Toledo. Isabella stood out for her great education and musical talent. At the age of sixteen she

the God of love brings back to life a human who is dead or feels dead. In this poem, death to which the pain of separation results, is overthrown by Eros, who will do what others cannot (*quel ch'altri far non puo*), outlined as the strongest god in the poet's poetic universe. In this universe Eros is the greatest god and martyrdom (*lo mio martire*) cannot be but the separation from the loved one. The martyr does not look like Christian martyrs, but is a martyr of love<sup>xxxviii</sup>.

Returning to the eclogue, it can be observed that the poet presents herself as the last among the attendees and she attains it with her reference to her bond with Fidia (verses 42-43). She is portrayed as Apollo's follower, interpreting in this way her name, Dafne, and so exploiting an original metaphor: as Apollo followed Daphne, so she followed the god, reversing the role of hunter and prey. The new Daphne is the hunter, who aspires not to love, but to art and contact with the divine, which is another kind of love, an attraction, a craving of the poet for the essential far from the worthless things of the earthly world (verses 44 -48): Daphne of the poem fits to both the Christian world, where the ideal of the Christian is to escape the earthly temptations, and the ancient Greek world, where the ideal of the philosopher is to overcome the illusions of matter and through the desire of the divine things to touch the incorruptible divine world<sup>xxxix</sup>.

After the presentation of all the members of the congregation and their association with the transcendental level of the gods, some people admire the diversity of the natural landscape, others praise Phoebe for the clear sky and others admire the sanctuary where worthy words are said for the king of the universe<sup>xl</sup> (verses 49-63). Inside this diffuse atmosphere of beatification of the divine, the poet is flaring to sing according to what Apollo dictates (verses 64-66): she becomes a divine songstress who holds a humble syringe like the ancient pipers. The object of her hymn is the place, which is a bearer of beauty (*belezza*), kindness (*bontate*) and virtue (*virtute*) (verses 70-71): her reference to the characteristics of the place is original, as she uses the words

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marries Giordano I Orsini, but remains at her father's house enjoying a great freedom. The intervals away from her husband were long, and after her father's death she was allegedly murdered by her husband and brother due to a reputation for her relationship with Troilo Orsini [Caroline Murphy, *Murder of a Medici Princess* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2008) 328-333], a case which other scholars refute [see Elisabetta Mori, *L'onore perduto di Isabella de' Medici* (Garzanti 2011)]. Battiferra, in this poem, refers to the separation from the loved one, giving voice to Isabella herself. In the first verse there are petrarchal echoes (see *Rime Sparse* 12.11: *gli anni, e i giorni, et l'ore*, 295.5: *l'ultimo giorno et l'ore estreme*).

<sup>xxxviii</sup> A similar expressive choice is common in the poetry of Gaspara Stampa, where martyrs of love have replaced the Christian martyrs (see the sonnets 7, 12, 13, 14, 31, 39 et al) Cf. Petrarca, *Rime Sparse* 12, 127

<sup>xxxix</sup> Plat. *Symp.* 201d-212c

<sup>xl</sup> If we consider that the sanctuary is the Santa Maria dell' Impruneta, located in that area and considered to be miraculous, it is interesting to see the convergence of the paganistic and Christian world in the poem: a few verses above, Battiferra refers to Apollo whom people bless. Not knowing with certainty if there is indeed a reference of the verses to Santa Maria dell' Impruneta, some may conjecture, contextually, that the sanctuary is a symbolism that declares the worship of Apollo who can be regarded as the king of the universe.

*bontate* and *virtute*<sup>xli</sup>, since in this way natural beauty acquires an ethical quality. In this way the poet records a natural world in which the good-and-beautiful (καλοκαγαθία) prevails. This complex concept of antiquity shifts from the human level to all elements of nature, showing that, in her worldview, human and nature are in an indissoluble relationship, and that every moral quality is based on a corresponding one that constitutes nature and the world intertemporally<sup>xlii</sup>. The poet at this point makes an analogy between the place that surpasses any other in terms of the characteristics mentioned above and the rose that is superior to any flower (verses 69-70), to conclude that it is ultimately due to this superiority that the place was named by the wise ancient saints<sup>xliii</sup> *LE ROSE* (verses 72-76): the name echoes the truth, which is intertemporal and incorruptible<sup>xliv</sup>.

