

Caterina of Siena in the Writings of Observant Poor Clares: Caterina Vigri and Battista of Varano

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Introduction

The letters of Caterina of Siena (Caterina di Jacopo di Benincasa) saw a substantial manuscript dissemination in various female monastic houses, both within miscellanies and in more organic collections that figure among the most important witnesses of the letters in question.¹ Caterina of Siena's letter collection was one of the first Italian works to be printed: In 1492 a first collection of 31 letters appeared with Fontanesi in Bologna, and in Venice an edition comprising 368 letters was issued in 1500 by the Venetian printer Aldo Manutius. Hence it is not surprising that the letter collection of the Sienese saint had a considerable influence during the fifteenth and the sixteenth century: Anna Scattigno has traced its presence in several female Dominican letter collections by, for instance, Osanna of Mantua, Tommasina Fieschi, Domenica of Paradiso and Caterina

1 See for instance three florentine manuscripts, two from the monastery of S. Brigida, also known as 'Il Paradiso' (P₅ and R₄), and one from the monastery of Niccolò in Cafaggio (F₁): Cf. Caterina of Siena, *Epistolario. Catalogo dei manoscritti e delle stampe*, ed. M. Cursi, A. Dejure & G. Frosini, *Fonti per la storia dell'Italia medievale. Antiquitates*, 54 (Rome: Istituto Storico Italiano per il medio evo, 2021), 95-96, 130-132, 144-145. R₄ contains a single letter by Caterina together with two sermons by Giordano of Pisa and other writings.

de' Ricci,² whereas Gianni Festa has underlined the importance of the Catherinian model in the Dominican hagiography from the same period.³ Specific borrowings of some Catherinian images can still be found during the sixteenth and seventeenth century in the works of the Florentine Carmelite nun Maddalena de' Pazzi, who used some metaphors of specification that Rita Librandi has identified as the most commonly used characteristic of Catherinian language by mystical writers.⁴ The first scholar who drew attention to this aspect of the style of the saint was Giovanni Getto. Since then, Giovanni Pozzi has dwelled on the particular links between mysticism and metaphorical language.⁵ Metaphors of specification are particular insofar as they comprise two constituting terms, of which the more abstract one is specified by a more concrete one, as in, for example, 'the lamp of the heart'. Precisely this is one of the most frequently used metaphors in the works of Caterina of Siena, who applied it in various letters, developing it on the basis of the evangelical parable of the ten virgins:⁶ just as the lamp has to be open at the top and closed at the bottom, the human heart has to accept illumination by God and be insensitive to terrestrial seductions. The image must have struck Maddalena de' Pazzi, who used it in one of her letters, just as she availed herself of other metaphors of this type present in the Catherinian letter collection, such as the metaphor 'worm of

2 See A. Scattigno, 'Suggestioni catheriniane negli epistolari femminili tra Quattro e Cinquecento', in: *Virgo digna coelo. Caterina e la sua eredità. Raccolta di studi in occasione del 550° anniversario della canonizzazione di santa Caterina da Siena*, ed. A. Bartolomei Romagnoli, L. Cinelli & P. Piatti, Atti e documenti, 35 (Rome: Libreria editrice Vaticana, 2013), 545-582.

3 G. Festa, 'Il modello catheriniano nell'agiografia femminile domenicana tra Quattro e Cinquecento', in: *Virgo digna coelo*, 449-488.

4 R. Librandi, 'Una storia di genere nelle scritture delle mistiche: connessioni e giunture metaforiche', in: *Storia della lingua e storia. Atti del secondo Convegno ASLI (Catania, 26-28 ottobre 1999)*, ed. G. Alfieri, Associazione per la storia della lingua italiana, 2 (Florence: Franco Cesati Editore, 2003), 319-335, and Eadem, 'Dal lessico delle "Lettere" di Caterina da Siena: la concretezza della fusione', in: *Dire l'ineffabile. Caterina da Siena e il linguaggio della mistica*, ed. L. Leonardi & P. Trifone, La mistica cristiana tra Oriente e Occidente, 5 (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo per la Fondazione Ezio Franceschini, 2006), 19-40.

5 G. Getto, *Saggio letterario su S. Caterina da Siena* (Florence: Sansoni, 1939); reprinted in Idem, *Letteratura religiosa del Trecento* (Florence: Sansoni, 1967), 109-267, and G. Pozzi, 'Il linguaggio della scrittura mistica: santa Caterina', in: *Dire l'ineffabile*, 3-18.

6 They can for instance be found in letters 23, 79, 112, 360, according to Tommaseo's numbering. Cf. Caterina of Siena, *Le lettere*, ed. U. Meattini (Milan: Edizioni Paoline, 1987), and *The Letters of Catherine of Siena*, ed. S. Noffke, 4 Vols. (Tempe, AZ: Arizona center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2000-2008). From now on, the numbering of the letters will be preceded by a 'T', to indicate the numbering of Tommaseo.

self-love'. The Carmelite nun did not hide the influence of Caterina Benincasa, in fact she addressed her directly in her autobiography.⁷

The influence of Caterina of Siena on the feminine Franciscan Observance

Shortly after her death in 1380, the promotion of the cult of Caterina of Siena became linked with the birth of the Dominican third order. Moreover, the most avid promoters of the Dominican Observance were very devout spiritual sons of Caterina, such as Raimondo of Capua and Tommaso Caffarini.⁸ In subsequent decades, especially after Caterina's canonization in 1461, her figure would continue to be a fundamental model for the Dominican Observance, as well as for several 'women of Savonarola', such as Domenica of Paradiso and Caterina de' Ricci.⁹ Nevertheless, the influence of her thought was not confined to the boundaries of the Dominican order family, and is also detectable in the orbit of the Franciscan Observance. Starting from the 1420s, the Poor Clares in Italy were no longer predominantly copyists or recipients of works, but became authors themselves. As Bert Roest has pointed out, this occurred shortly after the promoters of Franciscan Observant reform began to manifest themselves in the world of female monasticism.¹⁰

The two most significant Clarissan figures in this context, who at the same time turned their monasteries into centers for the diffusion of reforms and into places of literary and artistic production, were Caterina Vigri, known as the saint of Bologna, and Battista of Varano.¹¹ Like other

7 Cf. L. Quadri, *Una fabula mystica nel Seicento italiano. Maria Maddalena de' Pazzi e le Estasi (1609-1611)* (Florence: Olschki, 2020), 136, 248-249.

