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THE DEBATE ABOUT WOMEN AND ITS SOCIO-CULTURAL
BACKGROUND IN EARLY MODERN VENICE

Androniki Dialeti

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Glasgow

Department of History

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ABSTRACT

This Thesis deals with the development of the debate about women, also known in the European context as *querelle des femmes*, in Italy, from the 1540s to the mid-seventeenth century. The research is based on the contemporary Italian literature and correspondence. The Thesis' prime focus is Venice, as the main printing and intellectual centre where the debate was formulated and disseminated throughout Italy, especially during the first half of the sixteenth century. However, it also treats the shaping of the debate at the Courts of Central and Northern Italy.

The main object of the Thesis is to detect the socio-cultural context of the debate. So, it examines the significance of the emerging printing industry for the development and propagation of the debate, the social and literary networks of its agents, the reading public for which it was meant, and the role of the patronage system in the production of such writings. Special emphasis is also given to the part women's greater participation in intellectual life played in the shaping of the debate about them – as readers, writers, participants in contemporary discussions, members of Academies, salon keepers and dedicatees.

Furthermore, the Thesis underlines the changes the discourse on women and cultural formation of gender roles underwent in the sixteenth century, detecting the interplay between broader social developments, most importantly the establishment of the Catholic Reformation, and the fashioning of the dominant gender ideology. It explores the shaping of patterns of gender identity, comparing the love literature and writings on female superiority which dominated in the first half of the sixteenth century, and conduct literature, especially treatises on marriage and domestic economy, which mostly flourished in the second half of the century.

Finally, the Thesis traces the differences in the representation of gender roles and identities by male and female authors. It considers the identities of the "speakers" in the dialogues and how they might link with the arguments made and the model of behaviour the author suggests, and the representation of women's "defenders" and "enemies" in the literature under question, with the rhetoric deployed. An extensive range of writings is considered, by men and women, both well-known and obscure. Some well-known women writers are placed in a wider

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context, intellectual and social, while some obscurer male writers are revealed as interesting contributors to the debate.

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INTRODUCTION

The late medieval and early modern European debate about women began to attract scholars' attention in the early twentieth century. The emerging interest was part of the objectives and aspirations of the first-wave feminism. Most essays reflected the feminist movement's attempt to establish its origins in the past. These studies usually dealt with early French "feminism", focusing on the so-called *querelle de la Rose*, a dispute which was launched in France in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries with Christine de Pizan's letters and poems against the thirteenth-century Jean de Meung's *Roman de la Rose*, a mockery of women and chivalric love. Christine de Pizan was established as the first feminist and the *querelle de la Rose* as the landmark in the controversy over women.¹ The French term *querelle des femmes*, also known as *querelle des sexes*, found in some of the titles of these first essays, was broadly established to define the debate about women, as developed in the pre-industrial period not only in France but also in the rest of Europe, especially in England, Italy and Spain. The term is used to describe the conflicting views about women's nature and proper social position, and so it includes both the misogynist discourse and the pro-woman, or otherwise proto-feminist, arguments.²

Within the framework of the second-wave feminism, which peaked in the 1960s and 1970s, the woman question came again to the fore. Besides monographs, modern editions of the relevant texts came out.³ Scholarship mostly remained in the

¹ Some indicative works are: R. Rigaud, *Les idées féministes de Christine de Pisan* (Neuchâtel, 1911); C. F. Ward, *The Epistles on the Romance of the Rose and Other Documents in the Debate* (Chicago, 1911); A. Lefranc, *Grands écrivains français de la Renaissance: Le roman d'amour de Clément Marot, La platonisme et la littérature en France, Marguerite de Navarre... et la Querelle des femmes...* (Paris, 1914); L. McDowell Richardson, *The Forerunners of Feminism in French Literature of the Renaissance: From Christine de Pisan to Marie de Gournay* (Baltimore & London, 1929); B. H. Dow, *The Varying Attitude toward Women in French Literature of the Fifteenth Century* (New York, 1936); E. V. Telle, *L'oeuvre de Marguerite d'Angoulême, reine de Navarre, et la querelle des femmes* (Toulouse, 1937); F. L. Utley, *The Crooked Rib: An Analytical Index to the Argument about Women in English and Scots Literature to the End of the Year 1568* (Columbus, 1944).

² For the term *querelle des femmes* and its history, see: M. Zimmermann, "Le 'Querelle des Femmes' come paradigma culturale", in *Tempi e spazi di vita femminile tra medioevo ed età moderna*, ed. S. Seidel Menchi, A. Jacobson Schutte, T. Kuehn (Bologna, 1997).