Her song is a paganistic hymn: it invokes the plants to scatter around the sacred and holy scent, as if they were elements bearing divine qualities, as if they were mediators between gods and people. Then the invocation continues with the invocation of the Emblem of Athena<sup>xlv</sup>, which is equivalent to a call of the goddess herself to give her favors to the couple and tie it with an even stronger bond. It is remarkable that this is the second time that the metaphor of the bond is used in the poem to declare the relationship between man and woman. In both cases the bond is desirable: it is the bond that gives freedom, in the first case (verse 43), and the bond that the poet wishes to become even more tight and unresolved in the second case (verse 97). The above mentioned double reference, the usage of the word *amoroso* (verse 83) and the appearance of the roses have prepared the reader for the invocation of Aphrodite. The poet asks for the descent and epiphany of the goddess. Aphrodite will circle the sun with roses: the roses, symbol of Aphrodite, give to this structurally perfect and remarkable poem another link, as the roses blend with the place of *LE ROSE*, eventually denoting the mysterious and lasting presence of the goddess all around the poem. Additionally, the poet calls the companionship as the sons of Aphrodite (verse 105), implying the continuing presence of other divine entities on this feast, which are

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<sup>xli</sup> In the case of the word *virtute*, the interesting polysemy leads the reader to further thoughts about the role of nature within the paganistic world, built by Battiferra: beyond virtue, *virtute* can also mean strength, power, bravery; thus it is implied that nature imposes its laws on human and other creatures.

<sup>xlii</sup> For Plato, good and evil are related to the knowledge of the unalterable truth or its absence (*Protag.* 358d, *Rep.* 589c, *Tim.* 86d-e). See also the sapphic fr. 50 (Lobel-Page), where the good is the bearer of true invariant beauty.

<sup>xliii</sup> Battiferra, at this point, chooses to mention the soothsayers, because they are the most direct representatives of divine will and come in direct contact with the divine. In the Renaissance, a need arises for direct contact with the divine, following the exemplar of the ancient world, leading to the revival of clairvoyance, as it appears in the texts of Marsilio Ficino, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Pietro Pomponazzi, Gerolamo Cardano, Giambattista Della Porta [Brian P. Copenhaver, "Astrology and magic" in *The Cambridge history of renaissance philosophy*, ed. Charles B. Schmitt (Cambridge-New York: Cambridge University Press 1988) 264-300]

<sup>xliv</sup> According to Kabbalah, the name expresses the essence of the meant thing, and in this sense every reference to a name is a reference to the essence of the corresponding thing.

<sup>xlv</sup> Perhaps the poet chooses to invoke the symbol (olives) and not the goddess itself, because it is visible in the natural environment.



genealogically descended from Aphrodite, such as the Cupids (Erotideis). The torches lighted by Aphrodite's sons<sup>xlvi</sup> fit for the erotic context, recalling the element of fire, which is often a symbol of the power of Eros<sup>xlvii</sup>. The poet also gives a further dimension, saying that these torches are burning to heavenly things; thus the celestial Aphrodite is recalled in the mind of the reader, who, in its higher form, makes the craving for forms of union beyond the flesh<sup>xlviii</sup>. Battiferra's Aphrodite is heavenly, but also in harmony with the elements of this world, without the negative tendencies that dominate it. Then, from the goddess of Eros, the poet passes to Artemis, who seems to be walking around in those forests, hunting along with her greyhounds. The request to the goddess is to come close to the companionship, to favor it, to have an epiphany of her, since the members of this companionship have no purposes that will offend the goddess's virginity, as in the case of Actaion (verses 112-116).