8 Cf. G. Zarri, 'Catherine of Siena and the Italian Public', in: *Catherine of Siena. The Creation of a Cult*, ed. J.F. Hamburger & G. Signori, *Medieval women: texts and contexts*, 13 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 69-79, and S. Nocentini, 'Lo «scriptorium» di Tommaso Caffarini a Venezia', *Hagiographica* 12 (2005), 79-144.

9 See T. Herzig, *Savonarola's Women: Visions and Reform in Renaissance Italy* (Chicago-London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008).

10 B. Roest, *Order and Disorder. The Poor Clares between Foundation and Reform*, *The medieval Franciscans*, 8 (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2013), 304-307.

11 See J.M. Wood, *Women, Art, and Spirituality. The Poor Clares of Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), and K.G. Arthur, *Women, Art and Observant Franciscan Piety. Caterina Vigri and the Poor Clares in Early Modern Ferrara*, *Visual and material culture, 1300-1700*, 2 (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018).

members of the Franciscan second order, both came from aristocratic families, and had received a humanist upbringing. Indeed, Caterina Vigri had spent her youth at the Ferrara court of the Este family,¹² whereas Camilla, who later would adopt the name Battista, was the daughter of Giulio Cesare, lord of Camerino, a city from the Marches closely aligned with the neighboring court of the Montefeltro family from Urbino.¹³ The humanist upbringing of the latter has become particularly evident after the discovery, in 2009, of a Latin version attributable to her of the *Trattato della purità del cuore*, a work until then only known in the vernacular.¹⁴ For both Poor Clares, even more important than such a humanist upbringing, was the influence of some of the most well-known Franciscan Observant friars: Caterina Vigri of Bologna was particularly devoted to Bernardino of Siena, whom she considered to be a ‘new Saint Paul’, and in honor of whom she also wrote a Lauda;¹⁵ whereas the conversion of Camilla Battista of Varano accelerated after hearing a sermon by Domenico of Leonessa, one of the most important friars from the second generation of the Franciscan Observance.¹⁶

Caterina Vigri

Caterina Vigri, one of the writers most decidedly influenced by Caterina of Siena, is the author of the *Sette armi spirituali*, a work with a substantial manuscript dissemination and which was printed in Bologna by Azzoguidi between 1473 and 1475, contemporaneous with the *Libro della divina dottrine* of the Siennese saint, nowadays better known as the *Libro della divina*

12 See *Dalla Corte al Chiostro. Santa Caterina Vigri e i suoi scritti*, ed. Clarisse di Ferrara, P. Messa & F. Sedda, Viator (S. Maria degli Angeli (Assisi): Edizioni Porziuncola, 2012).

13 See *Un desiderio senza misura. Santa Battista Varano e i suoi scritti*, ed. P. Messa, M. Reschiglian & Clarisse di Camerino, Viator (S. Maria degli Angeli (Assisi): Edizioni Porziuncola, 2010).

14 Both versions are edited in Camilla Battista of Varano, *Trattato della purità del cuore. De puritate cordis. De perfectione religiosorum*, ed. S. Serventi, La mistica cristiana tra Oriente e Occidente, 30 (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo per la Fondazione Ezio Franceschini, 2019).

15 See Caterina Vigri, *Laudi, trattati e lettere*, ed. S. Serventi, Caterina Vigri: La Santa e la Città, 2 (Tavernuzze (Florence): SISMELE Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2000), lauda XI, 26-28, and S. Serventi, ‘Una lauda di santa Caterina da Bologna in onore di san Bernardino’, *Lettere Italiane* 52 (2000), 429-437.

16 A. Gattucci, ‘Riforma e Osservanza nelle Marche’, in: *I Francescani nelle Marche: secoli XI-II-XVI*, ed. L. Pellegrini & R. Paciocco (Cinisello Balsamo (Milan): Silvana Editoriale, 2000), 66-83.

provvidenza, or *Dialogo*. Francesco Sberlati has noticed that Caterina Vigri took from Caterina of Siena both particular linguistic forms, such as synonymic dittology, and specific images.¹⁷ One of the most interesting ones is that of the anvil, which appears both in the *Sette armi spirituali* and in another treatise produced in the Bolognese Clarissan monastery that probably is also a work by Vigri. In the *Sette armi spirituali*, she offers herself as an ‘infernal anvil’, in that she asks for her own damnation if that could bring forth God’s glory, and serve to pay the debt of all sinners.¹⁸ In the other work the anvil is an image of Christ on which the soul is forged:

‘Fra l’anchucene e’ l martelo / se fabrica el belo vaselo. E nota queste tre cosse: çoè el vaselo si è l’anima, el martelo si è el diavolo e l’anchucene si è Ihesu Christo benedecto, nel quale se de’ reposare l’anima quando è batuta e fabricata dal diavolo con le soe temptatione e colpi ch’el flagela l’anima.’¹⁹ (With the anvil and the hammer is made a beautiful vase. And remark the following three things: namely that the vase is the soul, the hammer is the devil and the anvil is the blessed Jesus Christ on which the soul has to rest when it is beaten and shaped by the devil with his temptations and the blows with which he hits the soul.)