³ Some indicative works are: K. Rogers, *The Troublesome Helpmate: A History of Misogyny in Literature* (Seattle, 1966); *La femme dans la littérature française et les traductions en français du XVI^e siècle*, ed. L. Guillermin Curutchet, J. P. Guillermin, L. Hordoir Louppe, M. F. Piejus (Lille, 1971); J. Ferrante, *Woman as Image in Medieval Literature: From the twelfth Century to Dante* (New York, 1975); C. Lougee, *Le Paradis des Femmes: Women, Salons, and Social Stratification in Seventeenth-*

context of literary criticism, without any substantial effort to provide the debate's historical conjunction. An important exception to the rule was the feminist and Marxist historian Joan Kelly's studies.⁴ Instead of a literary approach to the texts, Kelly offered a more complete study, relating the changes in the perception of women to broader social developments. Based on a comparison of the medieval courtly love literature and that of the Renaissance, Kelly maintained that the former implied mutuality and complementarity between the noblewoman and her lover, whereas in the latter woman became just a mediator for the perfection of man, and their love relationship just an allegory. According to Kelly, the different role the woman played in each literary tradition reflected the deterioration in women's actual conditions during the transition from medieval feudal society to the early modern state, between 1350 and 1530. The reconstruction of political power and family relations on this new basis strengthened the patriarchal values and practices, and women's power disintegrated in a variety of aspects, such as economic and political relations, participation in the intellectual world, their representation in the ideology of the sex-role system and sexual freedom and initiative. Kelly challenged a tradition based on the concept of the Renaissance suggested by the nineteenth-century scholar Jacob Burckhardt, and especially his remark that during the Renaissance "women stood on a footing of perfect equality with men".⁵ However, pointing out the significance of studying women as a social category to re-evaluate or reconstruct a historical period and underlying that women's power was downgraded in the

Century France (Princeton, 1976); I. Maclean, *Women Triumphant: Feminism in French Literature, 1610-1652* (Oxford, 1977); M. Angenot, *Les Champions des Femmes: examen du discours sur la supériorité des femmes, 1400-1800* (Montréal, 1977); *Le Débat sur le Roman de la Rose*, ed. E. Hicks (Paris, 1977); *Distaves and Dames: Renaissance Treatises for and about Women*, ed. D. Borstein (Delmar, N.Y., 1978); G. C. Odorisio, *Donna e società nel seicento: Lucrezia Marinelli e Arcangela Tarabotti* (Rome, 1979).

⁴ J. Kelly, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?", in her *Women, History and Theory* (Chicago & London, 1984). First published in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed. R. Bridenthall, C. Koonz (Boston & London, 1977); J. Kelly, "The Social Relation of the Sexes. Methodological Implications of Women's History", in her *Women, History and Theory*. First published in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 1: 4 (1976).

⁵ Kelly, "The Social Relation of the Sexes", p. 3. The claim of equality between men and women in the Renaissance often featured in general histories of women, such as E. J. Putnam's *The Lady* (1910), M. Beard's *Women as Force in History* (1946) and S. de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949). This schema also dominated most histories of Renaissance women, such as E. Rodocanachi's *La femme italienne avant, pendant et après la Renaissance* (1922); Kelly, "Did women have a Renaissance?", p. 47, n. 1.

Renaissance period, Kelly also questioned the landmark role of the Renaissance as symbol of progress and civilization.⁶

Kelly saw literature as a pointer towards women's social reality (her analysis focused on upper-class women), a method which has often been criticized by social historians. However, Kelly underlined the difficulties found in such an analysis, pointing out the complex relation between ideology and actual life. The ideology of sex roles "may be prescriptive rather than descriptive", it may "describe a situation that no longer prevails", or it "may use the relation of the sexes symbolically and not refer primarily to women and sex roles at all".⁷ So, the Renaissance symbolic relation of the sexes mirrored both "the new social relations of the state" and "the actual condition of dependency suffered by noblewomen as the state arose".⁸ Kelly's theoretical suggestion was later further developed from a post-modern point of view by Joan Wallach Scott, according to whom, "gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes", and so it also functions as "a primary way of signifying relationships of power".⁹

Over the last three decades, a large literature on women and gender relations has emerged, although, or because, women's history has gradually disassociated itself from the feminist movement, and its character has become more scholarly and less political.¹⁰ Late medieval and early modern Italian studies have an important share in current scholarship. Focusing mainly on Florence and secondarily on Venice, historians have explored the inheritance systems, family structures, marriage strategies and dowry transactions to establish the interaction between the institutions of family – especially ruling class families – and state, and the gender and broader social power relationships.¹¹ Besides the study of patriarchal values' and practices'

⁶ Kelly's attack reflected the increasing criticism of western thought in the 1960s and 1970s. Her criticism also aimed at the liberal concept of the classical Athenian civilisation and the French Revolution as "stages in the progressive realization of an individualistic social and cultural order": Kelly, "The Social Relation of the Sexes": pp. 2-4.

⁷ Kelly, "Did women have a Renaissance?", p. 20.

⁸ Ibid., p. 46.

