

From GRAY, Friday 15 February 1754

Printed from MS in Waller Collection.

Dated by HW: Feb. 15, 1754.

Address: To the Honourable Horace Walpole Esq. in Arlington Street, London.

Postmark: ROYSTON 16 FE.

Friday [Feb. 15, 1754], Cambridge.

Dear Sir,

I SEND you my story,¹ that you may not wait longer for it, though it does not at all satisfy me, but I do not know how to make it intelligible in fewer words.²

Bianca Capello,³

Veneta, adolescenti nupsit nobili Florentino,⁴ quem ideo a patre⁵ domo expulsum uxor sua opera diu sustentabat, donec Franciscus Medicus⁶ M[agnus] Hetruriæ Dux, mulieris forma captus eam in aulam perduxit,

1. HW had asked Gray to compose in Latin an account of Bianca Cappello, short enough to fit in a 'label' at the bottom of the frame of her picture by Vasari, which later hung in the Round Drawing Room at SH, and was sold SH xx. 92 (see also MONTAGU ii. 54). The picture was 'bought out of the Vitelli Palace at Florence by Sir Horace Mann and sent to Mr Walpole' ('Des. of SH,' *Works* ii. 469), and the story 'in a cartouche on the frame,' as quoted in the 'Description,' is a free English translation of Gray's Latin.

2. Gray's source has not been identified. In Florence, he might have read Bianca's story in a manuscript version. There is hardly an Italian library without a collection of *fatti tragici*, i.e. seventeenth and early eighteenth century manuscript accounts of murder, rape, and incest, concerning the Medici, the Farnese, the Cenci, etc. (see Guglielmo E. Saltini, 'Della morte di Francesco I de' Medici e di Bianca Cappello,' *Archivio storico italiano*, 1863, 2d ser. xviii pt i. 22). The Yale Library owns several such manuscripts, one of which is 'Istoria della Signora Bianca Cappello, Gran Duchessa di Toscana, e di Pietro Buonaventuri suo marito.' Gray probably wrote his account from memory, since he omits

important facts, such as Bonaventuri's name and the date of Bianca's marriage to Francis I.

3. Bianca (1548–87), dau. of Bartolomeo Cappello by Pellegrina Morosini, m. (1) (1563) Pietro Bonaventuri; m. (2) (1578) Francis I (Francesco de' Medici), Grand Duke of Tuscany (Samuele Romanin, *Storia documentata di Venezia*, Venice, 1912–21, vi. 371–87).

4. Pietro Bonaventuri (d. 1572), not a nobleman but a clerk in the banking house of the Salviati in Venice. See Romanin, *op. cit.* vi. 371–5; Riguccio Galluzzi, *Istoria del Granducato di Toscana sotto il governo della Casa Medici*, Florence, 1781, ii. 83–8; see also Celio Malespini's *novella* 'Come peruenisse la Signora Bianca Cappello Gran Duchessa di Toscana,' *Ducento novelle*, Venice, 1609, ii. 275b–278a (pt ii, *novella* lxxxiv).

5. Bartolomeo Cappello, Venetian senator. See Francesco Sansovino, *Venetia città nobilissima*, Venice, 1581, dedication to 'Bianca Cappello de' Medici,' also p. 178a, and the appendix ('Cronica Veneto') p. 38a.

6. Francis I (Francesco de' Medici) (1541–87), Grand Duke of Tuscany, 1574 (Litta, 'Medici di Firenze' table xiii).