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“An ample and very poetical narrative”¹: the vicissitudes of “La Pia” between the literary and oral traditions

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DANTE ALIGHIERI (Purgatorio, Canto V, vv. 130-136)
«Deh, quando tu sarai tornato al mondo
e riposato de la lunga via», seguitò 'l terzo spirito al secondo, «ricorditi di me, che son la Pia;
Siena mi fë, disfecemi Maremma:
salsi colui che 'nnanellata pria
disposando m'avea con la sua gemma».²

In the nearly seven hundred years since Dante's Purgatorio first appeared, the story of “La Pia” (Purgatorio V, 130-136), a Sienese woman who died under mysterious circumstances in the Maremma region, has generated much speculation as to her identity and the possible reasons for Dante's having situated this courteous but cryptic soul amongst the negligenti of antePurgatorio. These seven scant lines, placed at the very end of Canto V of Purgatorio, continue to give rise not only to a plethora of commentaries (surveyed and analysed in Diana Glenn's recent work)³, but also to a significant body of creative works that have expanded, elaborated and explored the fragmentary history of Pia. This paper concentrates on the circulation and dissemination of theatrical works drawing on the Pia story in the 19th and 20th centuries, with special emphasis on the Tuscan maggio, a form of sung popular theatre still performed in northwestern Tuscany today. There, La Pia is known to Maggio audiences, as indeed she was to Dante scholars until the end of the nineteenth century, by the name of “Pia de' Tolomei,” and her story unfolds over the course of about three hours.

How have seven lines from Dante managed to expand to fill three hours of Maggio performance? The story is a long but fascinating one. In Figure 1 I have listed some significant dates for the development of the Pia story.
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>1315-21</td>
<td>Dante’s composition of <em>Purgatorio</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1383</td>
<td>Benvenuto da Imola <em>Commentum super Dantem</em> - identification of Pia as Pia de' Tolomei murdered by her husband Nello de' Pannocchieschi della Pietra, means of death - being thrown from window</td>
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<td>1400</td>
<td>Anonimo Fiorentino commentary adds detail of Nello's jealousy</td>
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<td>1554</td>
<td>Bandello - vol. 1 novella 12 - short story recounting Pia de' Tolomei's adultery with Agostino de' Ghisi; Nello has her strangled in the Maremma by his henchmen</td>
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<td>1818</td>
<td>Ugo Foscolo, commentary on Dante in <em>Edinburgh Review</em>, suggests Dante portrays Pia as innocent, and dying of malaria</td>
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<td>1836</td>
<td>Carlo Marenco and Giacinto Bianco plays entitled <em>La Pia de' Tolomei</em> performed in Naples; Cammarano writes libretto for opera; Marenco: Pia dies of malaria; Bianco: text so far untraceable</td>
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<td>1837</td>
<td>Donizetti opera (libretto by Cammarano) <em>Pia de' Tolomei</em> opens in Venice; performances in Sinigaglia, Lucca, Naples, Rome) Pia is poisoned by Nello's henchman</td>
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<tr>
<td>mid-19th century</td>
<td>various paintings on the story, by D.G. Rossetti, Pollastrini, Massola, Ussi, Cabianca, Laugée etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1867</td>
<td>Maggio text <em>Pia de' Tolomei</em> published by tipografia Sborgi, Volterra (attributed to Pietro Frediani, of Buti (Pl)) - Pia dies of malaria</td>
</tr>
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<td>1880s</td>
<td>Giuseppe Moroni, detto il Niccheri (illetterato), <em>Pia de' Tolomei</em>, (Firenze: Salani) booklet in ottave designed to be sold by travelling cantastorie at fairs and markets] - Pia dies of malaria</td>
</tr>
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<td>1908</td>
<td>first of several silent films of <em>Pia de' Tolomei</em> (Mario Caserini, also Gerolamo lo Savio 1910, Giovanni Zannini 1921)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>reprinting of Moroni's cantastorie text</td>
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<tr>
<td>1930s</td>
<td>Emilian Maggio texts composed by Alberto Schenetti, Sesto Bonicelli, Attilio Costi, Amilcare Veggeti amongst others - many writers with links to Maremma region or to travelling salesmen/cantastorie</td>
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<td>1940</td>
<td>Enrico Novelli “Yambo” fumetto <em>Ghino di Tacco</em> includes episode on Pia</td>
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<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>Fotoromanzo <em>Pia de' Tolomei</em> in series “Grand Hotel”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 1: Chronology of a story: some dates of publication of works inspired by Dante’s Pia.*
It seems that Benvenuto da Imola around 1380 was the first early commentator to identify Dante's Pia as a certain Pia de' Tolomei who was killed at the instigation of her husband Nello de' Pannocchieschi. L'Anonimo fiorentino added the detail of Nello's jealousy, and this identification was accepted by scholars until archival research in the late nineteenth century disproved the thesis (Giorgio Varanini, Diana Glenn and others have produced extensive analyses of the historical arguments, which I will not rehearse again here). In 1554 a novella by Matteo Bandello presents a rather salacious version of the Pia story, recounting her adultery with the nobleman Agostino de' Ghisi. It begins:

Siena, mia antica patria, fu sempre, come anco oggidì è, molto di belle e cortesi donne copiosa, ne la quale fu già una bellissima giovane detta Pia de' Tolomei, famiglia molto nobile. Costei, essendo in etá di maritarsi, fu data per moglie a messer Nello de la Pietra, che era gentiluomo il piú ricco alora di Siena e il piú potente che fosse in Maremma.

The novella finishes with the adulteress Pia being strangled by servants, under Nello’s orders. Bandello’s claimed source for the story, “il molto piacevole messer Domenico Campana Strascino” (p. 151), claims to have had the story handed down to him in documents and stories from Sienese relatives.