⁹ J. W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis", in *Feminism and History*, ed. J. W. Scott (Oxford & New York, 1997), p. 167. First published in the *American Historical Review*, 91: 5 (1986).

¹⁰ For this turn in women's history, see: J. M. Bennett, "Feminism and History", *Gender and History*, 1: 3 (1989).

¹¹ The body of literature is too large to be mentioned here. Some indicative works are: S. Chojnacki, *Women and Men in Renaissance Venice. Twelve Essays on Patrician Society* (Baltimore & London, 2000); D. Herlihy, C. Klapisch-Zuber, *Les Toscans et leur familles* (Paris, 1978); D. O. Hughes, "Urban Growth and Family Structure in Medieval Genoa", *Past and Present*, 66 (1975); C. Klapisch-

impact on the elite women and the symbolic rituals around them, scholars have also studied the working conditions, legal representation, marriage relations and public appearance of lower-class women.¹² Women's position in law, their representation in art, issues concerning women's religiosity and sexuality or their cultural activities, as patrons, writers and artists, have also been focal points of the debate.¹³

Early modern controversy about women continues to be part of the broader interest in women's history and gender relations. Scholarship has now mainly shifted to English literature or comparative studies of the development of the debate in two or more European countries, usually England, France and Italy.¹⁴ The keen interest is also reflected in a series of modern editions of early modern works defending the female sex or written by women. The most complete project has been launched by the University of Chicago Press with the "The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe", a series edited by Margaret L. King and Albert Rabil Jr. In the last eight years, this series has provided modern English translations of about thirty relevant early modern works. Some of them, such as the translations of Jean Luis Vives, Cornelius Agrippa, Moderata Fonte, Lucrezia Marinella, Tullia d'Aragona and Arcangela Tarabotti, helped my research a lot.

Zuber, *Women, Family and Ritual in Renaissance Italy* (Chicago & London, 1985); A. Molho, *Marriage Alliance in Late Medieval Florence* (Cambridge, Mass. & London, 1994).

¹² S. Cohn, *Women in the Streets. Essays on Sex and Power in Renaissance Italy* (Baltimore & London, 1996); J. Brown, "A Woman's Place was in the Home: Women's Work in Renaissance Tuscany", in *Rewriting the Renaissance. The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, ed. M. Ferguson, M. Quilligan, N. Vickers (Chicago & London, 1986); J. Ferraro, *Marriage Wars in Late Renaissance Venice* (Oxford & New York, 2001).

¹³ T. Kuehn, *Law, Family, and Women: Toward a Legal Anthropology of Renaissance Italy* (Chicago & London, 1991); P. Tinagli, *Women in Italian Renaissance Art: Gender, Representation, Identity* (Manchester, 1997); M. Laven, *Virgins of Venice. Enclosed Lives and Broken Vows in the Renaissance Convent* (London, 2002); A. Jacobson Schutte, *Aspiring Saints. Pretence of Holiness, Inquisition, and Gender in the Republic of Venice, 1618-1750* (Baltimore, Md, 2001); J. G. Sperling, *Convents and the Body Politic in Late Renaissance Venice* (Chicago & London, 1999); G. Zarri, *Le sante vive. Profezie di Corte e devozione femminile tra '400 e '500* (Turin, 1990); J. Brown, *Immodest Acts. The Life of a Lesbian Nun in Renaissance Italy* (New York & Oxford, 1986); G. Ruggiero, *Binding Passions. Tales of Magic, Marriage and Power at the End of the Renaissance* (New York & Oxford, 1993); *Beyond Isabella: Secular Women Patrons of Art in Renaissance Italy*, ed. S. E. Reiss, D. Wilkins (Kirkville, Mo, 2001); M. Rosenthal, *The Honest Courtesan. Veronica Franco. Citizen and Writer in Sixteenth Century Venice* (Chicago & London, 1992); M. D. Gerrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi: the Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art*, (Princeton, N.J., 1989).

¹⁴ Some indicative works are: S. W. Hull, *Chaste, Silent and Obedient: English Books for Women, 1475-1640* (San Marino, Calif., 1982); L. Woodbridge, *Women and the English Renaissance: Literature and the Nature of Womanhood, 1540-1620* (Brighton, 1984); K. Usher Henderson, B. F. McManus, *Half Humankind: Contexts and Texts of the Controversy about Women in England, 1540-1640* (Urbana, 1985); C. Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism. Literary Texts and Political Models* (Ithaca & London, 1990); P. J. Benson, *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman. The Challenge of Female Independence in the Literature and Thought of Italy and England* (University Park, Pa, 1992); H. Solterer, *The Master and Minerva. Disputing Women in French Medieval Culture* (Berkeley & London, 1995).

