


Attribution, Imposture, and Interpretation: Galileo, Poetry, and the Digitized *Il dispregio della corte* (1601)

CRYSTAL HALL , Bowdoin College, USA

This article considers a previously unremarked manuscript edition of an early sixteenth-century poem written on the last page of an early seventeenth-century book in the British Library. A pasted bookseller's catalogue entry and handwritten notes on the inside cover attribute the verses to Galileo Galilei (1564–1642). No other documentation connects the book or the poem to him, and the analysis begins from the premise that a forgery is certainly possible. The article then assesses the ways in which different humanistic methods of analysis support or undermine the interpretation of the book-manuscript hybrid as an imposture, misattribution, or authentic Galilean manuscript.

INTRODUCTION

In July 2021, a serendipitous result appeared in a search for occurrences of “Galileo” or “Galilei” in digitized volumes in Google Books published prior to 1643. The search was part of an attempt to understand how thoroughly Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) had been able to collect mentions of himself in print. The search result, an exemplar of a book printed in 1601, years prior to Galileo’s first published debates on any topic, has not been evaluated in modern scholarship until now.

Pasted inside the front cover of the unexpected search result, an undated, printed sales catalogue note names Galileo as the author of an octave written on the recto of the last page of the final octavo gathering. This modern intervention in the material history of a late Renaissance book and the oft-lamented

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imprecisions of digitized text in Google Books combined to resurface this unusual artifact. The volume is a 1601 Italian translation of a Spanish text first published in 1539. The octave identified in the note was not authored by Galileo. Other than potentially similar handwriting, the contextual clues for this attribution have been lost. The manuscript lines are a slightly edited version of an octave written in the 1530s and then set to music as a madrigal in the 1580s. The book-poem hybrid thus bridges the early European Renaissance with the eve of the age of discoveries and controversies that resulted from the use of Galileo's modified telescope to observe the night sky. The poem is heavily inflected with religious imagery, and the book encourages readers to reject the kind of princely court that sustained and protected Galileo in the decades prior to his trial by the Inquisition in 1633. The book-poem hybrid provides little evidence that serves to authenticate the attribution to Galileo, but offers much to interpret as a cultural artifact.

Moreover, scandals over authenticity have followed Galilean texts since 1604. As recently as August 2022, Nick Wilding has connected a manuscript in the University of Michigan Library to the twentieth-century forger Tobia Nicotra (fl. 1920–35).¹ Given the likelihood of more fake Galileo materials in circulation than have been identified as such, this analysis begins from an assumption of the inauthenticity of this manuscript edition of the poem. Presuming a forgery shifts attention to both the interpretation of the madrigal and to the associated material practices embodied in a book-manuscript hybrid. What would a forger have needed to know about Galileo's relationship with books and his contemporary cultural moment to sell the artifice as a successful attribution? This question offers an opportunity to explore the extent to which different humanistic methods of interpretation support or challenge the hypotheses of forgery, misattribution, and authenticity.

My analysis begins with a consideration of the collocation of the discovery within the digital repository of Google Books. I then move to interpretation of the content of the eight handwritten lines of the poem based on literary analysis, the history of the poem in print, and an examination of the reading practices suggested by edits to the verses. This is followed by a consideration of the printed book in which this version of the madrigal is found using historical contextualization of key players in the creation of the volume and Galileo's habits related to collecting and annotating books. By way of conclusion, I outline why it matters that the legend of Galileo followed this volume and these lines into their digitized representation. Ultimately, I leave open the question of authentication. I focus instead on the literary, historical, and cultural contexts

¹ Blanding. Thankfully, rather than writing in books, Nicotra was known for ripping out blank pages to use as historic paper for his forged documents.



Figure 1. Screen capture of Google Books search result for “Galileo” or “Galilei” in any material printed before 1643. 7 July 2021. Image by author.

within which an attribution of this version of the poem to Galileo can be understood. While some of my arguments here expand the portrait of Galileo as a reader of poetry, they are in service of reporting the discovery of the attribution and the evaluation of the materiality and expressions of the book-poem hybrid that make attribution or imposture credible. The end goal is not a claim for authenticity or misattribution of the words on the page, but an investigation of the methods of their creation and interpretation.

GALILEO AND THE DIGITIZED *IL DISPREGIO DELLA CORTE* (1601)

Had this discovery occurred in a physical collection, standard practice would be to describe the collection and collocation of the item within it. Google Books as a site of discovery resists the stability of such description. In physical archives, serendipitous discovery of materials often relies on proximity, contact, and occasional human error, but a subsequent scholar can follow the organizational logic of the repository to retrieve the same item. Through collection names, call numbers, storage boxes, and folders, researchers can verify the object’s existence and contribute to the process of renewed or discredited authentication. Subsequent digitization, scanning, text recognition, and metadata are complicated labor, and they are far from static projects, changing not only over years but also from day to day via the ever-increasing algorithms that structure them.

This has two implications. First, a year after I found the pasted note that led to the manuscript, the same search for “Galileo” or “Galilei” prior to 1643 in Google Books no longer produced the result seen in figure 1. This is a potential indication that a computational model of language is driving the creation of a results list populated by snippets of text that are deemed accurate by the Google Books search algorithm. That is, a search for “Galileo” will not return all results

in which that sequence of letters appears, but only those instances that match the inferred rules about how “Galileo” is typically used in books. This effort to obscure the errors of text recognition suggests the foreclosure of certain kinds of serendipity in this digital collection. Google Books is functioning as a recommender system, not an archive.

The digital book described in the July 2021 result (fig. 1) is the British Library’s copy of *Il dispregio della corte, e lode della villa del Reverendissimo Monsignor Antonio di Guevara Vescovo di Mondogneto Traslato dalla lingua Spagnuola in volgar Fiorentino da Cosimo Baroncelli* (The dispraise of the court, and praise of the villa by the Most Reverend Monsignor Antonio di Guevara Bishop of Mondoñedo, translated from the Spanish language into vernacular Florentine by Cosimo Baroncelli [Florence: Bartolommeo Ruoti, e Compagni, 1601]).² In August 2018, in partnership with the British Library, Google scanned the book and converted the images to searchable text.

This brings me to the second implication of black-box algorithmic ordering of premodern (or perhaps any) collections. The British Library hosts the scan and provides local catalogue metadata. Google Books presents the full text search options. A search for Galileo in the catalogue of the British Library, which owns the book, does not produce the title in figure 1.³

The digitization process captured a much later printed document pasted into this volume (fig. 2). The note repeats written information found elsewhere on the inside of the cover board and initial guard sheet. A presumably earlier pencil note says: “+ vi è un’ottava di Galileo Galilei” (+ there is an octave by Galileo Galilei). This seems to repeat the substance of a nearly illegible annotation in blue pencil at the bottom of the page, which appears to read: “++ vi è scrittura del Galilei” (++ there is writing by Galilei). Pending an academic history of the blue pencil, I conducted a search for the phrase in

²The Google Books search query used: <https://books.google.com/books?id=CbeylhNIXl4C&q=galilei>.

³The British Library scan is part of their digital collection, which was impacted by a cybersecurity breach in October 2023. The bibliographic entry can be found through their interim online catalogue via a search for “Guevara” and the book’s title, and hopefully access to the scan will be restored in the future. As of 22 July 2022, the British Library’s copy is still findable in Google Books (https://www.google.com/books/edition/Il_Dispregio_della_corte_e_lode_della_vi/CbeylhNIXl4C?hl=en&gbpv=0). Further, Galileo’s name is still findable through full text search in that volume. While the ephemerality of the broader Google Search results has been better documented, less research has been done on the dynamism of results in the Google Books collection. For the dynamism of Google Search, see Lynch, 21–40. For a closer look at challenges of Google Books for modern texts, see Ben Schmidt, “How Badly is Google Books Search Broken,” *Sapping Attention* (blog), 10 February 2019, <http://sappingattention.blogspot.com/2019/02/how-badly-is-google-books-search-broken.html>.

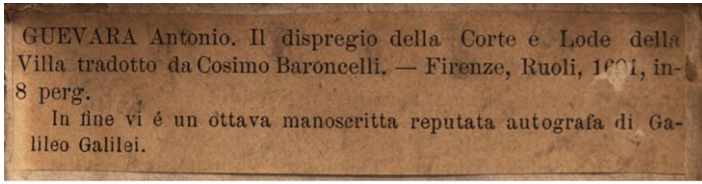


Figure 2. Detail from unnumbered guard page, recto, of Antonio de Guevara, *Il Dispregio della Corte, e Lode della Villa* (Florence: Ruoti, 1601). British Library 1478.c.44. Courtesy of the British Library, digitized by the Google Books project.

Google Books, where it appears that it was first used as a marking tool starting in the mid-nineteenth century, at least in the materials digitized to date by Google. The printed note (fig. 2) is part of the snippet preview of text in the Google Books search result (fig. 1). Much to the dismay of quantitative scholars of texts, the Google algorithm has struggled to distinguish between book plates (or other paratexts) and the contents of books, but that was advantageous here.⁴ After describing the book, the pasted information in figure 2, presumably from a late nineteenth or early twentieth-century Italian bookseller's catalogue, says: "At the end there is a handwritten octave reputed to be an autograph of Galileo Galilei."⁵ The authors of this note either overlooked or were unaware of the textual tradition of the madrigal verses. The only decipherable marks, other than the poem, are these notes from librarians or booksellers on the front cover and front guard sheet. There are collocation numbers and potentially lot numbers or a sale price written on the guard pages as well. Aside from a mark over the word *Mondogneto* on the title page, there are no other handwritten annotations on the 168 pages of the printed text, its prefatory material, or the index of chapters that appears at the end.

The stamp of the British Museum found throughout the volume is dated 28 March 1947. The British Library was founded in 1973, built in part from items in the British Museum Library, itself founded in 1753. The guide to British Library book stamps dates the acceptance of the volume into the collection in 1947.⁶ My communication with the Corporate Archives at the British Library revealed that there is no invoice for Guevara's book, although a

⁴See Ben Schmidt, "Digital History and the Copyright Black Hole," *Sapping Attention* (blog), 21 January 2011, <http://sappingattention.blogspot.com/2011/01/digital-history-and-copyright-black.html>.