The next significant appearance of La Pia in the literary annals was in an influential commentary by Ugo Foscolo, first published in the Edinburgh Review (translated from the French by James Mackintosh) in February 1818, during the period that Foscolo was in exile in England:

Nello della Pietra had espoused a lady of noble family at Sienna [sic], named Madonna Pia. Her beauty was the admiration of Tuscany, and excited in the heart of her husband a jealousy, which, exasperated by false reports and groundless suspicions, at length drove him to the desperate resolution of Othello. It is difficult to decide whether the lady was quite innocent; but so Dante represents her. Her husband brought her into the Maremma, which then as now, was a district destructive to health. He never told his unfortunate wife the reason of her banishment to so dangerous a country. He did not deign to utter complaint or accusation. He lived with her alone, in cold silence, without answering her question, or listening to her remonstrances. He patiently waited till the pestilential air should destroy the health of this young lady. In a few months she died. Some chroniclers, indeed, tell us, that Nello used the dagger to hasten her death. It is certain that he survived her, plunged in sadness and perpetual silence. Dante had, in this incident, all the materials of an ample and very poetical narrative. But he bestows on it only four verses.

… Yet these few words draw tears from those who know the fate of this young woman. Her first desire to be recalled to the remembrance of her friends on earth is very affecting. Her modest request, her manner of naming herself, and of describing the author of her suffering, without any allusion to his crime, and merely by the pledges of faith and love which attended their first union, are deeply pathetic. The
soft harmony of the last verses, full of gay and tender remembrances, forms a most striking contrast with the ides of domestic unhappiness, of death and of cruelty, which must rise in the reader's imagination.¹⁰

To my knowledge, this is the first publication of the plot twist that has come to dominate subsequent elaborations of the story: Pia was innocent, and her death was caused by the “pestilential air” of the Maremma region (rather than by being poisoned or thrown from a window, as reported by earlier Dante commentators). This resonated with then current Romantic characterisations of rural Italy as dangerously fecund and morbid landscape inhabited by a primitive, superstitious and violent society.¹¹ Although Foscolo does not spell out here his reasons for claiming that Dante portrays Pia as innocent, Carlo Marenco later, rather hesitantly, explained that this was a necessary deduction from Dante having placed her in Purgatory rather than Hell.¹² Foscolo justifies his interpretation not only by reference to the literary past — Dante and his interpreters — but also by invoking the cultural work of contemporary audiences, who flesh out Dante’s few words through prior knowledge of the full story (“the fate of this young woman” – presumably transmitted over the generations by word of mouth) and active exercise of their own powers of empathy. Foscolo's commentary was to inspire a variety of nineteenth-century literature in English,¹³ and it was also quickly circulated in France and Italy: it appeared in French almost word-for-word in Stendhal's De l'amour (written in 1819 but published in 1822) and in 1822 was cited at length in Italian by the Pistoiese Bartolomeo Sestini in the introduction to La Pia: leggenda romantica, a verse novella written in ottava rima.¹⁴

Sestini claimed that his hugely popular novella was based on popular Tuscan legends of the Maremma region. It is probably significant that Sestini himself came from the Pistoiese Appennines, whence itinerant labourers and shepherds would undertake seasonal travel to the Maremma. The turn of the plot that appeared for the first time in Sestini, and that is now accepted as an integral part of the story in Tuscany, is a central deception: Nello's friend Ghino tries to seduce Pia while Nello is away at the wars; she rejects him, but in revenge he induces Nello to believe that Pia has been unfaithful to him by arranging for him to see Pia meeting and embracing a man (who unknown to Nello is actually her brother). Nello then has Pia locked up to die slowly of malaria in his castle in the Maremma, while he wanders distraught in the nearby woods. Here he meets a hermit who encourages him to consider that Pia might be innocent. A storm breaks out and Ghino appears, having been mortally wounded by a wolf. With his dying words he reveals the deception to Nello:

Io ti cercavo, e non mi cal ch’io mora
Se ti ritrovo, mentre mi rimane
Tanto spazio di vita, e tempo ancora
Per dirti cose che ti sono arcane.
Sappi, che mentre tu festi dimora
Dalla patria lontan, fiamme profane
Mi arser per la tua Pia, né il labbro tacque
Da lei ne fui represso, e ciò mi spiacque.

E di vendetta nel desire acerbo
Tutto l’amor che le portai conversi
Appo la rottà il primo di, per verbo
Di un comperato messo, discopersi
Che con false divise a gran riserbo
Misto ai fuggiaschi, che riedean dispersi
S’era introdotto nella nostra terra
Il fratel della Pia, che a noi fa Guerra.¹⁵

After hearing the news, Nello rushes to the castle, only to find Pia already being buried. Smitten with remorse, he retreats into his castle, where he lingers grieving for some years before succumbing to an illness and being buried alongside his wife. The castle crumbles, and the novella concludes with an itinerant peasant farmer recounting the sad story to his wife and family.¹⁶ Sestini’s novella had an extraordinary literary and popular success, and editions were widely sold not only in the cities but also in the marketplaces of many small villages.¹⁷

Some years later, in the 1830s, the Piedmontese dramatist Carlo Marenco (1800-1846) produced his play *Pia de’ Tolomei*, based on Sestini but with the unapologetic addition of various new elements: “parendomi anzi esercizio non indegno di poeta, su non vergine tema, e sovra già note situazioni, ispirarsi a novità di pensieri.”¹⁸ Among these new elements were:

- the addition of historical details tying the events to the battle between the Guelphs and Ghibellines at Colle Val d’Elsa of 1269;
- the addition of the character of Pia’s father;
- the added plot twist that the man Pia embraces believing to be her brother is in fact an impostor hired by Ghino (her brother having been killed in battle); and
- the change of the name of Nello to Rinaldo, for the reason that “facilmente coll’articolo del medesimo suono si confonde.”¹⁹

Perhaps reflecting Marenco’s political views as to the role of the church in civil society, his play completely omits the figure of the hermit, who by contrast is pivotal to the action in the Sestini novella.