Nevertheless, although from the 1950s scholars had paid attention to the early modern Italian literature on women, and in a series of articles, scholars have dealt with the topic, a substantial monograph on the issue is still lacking.¹⁵ Furthermore, current scholarship tends to be in the context of literary criticism. For instance, Constance Jordan has studied the Italian pro-woman literature, along with the French and the English, but despite her contribution to the study of feminist and political thought, her work cannot offer much to historians. Her purpose is to "portray the general character of the Renaissance debate on women", and so she has dealt neither with the identity of each author nor with the particular socio-cultural environment in which the debate proliferated.¹⁶

On the other hand, current studies have almost exclusively dealt with women writers/defenders of the female sex, such as Moderata Fonte, Lucrezia Marinella and Arcangela Tarabotti, whereas male authors' writings have been greatly neglected.¹⁷ Only the best-known works of famous male participants in the debate, such as Baldesar Castiglione's third book of *Il Cortegiano*, have been better explored.¹⁸ The lack of concern for male authors' pro-woman works is mostly due to the dominant view that men's writings were just part of a literary/rhetorical game. In 1982, in a review of the European *querelle des femmes*, Joan Kelly wrote: "Moreover, many of the male authors who defended women persuasively set forth the misogynous as well as the pro-woman side of the debate, which makes their concern for women seem at least as literary in origin as it may be heartfelt".¹⁹ In a literary analysis of English and Italian literature defending women, Pamela Benson, has also seen these texts as "exercises in paradox: women, like folly, baldness, and the ass, have not traditionally been valued, and the proof that they ought to be is an essay in proving the unprovable".²⁰ Virginia Cox also maintains that by contrast with female writers, male authors "are talking about nothing more than a theoretical acknowledgement that women have the same moral and intellectual capacities as men...the possibility of

¹⁵ C. Fahy, "Three Early Renaissance Treatises on Women", *Italian Studies*, 11 (1956).

¹⁶ Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism*, p. 9.

¹⁷ See below p. 161, n. 130, p. 162, n. 132, p. 163, n. 133.

¹⁸ See below p. 6, n. 12.

¹⁹ J. Kelly, "Early Feminist Theory and the *Querelle des Femmes*, 1400-1789", in her *Women, History and Theory*, p. 75.

²⁰ Benson, *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman*, pp. 2-3.

women exercising their abilities on equal terms with men is regarded, perhaps inevitably, as an impossibility within society as it is currently constituted".²¹

This Thesis diverges from the general trends in current scholarship in two key points. On the one hand, it deals with the topic from a broader historical perspective, attempting to place early modern Italian literature on women in its historical context. So, a top priority is to trace the debate's cultural agents, its promoters, its recipients and the channels through which it circulated and was propagated, or, in other words, the "tactics of the debate". On the other hand, covering a much wider range of literature, by male and female writers, including famous names and texts and obscure ones, I hope to provide some wider perspectives on the debate; the changes it underwent through the sixteenth century in relation to broader social developments, the models of behaviour it suggested for women, the differences in gender ideology and representations between men's and women's writings, the rhetorical dimension of the debate and the impact each author's social position and broader aspirations had on his/her treatment of the topic.

My study is based on early modern Italian literature and correspondence, and covers the period from 1530 to the mid-seventeenth century, with emphasis on the period between 1540 and 1560. The main research was first carried out for three months in the John Rylands University Library of Manchester, where the Bullock Collection holds a large amount of sixteenth and seventeenth-century Italian literature. I continued my research for ten months in the *Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana* in Venice. Although initially I was interested in books exclusively dealing with female excellence, in the course of the research my study incorporated love literature, mostly love dialogues, and conduct literature on marriage and domestic life. Love and conduct literature includes interesting discussions of women's nature and proper social position, reveals more aspects of contemporary gender ideology and may contribute to a better understanding of the debate. Furthermore, the incorporation of different literary genres and approaches offers the opportunity for a comparative study of them. As the first chapter shows, love dialogues and literature on female excellence mostly flourished in the first half of the sixteenth century, whereas the later sixteenth century witnessed an important shift of interest to conduct religious books and treatises on domestic economy. This changing attitude reflected

²¹ V. Cox, "The Single Self: Feminist Thought and the Marriage Market in Early Modern Venice," *Renaissance Quarterly*, 48: 3 (1995), pp. 519-20.

broader social developments, such as the establishment of the Catholic Reformation and the gradual aristocratisation of the Italian upper classes. Finally, a significant part of my analysis is based on dedications, proems and printed correspondence. Although these sources present some problems due to their artificial and formulaic style, they can still be a good pointer towards authors' ideologies and their social networks.