⁵All translations are the author's unless otherwise indicated.

⁶See Christina Duffy, "A Guide to British Library Book Stamps," *British Library Collection Care Blog*, British Library, 23 September 2013, <https://blogs.bl.uk/collectioncare/2013/09/a-guide-to-british-library-book-stamps.html>.

group of Italian periodicals were accessioned on the same date. The backlog of cataloging gifts made to the museum during World War II persisted until the early 1950s, and public drives for paper salvage during the war resulted in more than 20,000 donations, some of which were rare books.⁷ Moreover, in this period, the Keeper of the Department of Printed Books, Henry Thomas, had a declared interest in collecting Spanish and Portuguese books.⁸ Yet, this copy of *Il dispregio della corte* escapes mention in Alston's 1994 survey of over 25,000 books with manuscript additions in the British Library. This is likely because no mention of manuscript notes is made in the library catalogue description, although Alston does report four other works by the author, Antonio de Guevara (1481–1545) in his survey.⁹ The digital catalogue of the British Library does not indicate any connection between this book and Galileo, nor does the print catalogue published after its accession in 1947.¹⁰ The only metadata that connects the book and the poem to Galileo rests in the pasted note that was temporarily a valid search result in Google Books.

Digital databases, such as that of the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale in Florence, where most of Galileo's annotated copies are held, are also inconsistent about whether the metadata in the catalogue entries mention a connection to Galileo. Some of the books have been incorporated into the Manoscritti Galileiani collection due to their marginalia. Others, which still bear the shelf marks identified by the late-nineteenth-century Galileo scholar Antonio Favaro as being exemplars from his library due to presumed Galilean marginalia, make no mention of their provenance, ownership, or connection to Galileo.

The digital layer of provenance of this book only further complicates *Il dispregio della corte's* long journey from Ruoti's press in Florence to the British Library in London. While knowing the identity of the donor or seller to the British Library could be helpful for authentication, the history of ownership was three hundred years long by the time it was accessioned. The inside front cover carries the most direct links to the history of the book involving Galileo, but auction and bookseller catalogues have not been systematically digitized to become a searchable repository of the changing fortunes of rare books. In this case, such a repository would need to cover an entire century of Italian book sales from the first uses of blue pencil in the 1850s until 1947. While knowing the identity of the bookseller could be helpful for tracing its provenance, this

⁷ See Harris, 586.

⁸ Harris, 583.

⁹ Alston, 255.

¹⁰ British Museum, 28.

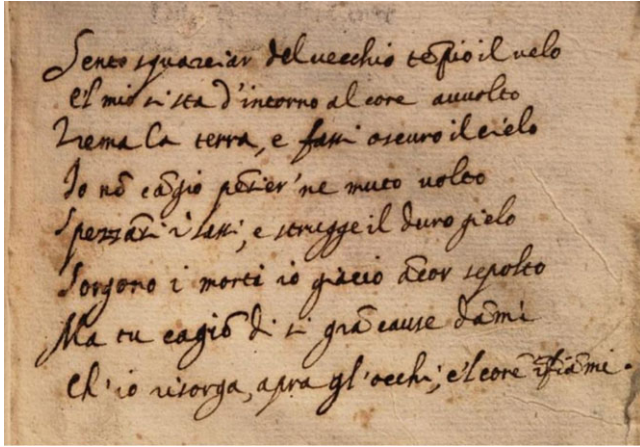


Figure 3. Detail from unnumbered final page, recto, of Antonio de Guevara, *Il Dispregio della Corte, e Lode della Villa* (Florence: Ruoti, 1601). British Library 1478.c.44. Courtesy of the British Library, digitized by the Google Books project.

would not be the first forged work to enter the market with a compelling, yet falsified, paper trail (or lack thereof).

In this sense, the book-poem hybrid offers only fragments of what Christopher Jones has called a “syntax of forgery.”¹¹ According to Jones’s elements of a successful imposture, the forger must find the right opportunity to make the work available, have the skills and materials to create the forged item, create a false provenance, and then ultimately be detected (in order to be revealed as a forgery rather than persist with a label of authenticity). Pending identification of the bookseller’s catalogue to reveal more about provenance, atmosphere, and audience, the remainder of this analysis focuses on the relationships between humanistic methods of interpretation and their role in attribution, misattribution, and forgery detection.

“SENTO SQUARCIAR” AS LITERARY TEXT

The recto side of the final page in the last octave gathering in this 1601 copy of Guevara’s *Dispregio della corte* became a manuscript edition of a sixteenth-century poem when someone wrote the following verses on it (fig. 3). Below are

¹¹C. P. Jones, 26.

a transcription and translation of the text in figure 3, with the abbreviations expanded in parentheses for later comparison to Galileo's writing practices:

Sento squarciar del vecchio te(m)pio il velo
 e'l mio si sta d'intorno al core avvolto
 trema la terra, e fassi oscuro il cielo
 Io no(n) ca(n)gio pe(n)sier' ne muto volto
 Spezza(n)si i sassi, e strugge il duro gielo
 Sorgono i morti io giacio a(n)cor sepolto
 Ma tu cagio(n) di si gra(n) cause da(m)mi
 ch'io risorga, apra gl'occhi, e'l core i(n)fia(m)mi.

I hear the veil rip from the old temple
 and mine stays wrapped around my heart.
 the earth trembles and the sky grows dark.
 I do not alter my thought or change my face.
 Rocks shatter and the hard ice melts.
 The dead rise. I lie still entombed.
 But you, reason for such great causes, grant to me
 that I rise again, open my eyes, and let my heart ignite.

The poem is a standard Italian ottava rima with an ABABABCC rhyme scheme. At its surface, the octave expresses diffidence and immobility in the face of literal earth-shattering change brought down from on high. It is a prayer that recognizes reluctance or resolve and asks for the strength for action or change.

While the "tu" (you) in verse 7 could be interpreted as a woman love interest of the poet, this imagery and these terms have a long history, echoing, first, Matthew 27:51–52. The verses from Matthew after Christ's death on the cross describe what is now an iconographic aftermath in the Christian tradition: "At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. / The tombs also were opened and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised."¹² In the poem, verses 1, 3, 5, 6, and 8 evoke aspects of this pivotal event. The "tu" (you) in verse 7 of the poem is then understood as the Christian God. The speaking subject of the poem describes an experience like that after the Crucifixion, the Harrowing of Hell, when the souls of Christians who died before Christ are redeemed by his death and allowed a place in heaven. The speaking subject in this poem is not among the holy who are saved.

The poem also echoes lines from the sixth-century CE *De actibus apostolorum* (On the acts of the apostles), written by the popular Northern Italian poet Arator (fl. 537–44). In a digression from the story of the apostle Peter curing a lame man, Arator draws on the symbolism of the Matthew verses, but adds more detail about the experience of the resistant, sinning subject. The

¹² Matthew 27:51–52.

passage is an attack on Judea and those who fought to suppress the worship of Christ. His second-person address creates a juxtaposition of divine and human wills that is matched in the structures of the lines of the poem on the last page of Guevara's book. Arator writes:

Sol ruit in tenebras, tu pectore nigra rebellas:
 arva tremunt concussa locis, tu fixior haeres:
 saxa crepant: tu dura manes; iam scission veli
 quae latuere diu nudavit mystica temple:
 lux tua nos adiit; tecum nox sola remansit.¹³ (I.321–5)

The sun falls down into darkness, you rebel in your black heart; the earth trembles when shaken from its place, you adhere more fixedly; the rocks crack, you remain hard. Now the tearing of the veil lays bare the mysteries of the temple which long were hidden. Your Light comes to us, with you night alone has remained.¹⁴

Arator describes the consequences of not converting: the Light (Christ), a Jew, is offered to Christians, but those who refuse to see him (the Jews) remain without the light of salvation. Arator's narrative introduces three elements to the imagery of events after the Crucifixion in Matthew 27:51–52: the heart of the subject (which remains veiled in the poem); the unchanging nature of the spirit; and the permanent night of death if resurrection is denied to the soul. Through this classical theological source, "Sento squarciar" evokes both a stubbornness in the face of tradition and an awareness, if not fear, of the outcome of not changing one's heart.

Thus far an analysis of literal, Christian allegorical, and source texts establishes a poetic "I" that is stubborn, yet perhaps hopeful of change, in the face of ruin. An imposture would need to capitalize on prevailing understandings of Galileo's character to successfully align the speaking subject of the poem with him. More than one individual, by perpetuating the attribution through multiple markings on the inside cover of the book, in what Silverstein has called "regimes of verification," heard enough resonance or saw convincing similarity between their idea of Galileo and the tone or appearance of the poem.¹⁵ Similarly, in an investigation of an ambitious sixteenth-century Italian forger, Walter Stephens paraphrases scholar D. C. Allen's explanation for the persistence of the forged texts as authentic: the forger "had told Europeans what they wanted to hear about the past."¹⁶ If Galileo did not write the words

¹³This connection seems to have been first noted by the editor Vincenzo Cavallucci in his edition of Francesco Beccuti's poetry: see Beccuti, 1750, 201–02.

¹⁴Arator, 34.

¹⁵Silverstein, 2.

¹⁶Stephens, S203.

on the page, the forger anticipated an audience that would want to hear his voice in these lines. Galileo's reputation for being stubborn has certainly persisted to this day in popular cultural memory as well as in the scholarly record.¹⁷ Thus, a modern audience would be receptive to such an imposture.

In a Galilean context, an intratextual reading adds a second interpretation to the cataclysm facing the speaking subject of the poem. The temple also evokes a metaphor that Copernicus used to describe the universe. Galileo was aware of this, paraphrasing it in the *Two Chief World Systems* (1632): "Copernicus admires the disposition of the parts of the universe since God constituted the great lamp, which had to provide the supreme light to all of His temple, in the center of it, and not from a part [of it]."¹⁸ In that sense, the veil being ripped from the temple would be the inherited Ptolemaic and Aristotelian conceptualization of the structure of the universe. The immobility would then be seen as inaction, not stubbornness. The prayer would be for the strength to pursue the course of action opened by this revelation.