Here is an extract from the second scene of the play, in which Rinaldo (the husband, in other texts known as Nello) calls upon Ugo (his friend, in other texts known as Ghino, secretly in love with Pia) to take care of her while Rinaldo is away fighting:
RINALDO: Fin ch’io starommi in campo, et tu, se altrove
Pubbliche cure non ti chiaman, veglia
Sulle mie case; e del lontano amico
L’onore almen, mentr’ei la vita arrischia,
L’onor tutela.

UGO (attonito): Io? (rimettendosi) Che? di casta donna
Avventuroso possessor non sei?
Quell’angiol di virtude, ah! troppo offende
L’ombra sol del sospetto.

RINALDO: È ver, l’oltraggio;
Pur mi s’è fitto in l’anima si addentro
Questo gelido verme, che a snidarlo
Finor fur vani e il suo costante affetto,
E il lungo studio delle sue virtudi.20

Similar scenes, establishing the jealous tendencies of the husband and the facile lies of
his adulterous friend, occur in many later versions of the story. According to Marenco’s
introduction to the publication of his tragedy, it became “divulgatissima.” We know that
it was performed at Naples in 1836, where it inspired Salvatore Cammarano to write the
libretto of the Donizetti opera of the same name,

Cammarano’s libretto, which restored the character’s original names as found in
the Sestini poem, was performed in Venice in 1837 and in Rome and Naples in 1838.21
Nello’s pathological jealousy, first introduced in the Marenco play, becomes a central
element in the opera plot. Here is an extract from Part II, Quadro 1, scene 2, in which
Ghino attempts to blackmail Pia, who has by now been locked up by the jealous Nello:

GHINO (abbassa la fronte, e rimane alquanto silenzioso)
Odemi, o Pia.
Per sempre dai viventi
di Nello un cenno ti separa, e Nello
sveller giurò dalla sua fronte i rai
anzi che più vederti. Ubaldo è schiavo
del mio voler: tu sei
già nella tomba; dalla tomba Ghino
sol può sottrarti, ed egli
t'offre il suo core... o morte.

PIA Iniquo!

GHINO Scelgli.
PIA  Morte, o colpa? Tu ben sai
    la mia scelta.

GHINO  Forsennata!...
        Scelgli?...

PIA  Morte.

GHINO  Ah! tu morrai
    dalle genti abominata...
    e l'infamia un negro velo
    sul tuo nome stenderà.

PIA  Benedetta e pura in cielo
    il Signor m'accoglierà. 22

The libretto draws on both Sestini and Marenco, but has Pia, already dying of malaria,
finished off by being poisoned by Nello's henchman Ubaldo, just before Nello arrives on
the scene. 23 The opera concludes with the reconciliation, at the dying Pia's instigation, of
the Ghibelline Nello and Pia's Guelph brother Rodrigo. The concern expressed in both
the Cammarano/Donizetti opera script and Marenco's play for reconciliation between
closely-related warring factions perhaps reflects the preoccupation of the Risorgimento
period to establish common cultural and political ground between the various entities that
would make up the unified Italian state. Egidio Saracini reports that Donizetti originally
composed the opera with only three main roles (the soprano Pia, the tenor Ghino and the
baritone Nello), and introduced the contralto role of her brother Rodrigo only at the
insistence of Berti, the president of the Fenice opera, in order to accommodate his
favorite, Rosina Mazzarelli. In the Naples production Donizetti was reportedly upset by
the Neapolitan censors' insistence that the plot be changed to have a happy ending. 24

There were many other nineteenth-century treatments of the Pia story in painting,
sculpture, and music. Works from the high art traditions are relatively easy to locate
using conventional searches of libraries, museums and art collections (all the more so
now that so many institutional catalogues are accessible online). Traces of songs and
stories circulating in popular oral traditions are far less easily detected. Fortunately, two
nineteenth-century Pia stories from the popular tradition have found their way into
writing, each having a bearing on the development of the Maggio stories performed today
in the Garfagnana. The first is a Maggio text published in 1867 in Volterra, and
attributed to the great Maggio librettist Pietro Frediani. 25 Compared to the high-flown
literary language of the works cited up to now, the Maggio text uses much plainer
vocabulary and syntax as it renders the story in the octosyllabic quatrains typical of the
Maggio tradition, as is shown in the following extract from the scene.
Plot elements of Frediani’s text seems to have been based mainly on the Sestini novella, with the addition of some features from the Marenco play (including the elaboration of two additional female parts in the person of a peasant woman whom the dying Pia befriends and asks to pray for her, and Pia’s daughter). In the published version of the Maggio play there is a happy ending, with Pia resuscitating at the last minute (more in keeping with the standard conventions of Maggio plays) but most currently performed Maggio plays keep Sestini’s tragic ending.

The other highly significant source for today’s Maggio plays is the cantastorie version of the Pia story. Cantastorie were itinerant singers who until recently travelled to local fairs and markets throughout Italy, where they would sing old and newly created stories and sell booklets and broadsheets with the texts. Diana Glenn has kindly made available to me a version of the Pia story composed by the cantastorie Giuseppe Moroni (nicknamed “Il Niccheri”) and published in Firenze in 1937. I believe this version may have been first published in the 1880s. Like Sestini’s text, Moroni’s uses the classic ottava rima of eight hendecasyllabic lines rhyming ABABABCC, but the actual fabric of the composition is entirely unrelated, with far simpler syntax, vocabulary and narrative structure. In plot it is closest to the Marenco play, but includes some elements, such as the figure of the hermit, from the Sestini novella. Cantastorie libretti like these were sold by travelling singers in marketplaces, and cantastorie versions of the Pia story have been
collected from the oral tradition on many occasions. In these popular works performed in the marketplaces, just as in the high art versions of the opera theatre, Pia’s story continues to be framed by an emphasis on internecine conflict and *campanilismo*, as can be seen in the introductory *ottava* of Moroni’s poem:

Negli anni che de' Guelfi e Ghibellini
Repubbliche a que' tempi costumava,
batteano i Cortonesi e gli Aretini
Specie d'ogni partito guerreggiava.
I Pisani battean coi Fiorentini
Siena con le Maremme contrastava;
E Chiusi combattea contro Volterra…
non vi era posto che un facesse guerra.

