

The Thoughts of a Noble Prisoner: Giovanni Marco Pio da Carpi's *Laude* as Examples of Good Morality

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Summary: The fifteenth-century manuscript MS 157 of the Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna belongs to a series of books related to the task of comforting those condemned to death in Bologna. To carry out such comforting, the local Confraternity of Santa Maria della Morte (founded 1336) used, among other things, a corpus of 211 *laude*, 106 of which are found in MS 157, more than half of which are still unpublished. Eleven of these texts were written by the nobleman Giovanni Marco Pio da Carpi (d. 1469), an interesting example of a literate prisoner who expressed his morals and thoughts in poetry. This article examines the contents of Pio's poems, nine of which are known only through MS 157, in order to analyse their edifying and exemplary function for those condemned to death.

According to Marina Gazzini “the study of prisons and their inhabitants opens up [...] an important window onto medieval society. Tracing a history of the medieval prison does not mean dealing only with criminal and penal institutions, but rather making a whole new ‘social history’.”¹ The act of methodologically opening the medieval prison towards the outside, in fact, shows how the prison already had a coercive function on the society of the time and how the convicts’ communication with society outside the prison helped to mitigate their suffering and boredom.² This burgeoning social history includes manuscript MS 157 of the Biblioteca Universitaria

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¹ “Studiare le prigioni e i loro abitanti apre [...] una finestra importante sulla società medievale. Fare storia della prigione medievale non significa infatti occuparsi solo dell’istituzione penale e contenitiva, ma fare una “storia sociale” a tutto tondo”; Gazzini, *Storie di vita e di malavita*, 5.

² Geltner, *The Medieval Prison*. The book contrasts the opinion of Michel Foucault who, in his *Surveiller et punir: naissance de la prison* (Paris, Gallimard, 1975), situates the passage from the repressive action on the body of the prisoner in the Middle Ages to the “moral orthopedics” on his soul in the post-illuminist period. Geltner shows that in the Middle Ages religion already acted in this sense.

of Bologna. Compiled during the fifteenth century, the volume belongs to a series of fourteen manuscripts related to the task of comforting those condemned to death in Bologna. Such comforting was carried out by the local Confraternity of Santa Maria della Morte, founded in 1336.³ In its ritual of comfort towards the prisoners, the Bolognese confraternity also used a corpus of 211 *laude*, 106 of which are found in MS 157. Eleven of these texts have been attributed to the nobleman Giovanni Marco Pio da Carpi (?–1469),⁴ a soldier who, during his captivity, expressed his final moral thoughts in poetry. Giovanni Marco was a co-ruler, with his six brothers⁵ and various cousins, of Carpi, a principality near Modena in Emilia Romagna.⁶ He was imprisoned along with some of his brothers in Modena on 17 July 1469. According to Antonio Cappelli, they have then transferred to the fortresses of Finale, Sassuolo, Canossa, and the Carpineti,⁷ and finally brought to Ferrara on 26 July, where Giovanni Marco was discreetly beheaded on 22 September inside the Castel Vecchio.⁸ The charge against Giovanni Marco was that he had taken part in the failed conspiracy against his uncle Borso d'Este (1413–1471), Duke of Modena, Reggio, and Ferrara, who was the *de facto* power behind Pio authority in Carpi.

³ On this confraternity see Filocamo, “Bolognese ‘Orations’ between Song and Silence,” with references.

⁴ On the insecurity of the authorship of the texts attributed to Giovanni Marco Pio see Troiano, “Un laudario per condannati a morte,” and Terpstra, “Confraternities and Capital Punishment,” 218–219.

⁵ His co-ruling brothers were Giovanni Marsiglio, Giovanni Ludovico, Giovanni Princivale, Giovanni Nicolò, Manfredo, Bernardino, all sons of Galasso II Pio, brother-in-law of Borso d'Este as husband of his half-sister Margherita di Nicolò III. The couple had a total of thirteen children. When Margherita died, Galasso remarried with Costanza di Bartolomeo Boiardo.