The starting point of this short work is derived from two verses from *Lauda* 68 of Jacopone of Todi, in which the Franciscan friar invites brother Giovanni della Verna to support his illness with patience.²⁰ Yet the interpretation of the anvil as Christ and the vessel as the soul is probably derived from Caterina of Siena, who used this imagery in her *Dialogo* and

17 F. Sberlati, ‘Tradizione medievale e cultura umanistica in Caterina Vigri’, in: *Caterina Vigri, la Santa e la Città, Atti del Convegno (Bologna, 13-15 novembre 2002)*, ed. C. Leonardi, Caterina Vigri: La Santa e la Città, 5 (Tavernuzze (Florence): SISMEL Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2004), 91-114, reprinted as ‘Caterina, o dell’ascesi mistica’, in: F. Sberlati, *Castissima donzella. Figure di donna tra letteratura e norma sociale (secoli XV-XVII)*, ed. L. Orsi (Bern-New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 63-94.

18 Caterina Vigri, *Le sette armi spirituali*, ed. A. Degl’Innocenti, Caterina Vigri: La Santa e la Città, 1 (Tavernuzze (Florence): SISMEL Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2000), 52 (IX 20).

19 Caterina Vigri, *Laudi, trattati e lettere*, ed. Serventi, 130 (treatise 8).

20 Jacopone of Todi, *Lauda*, ed. M. Leonardi (Florence: Olschki, 2010), 144 (*lauda* 68, vv. 7-8).

in several letters,²¹ for instance in letter 161 to Nella of Nicolò Buonconti and Caterina of Gherardo di Nicolò:

‘Ine [sul legno della croce] portò egli e’ pesi delle nostre iniquitadi; ine si fabricarono come ancuine sotto il martello: e così è fabricata l’anima nelle pene di Cristo per mezzo del fuoco della sua carità.’²² (‘There [on the wood of the cross] he carried the weight of our iniquities; there they are shaped with the anvil under the hammer: and thus the soul is made in the pains of Christ by means of the fire of his love.’)

The seventh chapter of Vigri’s *Sette armi spirituali* takes up another image that likewise can be found both in the work of Jacopone of Todi,²³ and in the letters of Caterina of Siena, such as in her address to Ristoro di Piero Canigiani, explicitly citing Saint Bernard.²⁴ The passage in Vigri’s *Sette armi spirituali* reads:

‘O carissime sorele, ricordove quello che dice santo Bernardo, cioè che soto lo capo spinato non se convene li membri dilicati. E però se volite esser non sollamente membri de Christo, ma etiam vere serve e spoxe, convenite andare per la via spinosa, seguitando le sue vestigie.’²⁵ (‘O beloved sisters, remember what Saint Bernard says, namely that delicate members do not fit under the head covered by spines. Hence if you want to be not only members of Christ, but also his true servants and brides, it behoves you to seek the road of spines, seeking his footsteps.’)

21 Cf. Caterina of Siena, *Il Dialogo*, ed. G. Cavallini (Siena: Cantagalli, 1995), 71 (chapter XXVI), and the letters T 29, T 76, T 77, T 161, T 188, T 301, T 315, T 318, T 329, T 378.

22 Caterina of Siena, *Le lettere*, ed. Meattini, 617 (T 161).

23 Cf. Jacopone of Todi, *Laude*, ed. Leonardi, 100 (lauda 48, vv. 41-42): ‘Nullo membro ce par bello / star so’ lo capo spinato.’

24 It concerns letters T 38, T 86, T 217, T 258, T 356. The explicit reference to Saint Bernard can be found in T 258, which reads: ‘unde dice santo Bernardo che non si conviene che sotto el nostro capo spinato stieno i membri dilicati’.

25 Caterina Vigri, *Le sette armi spirituali*, ed. Degl’Innocenti, 37 (VII 100). This passage constitutes the so-called ‘dottrina della beata Caterina da Bologna’ which also can be found in Caterina Vigri, *Laudi, trattati e lettere* ed. Serventi, 69-72 (treatise I.1).

As it calls to mind the image of the crucifix, the citation expresses in a concise and visual manner the invitation to imitate Christ on his road of suffering. Not by accident, the citation is taken from a sermon by Saint Bernard composed for the Feast of all Saints, to express that only the way of removal from comfort leads to paradise.²⁶ In the course of the treatise the 'thorny road' ('via spinosa'), which for the Poor Clare was the privileged way to follow Christ's footsteps, is defined as the 'road of the enamored cross' ('via della innamorata croce').²⁷ This last expression, probably taken from Ugo Panziera,²⁸ and which was also used by Battista of Varano,²⁹ cannot be found in Caterina of Siena. Yet the latter does write in several letters that Christ ran to the cross as a person enamored with the salvation of men, and in letter 260, addressed at several Siennese prisoners, she writes that Christ has smitten his enemies climbing on horseback on the wood of the cross.³⁰ A similar image can be found in the *Specchio della Croce*, a work written by the Dominican Domenico Cavalca between 1330 and 1342, from which the Siennese saint probably drew inspiration. There as well Christ is described as a knight who climbed on the cross as if it was his horse to save those he loved. If the identification of Christ on the cross with the figure of a lover was due to the Dominican, the comparison made between the body parts of the crucified and those of a young knight is obtained from the sixth chapter of Bonaventura of Bagnoregio's *De perfectione vitae ad sorores*, dedicated to the memory of the passion of

26 Bernardus Claraevallensis, *Sermones*, in: S. Bernardi *Opera*, vol. V, ed. J. Leclercq & H. Rochais (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1968), 368 (*Sermo* 5, 9 *In festivitate omnium sanctorum*): 'Pudeat sub spinato capite membrum fieri delicatum'. The same citation can be found in § 4, 5 of Saint Bonaventure's *Vitis mystica*. Cf. *La letteratura francescana*, vol. III, *Bonaventura: la perfezione cristiana*, ed. C. Leonardi (Milan: Fondazione Valla, 2012), 146.