Other literary aspects of these lines are less connected to Galileo. There is no evidence that he underwent a spiritual conversion of the kind that motivates the central prayer of the poem. Yet documents suggest that Galileo's relationship with spirituality was complicated. Historian Antonio Poppi discovered evidence of an inquisitorial investigation in Padua into accusations of heresy by one of Galileo's pupils in 1604.¹⁹ While the charges involved apparent belief in astrological practices and living a libertine lifestyle, Poppi paraphrased what to him was a comforting statement from the accuser: "Galileo always demonstrated great respect and is a true believer, even if his life does not conform to it."²⁰ In confirmation of this, an extant letter from Bonaventura Cavalieri (1598–1647), mathematics professor in Bologna, documents Cavalieri's attempts to send his former teacher a copy of Giovanni Panezio's *Dialogo tra Christo e l'anima* (Dialogue between Christ and the soul, 1625)

¹⁷ Literary scholar Andrea Battistini capitalized on this aspect of Galileo's personality when titling one of his final articles: "Un lettore esigente e puntiglioso: Galileo postillatore di Petrarca" (A demanding and stubborn reader: Galileo, annotator of Petrarch). The Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) NOVA special "Galileo's Battle for the Heavens" (2002) describes Galileo as "the famously stubborn scientist"; see <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/ancient/galileo-battle-for-the-heavens.html>.

¹⁸ Galilei, 1890–1909, 7:293. The original reads: "Il Copernico ammira la disposizione delle parti dell'universo per aver Iddio costituita la gran lampada, che doveva rendere il sommo splendore a tutto il suo tempio, nel centro di esso, e non da una banda."

¹⁹ Poppi, 69.

²⁰ Poppi, 76. The original reads: "Galileo dimostrò sempre grande rispetto ed è un vero credente, anche se la sua vita non vi è conforme."

during his house arrest, after his abjuration of Copernicanism at the end of the inquisitorial trial in Rome in 1633.²¹

Both forger and audience would have needed awareness of this lesser-known aspect of Galileo's life for the imposture or even a misattribution to be compelling. In that sense, a biographical reading of the religious literary aspects of the poem make an imposture or attribution harder to accept without more intimate knowledge of Galileo's spirituality. Similarly, the intratextual connection to Copernicus or the *Two Chief World Systems* is a small detail amid larger controversies surrounding Galileo and his telescope.

Importantly, though, this manuscript edition of the poem derives meaning not just from its literary underpinnings but also from the ways in which it departs from the print tradition of the octave before and during Galileo's lifetime.

“SENTO SQUARCIAR” IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

A comparison of this version of the octave to its early appearances in print provides an altogether different perspective on the (mis)attribution. The manuscript lines are a slight variation of an octave initially written by Francesco Beccuti (1509–ca. 1553).²² Beccuti, also called Il Coppetta, was a poet from Perugia and later affiliated with courtly life in Rome.²³ Some of his poetic compositions are critical of the court, condemning both murderous intrigues and the incongruity of expressed values of courtiers and their actual behaviors. He also composed jocular rhymes inspired by Francesco Berni (1497–1535), who was later one of Galileo's favorite poets. Beccuti's poems circulated as manuscripts, extant now in several European and American collections such as those removed from the suppressed convents of Florence, the personal archives of the twentieth-century Galileo scholar Stillman Drake, and one collection that also includes poetic works authored by Galileo.²⁴ Several of Beccuti's compositions were anthologized in print multiple times through the seventeenth century, but there is no evidence that Galileo owned any of these volumes.

Beccuti's spiritual poetry does not seem to have been as frequently anthologized until later in the sixteenth century. The earliest collection to include “Sento squarciar” appears to be a 1571 anthology by the translator Agostino Ferentilli (ca. 1550–ca. 1599), previously unreported in the scholarship on Beccuti.²⁵ Dozens of Beccuti's canzoni, stanzas, sonnets, and

²¹ Galilei, 1890–1909, 16:103–04.

²² On Beccuti, see Mutini.

²³ See Vermiglioli, 337–42.

²⁴ An *Iter Italicum* search for “Coppetta” lists nineteen different archival sources: see Iter, Inc. *Iter Italicum*: <https://italicum-itergateway-org>.

²⁵ Ferentilli, 23.

madrigals were collected in a standalone volume in Venice in 1580, including the poem in question.²⁶

Beccuti's later years, when he took on more roles in courtly life throughout the 1540s, were marked by spiritual compositions such as "Sento squarciar." Early twentieth-century literary scholar Abd-el-Kader Salza suggests that Beccuti's octave is part of a series in response to the death of a woman.²⁷ This interpretation emphasizes the Petrarchan conceit in which Eros and the Christian God are at times interchangeable. At a more abstract level, modern literary scholar Luigi Baldacci says: "Having to cross through the obligatory passage of religious experience, the poet will leave us an octave like *Sento squarciar del vecchio tempio il velo* as witness to his own vision and the immobility of his own situation."²⁸ The theme was so prevalent that one modern scholar has called the conversion literature of the sixteenth century a "common semantic field of experience at the time."²⁹ The poem has thus been read as biographical reflection and also as a composition that conforms to the genres of spiritual and conversion poetry.

Beccuti's inspiration was likely also driven in part by courtly life in Rome. His contemporary Vittoria Colonna (1492–1547) had written a sonnet that evokes the same biblical imagery, "Gli angeli eletti al gran bene infinito" (The angels elected to eternal bliss). First published in 1538, Colonna's evocation of the cataclysm at Christ's death relies on slightly different natural features to create its emotional effect:

Asconde il sol la sua fulgente chioma,
Spezzansi i sassi vivi, apronsi i monti,
Trema la terra anchor, turbansi l'acque.

The sun hides its beautiful, shining mane,
The living rocks break, the mountains burst open,
The earth and sky still tremble, the waters shake.³⁰

Colonna gives vernacular verse form to the imagery from Matthew 27 and Arator. Although modern scholars have not dated the composition of "The

²⁶ Mazzuchelli provides a comprehensive overview: see canto 2, stanza 2, 601–05.

²⁷ Salza, 103n1.

²⁸ Baldacci, 411. The original reads: "Dovendo varcare il passaggio obbligato dell'esperienza religiosa, il poeta ci lascerà un'ottava come *Sento squarciar del vecchio tempio il velo* a testimoniare la lucidità della propria visione e l'immobilità della propria situazione." Baldacci, 431n1, also remarks that the first line is evocative of Matthew 27:51: "Ecce velum templum scissum est in duas partes."

²⁹ Kendrick, 200n19.

³⁰ Colonna, 114–15, verses 9–11. Michelangelo's sonnet 298, "Non fur men lieti che turbati e tristi," adopts nearly the same phrasing. See Buonarroti, 292.

angels elected to eternal bliss,” its publication in 1538 and Beccuti’s later turn to spiritual poetry suggest that her sonnet was an inspiration. The two poets were following a Petrarchan poetic model, and both connected to a motif that was clearly popular in the cultural imaginary of the moment.

Nonetheless, there is no direct connection between Galileo and these source texts. While Galileo was an attentive editor of Petrarch, there is no evidence that he owned either Colonna’s 1538 edition or Beccuti’s posthumous 1580 collection that included “Sento squarciar.”³¹ Yet, shortly after the collected volume’s issuance, the poem began to appear in other musical and poetic printed works.

The musical afterlife of the poem was the most prolific. “Sento squarciar” was quickly set to music by Philippe de Monte (1521–1603) in *Il primo libro di madrigali spirituali* (The first book of spiritual madrigals, 1583) and then Luca Marenzio (1553–99) in *Madrigali spirituali di Luca Marenzio a cinque voci* (Spiritual madrigals by Luca Marenzio for five voices, 1584). The composer Philippe de Monte had worked in Italian courts in the early years of his career before returning to Central Europe in mid-century. Marenzio was a musician active in Rome, with origins outside Brescia, who only used this one poem from Beccuti as literary inspiration.³² The texts of de Monte and Marenzio’s “Sento squarciar” in 1583 are nearly identical to the Beccuti volume of 1580, with the exception of one elision.³³ A contemporary of Galileo’s father, Vincenzo Galilei Sr. (1520–91), Marenzio is a likely vehicle for the continued fame of the musical version of the lines, since this work was reprinted in 1588, 1606, and 1610. Modern critics consider him a virtuoso on the level of Monteverdi.³⁴ Beccuti’s poem appeared again as lyrics in a 1589 collection of madrigals for three voices by Giulio Zenaro (d. 1590) and as late as 1619 in a collection by Giovanni Francesco Anerio (1569–1630).³⁵

Marenzio’s contact with Florence, including the circle of Vincenzo Galilei Sr., would be consequential for his artistic development. He briefly joined the court of Ferdinando I de’ Medici in Florence in 1589 and contributed to the intermedii of

³¹The most thorough overview of Galileo’s engagement with Petrarch is Vianello.

³²See Chater, 19–20; and Arnold, 2–27.

³³See Marenzio, xxxi, where Ledbetter and Myers offer a translation of the text in their modern edition of Marenzio’s work: “I hear the veil of the old Temple rip, / and mine still stands before my eyes. / The earth trembles, the sky is darkened; / I do not change my thinking or my expression. / The rocks split, and I am ice cold. / The dead arise, I remain yet buried. / But you, cause of all these great events, grant / that I may rise; open my eyes, and let my heart be enflamed.”

³⁴Einstein, 2:608. See also Bizzarini, 165–70.