⁶ The Pio family ruled Carpi from 1329 to 1529. Their lordship began with the marriage of Manfredo di Federico Pio from Modena and Flandina di Gandolfo (known as Preposto de' Brocchi from Carpi), heir to rights over Carpi, a union celebrated in 1306. In 1450 Alberto Pio (d. 1464) obtained from the Duke Lodovico of Savoy the permission to add the name and the insignia of the Savoy to his family name, in recognition of his faithful military service; this privilege was also extended to his brothers and descendants. On the Pio family see Ori, “Pio.” On the historical reasons that favoured the flowering of the courts in Emilia Romagna between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance see Chittolini, “Una geografia di corti e di piccoli stati.”

⁷ “trascinati nelle rocche del piano e del monte, e cioè in quelle di Finale, di Sassuolo, di Canossa e delle Carpineti”; Cappelli, “La congiura dei Pio,” 371.

⁸ Because of the lack of suffering during the execution and reduced damage to the body, beheading was considered to be a less shameful death. For this reason it was reserved for nobles and prisoners who were ‘pardoned’ of their infamy.

Cappelli, however, states that the nobleman was probably condemned only for his sympathies for the king of Naples, an ally of the Pio family.⁹

The present article will explore the contents of Giovanni Marco's poems in MS 157 to reveal their edifying and exemplar function for those condemned to death as well as the author's original thoughts transpiring through the texts. The main aim of the Bolognese brethren of Santa Maria della Morte that collected the poems was the spiritual transformation of the prisoner's soul through a full and fast conversion from sin to sanctity. In Pio's case, moreover, the alleged crime of *lèse majesté* worsened his position as a sinner and thus made his possible conversion and repentance an even more exemplar event of Divine mercy. His crime was interpreted by the jurists of the time as treachery, one of the vilest felonies in medieval law. Such misdemeanour separated the traitor, breaker of the social peace, from his community and the Christian flock as a whole.¹⁰ This perspective, therefore, amplified the sense of sacrilege implicit in the rebellion to the ruler and posits the ruler as a metaphor of the state itself and as a holy mediator.¹¹

The poems Giovanni Marco Pio composed during his two months in prison were published at the beginning of the twentieth century by Francesco Ravagli without, however, any critical commentary.¹² Pio's eleven poems are found on folios 199v–202v of MS 157 and consists of four *capitoli quadernari*, four *capitoli ternari*, two sonnets, and one *ballata maggiore*. Nine of these poems are known only from this manuscript. The complete list, in order of appearance and according to their version in MS 157 follows (the asterisk indicates an *unicum*):¹³

⁹ “probabilmente di null'altro colpevole che di essere in procinto di passare ai servigi del re di Napoli”; Cappelli, “La congiura dei Pio,” 373. Military mercenarism was a forced choice in case of political fragility and poor places; see Chittolini, “Una geografia di corti e di piccoli stati,” 14. On the same topic see also Varanini, “I Pio da Carpi e la signoria carpigiana.” On the alleged conspiracy against Borso, see in chronological order, Tiraboschi, *Biblioteca Modenese*, 4:204–207; Cappelli, “La congiura dei Pio”; Cappelli, “Supplicazione di Gio. Marco Pio di Carpi”; Gundersheimer, “Crime and Punishment in Ferrara, 1440–1500”; Chiappini, *Gli Estensi*, 136–139; Troiano, *Il Laudario di S. Maria della Morte di Bologna*, 295–300; Forneri/Varanini, “Devozioni e sentimento religioso.”

¹⁰ Sbriccoli, *Crimen laesae maiestatis*, 163 and 164.

¹¹ Sbriccoli, *Crimen laesae maiestatis*, 80 and 84.

¹² Ravagli, “Rime edite ed inedite di Gio. Marco Pio di Savoia.” Four texts had already appeared in Pio, *Saggio di rime*, a booklet printed as a present for the wedding of Luigi Parenti and Marietta Vandelli.

¹³ All the texts listed here are published in Filocamo, “*Orationi al cepo ovvero a la scala*.” The spelling of the verses transcribed in this essay is very conservative, and adheres to the forms and norms I outlined in my “*Orationi al cepo ovvero a la scala*.”