27 Caterina Vigri, *Le sette armi spirituali*, ed. Degl'Innocenti, 33 (VII 88) and 58 (X 14).

28 He used it two times in his *Lettera mandata a pie religiose per confortarle al perfetto stato di innamorate della croce*. Cf. *Mistici Francescani. Secolo XIV* (Milan: Editrici Francescane, 1997), 781 & 783. This letter was known to Vigri due to its presence in one of the manuscripts of *Corpus Domini* in Bologna: Cf. S. Serventi, 'I trattati e le lettere come specchio della cultura di Caterina e delle consorelle', in: *Dalla Corte al Chiostro. Santa Caterina Vigri e i suoi scritti*, 157-176 (at 171).

29 Camilla Battista of Varano, *Istruzioni al discepolo*, ed. M. Reschiglian, *La mistica cristiana tra Oriente e Occidente*, 28 (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo per la Fondazione Ezio Franceschini, 2017), 227 (VIII 8).

30 Cf. letters T 97, T 184, T 225, T 259, T 260, T 337, and T 342.

Christ.³¹ Just as the lover wears colored clothing, Cavalca writes, so Christ was clothed in purple, and instead of a garland, he carried on his head the crown of thorns, and wounds instead of roses in his hands, whereas he had his side open to show his heart, instead of an open purse to show his money. Furthermore, Cavalca cited Saint Bernard, just as Bonaventura had done:

‘Onde dice santo Bernardo: Guarda, o anima, il tuo sposo con il capo inchinato per te salutare; la bocca chiusa per te baciare; le mani stese per te abbracciare; i piedi confitti per teco stare; il lato aperto per il suo cuore a te dare; e tutto il corpo disposto per te amare.’³² (‘Therefore, says Saint Bernard: look, o soul, at your spouse who inclines his head to greet you, has his mouth closed to kiss you, his hands extended to embrace you, the feet pierced to stay with you, his side open to give you his heart, and his whole body prepared to love you.’)

In fact, this passage is not found in the works of Saint Bernard, but it is evidently one of those famous citations that was disseminated during the late medieval period with an association to a famous name to grant it *auctoritas*.

If we shift our gaze from the writings of Vigri to those produced in the ‘workshop’ of her Bolognese Corpus Domini monastery, the importance of Caterina’s letter collection as a model manifests itself in two letters structured in way resembling those of Caterina of Siena: Both letters state at the start that the sender desires a change in the soul of the recipient, expressed in terms that resemble those in the Catherinian model, where, after the initial greeting, normally is found the formulation ‘with the desire to’. Likewise, the object of desire is also put forward in a way nearly identical to the source, in so far as the writer wishes that her fellow sister let herself to be burned by divine love, which is the bond that joins God with man,

31 Bonaventura of Bagnoregio, *Opuscoli spirituali* (Rome: Città Nuova, 1992), 364 (*De perfectione vitae ad sorores*, chapter VI, § 10): ‘Vide, inquit Bernardus, caput Christi, inclinatum ad osculandum, brachia extensa ad amplexandum, manus perfossas ad largiendum, latus apertum ad diligendum, totius corporis extensionem ad se totum impendendum’.

32 Domenico Cavalca, *Specchio della Croce*, ed. T.S. Centi (Bologna: EDS, 1992), 254-257 (chapter 32).

and which is the true chain that kept Christ pinned to the cross.³³ In the writings of Caterina of Siena the image of the ‘bonds of love’ abound, and in some of her letters it is confirmed that only love kept Christ on the cross, not the nails, nor the wood, nor the rock on which the cross was fixed.³⁴ Vigri, in turn, in a prayer recommended for novices and included by her in the *Sette armi spirituali*, prays to God in the name of the same love that caused him to be tied to the column and to sustain punishments for the salvation of mankind.³⁵

Battista of Varano

The Passion was also a deeply felt theme of Battista of Varano, the author of *Dolori mentali di Gesù nella sua Passione*, and who in a passage from her autobiography had asked God to make her whole life a Good Friday.³⁶ More in particular, she expressed the image of the inadequate nature of the instruments of the crucifixion without the voluntary choice of the cross in her *De puritate cordis*, composed between 1499 and 1501. She did this in a fashion very similar to what Caterina of Siena expressed in letter 102 to Raimondo of Capua: ‘né chiovo era sufficiente a tenerlo confitto e chiavellato, se l’amore ineffabile che egli aveva alla salute nostra non l’avesse tenuto’. (‘nor would the spike have been sufficient to keep him fixed and pinned to the cross, if the ineffable love he had for our salvation had not kept him in place’). In fact, Battista Varano writes:

‘Et sicut potentiam divinam non erant sufficientes clavi illi cruci tenere affixam sine amore, ita impossibile est sine Dei amore vota nostra illesa custodire.’³⁷ (‘And just as the nails on that cross were not sufficient to keep the divine power affixed to it without love, thus it is impossible to keep our vows intact without the love of God.’)

33 Caterina Vigri, *Laudi, trattati e lettere*, ed. Serventi, 172-173 & 178 (letters 1 & 3).

34 See letters T 38, T 91, T 102, T 129, T 136, T 142, and T 246.

35 Caterina Vigri, *Le sette armi spirituali*, ed. Degl’Innocenti, 28 (VII 66). Francesco Santi has drawn attention to this passage in ‘Di un Dio che obbedisce ai chiodi. Caterina Vigri e la tradizione francescana’, in: *Caterina Vigri. La Santa e la Città*, 177-86 (at 182).

36 See Camilla Battista of Varano, *Le opere spirituali*, ed. G. Boccanera (Jesi: Scuola Tipografica Francescana, 1958), 59 (*La vita spirituale*, chapter XVII).