I do not regard the literature under discussion as directly corresponding to women's social reality. In other words, I do not consider it a faithful account of women's actual life nor do I use it to provide a social history of women. However, many aspects featuring in early modern literature on women, such as women's position in marriage, their education, the issue of tighter enclosure of nuns, and prostitution, have also attracted modern scholars' attention. So, mainly in the second and partly in the third chapters, I discuss together some aspects of women's social condition in Venice, as have been explored in recent studies, and the same aspects, as have been dealt with in early modern debate. This parallel discussion can provide a better understanding of the relation between women's social condition, as modern scholars have established it, and the early modern ideology about it, which was not, however, unanimous. Early modern literature defending women apparently only dealt with aspects that would interest its reading public, which was inevitably coming from the middle or upper classes. So, issues concerning marriage, education or convent life often figure in the texts, whereas matters related to lower-class women, such as work conditions or institutions for poor women, orphan girls and ex-prostitutes, are almost never discussed. Furthermore, the second chapter seeks to show that the debate about women was influenced by the broader developments in women's life. As the sixteenth century progressed, literature on women gradually became more conventional, underlining women's domesticity, idealizing female chastity and explicitly excluding women from the public role which some works had at least potentially suggested for them in the first half of the century. This development was paralleled by a stricter definition of women's role in family, church and society, which allowed much less latitude in ambiguities or opinions diverging from the dominant norms.

That literature on women does not reflect directly women's social condition does not mean, however, that the debate does not put interesting historical questions. Quite the contrary. A closer examination of this body of literature reveals a large and

complex network of social relationships surrounding it. The individuals who wrote, dedicated, furthered, circulated and finally read this literature had specific objectives and expectations, which ranged from publishers' economic profits to writers' aspirations, female dedicatees' pursuit of fame and female readers' satisfaction of reading books which acknowledged them and their sex, even if this recognition remained on paper. It is this social dynamic behind the texts which constitutes a main aspect of my study. In this sense, my Thesis seeks to contribute not only to women's history and gender studies but also to some broader aspects of the socio-cultural history of early modern Italy.

The Thesis' basic focus is the Venetian socio-cultural scene. Venice was the main intellectual and printing centre of Italy and one of the most important ones in early modern Europe. It was mostly from here that the debate about women developed and was disseminated throughout Italy. From the 1530s, the great expansion and commercialization of the printing industry, along with the establishment of the vernacular, led to a "popularization" of the written culture and the emergence of a new literary figure, the so-called *poligrafo*, and a larger reading public, including less educated men and women. As discussed in the first chapter, these developments laid the foundations of the evolution of the debate in Venice. Nevertheless, the debate cannot be thoroughly explored if exclusively seen in the Venetian context. Venice was the hub of the circulation and popularization of these ideas, which had, however, often their origins in the fifteenth-century Italian Courts. In the sixteenth century, Courts continued to play a significant role in the development of the debate, and the powerful women of these Courts were most often the dedicatees of pro-woman literature. Furthermore, the writers who published their works in Venice came from the whole of Italy, and Venetian presses supplied books to the reading public throughout Italy. Finally, the repetition of themes and ideas featuring in literature on women does not permit us to regard a book published in Venice as reflecting an experience exclusively obtained from the Venetian environment. So, taking Venice as a starting-point, I also examine the literature and networks of influence promoting the debate in some Italian Courts and other cities, especially Florence and Siena.

The examination of the social networks surrounding the debate suggests a significant role on women's part. Although women's contribution to the debate as authors has attracted the attention of current scholarship, their equally significant role

in the formation of the debate as dedicatees, readers and participants in the contemporary intellectual projects (in literary salons, and at times also in Academies) has been generally neglected. In the fourth chapter, mostly based on dedications and proems, I make some suggestions about the role and function of female literary patronage, a study lacking in current scholarship, although art patronage has been better studied. I raise several questions about the personal acquaintances of the dedicatee with the author, whether the dedicatee asked the author to write a certain work or, hoping to please her and enjoy her protection, he took such an initiative, and whether there was any direct financing for the publication. I partly answer some of these questions, although there are serious difficulties in establishing the dedicatee-dedicator relationships, and so some issues cannot but remain open to further discussion. In the same chapter, I portray women's involvement in literary salons, and especially the establishment of their own ones, and their attempts to participate in Academies' activities and even to affect them, as the case of Arcangela Tarabotti indicates in the mid-seventeenth century. The fourth chapter also discusses the role women, especially widows, of the Courts of Central and Northern Italy played in the development of the debate, both as patrons and as exemplars of female virtue, and the interaction between female writers and female dedicatees, a relationship which functioned within two hierarchical systems; the power mechanism of patronage and the order imposed by the gender role structure. So, the fourth chapter seeks to contribute both to some aspects of women's history and to issues concerning the broader intellectual history of the Courts, Literary Academies and Salons.