- fol. 199r–v, heading: *Orationi e laude a la gloriosa Vergene facte e composte per lo signor Zohanne Marco, uno di signori de Carpi, essendo in presone sotto le forçe del duca Borso signor de Ferara, per un certo tractato per lo qual fu decolato*
Incipit: “Maria, vergene bella”
(ballata maggiore, 52 verses);¹⁴
- fols. 199v–200r, heading: *Lauda ancora per lo dicto signore composta*
Incipit: “O dolce Vergene sacra, madre sancta” (*)
(capitolo ternario, 100 verses);
- fol. 200r–v, heading: *Lauda del prefato signore a meser Yhesù Christo*
Incipit: “Apri le labra mie, o Yhesù Christo” (*)
(capitolo quadernario, 117 verses);
- fol. 200v, heading: *Sonetto del prefato signore Zohanne Marco*
Incipit: “Li mei parenti cum ciascun fedele” (*)
(sonnet, 14 verses);
- fol. 200v, heading: *Racomandatione, o vero oratione facta a la nostra donna per lo dicto signore stando in carcere*
Incipit: “A te ricorro, o porto di salute” (*)
(capitolo ternario, 58 verses);
- fols. 200v–201r, heading: *Devotione facta per lo dicto signore a reverentia de la sancta croce*
Incipit: “Ecco il gran legno de la sancta croce” (*)
(capitolo ternario, 42 verses);
- fol. 201r, heading: *Sonetto del predicto signore a san Bernardo*¹⁵
Incipit: “Del gran profundo d’esta ria presone” (*)
(sonnet, 14 verses);
- fol. 201r–v, heading: *Versi composti per lo dicto signore, parlando di sé stesso e di sua disavventura lamentandosi*
Incipit: “Io vegio bene che dal nascimento”
(capitolo quadernario, 121 verses);
- fols. 201v–202r, heading: *Oratione o vero supplicatione facta per lo dicto signore al duca Borso, racomandandosi a sua clementia*
Incipit: “Magnanimo signore, in cui s’appoggia” (*)
(capitolo quadernario, 81 verses);
- fol. 202r–v, heading: *Versi contemplativi e lacrimosi del prefato signore contra la humana fragilità*
Incipit: “Chi ben rimira e guarda la natura” (*)
(capitolo quadernario, 89 verses);

¹⁴ The authorship of this text is controversial and perhaps assignable to the Venetian Leonardo Giustinian. See Forner, “I Pio tra lettere ed armi,” 233.

¹⁵ “San Bernardo” is a clear mistake for St. Bartholomew, the apostle flayed in the East for the sake of God whose mediation is here implored.

fol. 202v, heading: *Lamento lacrimoso del prefato signore concludendo haver perso ogni speranza del suo campare et raccomandandosi a Dio*

Incipit: “I’ vegio ben ch’ogni pietate è morta” (*)

(capitolo ternario, 58 verses).

The eleven texts attributed to Giovanni Marco Pio in MS 157 are followed by three poems written by the only other prisoner known in that source: Andrea Viarani from Faenza (fols. 202v–203v), a lower-profile figure involved in the same plot against Borso d’Este, who was imprisoned and then executed on 12 August 1469 together with Giovanni Marco’s brother, Giovanni Ludovico.¹⁶ The three executions are recorded on fol. 6r of the *Libro dei giustiziati* (“Book of the executed”) of the Ferrarese Confraternity of Death, active since the fourteenth century.¹⁷

The examination of the eleven poetic texts attributed to Giovanni Marco Pio is of interest for various reasons. First of all, although the typology of poetic forms chosen by Pio certainly relates to the courtly literature of the time,¹⁸ there is no trace of a musical performance related to the poems. Even more importantly, MS 157 does not show any indication of “cantasi come...” (“to be sang as...”, which indicates the reuse of music from a previous text for a new poem with a similar metric form). This is not to say, however, that the texts might not have been performed together with some