³⁵For a modern recording, refer to track 7 of Luca Marenzio and Gli Erranti’s *Madrigali spirituali* (2005): <https://open.spotify.com/track/3nNM1rLAWne41PI41X0rIf>.

the play that was performed in celebration of Ferdinando's marriage to Christina of Lorraine, both of whom would be Galileo's patrons in later years. Scholars agree that Marenzio's work after the Florentine episode represents a compromise with Vincenzo Galilei's musical ideals and precepts.³⁶ There is no evidence that Marenzio met either Galilei while part of the Medici court, but the music director of Santa Maria Novella in Florence did purchase both Marenzio and Monte's spiritual works in 1595.³⁷ Modern scholars also indicate that volumes such as this were used in private homes for both entertainment and marking liturgical rituals.³⁸ Several members of the Galilei family had documented talent and association with vocal and instrumental music, making composition and performance a regular part of Galileo's biography.³⁹

Alongside these musical publications were also print volumes intended for reflective use in religious and spiritual settings that incorporated "Sento squarciar." The first to appear was by Perugian Marc'Antonio Maltempo (fl. 1585), a four-part treatise that covers personal and regional history as well as the path to religious life and exemplary holy figures, his *Trattato* (1585). Maltempo copied "Sento squarciar" with attribution to Beccuti as part of his compilation of famous individuals of his time, along with other figures from Perugia. Later, the poem appeared in the *Laudi spirituali di diversi: Solite cantarsi dopo sermoni da rev. padri della congregazione dell'Oratorio* (Diverse spiritual lauds, typically sung after sermons by the revered fathers of the congregation of the Oratory, 1603) collected by Paolo Martinelli (ca. 1600). Martinelli includes "Sento squarciar" in the section of poems on the Passion of Christ, without attributing the lines to Beccuti.

In addition to these eleven print versions appearing during Galileo's lifetime, there are likely more copies of the poem in other collected volumes and manuscripts. Musicologist Linda Marie Koldau writes of current surveys of Marenzio's work in particular: "while Northern anthologies have not been taken into account in this place, it is to be expected that there is yet a wealth of Marenzio contrefacta to be found in Italian archives."⁴⁰

Beccuti's work, like Marenzio's, was clearly popular and circulated for nearly a century in print and manuscript, and both oeuvres were part of contemporary cultural knowledge. Yet awareness of Beccuti, Marenzio, and the others who had reprinted or claimed the poem had disappeared by the time the attribution was made to Galileo. The bookseller's note indicates "un'ottava

³⁶ Arnold, 27.

³⁷ Marenzio, xiv.

³⁸ Marenzio, xv.

³⁹ Fabris, 59.

⁴⁰ Koldau, 156.

manoscritta” (a handwritten octave), while the pencil markings call it an octave or writing of or by Galileo (fig. 2). This attribution of the poem itself, not only the writing of it onto the page of Guevara’s book, negates any value that the print or manuscript tradition might have for successfully instantiating an imposture. But if Galileo did write these words, his knowledge of the octave aligns with his known appreciation for the style of Beccuti’s work, and opportunities for contact with Marenzio existed for him at court, at church, and at home.

Where the multilayered literary analysis and contextualization lent itself to a receptive modern atmosphere for an imposture or misattribution, tracing the dissemination of the poem via print and manuscript supports the overall attribution (via plausibility, not direct attribution), while making the imposture look rather risky. Beccuti and Marenzio had to have fallen far enough into oblivion by the mid- or late nineteenth century that a book buyer would not have recognized the lines. The content, form, and location of the lines then becomes the evidence for the evaluation of method and interpretation of the poem as imposture and (mis)attribution.

“SENTO SQUARCIAR” AS A POST-1601 MANUSCRIPT EDITION

While “Sento squarciar” persisted in cultural memory, it underwent minor changes in its many subsequent reprintings. The differences between the manuscript version of the poem attributed to Galileo and other known printings suggests more than a forger only copying handwriting to transcribe evocative, biographically relevant poetic verses.

Overall, Beccuti’s poem was regularly subjected to minor edits from its first printing. Table 1, below, summarizes the differences across the eleven editions described above, as well as a mid-eighteenth-century edited volume of Beccuti’s work, and compares them to the lines attributed to Galileo. The table does not report punctuation, capitalization, and orthographical differences, focusing instead on lexicon. The exceptional inclusion of variants of heart (*cor*, *core*, *cuor*, *cuore*) will be discussed.

The table helps to visualize the consistency of print versions (verses 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6) and the ways in which both the musical tradition and the poetic reprintings introduced alterations (verses 5, 7, and 8).

Given the frequency with which Beccuti’s poems circulated as manuscripts, the variations in verses 4 and 8 likely reflect a textual tradition to which the eighteenth-century editor Cavallucci had access, but that textual tradition is not captured by the other eleven editions covered in table 1. Another possible explanation could be that whoever transcribed the poem misremembered the

Table 1 – Comparisons of print versions of “Sento squarciar” to the manuscript version attributed to Galileo. Citations to musical texts list the page for the canto voice, but all scores were consulted.

Verse	“Galileian” Manuscript Text	Same As	Variants
1	Sento squarciar del vecchio tempo il velo	all	
2	e’l mio si sta <u>d’intorno</u> <u>al core avvolto</u>		dinanzi (a) gli occhi: Anerio, 142–43; Beccuti, 1751, 162; Beccuti, 1580, 21; Ferentilli, 340; Maltempi, 75; Marenzio, 182–84; Martinelli, 226; Monte, 28; Zenaro, 23 accolto: Zenaro, 23
3	trema la terra, e fassi oscuro il cielo	all	
4	Io non <u>cangio</u> pensier’ ne <u>muto</u> volto	Beccuti, 1751, 162	muto . . . cangio il: Anerio, 142–43; Beccuti, 1580, 21; Ferentilli, 340; Maltempi, 75; Marenzio, 182–84; Martinelli, 226; Monte, 28; Zenaro, 23
5	Spezzansi i sassi, e <u>strugge il duro</u> gielo		io son freddo gielo: Beccuti, 1580, 21; Marenzio, 182–84 io non rompo il gielo: Anerio, 142–43; Beccuti, 1751, 162; Ferentilli, 340; Maltempi, 75; Martinelli, 226; Monte, 28; Zenaro, 23
6	Sorgono i morti io giacio ancor sepolto	all	
7	Ma tu <u>cagion</u> di <u>si gran</u> <u>cause</u> dammi	Ferentilli, 340; Maltempi, 75; Martinelli, 226; Zenaro, 23	cagion → Signor: Anerio, 142–43 si gran → tante: Monte, 28 cause → cose: Beccuti, 1580, 21; Beccuti, 1751, 162; Marenzio, 182–84
8	ch’io risorga, apra gl’occhi, e’l <u>core</u> infiammi.	Beccuti, 1751, 162	cor: Beccuti, 1580, 21; Maltempi, 75; Marenzio, 182–84; Monte, 28 cuor: Anerio, 142–43; Martinelli, 226; Zenaro, 23 cuore: Ferentilli, 340

exact lines, since the terms in question were interchangeable in Italian at the time. In verse 4, the order of the original verbs *muto* (alter) and *cangio* (change) has been reversed. The edit does not otherwise alter the meter of the verse.

While there could also be an underlying literary reference, the exchange does have a sonorous effect by eliminating the double nasal n-m sequence of *non muto*, replacing it with *ne muto*, easily pronounced without a hard stop between words. A similar, small edit to the sound of a line is found only in the 1751 edition of Beccuti's poem: the use of *core* in verse 8 instead of *cor*, *cuor*, or *cuore* as seen in the other printings of the octave. While these changes do reflect a sensitivity to poetic sound, it is unclear to whom these interventions should be credited.

There are two other notable differences between the manuscript (after 1601) and the known print exemplars of the poem. The changes in verses 2 and 5 offer clues to the identity of the writer, whether Galileo or not. These aspects of the manuscript edition of "Sento squarciar" in Guevara's book indicate concerns for style, sound, and cultural context. They also hew most closely to the reprintings of the poem rather than to those of the musical texts.

The changes to verse 2 primarily reflect a sensitivity to word usage and imagery. First, the speaking subject's veil originally was wrapped around the eyes in Beccuti's poem, and not the heart as it is in the manuscript. This substantive change shifts the tone of the poem from a battle of the senses and the spirit, a frequent Petrarchan theme, to a more directly spiritual and emotional internal conflict. The subject of the modified version in the manuscript lines is not blind, but resolute in what they feel. Importantly, with this edit, the sight of the subject is not impeded. They do not need to change what they see, but what they feel. Accordingly, a veil around the heart needs rending, not one around the eyes. The imagery also pairs somewhat better with closing of the octave, in which the subject asks for the grace to open their eyes, rather than uncover them. This change to "Sento squarciar" implies that while divine truths can be seen, the spirit must change in the face of apocalyptic threat.

An attribution to Galileo imbues this editorial change with philosophical significance. After all, the controversy surrounding Galileo's discoveries with the telescope was based on seeing moons orbit Jupiter, spots on the Sun, and the mountains on the Moon. There were those who refused to look through a telescope and Galileo later caricatured their stubborn dogmatic beliefs in the character of Simplicio in the *Dialogue on the Two Chief World Systems* (1632) and the *Discourses on Two New Sciences* (1636). In Galileo's words concerning the Church's 1616 ruling about Copernicanism, his opponents were the ones who suffered from "implacable obstinateness" ("implacabile ostinazione").⁴¹ At the same time, Galileo's supporters and closest colleagues also recognized his

⁴¹ Galilei, 1890–1909, 13:238.

own stubbornness in the face of the theological challenges being raised by his discoveries. Close compatriots urged him to leave Rome and stop insisting on the truth of his ideas. They advocated a change of heart, moving from semi-public arguments and demonstrations to quiet support, as a protective measure. The speaking subject of the poem—fighting their heart, not their eyes—recognizes both the value and the struggle necessary to conform.

As an imposture, the poem does not need this edit to convince its audience of the attribution to Galileo. This edit is not a signal of importance or rarity like the signatures, seals, and first-person narration of discovery that have marked, in particular, the forgeries recently brought to light by Nick Wilding. The change from eyes to heart relies on an audience already familiar with the poem (and thus aware that Galileo was not the author) for the Galilean interpretation to carry meaning.