In the twentieth century the Pia story has entered into other popular narrative genres such as film, *fumetto* (comic strip) and *fotoromanzo* (using photographs). An exhibition including much of this material was held in Siena in 1999, but unfortunately the catalogue is now out of print. The bruscello “Pia de' Tolomei” is still performed occasionally by a number of amateur companies in rural Siena, most famously at Montepulciano, and the “Salto della Contessa” (the Countess's Leap) near Gavorrano is a tourist attraction at the historic Castello della Pietra (it is interesting that here popular stories have Pia's death caused by being thrown out a window, as in the early commentaries, rather than by malaria, as in the Sestini-derived narratives).

Before considering the Maggio versions of the Pia story in more detail, it may be helpful to give some general background information on this genre of sung popular theatre. Maggio is performed today mainly in the Tosco-Emilian Appennines. In Tuscany, it is most active in the provinces of Lucca and Massa-Carrara, with its heartland in the Garfagnana, the valley of the Serchio river situated between the Apuan Alps and the Appennines, to the north of the city of Lucca. A less flourishing performance tradition continues in the area between Pisa and Lucca. Maggio is also popular today in the Emilian Appennines, in the southern parts of the provinces of Reggio Emilia and Modena, where it adopts significantly different performance conventions. The earliest historical records of Maggio as a theatrical genre go back to sixteenth-century Siena (see recent work by Michele Feo). Nineteenth century accounts indicate that the tradition was then widespread throughout central and western Tuscany, occurring not only in its areas of current distribution, but also in the southern part of the province di Pisa, in parts of Grosseto and in the Pistoia region (where the genre was named *giostra* rather than *maggio*).

The following accounts draw on my fieldwork on the Tuscan Maggio, mostly
in the Garfagnana valley, where I attended and recorded many performances between 1992 and 2000. Maggio performances depend on a written script, which is read aloud a line at a time by an on-stage prompt and turned into dramatic action with great vocal and gestural bravura by amateur singer-actors. In the Garfagnana, performances are usually held outdoors on summer Sunday afternoons, with the supportive local audience surrounding the performance space, but in the Arno valley performances may be held in more conventional theatres with painted backdrops and the audience frontally arranged.

Maggio scripts typically enact stories of chivalrous romances, classical legends or sentimental lives of the saints. Figure 2 presents a fairly typical profile of the mixture of sources and themes used in Maggio performances in the Garfagnana valley in the 1990s. The stories, often taken from literary antecedents, were adapted by contemporary authors (most of whom were still active), to fit the performance conventions of the Maggio, whose standard metre is the four- or five-line eight-syllable stanza, sung with the accompaniment of violin or piano accordion to a conventional melody, the *aria del maggio*. Two special metres, the arietta (four seven-syllable lines) and the classic ottava (eight eleven-syllable lines), mark moments of particular pathos or narrative intensity. Stylised sword fighting, performed in the Garfagnana with miniature wooden swords and shields, is an integral part of any Maggio script, and reminds one of the *moresca* and other popular depictions of the battles of Moors and Christians with which the genre certainly shares antecedents, and which Paolo Toschi related to pre-Christian Mayday rituals symbolising the victory of the new growing season over the old.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compagnia di Gorfigliano,</th>
<th><em>La Guerra di Troia</em></th>
<th>Mario Pellegrinotti</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compagnia Acqua Bianca,</td>
<td><em>Antilla e Giffredo</em> [a chivalrous romance about the love between the woman warrior Antilla and her sworn enemy Giffredo]</td>
<td>anonymous author</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compagnia di Piazza al Serchio,</td>
<td><em>Le Sventure di Tristano e Isotta</em></td>
<td>anonymous author</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compagnia di Gragnanella-Filicaia-Casatico</td>
<td><em>La Figlia del sultano</em></td>
<td>Giuliano Grandini,</td>
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<tr>
<td>Compagnia di Partigliano,</td>
<td><em>La Regina della Dacia</em></td>
<td>Giuliano Bertagni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compagnia di Piano di Coreglia-Fabbriche di Vallico,</td>
<td><em>Santa Flavia</em> [a martyr]</td>
<td>anonymous author</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>La Pia de’ Tolomei</em></td>
<td>anonymous local text, rewritten by Gastone Tincani</td>
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*Figure 2. Scripts performed by Tuscan Maggio companies in 1996.*
From year to year, the same performers tend to wear the same costume and take on the same symbolic role, of the good king, the hermit, the virtuous heroine or the scheming adulterer, whether the warring factions represented are Greeks and Trojans, French and Saracens, Romans and Thracians or Guelphs and Ghibellines.

Once a text has been created in the appropriate metre and enters into circulation as a performance script, it does not remain fixed. The capomaggio, or company leader, will typically work on a script for the next year's performance during the off-season, copying it from another company or from an old script held by a collector of such prized objects, and adapting it to fit the forces at his disposal. During negotiations as to who will sing the following year, the capomaggio may write whole new scenes to give a vain performer enough ariette or ottave to show off his or her beautiful voice, or remove a character if someone who has promised to sing falls ill. Even during the performance minor changes and cuts are regularly made.  