¹⁶ The two were publicly executed in the main square of Ferrara, in broad daylight, opposite the ducal palace; see Mazzi, *Gente a cui si fa notte*, 109. Andrea Viarani from Faenza was the secretary of Taddeo Manfredi of Imola, a lord opposed to Borso d’Este. The known texts of Andrea Viarani, already published in the mid-nineteenth century (*Rime antiche edite e inedite di autori faentini*, ed. by Francesco Zambrini, Imola, Galeati, 1846), have been more recently also published in Troiano, “Specchio di un condannato a morte,” 157–164. Giovanni Ludovico, the real hub of the alleged conspiracy against Borso d’Este, is defined (twice) as “non Pio ma Impio” (“not Pius but Impius”), and “traditore homo, simile a Iuda Scarioth” (“traitor man, similar to Judas Iscariot”). See the entire chronicle transcribed in Cappelli, “La congiura dei Pio,” 381, 392, and 393. The document was first written in Latin and then immediately translated into Italian by the author himself because Borso did not read Latin; MS Modena, Biblioteca Estense Universitaria, fondo principale, a.G.6.12, *olim* VIII.D.18 (ital. 1004), *Storia del tradimento fatto verso il Duca Borso da Gio. Lod. Pio e Andrea da Varenana, tradotta di latino in italiano dal sud. autore* [Carlo Vannuccio di San Giorgio].

¹⁷ Ferrara, Biblioteca Comunale Ariostea, Classe I, MS 404, which lists 853 judicial killings with the names of the condemned from 1441 to 1577. See the modern edition of the *Libro dei giustiziati* in Mazzi, *Gente a cui si fa notte*, starting from p. 97. On the need to document the executions of people condemned to death, emanating from the transformation of communes into *signorie*, see Prosperi, “Statistiche criminali italiane d’antico regime,” where the modality with which the Ferrara brotherhood of death became an instrument of noble power is well clarified (pp. 506–519).

¹⁸ See Cavani, *La figura di Giovanni Marsiglio Pio*, 50–51; Forner/Varanini, “Devozioni e sentimento religioso,” 241, 249; McIlvenna, “Singing Songs of Execution,” 59–60.

contemporary musical schemes, such as the “arie da cantar sonetti” (“arias to sing sonnets”), and the like.¹⁹ Second, Pio’s poetry, although related to the contemporary courtly literary tradition, also follows in the footsteps of the comforting humanistic tradition of prison literature, a custom well exemplified by Boethius (c. 477–524 AD), who wrote the treatise *De consolazione philosophiae* during the years of his imprisonment in Pavia before his execution for treason by King Theodoric the Great. In the Middle Ages, this kind of literature was a consequence of the isolation experienced in prison by high-ranking political prisoners who transformed their cells into places of reflection.²⁰ Lastly, these texts allow us to enter into a world that was both private and public: in fact, we can find in them various references to personal facts, but also references to broader concepts that frame the individual in the religious and social environment of the time.

Because it belongs to the genre of prison writing, Giovanni Marco Pio’s poetry present in MS 157 basically revolves around two main themes: (1) the personal and biographical sphere; (2) the religious and social sphere. At least four texts by Pio refer to his biographical horizon: *Li mei parenti cum ciascun fedele, Io vegio bene che dal nascimento, Magnanimo signore, in cui s’appoggia*, and *I’ vegio ben ch’ogni pietate è morta*. Despite the fact that he belonged to the numerous Pio family from Carpi, Giovanni Marco seems rather discouraged about the lack of support he received from his family and friends, and the hostility directed by them against him from the moment of his imprisonment: “and my relatives have made a plaything of me, | and every friend has lost the right path.”²¹ Pio probably refers to his two hostile cousins: Marco (son of Giberto Pio) and Leonello (son of Alberto Pio).²² The theme of his complete solitude pervades the poem *I’ vegio ben che ogni pietate è morta* and culminates in a rather courageous comparison: “As it happened to the torment of Christ, | if the good shepherd is beaten, the flock feels lost, | so it happened to me, as now I feel: | because, as soon as I was imprisoned | all my friends were gone, and all their amity, I think, turned away.”²³

¹⁹ See McIlvenna, “Singing Songs of Execution,” 56, with references.