The second edit to the same verse seems equally unnecessary for the imposture. The preposition *dinanzi* (after, behind, or near) has been substituted for *d'intorno* (around). This subtle edit corrects the imagery of the wrapped veil in the same line and signals a writer attuned to the relationship between words and the images they create. A veil wrapped after, behind, or near the eyes is an awkward, nearly nonsensical expression when taken literally. Beccuti's poem circulated in print unchanged in this regard (table 1) in spite of the grammatical and usage challenges it represented. While editors tinkered with other aspects of the poem, "dinanzi a gli occhi avvolto" was reproduced ten out of eleven times. If the goal of the imposture was to pass off the poem as Galileo's (rather than just the book and handwriting), the edit is unnecessary.

If the goal was less ambitious, it nonetheless required an audience aware of Galileo's poetic interests and editorial skills to maintain the convincing association with him. An edit of this kind evokes Galileo's interventions in the epic poem *Orlando furioso* (1516, 1521, 1532) by Ludovico Ariosto (1474–1533). Modern editor Alberto Chiari labeled these as "inexactitudes" ("inesattezze") when he reproduced Galileo's line edits.⁴² Many of these were typographical errors, others were suggested substitutions for what Galileo felt was a better word to express the poetic sentiment of the lines in the epic poem. Others reflect a deep concern for usage, including one note that suggests Ariosto should change two lines to correct phrasing related to the verb *chiamare* (to call): "People are called, not names" ("Si chiamano le persone, e non i nomi").⁴³ Whether or not the manuscript of "Sento squarciar" was written by Galileo, this change demonstrates a similar level of engagement with how the Italian language functions.

⁴² Galilei, 1943, 230–51.

⁴³ Galilei, 1943, 272.

The final edit to Beccuti's poem again strains the forgery theory while lending weight to a (mis)attribution to a late Renaissance reader such as Galileo. This change in the manuscript edition at the British Library continues the struggles that later editors had with the fifth verse. Later printed editions of Beccuti's poem provided a third option: "I do not break the ice" ("io non rompo il gelo"). Neither Colonna nor Michelangelo after her discuss ice. Colonna opted instead for water imagery, specifically "choppy water" ("torbide acque") in verse 11 of her sonnet.

In the possible Galilean revision to the line, instead of the subject being icy cold ("io son freddo gelo"), the hard ice melts ("strugge il duro gelo") as part of the cataclysm. The "hard ice" in the post-1601 revision of Beccuti's poem potentially returns to a closer echo of Arator's "hard" subject (verse 322). The phrasing smooths the sound of the verse as well as changes the line to fourteen syllables, matching the meter of the subsequent verse 6. This edit also repeats the grammatical structure of line 3, in which there are two dramatic external changes to juxtapose against the subsequent unchanging subject in the later lines. It also removes the redundancy of calling ice cold. Notably, multiple of Galileo's marginalia in the *Canzoniere* of Francesco Petrarca (1304–74) point out that the poet is being unnecessarily redundant.⁴⁴

While the conceit of hard ice (*duro gelo* or *gielo*) is relatively common in Italian poetry, the connection of ice to the iconography of Christ's descent into Hell after the Crucifixion seems to appear first in Dante's *Commedia*. In *Purgatorio* 20, as the pilgrim ascends the terrace of avarice, the mountain experiences an earthquake. The event marks the redemption of a soul and its passage to paradise, while evoking the cataclysmic events at the death of Christ described in Matthew 27. Dante, like Virgil and Statius before him, describes his physical reaction as metaphorically icy and a kind of death: "When I felt the mountain shake like a falling thing, and a chill seized me such as takes him who goes to death" ("quand' io senti, come cosa che cada, / tremar lo monte, onde mi prese un gelo / qual prender suol colui ch'a morte vada").⁴⁵ Beccuti's version in the 1580 collection, and Marenzio's madrigal after it, follow this textual tradition most closely. The "gelo" is more of a bodily chill than an external, solid ice.

The phrasing evokes the frozen Lake Cocito that imprisons sinners in the ninth circle of Dante's *Inferno*, but also the imagery of a fearful heart wrapped in ice in the *Rime* (1564) of Giacomo Marmitta (1504–61). For a poet like

⁴⁴Vianello, 246.

⁴⁵Alighieri, 2003, 2:20.127–29. Singleton provides classical and biblical sources in his commentary. See Alighieri, 1991, 2:42 (canto 9).

Marmitta, “duro gelo” is provoked by fear, disdain, indifference, and jealousy.⁴⁶ Galileo’s family did own a copy of Marmitta’s poetry, but extant documents do not establish that he necessarily read these poems.⁴⁷ Still, while the melting of hard ice around the heart does have a tradition in this kind of love poetry, the source for the edit to the verse might be found in another genre entirely.

In addition to these poetic representations, the combination of rocks, ice, and sinning subjects appears in devotional literature related to the rites of Communion, connecting better to the contexts of the reprinted poem than the musical tradition of “Sento squarciar.” For example, the popular *Delle pratiche di meditationi per avanti, e dopo la santissima Comunione* (On the practice of meditation for before and after the most holy Communion, 1619) by the well-regarded priest Cesare Franciotti, SJ (1557–1627) offers models for inspiring divine love within oneself. The text provides sermons as well as reflective soliloquies meant to be used by the reader. One soliloquy includes a citation from Luke 12:49: “I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!”⁴⁸ The subsequent interpretation of this biblical chapter unites the imagery of the broken stones and melted ice as the speaker addresses Christ in prayer: “You brought fire, when in conversation you used words so powerful that you broke the hard rocks of sinners, and so afire that they melted the hard ice of the hardened souls.”⁴⁹ Here is the clearest parallel with “Sento squarciar” in its version in the manuscript in Guevara’s book at the British Library. Rocks and hard ice are directly tied to sin. The prayer goes on to give thanks for the grace of Communion, which offers life after death, and describes the great flame that is ignited within the sinner to burn anything that is not sacred. There is likely a longer liturgical tradition underlying this expression as well as oral tradition surrounding masses and prayer.

The nonspecificity of the literary interpretations of this edit push instead for an evaluation of how the writer of this edition of the poem was reading rather than what they were reading for inspiration. The changes to the poem that are seen in the manuscript at the end of Guevara’s book reflect an author adept in the mechanics of poetry and attuned to the turn-of-the-seventeenth-century cultural moment in Italy. Admittedly, my next analysis focuses where an

⁴⁶ See Marmitta, 9 (“Timor che l cor di duro gelo avolto”), 71 (“Donna gentil qual tremolando l’acque”), 34 (“Ben m’accors’io che il duro gelo vinse”), and 39 (“Non hebbi in cotant’anni ingrato Amore”), respectively.

⁴⁷ In the inventory of books at the death of Galileo’s son is listed “Rime del Marmitta” (Archivio di Stato Firenze, Fondo Notarile Silvestro Pantera, 3483.3 [cited hereafter as Arch. 3483.3] fol. 114^r, line 25). Also reported in Favaro, 281 (entry 415).

⁴⁸ Luke 12:49.

⁴⁹ Franciotti, 85. The original reads: “Portaste il fuoco, quando conversando, havevate parole tanto potenti, che rompevate i duri sassi de’ peccatori, e tanto ardenti, che struggevate il duro gelo dell’Anime indurate.”

imposture would hope: Galileo's methods of reading and editing poetry. His training was similar to that of his contemporaries, but some details push back against imposture or even misattribution.

In terms of interventions in poetry, the changes to Beccuti's verses align with Galileo's other edits to Italian texts, such as works by Petrarch and Ariosto, not only in general poetic concerns but also in specific phrasing. The annotations that Galileo made in a 1582 edition of Petrarch's *Rime*, now with shelfmark Post. 60 at the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale Firenze, and reported by Nereo Vianello in 1956, include, among other marginalia, three types of corrections: grammatical, typographical, and poetic.⁵⁰ Galileo was attentive to improvements in sound, meter, and structure. His notes on Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* address similar concerns, in addition to other kinds of marginalia.⁵¹ In the notes for both poetic works, Galileo changes word order, phrasing, and terms. Certain substitutions and cancellations are clearly meant to improve the texts, either by comparing editions or by intervening in original ways. In addition to concerns about exact phrasing, editor Alberto Chiari created a category of Galileo's annotations called *durezze* (harshnesses) to highlight how often Galileo replaced words and phrases in Ariosto's poem with what was, to him, a better sounding alternative. Vianello listed examples of the same concern and edits in Galileo's marginalia for Petrarch's poems.⁵²

At first glance, the phrase *duro gielo* would seem to be a redundancy of the sort that Galileo frequently edited out of other poems. Yet, an example from Galileo's edits to *Orlando furioso* brings together these concerns as well as the imagery from "Sento squarciar." Galileo's student and amanuensis, Vincenzo Viviani (1622–1703), transcribed these notes from Galileo's copy of the book, the whereabouts of which are unknown today. In canto 12 of Ariosto's epic, Galileo amends the second of the following lines, given here in Italian and English: "Now beginning, the tepid streams / to melt the cold ice into tepid waves" ("Or cominciando i tepidi ruscelli / A sciorre il freddo ghiaccio in tepid'onde").⁵³ Galileo's edit changes the second line with the underlined terms "A sciorre il duro ghiaccio in liquid' onde" ("To melt the hard ice into liquid waves").⁵⁴ The lexical substitutions remove two obvious redundancies: the repetition of *tepid* and the declaration of ice to be cold. Moreover, Galileo can

⁵⁰Vianello, 243–50.

⁵¹Documented in Galilei, 1890–1909, 9:151–94. Vincenzo Viviani's copy of these annotations is in Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, Florence (cited hereafter as BNCF), Manoscritti Galileiani, Gal. 28 and BNCF, Gal. 29.

⁵²Vianello, 247–48.

⁵³Ariosto, 1:306 (canto 12, stanza 72, verses 1–2).

⁵⁴As given in Galilei, 1943, 276.

be seen engaging with the expression of the seemingly redundant phrasing of hard ice seen in “Sento squarciar.” The lexical change draws attention to a less obvious feature of ice while maintaining the rhyme with *cielo* (verse 3).