In the period of my fieldwork, Maggio scripts were usually printed up by the Centro per la Raccolta lo Studio e la Valorizzazione delle Tradizioni Popolari della Provincia di Lucca (abbreviated as CTP) (set up in the mid-1970s under the initiative of the late Gastone Venturelli). These texts were often published along with an introduction and sometimes a critical apparatus written by a capomaggio or a researcher. The booklets were sold at performances for a small sum (3,000 lire) and used by many members of the audience to follow the action.

Let me now turn to the numerous versions of the Pia story that have been performed in the last thirty years in Tuscany. Figure 3 shows that at least ten distinct Maggio texts were in circulation during this period, each one of which is subject to considerable variation in performance along the lines already described.

Sometimes the text used by one company is substantially the same as that of another — this is the case for the texts used by the companies of Buti and Pieve di Compito (texts 1 and 2 on the list), both of which are within the Pisa-Lucca stylistic area. As shown by Gastone Venturelli in his preface to the published script of number 2, this text is closely related to the Frediani Maggio script already discussed. Texts numbers 4 and 5 are also closely related, and performed by companies that shared a number of members. Considerable redrafting work was done by Gastone Tincani, the present capomaggio of the Piano di Coreglia-Fabbriche di Vallico company, to transform an old text originally in five-line stanzas into one using the four-line stanza. There are two distinct scripts used by the Gorfigliano company. The first, a handwritten manuscript (number 6), shares a number of features and some complete stanzas with the Piazza al Serchio text (number 7) — the capomaggio of the Piazza company, Andrea Bertei, was formerly a member of the Gorfigliano company. The second Gorfigliano Maggio script, entitled Pia e Nello della Pietra (Number 8 on the list), is completely different from the older version, and is possibly derived from the fumetto Ghino di Tacco, and
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Year(s) performed</th>
<th>Title and publication details</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buti (PI)</td>
<td>1980-1982</td>
<td><em>La Pia de' Tolomei</em>, secondo il testo adottato dai maggianti di Buti (Pisa), a cura di Gastone Venturelli (Lucca, CTP Lucca 27, 1980)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piano di Coreglia-Fabbriche di Vallico</td>
<td>*1996</td>
<td><em>La Pia de' Tolomei</em>, secondo il testo adottato dai maggianti di Piano di Coreglia-Fabbriche di Vallico (LU), elaborato da Gastone Tincani (Lucca, CTP Lucca 122, 1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gorfigliano (LU)</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td><em>Pia de Tolomei</em>, handwritten script transcribed by Erminio and Giuly Monelli, Gorfigliano (LU), 1978, unpublished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piazza al Serchio (LU)</td>
<td>*1990</td>
<td><em>Pia de' Tolomei</em> [text published by Comune di Piazza al Serchio, LU]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gramolazzo (LU)</td>
<td>*2000</td>
<td>extracts from <em>Pia de' Tolomei</em> provided by Iole Paladini to be sung by children at Gramolazzo [unpublished - drawn from 6, 7, 8]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antona (MS)</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td><em>La Pia dei Tolomei</em>, maggio di A. Polini, a cura di G. Bertuccelli (Massa, 1982).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montignoso (MS)</td>
<td>2000-2001</td>
<td><em>La Pia dei Tolomei</em> [text by A. Polini?]*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3:* Tuscan Maggio Texts of Pia de' Tolomei. 
(*Audio-visual recording held in Barwick’s collection*)
was written in 1986 by Luigi Casotti, the son of the then *capomaggio* of the Gorfigliano company, Gian Casotti. I hold in my collection a copy of this booklet used by the prompt during performances in the 2000 revival of this play, at which time the company added a whole new character to the script.\textsuperscript{37}

Although full aesthetic experience of Maggio requires immersion in the music, movement, landscape and society with which and in which it is performed, I will briefly discuss here five excerpts from several Maggio performances. The first is the deathbed scene from a performance by the Pieve di Compito company, recorded on the wooden stage set in the chestnut forest above Gragnanella, near Castelnuovo Garfagnana (LU) in 1992. Pia lies dying, addressing her final words to the castle custodian:

\texttt{PIA} Vissi in Siena amata e lieta
ricca e nobile e onorata
or da tutti abbandonata
al castello della Pietra

Ma che dico? Oimè che sento!
La mia vita mi abbandona
sudor freddo … aimè sprigiona
l' alma mia … dal corpo … spento\textsuperscript{38}

The pathos and melodrama of the scene is more fully marked in the text (based on Frediani’s 1867 original) than in its musical performance, which uses the same melody, metre and piano accordion accompaniment as the other 190 stanzas of the script. Despite the fact that few in the northern Garfagnana audience appreciated the relatively unadorned musical style and plaintive melody used by the Pieve di Compito company (who travelled from south of Lucca to perform), there was considerable applause for their star singer Violetta Bacchi, who made a very graceful corpse arrayed on a red velvet cushion supplied at the last moment by the castle custodian.

The second example comes from the text used by the Partigliano company, a large and relatively young company directed by the energetic Alberico Andreuccetti, who also revised the text. This booklet was not for sale at the performances, but I later obtained a copy and discussed it at some length with Andreuccetti. A number of unique and probably archaic features appear in this text: such as the appearance of little devils (played by Andreuccetti’s small children) who accompany the villain to hell. The text also includes a peasant woman Esole, whose dramatic function equates to the (differently-named) peasant woman found in Marenco’s play and Frediani’s 1867 Maggio script. After the dying Pia gives Esole a ring, she asks what she can do in return:
Performance of the Pieve di Compito maggio company at Gragnanella (LU), 24 July 1992. Assembled around the defunct Pia (Violetta Bacchi) are (left to right) actors in the roles of the castle caretaker (Andrea Triolo), the hermit priest (Orleo Gini), Nello (Silvano Nicolosi) and Pia's daughter Caterina (Manila Vecchianiti). The prompt Mariella Gini stands behind Nello (the piano accordion player Nicola Perdini is off camera to the left). Photograph by Linda Barwick.