²⁰ See Meneghetti, “Scrivere in carcere nel Medioevo”; Petoletti, “Scrivere in catene,” 195–197; Cursi, “Con molte sue fatiche,” 152–153.

²¹ “e i miei parenti han fatto di me un gioco, | et ogni amico la via dritta ha persa”; *Li mei parenti cum ciascun fedele*, vv. 12–13.

²² See Cappelli, “Supplicazione di Gio. Marco Pio di Carpi,” 494.

²³ “Non altramente in Christo al suo tormento, | percosso il buon pastore el grege è sper-so, | coss’interviene a me, come hora io sento: | ché, tosto ch’io fui preso, fu somerso | ogni mio amico, e tutta sua amicitia | credo ben che sia volta in altro verso”; *I’ vegio ben ch’ogni pietate è morta*, vv. 19–24.

Alongside the previous themes present in the poems we find the medieval topos of the reversal of fortune (“My fortune goes upside down”),²⁴ which — according to Pio — applies even to his status as a nobleman “because fortune turns her feet | as she likes, and often causes | the ruler to fall, | putting the son of a barber on the throne.”²⁵ Similarly, the author scorns fortune for his sad fate: “And I became a servant, after being a lord.”²⁶ In another short poem in the collection we find the subject of imprisonment in the broadest sense, as a mental state that begins with a baby’s swaddling clothes, continues with schooling, love, marriage, warfare (with its harmful consequences on the body), and ends with imprisonment.²⁷ As a consequence, the falsity of the world is a predominant theme in Pio’s poetry: all that remains for a prisoner is to rely on the protection of St. Bernardine of Siena, a charismatic figure for Giovanni Marco even before the friar became the patron saint of Carpi.²⁸ Pio’s petition to Borso d’Este, *Magnanimo signore, in cui s’appoggia*, is a litany of theological virtues (Faith, Hope, Charity) and cardinal virtues (Prudence, Fortitude, Justice, Temperance) attributed to the duke that is clearly meant as a *captatio benevolentiae*.²⁹ In this text, Pio even seeks the mediation of the Madonna with Borso³⁰ so that his children do not remain orphans.³¹ Although Borso, like all Italian rulers, did not use the mythology of the sacrament of royal anointing, he did, as the first Estense duke, “[favour] forms of personality cult, not disdaining unrealistic Augustan symbolologies,”³² something that Pio seems very aware of.

²⁴ “La mia fortuna tira a la roversa”; *Li mei parenti cum ciascun fedele*, v. 9.

²⁵ “perché fortuna volta le sue piante | come li piace, e spesso fa cadere | colui che sta a sedere, | ponendo in sedia un nato d’un barbero”; *Io vegio bene che dal nascimento*, vv. 13–16.

²⁶ “e servo facto son, ch’era signore”; *I’ vegio ben ch’ogni pietate è morta*, v. 36.

²⁷ It is the overall subject of the capitolo quadernario *Io vegio bene che dal nascimento*.

²⁸ See *Io vegio bene che dal nascimento*, vv. 101–108. St. Bernardine preached in Carpi in 1427; he unofficially became the city’s patron saint in 1505 and, officially, on 23 October 1643.

²⁹ *Magnanimo signore, in cui s’appoggia*, vv. 5–20.

³⁰ *Magnanimo signore, in cui s’appoggia*, vv. 45–60.

³¹ *Magnanimo signore, in cui s’appoggia*, vv. 69–76. According to Tiraboschi and Maini, Gian Marco had three sons (Francesco, Galasso, and Borso) and a daughter (Margherita, married to Giovanni Lodovico Montecuccoli) from his wife Polissena Appiani from Piombino; see Tiraboschi, *Biblioteca Modenese* 4:153, and Pio, *Saggio di rime*, vi.