37 Camilla Battista of Varano, *Trattato della purità del cuore*, ed. Serventi, 24 (§ 41).

This motive is also found in Ludolph of Saxony's *Vita Christi*, completed in 1374.³⁸ It is unlikely that Caterina of Siena knew the work of this Dominican later turned Carthusian, as it was predominantly disseminated in Italy during the sixteenth century.³⁹ Yet the work was probably known by the Poor Clare Battista of Varano. It is in any case significant that the manuscript tradition of Ludolph of Saxony's work was intertwined with that of Caterina's oeuvre: a codex containing the second part of the *Vita Christi* dedicated to the Passion, nowadays kept in the Biblioteca dell'Archiginnasio of Bologna,⁴⁰ was illuminated by Cristoforo Cortese, the artist to whom in all probability have to be ascribed the miniatures in some of the most important manuscripts of the works of Caterina of Siena.⁴¹

A further indication of Battista of Varano's acquaintance with the writings of the Sienese saint is the resumption of an image found both in Caterina's letters and in her *Dialogo*:⁴² In Battista of Varano's *Istruzioni al discepolo*, written around the same time as *De puritate cordis*, the Poor Clare recommends the intended reader to always have the heart kindled by divine love 'perché alla pigniatta che bolle non si appressono le mosche, ma a quella che è tiepida vi si aniegano. Dalla anima che bolle del divino amore si fugge lo demonio e le immonde cogitationi' ('For flees do not approach a boiling put, but will jump in a tepid one. Both the devil and bad thoughts flee from a soul boiling with divine love').⁴³ Again in this case Varano's model Caterina Benincasa could have found in Cavalca the simile between the fly trying to enter the saucepan and the devil harassing the soul, for it appears among the notable sayings of an antique father in

38 Ludolphus de Saxonia, *Vita Christi*, 2 Vols. (Paris: Palmé, 1865/Facsimile Edition Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik Universität Salzburg, 2006-2007), 640 (II, 63).

39 See G. Picasso, *Tra Umanesimo e 'devotio'*. *Studi di storia monastica raccolti per il 50° di professione dell'autore*, ed. G. Andenna, G. Motta & M. Tagliabue, Scienze storiche, 67 (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1999), 67.

40 It concerns MS A. 121 (first half 15th cent.). See *Biblioteca Comunale dell'Archiginnasio. Bologna*, ed. P. Bellettini, *Le grandi biblioteche d'Italia* (Fiesole: Nardini, 2001), 170-173.

41 See S. Fumian, 'Cristoforo Cortese e i Domenicani a Venezia: di alcuni manoscritti cateriniani', in: *Le arti a confronto con il sacro. Metodi di ricerca e nuove prospettive di indagine interdisciplinare. Atti delle giornate di studio (Padova, 31 maggio-1 giugno 2007)*, ed. V. Cantone & S. Fumian (Padua: CLEUP, 2009), 101-109.

42 Letters T 128, T 172, T 287, as well as Caterina of Siena, *Il Dialogo*, ed. Cavallini, 241-242 (chapter XC).

43 Camilla Battista of Varano, *Istruzioni al discepolo*, ed. Reschiglian, 215 (*Sesto ricordo*, § 13).

the third part of Cavalca's vernacularizing of the *Vite dei Santi Padri*.⁴⁴ The image must have had a wide dissemination, as it can also be found in the letter written by the Augustinian Simone Fidati of Cascia to Tommaso Corsini in 1336.⁴⁵ Battista of Varano in addition uses several metaphors of specification that she might have found in the writings of the sienese saint, such as the bed of the cross and the blight of sin.⁴⁶ The first of these is a typical form of mystical language, and can also be found in Angela of Foligno's *Memoriale*, where it is connected with the motive of nudity,⁴⁷ something also taken up by our Clarissan author. In the conclusion of her *Ricordi di Gesù*, we read in fact: 'Recordate che Dio te vole sola sola, nuda nuda, nel letto della croce' ('Remember that God wants you alone, alone, naked, naked, in the bed of the cross'),⁴⁸ an expression in which can be grasped an echo of the adage 'Nudus nudum Christum sequi', derived from Saint Jerome and later disseminated within Franciscan circles.⁴⁹ The second metaphor is found in Varano's *Trattato della purità del cuore*, where, developing the theme of the knowledge of God and oneself, the Poor Clare writes that, once the soul is illuminated by the fiery lightning bolt of divine love, it burns and consumes in itself 'all blights of its defects'.⁵⁰ This image, which dates back to Gregory the Great,⁵¹ was a trope of religious

44 Domenico Cavalca, *Vite dei Santi Padri*, ed. C. Delcorno, 2 Vols. (Florence: Edizioni del Galuzzo per la Fondazione Ezio Franceschini, 2009), II, 958-959 (third part, chapter 18), where he translates Pseudo Rufino, *Vitae Patrum*, lib. III, n. 204, in: *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne, 221 Vols. (Paris: J.-P. Migne, 1841-1865), LXXIII, col. 805.

45 See Simone Fidati of Cascia, *L'ordine della vita cristiana; Tractatus de vita christiana; Epistulae; Laude; Opuscula*; Giovanni of Salerno, *Tractatus de vita et moribus fratris Simonis de Cassia*, ed. W. Eckermann, *Corpus scriptorum Augustinianorum*, 7/8 (Rome: Augustinianum, 2006), 254 (*Epistula quinta*).

46 See Caterina Benincasa's letter T 152 for the simile of the bed of the cross and letter T 80 for the blight of guilt.

47 *Il "Liber" della beata Angela da Foligno*, ed. in facsimile e trascrizione del ms. 342 della Biblioteca Comunale di Assisi, con quattro studi, ed. E. Menestò, 2 Vols. (Spoleto, CISAM, 2009-2010), I (*Trascrizione del ms. 342 della Biblioteca Comunale di Assisi*, ed. F. Verderosa), 8: 'nuda irem ad crucem', and 42: 'crux est tua salus et tuus lectus'.

48 Camilla Battista of Varano, *Le opere spirituali*, ed. Boccanera, 139 (*Ricordi di Gesù*).

49 Cf. G. Miccoli, *Francesco d'Assisi: realtà e memoria di un'esperienza cristiana* (Torino: Einaudi, 1991), 188. It was also used by an Augustinian contemporaneous with Caterina Benincasa, namely Girolamo of Siena, *Epistole*, ed. S. Serventi (Venice: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 2004), 166 (letter III, § 34).