The third chapter deals with female readership and its relation to the debate. The issue of book possession in early modern Italy remains largely unexplored in current scholarship, let alone female book owning and libraries, through inventories. Examining the printing activities and advertising techniques of the Venetian publisher Gabriel Giolito de Ferrari, I propose that, due to the significant developments in the book industry, the capture of female readers' attention became a significant pursuit from the 1540s. Giolito and his collaborators repeatedly addressed the female reading public in their dedications and proems. Besides Giolito's editions, generally the pro-woman literature addressed female readers. So, I suggest that women had considerable cultural influence as readers in the formation of the debate, and that proems can be a pointer towards women's reading preferences. One could counter-propose that proems' declarations should not be taken at face value and that

their reference to a female reading public was just part of a literary game involving authors and publishers. Only further examination of book owning in Italy could offer an overall picture of female readership and its reading preferences. However, taking into account that sixteenth-century book production was a commercialized and competitive industry, it is reasonable to argue that rather than, or apart from, being a literary game, the address to female readers was a commercial issue. That, in the second half of the sixteenth century, Giolito changed his titles to adjust them to the Catholic Reform spirit, continuing, however, to respond to the demands of a female reading public, now mostly religious women and nuns, points to the same direction. It was a two-way process; women readers were both influenced by the contemporary ideology about them and in turn affected it with their expectations, at times promoting cultural change. Exploring literary dialogues incorporating female speakers, the fifth chapter discusses how female readers might have responded to their literary representations.

Both male and female authors who defended the female sex in early modern period inevitably functioned within the limits of the contemporary mentality, and so their arguments were different from those of the nineteenth or twentieth-century feminists. Furthermore, early modern "feminist" thought was not related to some particular movement for social change, and so most arguments remained disassociated from social references. However, there are also many cases in which women were seen as a sociological group and not only as a biological category. Both male and female authors underlined the social factors which placed women in an inferior social position, and attacked the contemporary legal system, women's exclusion from education and public offices, and contemporary practices, such as women's home and convent seclusion. The first substantial defences of the female sex written by women (Moderata Fonte, Lucrezia Marinella and Arcangela Tarabotti) appeared from the end of the sixteenth century and were deeply influenced by the previous literary tradition. Nevertheless, female writers' tangible social experience rendered their writings less rhetorical and enriched them with more social references (especially in Fonte's and Tarabotti's cases). In the fifth and sixth chapters, focusing on specific aspects of the debate – the representation of female speakers in literary dialogues and the shaping of women's "defenders" and "enemies" identity in pro-woman literature – I draw a comparison between men's and women's writings to

point out some features in women's works which have not adequately been explored, and underline some key differences in their approaches.

The sixth chapter discusses the rhetorical dimension of the debate. Rhetoric was an integral part of the contemporary literary expression and writers themselves implied the rhetorical dimension of their works. However, rhetoric, or otherwise the art of persuasion, was not by definition synonymous with falsehood. Sperone Speroni, a contributor to the debate about women and also a professor of logic in Padua, defined orator's speech as "something merely similar to the truth", or "an image of the truth".²² This game between truth and falsehood helped writers to disguise their own danger or paradoxical beliefs. As discussed in the first chapter, some of the contributors to the debate also were forceful contributors in other social and religious campaigns and their works were later listed in the Indexes of prohibited books. Furthermore, whereas advocating female superiority was not such a "dangerous" idea in its own right, it could lead to broader social comment and criticism or religious criticism, since it often attacked directly the contemporary patriarchal organisation of the society, and suggested new interpretations of the Scriptures, especially concerning the book of Genesis.

However, although the rhetorical dimension of the texts cannot be denied, rejecting men's writings as a mere literary game would prevent us from detecting interesting aspects of their works. Besides, female writers cannot be seen as representatives of the female sex at large. Other determinants, most importantly their social status, differentiated them from the rest of women as much as their sex distinguished them from their male counterparts. In this sense, both men's and women's writings should be historicized not only in accordance with the sex but also with the social standing of the writer, his/her ideological orientation, and broader expectations, and his/her networks of acquaintances. Analyzing how women's "defenders" and "enemies" were represented in several texts, the sixth chapter shows that these representations were often interrelated to the social identity that each author wanted to construct for himself /herself.

Finally, I deal with some aspects of early modern dialogue. In dialogue, if not didactic, the author's view remains suspended. This helps the writer to give diverse views which he can simultaneously deny holding. Written in 1574, Sperone

²² See below p. 227.

Speroni's *Apologia dei Dialoghi* is indicative of the dialogue's poetics. Speroni wrote *Apologia* to defend his previous *Dialoghi*, which were now denounced to the Roman Inquisition for certain passages regarded as offensive to the public morality and the political and theological principles of the Catholic Reformation.²³ Speroni claimed that a dialogue could not be condemned, since it presents by definition not only the right views but also the erroneous ones. Dialogical writing resembles rhetoric in the sense that both develop a complex relation with "truth". In words similar to those he had used to define rhetoric, Speroni maintains that dialogue "speaks in vain, while it wanders from game to game without getting closer to truth; but to wander in such a way is neither wicked nor dishonest".²⁴ Works defending women were often written in dialogical form, structured around a verbal conflict between women's "defenders" and "enemies", which has raised reasonable questions about how convincing or "sincere" these defences could have been.