The poem then sums up the invocations to the three daughters of Jupiter and argues to persuade them to appear (verses 119-120)<sup>xlix</sup>: the companionship has managed to approach ancient gold (verses 121-123); thus the return of the ancient gods to a world that can understand them and touch their essence is feasible. The word *venite* is chosen, which directly declares the arrival of the gods in the world of humans. Does Battiferra refer her ideas only to the companion that has approached the ancient gold or to all her era, in which the antiquity is rediscovered? More specifically, is this an indirect reference to the effort to revive the ancient religion during the Renaissance<sup>1</sup>? In this interpretation someone can conclude if he reads the continuation of the poem. There, the light of the sky (*Vago lume del ciel*), which is identical to Apollo, who once was

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<sup>xlvi</sup> Maybe the Cupids (Erotideis) are implied, or possibly the attendees, who, as the poet suggests, have a special bond with the goddess of beauty and love.

<sup>xlvii</sup> Let us remind the fire (pyr) of Sappho in the particularly influential in the Renaissance fr. 31 (verse 10) or the *Canzoniere* of Petrarch (see 14: 241: 9-13, 264: 44, 270: 17-18) and Gaspara Stampa (see 4:13, 35:6, 36:4, 44: 3-14, 75: 5-7), in which the element of fire is one of the main expressive ways, declaring the invincible power of Eros. In addition, the torch is one of the characteristic symbols of the mysteries: in the Eleusinian mysteries, the Daughter (Kore) is depicted holding the lit torch, while the same is done by the participants. The image, therefore, implies both the power of love and an initiatory state of integrating people into the forces of nature that Aphrodite dominates.

<sup>xlviii</sup> See Marsilio Ficino, *D' Amore* VII, VIII, XI

<sup>xlix</sup> Kirkham (*Laura Battiferra and Her Literary Circle: An Anthology* (n.8 above, 245)] argues that at this point Battiferra invokes the Muses, but the invocation could also be interpreted as a summation of the invocation to Aphrodite, Artemis and Athena. Among the different mythological versions of Aphrodite's genealogy, Sappho 1(Lobel-Page), Homer (*Il.* 15, 348) and Pseudo-Apollodorus (*Biblioth* 1. 3) record Aphrodite as the daughter of Jupiter.

<sup>1</sup> Ficino was considered as one of the proponents of the revival of a religious spirit that has its foundations in ancient paganism: in 1485 Giovanni Pannonio accused Ficino of a *renovatio antiquorum*, as well as of the fact that he eventually proposed a *theologia antiqua* [Sebastiano Gentile, "Considerazioni attorno al Ficino e alla prisca theologia" in *Nuovi maestri e antichi testi. Umanesimo e Rinascimento alle origini del pensiero moderno* (Firenze: Atti del Convegno internazionale in onore di Cesare Vasoli 2012) 60]. This idea of the revival of ancient religion has its roots in the ideas of George Gemistus Plethon, a precursor of the Renaissance: Plethon composes hymns for the Greek gods and establishes in Mystras a philosophical-adoration cycle. His ideas are transferred to the West by himself and his disciples, such as Bessarion, in texts of whom the faith in the power of ancient religion is clear [See François Masai, *Pletone e il platonismo di Mistra* (Forlì: Victrix 2010).

running in Thessaly<sup>li</sup> (verses 126-129), is called to descend (*scendi*), be healed from its exile off the world and sing again (verses 130-134). The song seems to fit only in a world of harmony between mortals and gods.

In the mountains where the company is located, Lyco (*Lico*) leaves his girlfriend Nyssa (*Nisa*)<sup>lii</sup> to walk around, as in the case of Cerere in Sicily<sup>liii</sup>, while also Pan and Pomona, the Roman goddess of vegetation, like to be there. Perhaps it is of no coincidence that the poet chooses to refer to divine entities, which are connected with mysteries concerning the cycle of the seasons, the vegetation and the orgiastic forces of nature: Battiferra is attracted of a world of direct contact with the divine, a world of initiations and direct participation of human to the cosmic mystery. Within this gathering of gods and people, the poet asks her song to stop to hear this high harmony (verses 144-146). Then Alfeo begins his own hymn, who, as a divine singer with his lyre, has often charmed the animals<sup>liv</sup> (verses 150-151). In his song he addresses the shepherds who are adorned with roses to hear. He declares that Pallas and Artemis are used to come to that place inconspicuous, since if anyone met them would be at risk (verses 162-164). Mythology, therefore, is the truth of the present. The world is the field where the divine entities are involved with people. The song then continues with Tirsi, who is also immersed in the grace of the Muses and Apollo (verses 168-170). He calls the Nymphs to an epiphany in front of the queen of the place, Galatea, and her husband Alfeo. Nymphs are invited to decorate the owners of the place with roses and sing (verses 171-174).