ESOLE Ti ringrazio del tuo dono ma non possoti aiutare

PIA Ne verrai per me a pregare quando qui sepolta io sono

PIA Ti rammenta son la Pia che ben sai Siena mi fece la Maremma mi disfece qui avrà fin la vita mia

>This performance used an indoor theatre in the performers’ home village of Partigiano (situated in the lower part of the Serchio valley), and the lead singer Giovanna Santini gestured to the painted backdrop of the Sienese hills as she sang her lines. The second stanza was evidently crafted with close reference to *Purgatorio* V 133-134 “Ricorditi ti me che son la Pia/ Siena mi fè, disfemmi Maremma.”

The third extract presents a scene performed by the central Garfagnana company of Piano di Coreglia-Fabbriche di Vallico in 1996, in which Pia’s father and brother, travelling with Nello and the hermit, have just witnessed the dying Ghino’s confession of his calumny of Pia. As they turn to leave to free her, the figure of the Giullare, a type of fool in particular dress, appears to comment on the action, speaking directly to the audience.
PADRE         Nello non più s'indugi
PIETRO        Andiamo o buon cognato
NELLO         Lasciamo l'empio ingrato
ROMITO        Il ciel lo punirà

GIULLARE     Finalmente il Padreterno
              La giustizia fe' trionfare
              Saprà Dante collocare
              L'alma tua al fondo inferno

Fools are rare in Maggio performances today, and are mainly found in the Garfagnino and Emilian Maggio traditions. This particular clown calls on the audience’s presumed familiarity with the literary source of the Pia story by jocularly supposing that Dante will place Ghino in deepest Hell (as opposed to Pia’s place in Purgatory). The large local audience was most appreciative of the play in general and the clown’s intervention in particular.

The fourth example comes from the same performance. At the end of the play, the clown intervenes again: after Pia’s death the cast assembles around her to sing the traditional *arietta di congedo*, begging the audience’s pardon for any mistakes in the performance.

TUTTI     Morta è l'amata Pia
              Dal ciel prega per noi
              Ed or signori voi
              Dovete perdonar
              Ed or signori voi
              Dovete perdonar

GIULLARE  'isto Maggio è da rifare
              Qui qualcosa a me non torna
              Quell'intrigo amore e corna
              Non dovea la Pia crepare

TUTTI     Il buffo ci ha ridato
              A tutti l'allegria
              Ed or insieme a Pia
              Voi tutti salutiam
              Ed or insieme a Pia
              Voi tutti salutiam

The clown’s intervention this time is in florid local dialect, his coarse language and references contrasting with the high-flown sentiments and language usual in Maggio scripts. He takes Pia by the hand, thus “resurrecting” her before the final stanza and providing the only instance of a happy ending to the Pia story amongst
the various texts in circulation today. Nevertheless, the video shows that several elderly women in the front row were weeping as the play finished, still affected by the preceding deathbed scene.

Our fifth example comes from the Piazza al Serchio company, one of the most flamboyant companies of the upper Garfagnana valley. In this performance, which took place just over the provincial border in the Lunigiana area of Provincia di Massa, there was a huge local audience, and the whole event was filmed by the local television station NoiTV. Although there are presently no active Maggio companies in this area of the Lunigiana, there was still a keen audience, and some singers from this area travelled regularly to join the Piazza al Serchio company at various times during my fieldwork. This deathbed scene takes place between Pia and her daughter Ginevra (a character who appears in several other libretti from the upper Garfagnana).

PIA  Tieni questa crocellina
     morta presto mi vedrai
     qui sepolta mi farai
     la preghiera mia bambina
     ché la morte è già vicina

GINEVRA  Non morire o madre
         a te sarò vicino

PIA  Addio caro visino
       ci revedremo in ciel

The first stanza is sung in the quintina, the five-line stanza a maggio rhyming ABBAA characteristic of the upper Garfagnana, while the second stanza is in the arietta form, often used for particularly affecting moments. The dramatic function of the daughter here is similar to that of the peasant woman Esole (in example 2 discussed above): to act as an audience for Pia’s expressions of piety. During the arietta, the wonderful singer Iole Paladini, one of the stalwarts of the Maggio tradition in this area, is so affected by the pathos of the scene that she bursts into tears, even as she executes yet another florid melismatic ornament, followed by vociferous applause and encouragement from the audience. The high emotion of the text, in combination with the technical excellence of the singing and acting and the excitement of the huge and engaged audience, made this a memorable moment that Maggio appassionati continued to discuss for years afterwards.

While the phenomenon of campanilismo, or local rivalry, has been discussed at length in relation to other areas of Italy (by sociologists such as Eugene Cohen and Anton Blok), the rivalry between neighbouring regions, villages and quartieri is a feature of many Tuscan traditions, and the Maggio is no exception. In the Garfagnana, the Maggio tradition is firmly situated within what Edward S.
Casey has called an “entire teeming place-world.” Maggio companies are named for places, and local tradition holds that each place has its own particular way of performing the melody, and, as has been demonstrated, holds its own characteristic version of the common Maggio stories such as La Pia. There is certainly an element of overt rivalry between the different companies, not only in terms of competition for recruiting singers, but also for showing off their performance style to audiences in the various local Maggio venues (I have often been asked to rank the different squadre). Just as football teams bring their die-hard fans along to away matches, so each Maggio company tours its play to surrounding villages with a significant proportion of the audience made up of its supporters (family members and appassionati). Today, companies tend to include individuals from a number of different villages, who have to compromise in some respects in order to perform together, but who nevertheless give their place of residence as their main identifying feature. In rare but notable instances, individuals may adjust their way of singing to conform with the expectations or the tastes of the locality where the performance is taking place, for each company tours its production to a number of different localities in the region.

