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978-1-107-04376-3 - Michelangelo's Christian Mysticism: Spirituality,  
Poetry, and Art in Sixteenth-Century Italy

Sarah Rolfe Prodan

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## MICHELANGELO'S CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM

In this book, Sarah Rolfe Prodan examines the spiritual poetry of Michelangelo in light of three contexts: the Catholic Reformation, Renaissance Augustinianism, and the tradition of Italian religious devotion. Prodan combines a literary, historical, and biographical approach to analyze the mystical constructs and conceits in Michelangelo's poems, thereby deepening our understanding of the artist's spiritual life in the context of Catholic reform in the mid-sixteenth century. Prodan also demonstrates how Michelangelo's poetry is part of an Augustinian tradition that emphasizes mystical and moral evolution of the self. Examining such elements of early modern devotion as prayer, *lauda* singing, and the contemplation of religious images, Prodan provides a unique perspective on the subtleties of Michelangelo's approach to life and to art. Throughout, Prodan argues that Michelangelo's art can be more deeply understood when considered together with his poetry, which points to a spirituality that deeply informed all of his production.

Sarah Rolfe Prodan is a Research Fellow at the Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies at Victoria College in the University of Toronto, where she has designed and taught cultural history courses for the Renaissance Studies Program and lectured on Italian language and literature. Her research interests include Michelangelo, the Italian Reformation, and the intersection of literature and art in the Italian religious culture of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Prodan has been interviewed on Michelangelo and on the Renaissance for both audiovisual and print media and she has participated in numerous international conferences as a speaker and as an organizer. A published translator of French and Italian, and a scholarly writer, her work has appeared in such journals as *Quaderni d'italianistica*, *Confraternitas*, and *Annali d'italianistica*. Most recently she coedited a volume on friendship and premodern Europe.

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*In loving memory*

*of*

*David Lloyd Willett*

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## Acknowledgments

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me permission to reproduce selections of Michelangelo's poetry from his edition of the *Rime*, and to James Saslow for permitting me to use his English translation of Michelangelo's verses. I thank Donna Anstey at Yale University Press for her assistance with obtaining the rights to reproduce the English translations. I owe an additional and personal debt of gratitude to James Saslow and to Enzo Noè Girardi as well as to Grazia Dolores Folliero-Metz and to Maria Teresa Girardi for assisting me in the process of securing these textual permissions. Valerie Hoagland was exceptionally helpful with the indexing of this book. I am deeply indebted to Beatrice Rehl, my editor at Cambridge, for her support, her expertise, and her patience.

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## Note on the Text

Given the highly interdisciplinary nature of the present study, which draws upon research from a variety of fields and in the liminal areas where these disciplines intersect, I have made some concessions in style, in documenting, and in language to produce a more accessible study.

Most notably, there are many citations in this text from primary sources in a language other than English, but for which linguistic and semantic particularities are of great significance, and so I have chosen to include all quotations from early modern letters as well as from poetry and its contemporary exegeses in the original and in English translation.

All translations of early modern Italian letters are mine, unless otherwise indicated. In the case of the correspondence between Vittoria Colonna and Marguerite de Navarre, I have often, but not always, quoted Barry Collet's translation of them, which he has published together with a transcription of the originals in his study of their epistles: *A Long and Troubled Pilgrimage: The Correspondence of Marguerite d'Angoulême and Vittoria Colonna, 1540–1545*. Studies in Reformed Theology and History, new series, 6. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Theological Seminary, 2000.

I quote Enzo Noè Girardi's edition of Michelangelo's poetry (the *Rime*) for the Italian original and James Saslow's English translation of it throughout this study. Dante's poetry is drawn from Giorgio Petrocchi's Italian edition of the *Commedia* (the *Divine Comedy*), and from the English translation by Charles S. Singleton of its three canticles (*Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*). Cristoforo Landino's *Comento sopra la Comedia*, or fifteenth-century commentary on Dante's *Commedia*,

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is quoted from Paolo Procaccioli's Italian edition, but the English translations of it are mine. Vittoria Colonna's poems for Michelangelo are cited from Abigail Brundin's edition of the Italian originals and her translation of them: *Sonnets for Michelangelo*. All translations of Petrarch are by Robert Durling.

Though it would have been useful to also cite such important works as Augustine's *Confessiones*, Bonaventure's *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, and the Vulgate in the original Latin (or better yet, early modern Italian translations) as well as in English, I have elected to not systematically include the Latin original of these works. Occasional words or expressions in the original are provided, however, when the particular wording is germane to the interpretation or to the discussion at hand. I wanted to be mindful of overburdening my readers with an unreasonable accumulation of original and translated material.

I have chosen to keep most titles in their original language, in part because it was more concise to do so, and in part because not all of the texts are translated into English or have ready English equivalents for their original titles. I have, however, opted to use the English for Augustine's *Confessions* and for Bernardino Ochino's *Seven Dialogues*, both of which are quoted in English translation only (by Henry Chadwick and by Rita Belladonna, respectively).

Some other linguistic choices have also been made in favor of concision. I employ a number of Latin phrases throughout my study for this reason. An explanation of such terms accompanies their first appearance in the work.

Last, I often refer to Michelangelo's poetry as the *Rime* (the title consistently given to the collection of his poetry prepared by Italian editors). Most frequently, I use the term to denote the sum total of Michelangelo's poetic output in a general way. Other times, however, I refer specifically to the philological history of his poetry, employing the term *Rime* in a discussion of the critical reception and handling of his verses, which Michelangelo himself did not prepare as the collection with which we are so familiar today.