50 Camilla Battista of Varano, *Trattato della purità del cuore*, ed. Serventi, 71 (§ 117).

51 See Gregorius Magnus, *Homiliae in Evangelia*, ed. R. Étaix, *Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina*, 141 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), 291 (Liber II, Homilia XXXIII, 4): 'Quid, fratres mei, esse dilectionem credimus nisi ignem? Et quid culpam nisi rubiginem?'.

language, as shown in its parodic use by Giovanni Boccaccio in the tale of *Ser Ciappelletto*, and it is also found in Domenico Cavalca's *Specchio de' peccati*.⁵²

Yet the consonance between the saint of Camerino and the Sienese saint goes beyond the retrieval of images or specific metaphors, and concerns common themes that stand at the basis of their thought, such as the meditation on the suffering of Christ on the cross and the desire to take part in this suffering by entering in his wounds. It is a theme with various facets which for both authors starts from their interpretation of the evangelical passage in which Christ on the cross asks for a drink, all the way to the analogy between the wounds of the crucifix and the holes in rock formations where doves make their nest. In a letter to the prior of Montoliveto, Caterina of Siena invites the addressee to become a 'mangiatore e gustatore dell'anime, imparando dalla prima dolce Verità che per fame e sete che aveva d'ansietato desiderio della salute nostra, gridava in sul legno della santissima Croce, quando disse *Sitio*' ('an eater and taster of souls, learning from God, who is the first sweet Truth, who, because of the hunger and thirst he had from the desire filled with anxiety for our salvation, cried on the wood of the cross, saying *Sitio*').⁵³ Battista of Varano, in turn, develops this theme especially in *De puritate cordis*, where she puts the following words in Christ's mouth:

'O amatores crucis, ego pastor bonus, ego Dominus, Pater et Redemptor vester, sitio salutem animarum. Si diligite me, afferte ori meo sitiendi vinum optimum salutis animarum, non mirratum vestrae expectationis premii.'⁵⁴ ('O lovers of the cross, I the good pastor, your Lord, Father and Redemptor, I am thirsty for the salvation of souls. If you esteem me, offer to my thirsty mouth the best wine of the salvation of souls, not mixed with your desire of reward.')

52 Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decamerone*, ed. V. Branca, 2 Vols. (Turin: Einaudi, 1992), I, 1 (§ 43), and Domenico Cavalca, *Specchio de' peccati*, ed. M. Zanchetta (Florence: Cesati, 2015), 223 & 327.

53 See Caterina of Siena, *Le lettere*, ed. Meattini, 1312, T 8. The same interpretation is found in letter T 12.

54 Camilla Battista of Varano, *Trattato della purità del cuore*, ed. Serventi, 94 (§ 143.III).

The Poor Clare could have found this interpretation in fourteenth-century literature, for instance in works by Caterina of Siena, Domenico Cavalca, Bianco of Siena or in the *Meditationes vitae Christi*,⁵⁵ but it cannot be ruled out that she obtained it from the common source of these authors, namely the Augustinian commentary on Psalm 68. While commenting on verse 11 in the context of fasting, Saint Augustine refers to the thirst of Christ on the cross, that is to his zeal to save humanity, and this is linked to a verse cited slightly earlier: 'Zelus domus tuae comedit me' ('The zeal of your house devours me').⁵⁶ Battista follows the same route, and before speaking about Christ's thirst to save souls, she makes the inflamed soul that burns with zeal for the house of God, that is to say for his neighbor, pronounce these words of the psalm. Continuing in her meditation, the saint of Camerino affirms that what the faithful can do to quench Christ's thirst, is to offer oneself as beverage, and to take in oneself some of the bitter vinegar by meditating on the Passion. The memory of the Passion is indeed a central theme for Battista, who considers it to be 'un'arca del tesoro celeste' ('an ark of celestial treasure') and the most important of the spiritual arts.⁵⁷ It concerns a characteristic theme among Observant Poor Clares, as becomes clear from the preference Vigri had for it as well, and for whom 'la memoria della Passione' is the fourth spiritual weapon.⁵⁸ In Caterina of Siena this particular expression cannot be found, because in her writings the term 'passion' was not used to indicate the suffering of Christ. Nevertheless, it is clear that for her this is also a central motive: for she repeatedly invites her interlocutors to exercise themselves in the memory of the crucifix or in that of the blood of Christ crucified. As can be read in the letter she wrote to the merchant Marco Bindi, for her the death of Christ

55 See chapter 33 of Domenico Cavalca's *Specchio della Croce*, as well as Bianco of Siena, *Laudi*, ed. S. Serventi (Rome: Antonianum, 2013), 1340 (*Indice tematico*), and *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, chapter 79 in: *Mistici Francescani. Secolo XIV*, 930. For the Latin text of the latter, see Iohannis de Caulibus, *Meditaciones vite Christi olim S. Bonaventuro attributae*, ed. M. Stallings-Taney, Corpus Christianorum. Continuatio Mediaevalis, 153 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997).

56 Aurelius Augustinus, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, LXVIII, 11, in: *Patrologia Latina*, ed. Migne, XXXVI, col. 851 (§ 14): 'Et de cruce cum diceret, *Sitio*, fidem illorum quaerebat... Sed illi homines quid propinarunt sitienti? Acetum.'