Again, these line edits do not seem necessary for a successful forgery of a Galilean manuscript. They require knowledge of Beccuti’s poem and Galileo’s habits of editing poetry to have an additive effect for convincing an audience of their provenance. Returning to Jones’s syntax of forgery, this embellishment, unlike a signature or seal, significantly restricts the size of an audience with that potential knowledge. The two substantive differences between the print tradition of “Sento squarciar” and the edition in the back of Guevara’s book point to a sensitivity for accuracy of the Italian language and align the poem overall with a broader literary and spiritual tradition. Galileo’s engagement with other poems suggest that he was attuned to details such as this, although he cannot be connected directly to any of the texts through ownership.

As a result, three possible narratives emerge. First, that Galileo indeed wrote the poem in the back of the book and his name stayed attached to the lines, but the awareness of Beccuti was lost by the time the book was sold in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. Trust existed between subsequent owners, sellers, and buyers to perpetuate the provenance claim, but not to support it beyond the handwritten and eventual typed notes on the inside cover. The importance of these lines and their edits point to a moment of introspection that has been undetected in other Galilean materials. Second, that someone else wrote the lines into this exemplar of Guevara in the seventeenth century, and owners in later centuries wanted to hear Galileo’s voice in the verses and in what they thought looked like his handwriting. The writer happened to reflect the contemporary sensitivities for poetic style that can be found in extant Galilean marginalia. Or, finally, that a forger transposed the lines edited in a manner similar to Galileo in a handwriting that was convincing enough to pass as his, at a time open to seeing the natural philosopher as both stubborn and at a moment of spiritual and institutional impasse. This is potentially where the poem’s location in Guevara’s book can further help to evaluate both the likelihood of these paths and the methods for determining them.

CONTEXTUALIZING THE MANUSCRIPT WITHIN *IL DISPREGIO DELLA CORTE*

That this variation of Beccuti’s poem is found at the end of a copy of the 1601 edition of Antonio de Guevara’s text creates an overall message that situates the spiritual, if not cosmic, crisis of the poem squarely in the courtly environment of patronage and politics. Guevara was a Spanish Franciscan active at the royal court of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, a commissioner for the

Inquisition, the official chronicler of Emperor Charles V, and Bishop of Guadix and then of Mondoñedo. Modern biographers hint that he may have been a direct contributor to the anonymous mid-sixteenth-century picaresque novel *Lazarillo de Tormes*.⁵⁵ Originally published in 1539 with the Spanish title *El Menosprecio de Corte y Alabanza de Aldea*, Guevara's work was translated into English as early as 1548, but into Italian only in 1601, with a reprinting in 1602.

At one level, Guevara's book functions as a juxtaposition of urban, political, courtly life and a more idyllic, devout, rural existence. But both lifestyles are critiqued, and the work is framed as a preparation for a holy death via a mock-legal chronological assessment of regrets that had accumulated over a lifetime.⁵⁶ The overall message is that courtiers should escape the courtly environment before they are thrown out or worse. As such, the book fits into a genre of writing that both described and criticized the system of patronage and pageantry that sustained much artistic and intellectual work across Europe in the late Renaissance.

While there are many classical, medieval, and Renaissance inspirations for such a story of conversion away from the urban to the bucolic, the book should not be taken just at its surface. As one modern editor summarizes: "This, like all of the secular books by Fra Antonio de Guevara, without any exception at all, is full of false quotations, imaginary authors, fabulous characters, apocryphal laws, anecdotes of pure invention, and geographical and chronological entanglements that astonish and confuse."⁵⁷ Early modern readers might have found this style similar to that of Cervantes (1547–1616). European Renaissance readers familiar with Ariosto would recognize the narrative strategies of Archbishop Turpin, on whom Ariosto claims to rely for comedic effect.⁵⁸ Galileo would capitalize on this in *The Assayer* (1623), where he cites Ariosto citing Turpin, and, winking to the reader, adds, "everyone knows how truthful he is and how necessary it is to believe him."⁵⁹ For a reader inclined to approach courtly life with suspicion, *Il dispregio della corte* offered a fun, biting tour of an uncomfortably familiar space.

⁵⁵J. R. Jones, 103.

⁵⁶J. R. Jones, 99–103.

⁵⁷Guevara, xvii. The original reads: "Este, como todos los libros profanos de Fray Antonio de Guevara, sin excepción alguna, está lleno de citas falsas, de autores imaginarios, de personajes fabulosos, de leyes apócrifas, de anécdotas de pura invención y de embrollos cronológicos y geográficos que pasman y confuden."

⁵⁸For a high-level Italian-Spanish analysis, see MacPhail.

⁵⁹Galilei, 1623, 183.

Guevara's text thus makes for a curious but evocative frame for this handwritten variation of "Sento squarciar." Both offer inflection points in the lives of their first-person subjects. Both describe the unease of that subject vis-a-vis institutions of authority. Together, they make a powerful statement about the competing obligations of a member of a princely court, who on the one hand must conform to a certain style of behavior for success and on the other risks spiritual crisis or disaster as a result of the conformity.

This thematic framing for "Sento squarciar" adds new complexity to the three possible hands that put pen to page to create this book-poem hybrid: the forger, the misattributed writer, and Galileo. The successful imposture and misattribution depend on Galileo having a reputation of engagement with princely courts, and a sometimes problematic one at that. Modern historian Mario Biagioli has authored the definitive study on the subject, *Galileo, Courtier* (1993). In all cases of the status of this poem, the "tu" to which it is addressed could then be understood as the Medici court in Florence or the papal court in Rome, or perhaps even both. These institutions were the arbiters of behavior, morality, and fame, the secular forms of judgment and afterlife rather than the spiritual ones that Arator, Colonna, Beccuti, or Marenzio described in their verses. The change of heart (not eyes) longed for by the poetic self in the poem gains the connotation of maneuvering through courtly politics.

In that sense, the spirit of the "Sento squarciar"-*Disprezio della corte* combination could align with several moments in Galileo's life. The poem narrates a spiritual crisis at a literal turning point in the physical and theological heavens. Galileo's encounters with the Inquisition in 1616 and 1633 represent a similar nexus of colliding world views in the debates over two natural philosophical systems (Ptolemaic and Copernican), questions of method (Aristotelian logic and the new science of empiricism), and post-Reformation attitudes toward the interpretation of religious dogma. The circumstances and events in 1615 and 1616 offer one example for extending the interpretation. This is also when "Sento squarciar" had reached peak popularity in print, and when key players in the creation of the Italian translation of Guevara's critique of courtly life were interacting with Galileo and his patrons in Florence.

Galileo had arrived at the Medici court in Florence a few years prior and was pulled into a debate resulting from conversations involving the grand duke and duchess, as well as courtiers, mathematicians, and other intellectuals. One of the central challenges to the Copernican system was how a supposedly stationary sun could have stopped in the sky at the Battle of Gibeon to miraculously help the Israelites defeat the Amorites, as reported in Joshua 10. As the conflict spiraled, Galileo found himself trying to maintain the value of his telescope and his conclusions while addressing, but also trying to avoid interpreting, scripture. He was called to Rome, another courtly environment of

intellectual and artistic competition, as part of the inquiry into the heterodoxy of the Copernican theory and whether he had committed heretical acts by entering into debate over interpretation of biblical passages that discuss the cosmos. He needed to walk a fine line to maintain his privileged status as intellectual groundbreaker at the Medici court in Florence and rule-abiding follower of the papal edict. If the poem is indeed Galileo's work, it is an expression of his awareness of the conflict between seeing the truth and arguing for it. Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956) used this image in his nuclear-age drama *Galileo* (1938).

Beyond a thematic aura of connection to Galileo, the possible connections between him and those who created the book, particularly the translator and dedicatee, support this contextualization in the years surrounding the anti-Copernican movement in Florence and the investigation in the fall and winter of 1615 into the unorthodoxy of Galileo's writings. The translator of *Il dispregio della corte*, Cosimo Baroncelli (1569–1626), overlapped with Galileo at the Medici court in Florence for several years. Existing correspondence from his role as secretary for Don Giovanni de' Medici (1567–1621) shows that Baroncelli was aware of the political maneuvering that faced Galileo between the archduke's court and the papal court in Rome.⁶⁰ Importantly, as historian of science Massimo Bucciantini has described, Giovanni de' Medici represented a method of inquiry and argumentation that was antithetical to Galileo's epistemology of mathematically informed observation and experimentation.⁶¹ The Medici court in Florence was thus both a bastion of support from some members and the site of potential skepticism, if not challenge, from others. According to Bucciantini's analysis of correspondence surrounding Giovanni de' Medici, his circle did not believe that Galileo would persevere in Rome, let alone that his ideas would gain traction. Considering Galileo as a potential owner of Guevara's book, with Baroncelli at the helm, adds an extra valence to its interpretation as a frame for "Sento squarciar." Not only could cataclysmic results ensue from a negative outcome in Rome, but the courtly environment in Florence was far from stable or serene.

Moreover, Galileo had significant and sustained contact with the book's dedicatee, Cosimo Ridolfi (1570–1619).⁶² In May 1613, Galileo's friend and supporter Filippo Salviati (1582–1614) wrote to Prince Federico Cesi (1580–1635) about long conversations with Galileo on potential new members of the *Accademia dei Lincei* (Academy of Lynxes), which Cesi had established in 1603 to support inquiry in natural philosophy. Salviati and Galileo were

⁶⁰Bucciantini, 15.

⁶¹Bucciantini, 14.