³² Borso “aveva favorito forme di culto della personalità, non disdegnando velleitarie simbologie augustee.” The ceremonial sumptuousness of his funeral falls into this frame, as did the elaborate treatment of his corpse; see Ricci, *Il principe e la morte*, 13, 77–78, 87. Even Luigi Maini, in the mid-nineteenth century, did not hide his boundless admiration for Borso, “the rare example of a prince, whose praises he received from historians and contemporary poets resisted the severe judgment of posterity” (“il raro esempio di un principe, i cui elogi resigli

The other seven texts attributed to Giovanni Marco Pio in MS 157 belong to the religious and social sphere, and their contents are not very different from the usual devotional texts in vogue at the time, apart from a few personalisations: Marian lauds for requests for intermediation, lauds addressed to God with direct requests for help and forgiveness, invocations for protection addressed to saints, and theological concepts. Some of these themes are developed by Pio with a certain vivacity. For example, with regard to the concept of levelling and absolute randomness linked to death present in *Apri le labra mie, o Yhesù Christo*, Pio writes: “We are like the fish in the fish farm, | which is taken away from its fisherman | every day and hour | to give to those who want to buy it,”³³ but also: “Death is equal to princes and great kings, | popes, cardinals, wise men and crazy people; | each one in their great paraments | must fall, and nobody knows when.”³⁴ This sort of wise cynicism is well connected with another memorable image, which suggests not to postpone the repentance of the sinner: “and don’t wait and say: ‘I will do it tomorrow’, | because the hardy man soon becomes foolish | and in a few hours he loses his mind | and cannot say: ‘I’m sorry’, | before plunging into the vast Hell.”³⁵ Then, defining the vanity of life Pio writes: “Since any mortal thing does not last forever, | for everything in this world is decaying, | and as a vain froth | the life of any haughty goes away,”³⁶ connected to the repetitive subject of *ubi sunt* in the same text.³⁷

Even for a layman like Giovanni Marco Pio the eight-step ladder to heaven (contrition, confession, satisfaction, faith, penance, hope, humility, pain) was deemed to be essential for gaining eternal life.³⁸ And firmness in the face of martyrdom was taken as a model.³⁹ The capitolo ternario *Ecco il gran legno de la sancta croce*, which describes the salvific value of

dagli storici e dai poeti contemporanei resistettero al severo giudizio de’ posteri”); Pio, *Saggio di rime*, vi.

³³ “Siam come ’l pesce posto nel vivaro, | che vien levato dal suo pescatore | in ogni giorno et hore | a darne a chi ne vuol ben comparare”; *Apri le labra mie, o Yhesù Christo*, vv. 29–32.

³⁴ “La morte è equale a prencipi e a gran regi, | a papi, a cardinali, a savii e a pacci; | ciascun nei suo gran lacci | convien cadere, né ha sicuro un’hora”; *Chi ben rimira e guarda la natura*, vv. 33–36.

³⁵ “e non aspetti e dir: ‘Doman faremo’, | ché l’huom gagliardo presto torna scemo | et in poc’ora perde il sentimento | e dir non può: ‘Mi pento’; | ch’el se ne va calcato al grande Inferno”; *Apri le labra mie, o Yhesù Christo*, vv. 88–92.

³⁶ “Però che mortal cosa alfin non dura, | ché tutto in questo mondo si consuma, | et come vana schiuma | sen va la vita de qualunque altero”; *Chi ben rimira e guarda la natura*, vv. 5–8.

³⁷ *Chi ben rimira e guarda la natura*, vv. 13–28, refer to *ubi sunt* theme.

³⁸ *Chi ben rimira e guarda la natura*, vv. 57–72.

³⁹ *Del gran profundo d’esta ria presone*, where the example of St. Bartholomew is invoked as a model.

the cross, was probably composed for the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (14 September; renamed in the twentieth century as the Feast of the Triumph of the Cross). Adriano Prosperi points out that “Out of the practice of pains, the cross became a symbol of salvation and hope.”⁴⁰ In Pio’s poems, the figure of the Blessed Virgin Mary is always a reassuring source of comfort in itself, but it assumes contours of theological utility when Mary’s function on this earth is clarified: “but her pain and her every satisfaction | was to pull every man to Paradise.”⁴¹ The description of her exceptionality as a woman (“you were the daughter and mother of your son”⁴²) is here modelled on Dante’s “Virgin Mother, daughter of your son” (*Paradiso* 33, v. 1). Mary’s role as an intermediary, attributed to her in devotional literature of medieval urban piety, stemmed from the theological emancipation of her figure that had begun in the thirteenth century. Franciscan preachers in particular insisted on this, thus contributing to the promotion of the importance of the figure of Mary in religious pedagogy: the Virgin became a subject of study.