57 Camilla Battista of Varano, *Trattato della purità del cuore*, ed. Serventi, 61 (§ 103).

58 Caterina Vigri, *Le sette armi spirituali*, ed. Degl'Innocenti, 10.

is the largest gift that man has received from God, and the reminiscence of it transforms the bitterness of sin and suffering into something sweet.⁵⁹

In the same letter Caterina of Siena adds that when we reflect in a serious manner on our offenses against our Creator, we would agree that we merit a thousand hells ('degni siamo di mille inferni'). This figure of speech, which recurs also elsewhere in her letter collection, can be found both in the *Trattato della purità del cuore* and in the *Meditatione sopra la Cantica di Salomone*, a recently discovered work that also can be attributed to Varano.⁶⁰ Likewise, the theme of bitterness becoming sweet is re-used by Saint Battista in *De puritate cordis*, where, while extolling the workings of the Holy Spirit she addresses God as follows: 'Nam quos magis diligis, frequentius permictis affligi atque vehementius torqueri, ut amarescant illis terrena et tu solus dulcis appareas' ('For you permit those who you love more to be afflicted and more vehemently tormented, so that the world becomes bitter to them and only you appear sweet to them').⁶¹ As said earlier, another image related to the crucifix that experienced great fortune and which we find in both female authors, is the link between the wounds of the crucified and nesting holes in the rocks. The source for this are the *Sermones super Cantica* of Saint Bernard, who interprets in this way the cavity into which the dove, the beloved of the Song of Songs, is invited to make its nest.⁶² Whereas this motive was sufficiently widespread to be present in the *Glossa al Cantico*,⁶³ in Sienese authors contemporaneous with Caterina of Siena such as the Jesuate Bianco of Siena and the Augustinian Girolamo of Siena,⁶⁴ as well as in many fifteenth- and sixteenth-century mystical

59 Caterina of Siena, *Le lettere*, ed. Meattini, 1602 (letter T 13): 'Abbate memoria del Sangue di Cristo crocifisso; e ogni amaritudine vi tornerà in dolcezza, e ogni gran peso vi tornerà leggero.' Cf. also letter T 169.

60 See Camilla Battista of Varano, *Trattato della purità del cuore*, ed. Serventi, 75 (§ 122), and 111 (Appendix).

61 Ibidem, 56 (§ 98).

62 Bernardus Claraevallensis, *Sermones super Cantica Canticorum*, in: S. Bernardi *Opera*, ed. Leclercq & Rochais (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses), II, 148-153 (sermo 61).

63 *Glossa Ordinaria*, Pars 22: *In Canticum Canticorum*, ed. M. Dove, Corpus Christianorum. Continuatio Mediaevalis, 170 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997), 181.

64 Bianco of Siena, *Laudi*, ed. Serventi, 957 (lauda XCIX, vv. 8-9), and Girolamo of Siena, *Adiutorio*, in: *Delizie degli eruditi toscani*, ed. Ildefonso di San Luigi, 24 Vols. (Florence: Cambiagi, 1770-1789) I, 101.

authors,⁶⁵ it seems that its treatment by our two female authors differs. While Caterina of Siena avoids the reference to the image of the Song, and instead compares the rib cage of Christ to an ‘open shop’,⁶⁶ a shop filled with spices, or rather filled with mercy, Battista adheres to the source and cites in Latin the biblical reference:

‘Anima santa, [...] nella quale è la purità gioconda, la columba del Spirito Santo nidificante nelli forami della pietra [...] Gli forami della pietra, nelli quali fa il suo nido questa columbina pura, sono le piaghe di Cristo. *In caverna maceriae*, cioè nella piaga del costato.’⁶⁷ (‘Holy soul [...] in which joyous purity resides, the dove of the Holy Spirit nesting in the holes of the rock [...] the holes in the rock in which that pure dove makes its nest, are the wounds of Christ. *In the cavern of the wall*, namely in the wound of his side.’)

In the writings of the Siennese saint, the emphasis is on the motive of blood and on the table represented by the cross: in chapter 88 of her *Dialogo*, Caterina specifies that God represents the table, that the Son is the food, and that the Holy Spirit is the server, and affirms that Christ remained on the cross ‘blissful and painful’ (‘beato e doloroso’), because even while suffering as a human being, his divine spirit could not sustain punishment, to conclude that he who sustains his own cross with the ardor of charity experiences a ‘fattening pain’ (‘dolore ingrassativo’). This expression again seems to resonate in the works of Battista, who in her *Dolori mentali di Gesù nella sua Passione* invites the readers to feed themselves with the poisoned food of the Passion, and in her *Ricordi di Gesù* she speaks about ‘the fat pastures of suffering’ (‘pascui grassi del mal patire’).⁶⁸

For both mystics the love for the crucified is contrasted with a ‘holy hate for oneself’ (‘l’odio santo di sé’), which is born from a profound understanding of the self. Caterina of Siena often turns to this theme, both in her letters and in her *Dialogo della divina provvidenza*, where she writes

65 See *Scrittrici mistiche italiane*, ed. G. Pozzi & C. Leonardi (Genoa: Marietti, 1988), 741 (*Lessico dei termini mistici*, s.v. *Caverna*).

66 Caterina of Siena, *Le lettere*, ed. Meattini, 1624 (letter T 163). See also letters T 112 and T 273.

67 Camilla Battista of Varano, *Trattato della purità del cuore*, ed. Serventi, 21 (§ 33).

68 Caterina of Siena, *Il Dialogo*, ed. Cavallini, 208; Camilla Battista of Varano, *Le opere spirituali*, ed. Boccanera, 137 (*Ricordi di Gesù*), 146 (*Dolori mentali*).

that humility is born from a ‘cognoscimento e odio santo di sé medesimo, cioè della propria sensualità’ (‘a knowledge and holy hatred of the self, namely one’s own sensuality’).⁶⁹ Likewise, in the writings of Battista of Varano, this theme is linked to that of humility: speaking about the final moments in the life of the Franciscan friar Pietro of Mogliano, she writes that he was ‘full of holy hatred for himself’ and compared him to Saint Jerome for his profound contrition.⁷⁰ At the end of *De puritate cordis*, she weaves a veritable eulogy of this sentiment, the value of which many do not understand:

‘Odium sanctum, dulce et delectabile, tuam ignorant dulcedinem, qui inter lutum negligentiarum semper in vita spirituali iacent.’⁷¹
 (‘Holy hatred, sweet and delightful, those who always remain in the dirt, negligent in their spiritual life, do not know your sweetness.’)