On the other hand, according to Speroni, in dialogue "each one speaks as what he is, or seems to be", and, as in comedy, interlocutors "speak according to the social customs and the way of life that each of them represents to us".²⁵ In this sense, although the dialogue may prevent us from detecting the author's "real" opinion, it still helps to trace his/her opinion about the others, the social categories which his/her speakers represent, and the decorum the author suggests for them. As shown in the sixth chapter, both the speakers/defenders and the speakers/enemies of the female sex are usually respectable contemporary political or literary figures. At first glance, this makes both arguments (for and against women) equally valid. However, women's "opponents" often attempt to legitimate their attitude on the grounds that such a confrontation advances the conversation, or even benefits women themselves, since it is only via controversy that the arguments favouring the female sex can be further developed. In other cases, it is claimed that both women's defenders and enemies do not express their "real" opinions but just adopt different points of view so the dialogue could be developed. When both the writer and speakers hide their views, the whole matter becomes an intellectual game between truth and falsehood, in which nothing is incontrovertible. But, in final analysis, if nothing is incontrovertible, the patriarchal order of society is also open to challenge. However,

²³ For Sperone Speroni's *Apologia dei Dialoghi*, see: J. R. Snyder, *Writing the Scene of Speaking. Theories of Dialogue in the Late Italian Renaissance* (Stanford, 1989), pp. 87-133.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 103

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 97-8.

when gender enters this play of roles, things become clearer. Analyzing the representation of different kinds of female speakers – the noblewoman or Court lady, the courtesan, the obedient wife, the “dissolute” low-class aged woman or the mythological female figure – the fifth chapter suggests possible interplays between female speakers, female dedicatees, potential female readers and recommended models of female behaviour.

During the research and writing up a number of difficulties emerged. After I left Venice, in September 2002, I had no opportunity to consult again the material due to financial and time considerations. So, I had to follow the plan I had initially made, without much opportunity to include aspects of the debate which in the course of the study proved to be equally interesting. Modern editions were quite helpful but they cover only a small part of the literary body I deal with. Furthermore, although in my endeavour to place the debate in its socio-cultural context, I used proems, dedications and correspondence, I had also to rely upon secondary sources, since it would have been impossible to carry out personal research for each separate author in this period of time. Information about the writers who worked in the first half of the sixteenth century, especially in Venice, was relatively easily obtained. However, it was quite difficult to trace the activities of less known and obscure authors, who mostly figured in the second half of the century. The *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani* unfortunately remains incomplete, having covered entries until the letter “G”, and general encyclopaedias of the Renaissance do not devote space to minor and obscure figures.²⁶ So, the activities of some authors are better explored than those of others. Furthermore, since I deal with a long period and a large amount of works and authors, it would have been impossible to devote equal space to them. So, I focus on the first half of the sixteenth century which was the most prolific period of the debate.

Some aspects of the Thesis were presented at conferences, where discussion with the other participants helped me to formulate better views. A conference paper, based on the sixth chapter, under the same title, was presented at *The Fifth European Feminist Research Conference – Gender and Power in the New Europe*, at the

²⁶ *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, 61 vols (Rome, 1960-).

University of Lund (Sweden, 20-24 August 2003). A briefer discussion of the fifth chapter, with the same title, was presented at the *Social History Society Annual Conference*, at the University of Rouen (France, 8-10 January 2004). Finally, some aspects of the literature on domestic economy were presented as a conference paper, entitled "Age, Gender and Social Status: Domestic Culture and Social Hierarchy in Early Modern Italy", at *Age, Gender and Domestic Culture Conference*, organised by *The Bedford Centre for the History of Women* and *AHRB Centre for the Study of the Domestic Interior*, at the Royal Holloway, University of London (UK, 3 July 2004).

All quotations are provided in translation from Italian into English. The translations are mine unless otherwise indicated. Although I have made an effort to provide faithful translations, my main purpose is to give the basic content of the argument. For this reason, I also provide the original Italian text in footnotes. The original spelling has been retained. When I use modern Italian editions, I also translate the text into English, quoting the original text, as appears in the modern edition, in a footnote. In other cases, I provide a precis in the main text, usually citing the whole original text in a footnote. Some fourteenth-century writings, such as those of Giovanni Boccaccio, have been mostly dealt with in their later versions, since it is the sixteenth-century editors, translators and publishers who are examined in this study. Similarly, in the bibliography, these works have been placed under the name of the editor or translator, unless the editor is not known or I refer to a modern edition of Boccaccio. Finally, since most early modern Italian dedications are unpaginated, without, however, being longer than two or three pages, I do not give the exact pages in the footnote.