Within this atmosphere, finally the epiphany of Apollo takes place (verses 204-208), who decides to immerse in the sea showing in this way his contempt to the human, after he realized that the mortals were able to compete with him and even surpass him in art. In the world of Battiferra, human is not a slave of the god, as in a Christian universe, but the poet approaches the ancient Greek notion that human can touch the eternal world, and acquire graces appropriate to the gods. This does not mean that such an effort does not pose a risk to the mortal in Greek thought: human ought to stand in awe before the greatness of the world and his divine breath, to understand that his approach to the divine is in a complete harmony with laws of gods and nature and that it is not his transformation to God<sup>lv</sup>. The usually vengeful Apollo, when a mortal offends him, accepts in this case the capacity of the mortals in singing, since as his

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<sup>li</sup> See *Ov. Met.* I 452-567

<sup>lii</sup> The nymph Nyssa for various ancient writers, such as Diodorus Siculus (4.2), was the one who nurtured the little Dionysus at the command of Jupiter, away from the rage of Hera, in the homonymous mountain. Mount Nyssa is located in the Lycia region: the ancient kingdom of Lycia was named after the king Lycus (*Her. Hist.* 1.173).

<sup>liii</sup> The Roman god Cerere is identified with the ancient Greek goddess Demetra. Cerere in ancient writers has special ties to Sicily (*Diod. Sic.* 5.2, *Cic. in Verr.* IV, 48-49).

<sup>liv</sup> After referring to Tirsi as a new Orpheus who overturns the natural laws, Alpheus is also presented in the same way.

<sup>lv</sup> In Greek mythology, the mortals who claim to reach the gods are committing *hybris* (exaggerated self-pride), the surpassing of measure, which is punished, as shown by a myriad of myths. Especially in the case of Apollo, the revenges are cruel, as in the myth of Marsyas, who tried to overcome him in his art.

children and his followers and under the enlightenment he gives them, they exceed his song: contempt here denotes a hidden acceptance and the epiphany is mainly a response to a call. In front of this divine epiphany, they all take a step back and retire to the house together in the end of the day (verses 209-210). Thus Apollo became Helios (Sun)<sup>lvi</sup>, the supreme god who during the celebration was giving light, and when he died in the ocean brought the night<sup>lvii</sup>. The last invocation is again to Apollo - Helios to stand again, to be there as a help for the companion, to lift people away from the shadow of the mortal state (verses 215-219). The latter phrase involves the polysemy that we have encountered elsewhere in the text: in a Christian context, the removal of human from the mortal shadow entails passing to a post-death heavenly reign. However, in the paganistic climate that dominates the whole poem, the removal from the mortal shadow can be read as the passage into another state, in which the mortal touches the divine, has acquired divine virtues and qualities. Thus, the poem seems to seal a double reading that fits into Christian contexts and interpretations in most of its points, but it also acquires an interpretation that approaches the revival of a worldview derived from a world of a purely paganistic nature.

Through the study of the above poem, it becomes apparent that Battiferra exploits invocations to divine entities, not to call these transcendental forces into helping people, but to achieve their descent into the world of mortals and their direct involvement in the things of the earthly world. In her poetic world, the gods descend, enjoy the harmony of nature, share the human joys, make the mortal participants of divine virtues. The mortals in the poems of Battiferra are the gifted carriers of a world who can return to the ancient gold of the paganistic world, who can communicate with immortal entities without mediators.

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<sup>lvi</sup> Pico della Mirandola and Marsilio Ficino bring back to the spiritual circles of the Renaissance the occult of Zoroastrianism, which has at its center the god Son (Helios), as part of Prisca Theologia.

<sup>lvii</sup> The image of Apollo involves Homeric echoes: ὁ δ' ἦϊε νυκτὶ ἐοικώς (*Il.* 1,47) [and he came looking as the night]

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