In the vernacular this expression becomes a veritable oxymoron, namely ‘lovable hatred’ (‘odio amabile’), presented as the foundation of true perfection. For both female authors, the struggle with one’s own egoism must lead to acting only ‘for the honor of God and the spiritual wellbeing of one’s neighbor’ (‘per l’onore di Dio e la salute del prossimo’). This is a veritable refrain of the Sienese saint, present in many of her letters and in the preface to the *Dialogo*,⁷² and one that can again be found several times in Battista of Varano’s *Trattato della purità del cuore*.⁷³ Just as frequent in the works of Caterina of Siena is the adjective ‘ansietato’, which means ‘filled with trepidation’, which is normally linked to desire, and which can be found everywhere in the *Dialogo* and also with great frequency in her

69 Caterina of Siena, *Il Dialogo*, ed. Cavallini, 160 (chapter LXIII). See also letters T 30 and T 169. The expression also appears in the works of Domenico Cavalca, who connects it to the confession of one’s own sins. See Domenico Cavalca, *Specchio de’ peccati*, ed. Zanchetta, 217.

70 Camilla Battista of Varano, *Il felice transito del beato Pietro da Mogliano*, ed. A. Gattucci, *La mistica cristiana tra Oriente e Occidente*, 11 (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo per la Fondazione Ezio Franceschini, 2007), 8 (chapter I, § 35).

71 Camilla Battista of Varano, *Trattato della purità del cuore*, ed. Serventi, 98 (§ 148).

72 See for instance letters T 2, T 6, T 8, T 11, T 16, as well as Caterina of Siena, *Il Dialogo*, ed. Cavallini, 1: ‘Levandosi una anima ansietata di grandissimo desiderio verso l’onore di Dio e salute dell’anime.’

73 Camilla Battista of Varano, *Trattato della purità del cuore*, ed. Serventi, 9 (§ 10), 11 (§ 14), and 83 (§ 133).

letter collection.⁷⁴ An echo of the expression ‘anxious desire’ can likewise be found in the writings of both Clarissan authors: it appears at the end of Vigri’s *Sette armi spirituali*, where she deplors the fact that she has not sought with all her heart to ensure that all creatures recognizes her nothingness,⁷⁵ and it pops up three times in Varano’s *Meditatione sopra la Cantica di Salomone*.⁷⁶

Conclusion

The use of specific expressions and metaphors, as well as the identity of motives and sources, show how profoundly the footprint of Caterina of Siena was traceable among the Poor Clares of the fifteenth century. The Catherinian writings, diffused widely in manuscript format and in print, could easily have influenced the Poor Clares of the Observance, who found embedded in them the patristic tradition, enriched by the mysticism of Saint Bernard and Saint Bonaventure. This tradition had already been elaborated by the Dominican Domenico Cavalca, who, having absorbed more the Augustinian and monastic than the scholastic and Thomistic tradition, had focused on the passion of Christ and on the possibility to order and heal one own passions through the contemplation of the cross.⁷⁷ It is therefore not surprising that Cavalca was still read by Bolognese Poor Clares in the sixteenth century, as is clear from the presence of the 1524 edition of his *Specchio della Croce* in the library of the Corpus Domini monastery.⁷⁸ On the other hand, it can be noted that in the course of the sixteenth century the Dominicans themselves became attentive readers of the writings of Battista of Varano, as can be glimpsed from two manuscripts containing her *Istruzioni al discepolo*. In one case the work was transcribed by the Dominican friar Domenico Baglioni together with spiritual works by Ignazio Manardi, while in another case the work was inserted in

74 See for example letters T 8, T 35, T 63, T 83, T 96, T 100, and T 102.

75 Caterina Vigri, *Le sette armi spirituali*, ed. Degl’Innocenti, 57 (X 12).

76 Now edited in an appendix to Camilla Battista of Varano, *Trattato della purità del cuore*, ed. Serventi, 109-113 (at 110 and 112).

77 See C. Casagrande, ‘Specchio di croce». Domenico Cavalca e l’ordine degli affetti’, *Comunicazioni Sociali* 2 (2003), 221-230.

78 S. Spanò Martinelli, ‘La biblioteca del “Corpus Domini” bolognese: l’inconsueto spaccato di una cultura monastica femminile’, *La Bibliofilia* 88 (1986), 1-23 (at 11).

a letter of the bishop Vincenzo Ercolani, and as a result was erroneously attributed to him by the copyist Timoteo Bottonio.⁷⁹ The road sketched by Varano, which invites the reader not to judge God and one's neighbor, but rather forces the reader to know himself and to purify his own heart by meditating on the benefits received and in particular on the Passion of Christ, would see an ongoing reception also among the new orders of the Counter Reformation, as is shown by the many Oratorian manuscripts that transmit the works of the saint of Camerino, or the edition of Varano's *Dolori mentali* in conjunction with the works of the Theatine Lorenzo Scupoli.⁸⁰ Filippo Neri likewise had a manuscript with the works of Battista Varano, today conserved in the Biblioteca Vallicelliana of Rome under the signature F.24, whereas Cardinal Federico Borromeo even engaged in a transcription of her *Vita spirituale*, *Dolori mentali* and *Ricordi di Gesù*, all of which can be read in his hand in manuscript G 17 inf. 3 of the Milanese Biblioteca Ambrosiana.⁸¹

79 See M. Bucur , 'Camilla Battista Varano da Camerino: Istruzioni al discepolo. Dos dominicos testigos de un texto de espiritualidad franciscana a principio de la edad moderna', *Memorie Domenicane* 32 (2001), 291-311.

80 From 1593 onward, Varano's *Dolori mentali* were issued several times together with Scupoli's *Combattimento spirituale*. Cf. G. Zarri, *Libri di spirito. Editoria religiosa in volgare nei secoli XV-XVII*, La storia e le storie (Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier, 2009), 188.

81 S. Serventi, 'Camilla Battista da Varano', in: *Autographa* II.1, *Donne, sante e madonne (da Matilde di Canossa ad Artemisia Gentileschi)*, ed. G. Murano (Imola: La Mandragora, 2018), 103-109 (at 104).