Figure 4 shows that from 1971-2001 there were at least 53 performances, and probably many more, of Tuscan Maggio plays about Pia de' Tolomei. The story of Pia is now firmly embedded in the contemporary memory and landscapes of the Garfagnana.

This is an area where each family has its own smallholding and where virilocality continues to be the preferred practice: women traditionally marry out of their village, and live in their husband's paternal village. What this means, of course, is that it is through the woman's husband and children that she comes to truly belong to a place. Although affiliation to a particular village or locality is so fiercely asserted, the most bitter rivalries and feuds often pertain to very close relationships, such as between brothers or in-laws. Such feuds, which may be perpetuated for generations, on occasion find their way, more or less disguised, onto the Maggio performance stage, where the stylised battles offer scope for public expression of well-known personal animosities. One could argue that the apparent fascination of the Maggio tradition with intercultural conflict where the passions for power, lust or revenge are bridled only by repeated appeals for pardon — in the Pia story, for Nello to pardon Ghino, for Pia to pardon Nello, and, in the formulaic final stanzas, for the audience to pardon the performers' mistakes — constitutes a projection of these very local anxieties that continues to be relevant today.

The Pia story foregrounds this anxiety about women as inherently unstable elements in the patriarchal place-world. While it is necessary to take a wife in order to produce successive generations to hold that place and its traditions, in a society in which birthplace is ascribed such primacy, suspicions may always be harboured about the woman's ultimate loyalty to her husband's house rather than
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th># performances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>Partigliano</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Loppia-Filecchio-Piano di Coreglia</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Gorfigliano</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Loppia-Filecchio-Piano di Coreglia</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Pieve di Compito</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Loppia-Filecchio-Piano di Coreglia</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Buti</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Buti</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Buti</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Antonia</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Pieve di Compito</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Gorfigliano</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Gorfigliano</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Piazza al Serchio</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Pieve di Compito</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Partigliano</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Partigliano</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Piano di Coreglia-Fabbriche di Vallico</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Montignoso</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Gorfigliano</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9+</td>
</tr>
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<td>2001</td>
<td>Montignoso</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3+</td>
</tr>
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<td>2001</td>
<td>Partigliano</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Gorfigliano</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>(TOTAL)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>53+</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4: Performances of Pia de’ Tolomei by Tuscan Maggio companies, 1971-2001.

The number of performances is inserted only when known to me personally. The information in this table is derived from published sources and/or personal contacts with the companies concerned.

that of her brother or father, especially when the husband mistreats her. The seemingly amorous relationship between Pia and her brother embodies a real point of conflict and contradiction within this philosophy of place. One can read its eventual resolution with Pia's death as an object lesson on the ultimate aridity of male jealousy (extinguishing the means of procreation) — or as a warning to women to toe the patriarchal line (or else). The continuing invocation of the social role of the Church, through the intervention of the hermit figure in resolving the conflict between husband and wife (almost universal in Maggio versions of the Pia plot, even when the literary antecedents on which they most
closely depend, such as the Marenco play, completely omit this character) perhaps reflects the Church’s continuing influence in the social life of the Garfagnana, where many women and a considerable proportion of the men attend mass several times a week, or even daily.

We may perhaps attribute the continuing fascination of the Pia story for audiences in the Garfagnana not only to the persistence of these ancient place-oriented forms of social relationship, but also to the real historical and social links that until recently saw a proportion of the population undertaking the dangerous annual migration to the Maremma. Today the Maremma is no longer such a dangerous place, and emigration is more likely to be to the industrial cities of the northern Italy, northern Europe or even to Australia and America, where practices of chain migration have tended to continue to reproduce social loyalties between paesani. But the question as to how to overcome locally-constructed cultural difference and establish common principles for cooperation and identification between groups of different cultural and social traditions is one that continues to exercise many of us today, just as it did Dante and the thinkers of the Risorgimento period.

Notes
1 Ugo Foscolo, [“First article on Dante”], Edinburgh Review, LVIII (February, 1818), 458.
4 The Dartmouth Dante Project collates most of the significant commentaries -- see <http://dciswww.dartmouth.edu:50080/v3?db=7&page=q&qry=%22Pia%20de’Tolomei%22&dfn=1&srt=1> (accessed 20 February 2005).
6 Matteo Bandello, Le novelle (Bari: Laterza, 1928), part 1, Novella XII, pp. 151-6.
7 Bandello, pp. 151-2.
8 “Questa è quella Pia che il virtuoso e dottissimo Dante ha posta in Purgatorio. Io ciò che narrato vi ho trovai già brevemente annotato in un libro di mio bisavolo.” Bandello, p. 156.
10 Ugo Foscolo, [“First article on Dante”], Edinburgh Review, LVIII (February, 1818), 458. A useful discussion of the Romantic myth.
of Italy developed by the Northern European thinkers in the period 1775-1825, and Foscolo’s role in promoting a more accurate assessment of Italian culture abroad is found in Joseph Luzzi, “Italy without Italians: Literary Origins of a Romantic Myth,” *MLN* 117.1 (2002), 48-53.

11 See Luzzi, p. 51.


13 For those interested, Appendix 1 contains a list of some of the more significant works in English, which however I will not discuss at more length here. Here is Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s influential verse translation of the relevant lines from Dante (*Purgatorio* V, 130-136): “‘Ah when on earth thy voice again is heard, / And thou from the long road hast rested thee,’ / After the second spirit said the third, / ‘Remember me who am La Pia. Me / Siena, me Maremma, made, unmade. / He knoweth this thing in his heart - even he / With whose fair jewel I was ringed and wed,’” (first published in *The Early Italian Poets* (London: Smith Elder & Co., 1861), reprinted in *The Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Edited with Preface and Notes by William M. Rossetti: Revised and Enlarged Edition* (London: Ellis, 1911), p. 546).