⁶²I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer of this article for pointing out this connection.

proposing one of Galileo's students, mathematics professor Benedetto Castelli (1578–1643), and Cosimo Ridolfi, presented as “a free-thinking philosopher, knight of very noble concepts, a man of very great learning, and one who in all his actions gives honor and glory to his [high-ranking] family, rather than begging it for them.”⁶³ Ridolfi was also a distant relation of Salviati.⁶⁴ Cesi wrote to Galileo with his approval ten days later.⁶⁵ Cesi included greetings to Ridolfi at the end of several letters to Galileo, creating the sense that the two spent time together frequently in Florence.⁶⁶

Historian and Galileo scholar Federica Favino has recently shed new light on Ridolfi's complex relationship with the Lincei, Florentine court culture, and the intellectual circles that supported and opposed Galileo's new science and Copernicanism. According to testimony provided to the Florentine Inquisitor prior to the ban on support of Copernicus in 1616, Ridolfi had been present at conversations with the parish priest Giannozzo Attavanti in the Florentine monastery of Santa Maria Novella that provoked an anti-Copernican sermon in November 1614 by Tommaso Caccini (1574–1648).⁶⁷ Caccini made reference to topics discussed at a 1613 dinner at the Medici court, hosted by Grand Duke Cosimo II (1590–1621) and the Grand Duchess Christina of Lorraine (1565–1637), at which Castelli defended Galileo from thinly veiled accusations of heresy for supporting the idea of the motion of the earth and a stationary sun. That conversation, and several intermediary letters, ultimately prompted Galileo to write the *Letter to the Grand Duchess* (1615) that attempted to distinguish theological reading goals and methods from those of empiricist, Copernican observation, experience, and argumentation. Those circumstances eventually led to his first trial in Rome for suspected heresy in the winter of 1615. Thus, as Favino highlights, Ridolfi's membership in the *Accademia dei Lincei* developed while the anti-Copernican movement was gaining momentum in Florence.⁶⁸

In addition, Favino convincingly connects the parish priest Attavanti, Cosimo Ridolfi, the translator Cosimo Baroncelli, and one of Galileo's key intermediaries in Rome, Cardinal Alessandro Orsini (1592–1626), to the circle of alchemical investigations in Florence supported in large part by Don Giovanni de' Medici.⁶⁹ Orsini was an important bridge between the papal court

⁶³ Translation from Favino, 134. Original in Galilei, 1890–1909, 11:510.

⁶⁴ Favino, 136.

⁶⁵ Galilei, 1890–1909, 11:515.

⁶⁶ Galilei, 1890–1909, 11:561, 599, for example.

⁶⁷ Favino, 131.

⁶⁸ Favino, 135.

⁶⁹ Favino, 137–47.

in Rome and the Medici court in Florence during the winter of 1615, as well as a supporter of Galileo in later years. From a series of letters in the Orsini archive, Favino has shown that Ridolfi took a leading role in alchemical experiments from at least 1616 until his death in 1619: “The sources examined leave no doubt about his adherence to the *entourage* . . . of Don Giovanni de’ Medici and their vision of the world including a place for alchemy and cabalism.”⁷⁰ At the end of her analysis, Favino leaves room to speculate that the motives for including Ridolfi in the Lincei might have been due less to intellectual affinities than to individual politics and power plays related to Galileo’s status at the court and in the *Accademia dei Lincei*.

If Ridolfi is (or is meant to be) the connection between Galileo and this copy of *Il dispregio della corte*, the historical context is then likely the years 1613–19, when the controversy around Copernicanism reached a dramatic apex for Galileo by 1616. If the book were a gift from the translator Baroncelli or from Ridolfi to Galileo, the change of heart in the lines of the poem takes on the significance of a shifted relationship with the broader Medici court, beyond the Grand Duke’s immediate family. If the first line of the poem represents Copernicus having ripped the veil from the temple of the universe, and the cataclysm that followed the theological and political battles around the consequences of a sun-centered universe, then the poem’s appearance in the back of a book dedicated to Ridolfi suggests that the lines were a reaction to the necessary courtly maneuverings in Florence and Rome for personal success.

A forger could have capitalized on this connection to establish credible provenance. A misattribution could have similarly relied on knowledge of the connection between Ridolfi and Galileo to justify hearing Galileo’s voice or seeing his handwriting in these lines of “Sento squarciar.” Thus, an analysis of the textual frame of the poem and the potential historical context of its creation lead to an inconclusive result.

CONTEXTUALIZING *IL DISPREGIO DELLA CORTE* WITHIN GALILEO’S LIBRARY

The materiality of the madrigal-book hybrid is perhaps more important than thematic or contextual connections for evaluating the attribution. To that end, the following remarks will situate the manuscript and book within Galileo’s habits related to book ownership and annotation. This will include one comparative example of handwriting, supplemented by the appendix. I will turn then to the history of the transmission of his annotated books from his death to known exemplars today. For the imposture and (mis)attribution to withstand

⁷⁰Favino, 155. Emphasis in the original.

scrutiny, the book and the verse marginalia should not seem out of place in Galileo's collection. The contextual information reported here is the result of returning to the primary sources related to Galileo's books (correspondence and inheritance documents) in consultation with catalogues of printed books of the period.

First, the conditions of the production of the book are not anomalous in Galileo's library. Guevara's book would be the only title printed by Bartolommeo Ruoti in the library, but of the 306 known printers of books in Galileo's collection, 222 produced only one title that he owned. Even though the book was printed in Florence in 1601, when Galileo was living in the Veneto, this does not make it an outlier. Of the eighty-nine books from his library printed during the years of Galileo's time in the Veneto (1592–1610), thirty-one were printed in Padua and Venice. Fourteen were from Florence, the rest were printed in nineteen other cities in Italy and Europe. Only one other previously identified book in the collection was printed in 1601, but the 565 books with a known year of publication are distributed over a span of 169 years, with 1609 as the median. In that sense, Guevara's book would not seem unusual in the context of the material patterns of Galileo's book collection.

Baroncelli's edition of Guevara's volume fits within the small subset of Spanish works in Italian translation in the inheritance documents related to Galileo's library. These include *Lazariglio di Tormes* (to which Guevara was rumored to have contributed), both volumes of the picaresque *Don Chisciotte*, as well as the epic tale *Historia delle gloriose imprese di Polendo* (History of the glorious feats of Polendo, 1611).⁷¹ The thematic connections to critique of courtliness and the style of Turpin would have resonated with an attentive reader of Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*, as Galileo was known to have been. Thematically, then, Guevara's text is not a surprise in the library.

Moreover, there are two extant instances of Galileo writing seemingly unrelated notes in a book written by another author. In one instance he has used the blank pages as scrap paper, which may also serve as his assessment of the value of the text. On the guard papers of a work on the geometric compass, plagiarized by Baldassare Capra (1580–1626) from Galileo's manual on the same topic, one can still see reminders, apparent checklists, and doodles that Galileo wrote.⁷² These sheets might have been the nearest paper for capturing thoughts, but Capra's text might also have seemed worthless.

⁷¹ Arch. 3483.3, fol. 115^r, lines 4–5, lines 15–16, and lines 7–8, respectively. Provided in Favaro, 284 (entries 458 and 456), and 275 (entry 330), respectively.

⁷² See BNCF, Gal. 40, <https://teca.bncf.firenze.sbn.it/ImageViewer/servlet/ImageViewer?idr=BNCF0003619812>.

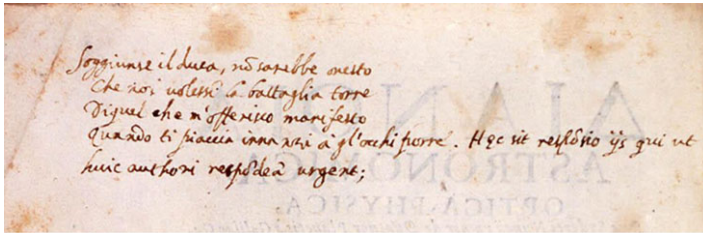


Figure 4. Detail from the verso of the title page of Gal. 56, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze. Su concessione del Ministero della Cultura - Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze. È vietata ogni ulteriore riproduzione con qualsiasi mezzo.

The exemplar that best matches the “Sento squarciar” material conditions also occurs in a book in which Galileo found little value. On the back of the title page of *Dianoia astronomica* (Understanding of astronomy, 1611) by Francesco Sizi (early seventeenth century), Galileo copied lines from *Orlando furioso*.⁷³ Sizi had been one of the early opponents of Galileo’s telescope, refusing to look through it even though his book was an objection to Galileo’s observations. Nearly all of Galileo’s marginalia in the volume are in Latin, pointing out typos, grammatical errors, obscure sayings, and a few declarations of outright falsehoods. Dashes and underlines litter the pages in a fury of rejection, but the verso of the title page received special attention. As in the case of the Beccuti lines attributed to him, in this instance Galileo transcribed memorized lines of poetry on the pages of a bound book.

Aside from offering a valuable handwriting sample (to be discussed briefly below), the annotation in figure 4 establishes a precedent, both for using poetry as a commentary on current events and for using blank pages for verses. Importantly, Galileo has slightly modified Ariosto’s verses in his reaction to Sizi’s attack on the *Starry Messenger*. He also adds a Latin note of explanation:

Soggiunse il duca, no(n) sarebbe onesto
 che noi volessi(m) la battaglia torre
 di quel che m’offerisco manifesto
 quando ti piaccia innanzi à gl’occhi porre. Haec sit responsio ijs qui ut huic
 authori respo(n)dea(m) urgent.⁷⁴

⁷³BNCF, Gal. 56. Available in digital format: <https://teca.bncf.firenze.sbn.it/ImageViewer/servlet/ImageViewer?idr=BNCF0003662620>.

⁷⁴Ariosto, 1:107 (canto 5, stanza 40, verses 1–4). Favaro records this note in Galilei, 1890–1909, 3:204, but with modern capitalization and punctuation, without indicating where abbreviations were expanded. Gebler, 39, addresses this annotation, but likely copied the verses as reported Allan-Olney, 57. Unlike what Allan-Olney and Gebler report, Galileo did write other annotations in the volume.

The duke added: It would not be good form
 if we wanted to take up battle
 over that which I offer myself, manifest,
 when it pleases you, to put before your eyes. This is the response to those who
 urge me to respond to this author.

Galileo's transcription of the third line changes "t'offerisco" ("I offer to you") to a more literary variant "m'offerisco" ("I offer myself"). This and other examples of both implicit and explicit citation of poetry show that Galileo was keen to find the right verse or verses for the moment. Here, he draws from a dramatic competition between two characters over a woman. One character is using all manner of schemes to deceive the other. Galileo's message is clear: there is no use arguing if they are not looking at the same thing.