As Fabio Forner points out, “With Giovan Marco we are not, therefore, in the presence of an erudite, but, at least, of a sincere poet who had the opportunity to read the most important vernacular authors of the fourteenth century and his century, until he reached a level that allowed him to express in verse the pain felt in the last dramatic months of his life.”⁴³ Forner’s comments are in line with those of the eighteenth-century scholar Girolamo Tiraboschi who did not see great value in Giovanni Marco Pio’s literary production.⁴⁴ Despite the harsh judgment leveled on Giovanni Marco Pio by past critics, there is no doubt that in his texts he reflected both the proud self-awareness as a nobleman and the humble self-perception as a common sinner at the end of his earthly existence.

⁴⁰ “Uscita dalla pratica delle pene la croce passò dunque tra i simboli di salvezza e di speranza”; Prosperi, *Giustizia bendata*, 75.

⁴¹ “ma la sua pena e ogni suo contento | fu per tirare ogni huomo a Paradiso”; *O dolce Vergene sacra, madre sancta*, vv. 43–44.

⁴² “tu fusti figlia e madre del tuo figlio”; *O dolce Vergene sacra, madre sancta*, v. 50.

⁴³ “Con Giovan Marco non si è, dunque, alla presenza di un erudito, ma, almeno, di un poeta sincero che ebbe la possibilità di leggere i più importanti autori volgari del Trecento e del suo secolo, fino a giungere ad un livello che gli permetteva di esprimere in versi le pene provate negli ultimi drammatici mesi della sua vita”; Forner, “I Pio tra lettere ed armi,” 236.

⁴⁴ Tiraboschi will instead dedicate at least a hint to the poetic production of Giovanni Marsiglio Pio (“ei fu verseggiatore in un tempo in cui l’aver qualche tintura di lettere non era picciola lode” — “he was a poet in a time when having some allusion of letters was not small praise”), also incarcerated because of the supposed involvement in the same conspiracy against Borso d’Este, but then released in 1477 (see Tiraboschi, *Biblioteca Modenese*, 4:204). On the poetic production of Giovanni Marsiglio see Cavani, *La figura di Giovanni Marsiglio Pio*, and Forner/Varanini, “Devozioni e sentimento religioso.”

The two aspects clearly coexist in Pio's verses, giving them a true human and intimate form. Giovanni Marco was certainly not a common prisoner: because of his name and status he had the opportunity to think and write, he could express his thoughts and make himself heard. This is perfectly in line with the phenomenon of the "singular noble particularism" (*spiccato particolarismo nobiliare*) that characterized the history of Emilia in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries but outraged the Florentine politician Francesco Guicciardini.⁴⁵ With the 'pacts of adherence', major and minor *signorie* were mutually bound not as between prince and subject, but "between two potentates, one higher than the other in degree of authority and power, *suzerain*, in short, but on the same level of honour and dignity."⁴⁶ The same dignified honour can be found in the modest poetic production of Giovanni Marco Pio in prison awaiting execution. The poetry he composed while a prisoner about to sacrifice his life for a crime that perhaps he had not committed, attests to the personal composure that allowed him to face his destiny with dignity, a high example and a warning for every condemned man who believes in the afterlife.

ISTITUTO SUPERIORE DI STUDI MUSICALI "G. BRICCIALDI" DI TERNI
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CITED WORKS

- Cappelli, Antonio. "La congiura dei Pio, signori di Carpi, contro Borso d'Este marchese di Ferrara, duca di Modena e Reggio, scritta nel 1469 da Carlo da San Giorgio Bolognese, con aggiunta di osservazioni e documenti." *Atti e memorie delle RR. Deputazioni di storia patria per le province modenese e parmensi* 2 (1864): 367–416.
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⁴⁶ See Chittolini, *La formazione dello stato regionale*, 274.

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