14 Frédéric de Stendhal [Henri Beyle], *De l’amour* (Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, 1920), ch. 28. In Italian, it is cited at length by Bartolomeo Sestini in the preface to his *La Pia: una leggenda romantica* (Roma: Stamperia Ajani, 1822).


17 See Gastone Venturelli’s comments in his introductory notes to the Maggio booklet *La Pia de’ Tolomei, secondo il testo adottato dai maggianti di Pieve di Compito (LU) a cura di Gastone Venturelli* (Pisa: Centro Tradizioni Popolari di Lucca no. 64, 1982).


23 In conformity with early commentaries that have Pia being murdered by Nello’s servants.


25 I have not as yet been able to locate an original publication of the 1867 Maggio text, but am relying on the information included in Gastone Venturelli’s detailed comparison of this 1867 Maggio version with the present text used by the companies of Buti and Pieve di Compito by Gastone Venturelli, in his preface to *La Pia de’ Tolomei, secondo il testo adottato dai maggianti di Pieve di Compito (LU) a cura di Gastone Venturelli* (Pisa: CTP Lucca 64, 1982).
From Venturelli, *La Pia de’ Tolomei*.

Pia de’ Tolomei, composizione in ottava rima di Giuseppe Moroni, detto il Niccheri, illetterato (Firenze: Salani, 1937). The evidence for it having been originally published in the 1880s is the publication by Salani of other compositions by Moroni in the 1880s, such as his *Il nipote sogna il nonno morto* (1889).

There are too many instances to list fully here; see for example Giuseppe Rosati, a. 62. 27/3/1970 at Montelibretti, reg. Sandro Portelli, on Side 1, track 7 of the disc *La Sabina. Una caratteristica area di transizione, a cura di Sandro Portelli* (Milano: Edizioni del Gallo, 1973, Dischi del Sole DS517/19). Other versions have been collected from the oral tradition in Umbria, Tuscany and Emilia.

Stanza 1 of Moroni, *Pia de’ Tolomei*.


For Pistoia see Giuseppe Tigri, *Canti popolari toscani, raccolti e annotati da Giuseppe Tigri*. (Firenze: 1869). For historical attestations of Maggio, see Gastone Venturelli, “Le aree del Maggio,” throughout but especially note 2, pp. 103-4, and the work of Fabrizio Franceschini, for example “Un Maggio di Castagneto Carducci” in *Canterem mirabil cose*, pp. 9-29. The bruscello, zingaresca and befanata genres of the Arno valley and the Sieneuse hills are historically and formally related to Maggio, but today quite divergent from Maggio in their metre and performance styles.


A zingaresca and a befanata (both verse plays) of the same title were both performed during this period: the zingaresca by the Compagnia di Pieve di Compito (LU) in 1979, and the befanata by the Compagnia di Soiana (PI) in 1980. See Venturelli’s discussion in CTP 64, 1982, p. [1].

I was told that this was because their second woman singer had threatened never to sing with them again unless she was given a role, which the capomaggio Amilcare Paladini then wrote and inserted the additional stanzas by pasting typewritten slips into the original printed booklet from 1986. The interpolation of this character bears interesting comparison with the addition of the Rodrigo character to Donizetti’s opera, discussed above.
41 See Venturelli’s discussion in “Le aree del Maggio.”
42 The young actress “died” into a chair to protect the antique red velvet dress.
43 Compagnia Pian di Coreglia-Fabbriche di Vallico, Vallico di Sopra 25/8/1996 (St. 150-152).
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Primary sources


Secondary sources


Foscolo, Ugo. [“First article on Dante.”] *Edinburgh Review* LVIII (February, 1818).


Glenn, Diana. “‘Ricorditi di me, che son la Pia’: Purgatorio V.” *Esperienze Letterarie* 20.3 (1995), 47-62.


APPENDIX 1  
Chronology of references and works on “La Pia” in English, 1818-1894  
compiled by Linda Barwick

1818  Ugo FOSCOLO [“First article on Dante”], Edinburgh Review, LVIII  
(February,1818): 458-9  
translated from the original French by James Mackintosh

1820  HEMANS, Felicia Dorothea Browne, 1793-1835. The works of Mrs. Hemans;  
With a memoir of her life, by her sister. In seven volumes. Edinburgh: William  
Blackwood and London: Thomas Cadell, 1839, 7 v.  
Vol III, pp. 130-139, “The Maremma.” 246 lines

1820  HERBERT, William Works of the Hon. and Very Rev. William Herbert ...  
Excepting those on botany and natural history. With additions and corrections by the  
author. London: H. G. Bohn, 1842, 3 v. Vol I (Horae Pieriae, or Poetry on various  
subjects), pp. 3-24, “Pia della Pietra.” 653 lines

1868-80  ROSSETTI, Dante Gabriel. La Pia de’ Tolomei. 1868-1880. Oil on  
canvas. Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS, USA

1871  SWINBURNE, Algernon Charles (1837-1909) The Poems of Algernon Charles  
sunrise and songs of two nations, first published 1871 [dedicated to Joseph Mazzini], pp.  

Gabriel Rossetti: Edited with Preface and Notes by William M. Rossetti: Revised and  
p. 546 “La Pia” Dante [translation from Purgatorio V, 130-136]

1884  SHARP, William Earth's Voices, Transcripts from Nature, Sospitra, and Other  
[second of two sonnets based on paintings by Dante Gabriel Rossetti]

1886  CONE, Helen Gray The Atlantic monthly, volume 58, issue 350 (December 1886)  
pp745-7, “Madonna Pia” 88 lines


1894  MARTIN, Theodore (1816-1909) Madonna Pia: A Tragedy and Three Other  
Blackwood, 1894, 315 pp., pp. 3-92 “Madonna Pia: A tragedy in three acts.” Blank verse  
(Alexandrines.)