The annotation carries a further striking, albeit subtle, parallel with "Sento squarciar" in the copy of *Il dispregio della corte*: it was also an instance of writing to an audience in a personal copy of a book that might only ever be seen by Galileo. Galileo's lines from Ariosto are a message to colleagues who urged him to reply formally to Sizi, and yet, without access to his copy of the book, they'd never see it. So too the lines of "Sento squarciar," thoughtfully written onto the last page of Guevara's book, invoke an absent "tu" at the end of an otherwise unmarked book that was closed and placed on a shelf. Sizi's volume was eventually given to Vincenzo Viviani by Galileo's son, Vincenzo Jr. (1606–49), according to the note on the front flyleaf.⁷⁵ If it did belong to Galileo, without any markings at the front or on the pages of the Guevara volume it is possible that even in a search for valuable items on the family bookshelves, Vincenzo Jr. might still have overlooked something like this, contributing to its obscurity in the record.

Galileo's reappropriated lines used as a preface to Sizi's volume (fig. 4) offer an opportunity to compare the shape, spacing, pen lines, and abbreviations to the manuscript edition of "Sento squarciar" in Guevara's *Il dispregio della corte*. "Sento squarciar" would be a nearly identical intellectual and material process, in addition to the (easily mimicked) pen strokes of the lettering. The annotation offers important provisos for any handwriting analysis. The four *p*'s in lines 4 and 5 have entirely different tails and at least three unique heads. The mark to signal the abbreviation o(n) in lines 1 and 4 do not have the same shape. The letter *d* in lines 1, 3, 4, and 5 appears in three distinct forms. The variations are potentially, but not necessarily, dependent on ligatures with the vowels that follow them. In short, aspects of Galileo's handwriting are internally inconsistent.

The appendix zooms in to capture both this variation and similarities with the capital *S* (line 1), the *gg* (line 1), *gl'occhi* (line 4), and other ligatures that exist in this annotation and "Sento squarciar." Because the words in "Sento squarciar"

⁷⁵ BNCF, Gal. 56, fol. iii^r.

are rare overall in the Galilean corpus, let alone in manuscripts confirmed to be in his hand, the appendix primarily focuses on short sequences of one to two letters. For every entry that finds similarity, there is at least another one that shows a difference, sometimes in the same line. Since Galileo's handwriting has been forged repeatedly, and revealed as such, I offer this evidence to show the patterns and gaps where an impostor could insert "Sento squarciar." Given the idiosyncrasies of Galileo's hand within documents and over his lifetime, as well as the relative ease of copying ligatures, this analysis contributes the least to interpreting the attribution.

The Galilean provenance of Guevara's volume falls into a murky area typical of the fate of Galileo's annotated volumes. As part of the larger research project that brought to light this manuscript in the back of *Il dispregio della corte*, I completed a systematic review of the books confirmed or presumed to contain Galileo's marginalia. Of the sixty-three titles in this group, three were challenged as misattributions over a century ago and twelve were last seen or known to have been in private collections, the whereabouts of most of which have since been lost or obscured. Nick Wilding has also provided compelling evidence that the marginalia and signatures attributed to Galileo in an Aldine edition of the classical poet Horace and the astronomical Alphonsine Tables are counterfeits.⁷⁶ The rest have slowly made their way into the holdings of Italian libraries, primarily, but not exclusively, in Florence. In that sense, Guevara's book would be exceptional for its current location at the British Library. However, other Galilean manuscripts left Florence for the British Museum.⁷⁷ Given the collapse of Italian aristocratic society and the sale of family possessions at auction in the second half of the nineteenth century, many rare volumes were dispersed far beyond Italy or England.

The copy of Guevara's book at the British Library also aligns with other trends (or lack thereof) related to accepted Galilean marginalia. Only five books contain an *ex libris* indication of Galileo's ownership, so there is no expectation to find Galileo's signature or name in books that belonged to him. In fact, the work's authenticity would be more suspect if it bore his name. In addition to the two volumes that Wilding has identified as likely impostures, the other books that do have his signature include one from the press of Aldus Manutius (1449–1515), a book that belonged to Giorgio Vasari (1511–74), and a copy of *De Magnete* (On magnets, 1600) by William Gilbert (1544–1603). These first two are books with material histories that marked them as valuable during Galileo's

⁷⁶Wilding, 49–50.

⁷⁷Galilei, 1890–1909, 5:15n2. The original reads: "Il Sig. Egerton Brydges acquisto' questo manoscritto, che contiene anche altri autografi di Galileo, da F. Fontani, bibliotecario della Riccardiana di Firenze." The manuscript also contains the hand of an amanuensis.

lifetime and that continue to carry recognition of their worth. In his book, Gilbert played a fundamental role in the development of Galileo's theories of motion. The status of these works' authenticity has not been challenged. Four out of the accepted sixty books with marginalia, including Gilbert, contain only one annotation like the Guevara title.

The fact that no other seventeenth-century sources mention this volume is also not surprising. Fifty out of the sixty titles related to marginalia avoided all documentation of their connection to Galileo until long after his death. There are another ten titles, in addition to those already identified, for which an annotated copy would be expected, but no mention of them is made in book lists related to Galileo's family, nor have they appeared on the modern book market. Overall, the book is not unusual in his collection. It is surprising precisely for its lack of sensational attributes.

Part of the reason that so many of the extant books with Galilean annotations are not found in the documentation related to his children's inheritance or other sources is that his eldest son and likely also his grandson sold them to ease the financial burdens facing the family. While the hand does not match that of Galileo's son Vincenzo Jr., or that of his grandson Cosimo (1636–72), there is still room for skilled imitation.⁷⁸ Could Vincenzo Jr. or other booksellers have conspired to create such an elaborate forgery? Certainly. Modern examples of forgeries of Galilean books filled headlines in 2012 with the canceled auction of an elaborately fabricated proof copy of the *Sidereus Nuncius* (Starry messenger).⁷⁹ Forged manuscripts of letters and book drafts constitute an altogether different problem, as Nick Wilding's recent discoveries at the University of Michigan have revealed.⁸⁰

But these are instances of someone attempting to mimic Galileo as author of something reported to have existed in other sources. Considering the material and cultural knowledge necessary to make sense of the connection to Galileo, any presumed forger would have had to do more than fabricate the ink and script. Labeling "Sento squarciar" as Galileo's without editing the poem would have been sensational enough, bringing to light a crisis of knowledge and spirituality tucked in the back of a book not meant to be seen, but important enough to write down.

It is quite easy to insert a forgery into a history as full of gaps as that of Galileo's library. As Christopher P. Jones points out in his syntax of forgery, provenance,

⁷⁸A comparison to BNCF, Gal. 161, fol. 40^r shows the different angles for the loops on *d* and *p* as well as the tops of *g* in Cosimo's handwriting. <https://teca.bncf.firenze.sbn.it/ImageViewer/servlet/ImageViewer?idr=BNCF0003625172>.

⁷⁹See Wilding.

⁸⁰See University of Michigan Library, "The Galileo Manuscript."

closely related to these material histories, is “where forgeries often break down.”⁸¹ In this case, an imposture has ample space for invention, a misattribution finds few details to resist a willful echo of Galileo’s voice in the edited lines of “Sento squarciar,” and an authentic Galileo manuscript suffers from lack of evidence.

DOES IT MATTER IF THIS WAS GALILEO’S BOOK?

It is tantalizing to hear Galileo’s voice and poetic skill in the voice of the speaking subject of the manuscript poem. Thematically, and I would argue even in many of the details, the connections between “Sento squarciar,” *Il dispregio della corte*, and Galileo are plausible, evocative, and compelling. But I absolutely run the risk of joining the wilful misattributers. That is why this article focused on the methods for interpreting the little evidence offered by this book-poem to attribute it to Galileo. Literary analyses through intratextual and biographical interpretations support the forgery and the attribution theories alike. Contextualization within the print tradition of the poem undercuts the imposture theory, but the inconsistencies of the handwriting support it. Recreating the reading method used to edit the poem points to early modern textual practices, but a consideration of Galileo’s collecting practices reveals significant opportunity to place a forgery. Historical identification of the relationship between Galileo and the dedicatee Ridolfi provide a possible line of provenance of the book and provocation to adapt the lines of the poem to the specific context of the Medici court in the 1610s. No method is sufficient; together, they invite continued discussion of how humanists evaluate their materials and of how or why the temptation to connect materials to Galileo persists.

If these lines of poetry are a later misattribution to Galileo, it is because they resonate with the subsequent mythology surrounding him. The persecution and suffering of Christ as martyr align with the modern Brechtian associations of Galileo suffering for the higher cause of scientific truth. The verses give dramatic context to the competing world views of dogma and personal motivation. If this is a misattribution, it reflects a collective understanding of Galileo that wants to connect him to Beccuti’s poem of crisis and Guevara’s book of critique. If it is a forgery, though, it reflects a deep cultural contextual knowledge of far more than the material production of Galileo’s handwriting. Finally, approaching the four hundredth anniversary of the trial that ultimately resulted in Galileo’s condemnation, the rediscovery of this book is a reminder that there can still be surprises in the study of a figure who has already received so much scrutiny from so many institutions in these four centuries.

⁸¹C. P. Jones, 31.

Crystal Hall is an Associate Professor of Digital Humanities in Digital and Computational Studies and an affiliated faculty member of Italian Studies at Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine. Her research and teaching focus on the relationship between technology, textual expression, and the creation of knowledge, with specializations in premodern Italy and the digital and computational artifacts of the twenty-first-century United States.

APPENDIX

Comparison of letters, ligatures, and words in “Sento squarcia” and three Galilean manuscripts. The details of the image from the manuscript of “Sento squarcia” are reproduced here courtesy of the British Library, digitized by the Google Books project. The samples from *Manoscritti Galileiani* (MS Gal.) are provided with the following permissions: Su concessione del Ministero della Cultura - Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze. È vietata ogni ulteriore riproduzione con qualsiasi mezzo.

	"Sentio squarciar," British Lib. 1478.c.44	BNCF Ms. Gal. 56, post-1611, c. 1v	BNCF Ms. Gal. 54. Galileo to Dini 1611, c. 18v.
d	 	 	
o(n)	 	 	
p	 	 	
q			
s	 		
gg			
st	 	 	
ssi			
la			
rr			
ga			
gl'occhi			
gra(n)			
pensier			
oscuro			
intorno			

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