

## Splenditello

I, Guliano Carlini, third richest man  
In Vellano, this scurf-edge of the Apennines,  
Where our children are assailed by witches  
In the shapes of swallows or nightingales,  
Which is rich only in undowried girls,  
Which is scoffed at even in Pescia,  
I do promise and avow, Madonna,  
That I will make my house a shrine to you  
And my only child, my daughter Benedetta,  
Blessed, will be herself a hymn to you,  
Whose long birth that midwife is now botching  
Because she has lain with seven devils  
And as a midwife will, a wetnurse will,  
So by my own hand I will raise her, Madonna,  
But intercede for me with Christ your son,  
Loosen the cord from Benedetta's neck  
That she may be delivered soon, breathing,  
And later sing your mercy and His charity  
In the best convent I can afford  
Where she will be commended with St. Jerome's words;  
"If a woman is for toil and childbirth  
She is further than soul from body to a man.  
If she would then serve Christ more than this world  
She is no more a woman, and will be called a man."

When Benedetta married Jesus Christ  
He designed the ceremony Himself;  
The green altar-cloth referred to her hope,

Red silk flowers to her love, blue brocade  
To the exertion of her mind on Paradise.  
Twelve gloves represented the Apostles  
And thirsty-three candles His earthly years  
("Any buy the best wax! Not those stumps of lard  
You smoked out the chapel with last Easter!")  
The largest three were banded twice with gold  
For His charity and the Madonna's mercy,  
The mud floor symbolised the rest of us.

But it was always me, Poor Bartolomea  
Who was there for her night-sweats and visions  
And Bartolomea who held her palms  
When they shot blood into her silkworcing,  
Bartolomea who pressed down His Sacred Heart  
when it slid about her ribcage like a loaf,  
who softened for her that graceless movement  
in her genuflection, who smuggled in  
the Cremonese mortadella He had banned,  
who was loved by Christ or Satan with her body.  
Christ. Satan. They all piss in the same pot.

lii

"Dear Christ, to make a mountain goat abbess!"

"She could read, keep the books, was good for business –  
Much was harmless; a saffron ring, foil stars,  
Some self-inflicted wounds, a few visions..."

"Visions, or the mists from a woman's heat?"

“The Liber Gomorrhianus is silent on that  
(as you know is Dante). No instruments were used.

They call it @the mute sin’. Fillucio  
Ranks it minor, as does Sinistrari...”

“So neither sodomy nor blasphemy  
Will burn her. I suppose she did marry...”

“...albeit above herself. We are come  
Above all to crush an embarrassment,  
So we cite Aquinas with Bartolomea  
And press for St. Theresa’s solution.”

“Agreed. Solitary confinement until death.

(this last part of the poem is missing from Sean’s travels and journeys)