CHAPTER ONE

THE FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE DEBATE ABOUT WOMEN IN EARLY MODERN VENICE

THE ORIGINS OF THE DEBATE IN EUROPE

The end of the fifteenth century marked a turning point in the European articulation of gender perceptions. Throughout the sixteenth century, the long-established medieval discourse, traversing the whole Europe, gave place to new questions concerning the proper place of women in society, their moral and intellectual integrity and gender relations.¹ The emerging debate, sometimes known as *querelle des femmes*, did not develop along a single line. Sometimes it reshaped the traditional perceptions of the female sex and favoured women's physiological, intellectual and moral equality, or even superiority, to the male sex, even claiming social and political equality between men and women. Other times, it remained more closely attached to the long-established schemata, adjusting the traditional gender bias to the contemporary value systems and social practices.

Under this new configuration, a literature concerning women and gender relations, mostly written by male authors, flourished in Italy from the second quarter of the sixteenth century. The increasing interest in gender issues is manifested in treatises or dialogues on the superiority/inferiority of women, biographies of famous women, conduct books on the proper female behaviour, texts on marriage and domestic economy, works on love and female beauty or even medical writings about women's illnesses or feminine embellishment. Besides, discussions and lectures taking place in Courts, Academies and literary salons, and the topics circulating in the contemporary correspondence, reflect the same interest in a redefinition of gender norms.

¹ For an overview of the dominant notions of the female sex in Europe, see: I. Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman. A Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life* (Cambridge, 1980).

However, the challenge to the dominant gender structure was not a completely new phenomenon. The Hebrew, Greek, Roman and Christian tradition, which had formed the religious, philosophical, moral and biological basis for the legal, economic, social and cultural discrimination of women, had been challenged in individual cases already in the medieval period. For instance, the French courtly verse romance of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries has often been seen as a different, positive attitude towards women. Exalting the participation of the female lover, degrading female chastity and underlining the male service of the knight to his lady, the medieval romance gave a more active role to women. Nevertheless, this genre was developed in courtly environments and its implications were limited to the women of the aristocracy.²

However, the first serious criticism against the patriarchal social order came from a woman writer, Christine de Pizan, who lived and wrote in France at the turn of the fourteenth century. Pizan was the daughter of an Italian astrologer, physician and councillor in the services of Charles V of France. Her father had taught her French and Italian literature and some Latin. Having been widowed and having lost her father at the age of twenty-five, Pizan began to write and dedicate her works to powerful contemporary figures in order to sustain herself, her children and her mother. Among writings on moral questions, education, the art of government and a biography of Charles V, Pizan also wrote works in defense of the female sex. Written in 1399, her poem *Epître au Dieu d'Amours* (Letter to the God of Love) was an answer to the popular *Roman de la Rose*, a mockery of women and chivalric love, which was begun around 1230 by Guillaume de Lorris and was continued in 1275-80 by Jean de Meung. In 1404 Pizan wrote her major defence of the female sex, the *Book of the City of Ladies*, and dedicated it to Marguerite of Burgundy. The main object of the work is proving the moral qualities of women, rejecting the misogynist notions of her contemporaries. One year later, in her *Treasure of the City of Ladies*, Pizan developed further her arguments by giving advice for a better way of life to women, including peasants, prostitutes and nuns.³

² The pro-woman character of the medieval courtly romance has been noticed by Joan Kelly in her influential article "Did Women have a Renaissance?"; however, thenceforth scholars have pointed out misogynist aspects of this literature and have downplayed its positive attitude towards the female sex: R. I. Krueger, *Women Readers and the Ideology of Gender in Old French Verse Romance* (Cambridge, 1993).

³ Kelly, "Early Feminist Theory and the *Querelle des Femmes*"; C. C. Willard, *Christine de Pizan. Her Life and Works* (New York, 1984); S. Lawson, "Introduction", in C. de Pizan, *The Treasure of the*

Pizan's defence of women was followed by other similar, though more conventional, writings by male *literati* during the fifteenth century, such as Juan Rodríguez' *Triunfo de las donas* (1438) and Martin le Franc's *Le Champion des dames* (1440-42). However, written mainly in Latin and remaining in manuscript form, fifteenth-century defences did not have a broader social impact. They were limited in narrow circles, usually related to courtly environments, and they had often been recited as lectures before a powerful woman, whose favour the writer enjoyed. Some fifteenth century defences of the female sex, such as Bartolomeo Goggio's *De Laudibus Mulierum*, Mario Equicola's *De Mulieribus*, Agostino Strozzi's *Defensio Mulierum* and Vincenzo Maggi's *Brieve trattato dell'eccellentia delle donne* were connected with the Ferrara or Mantua Courts and especially with Eleonora d'Aragona and Anna d'Este.⁴ Like the medieval courtly romance, the early modern debate about women seems to have had its roots in courtly settings. In both cases, aristocratic women played an important role in the development of the genre as patronesses, dedicatees, audience or just sources of inspiration.

However, it is only at the beginning of the sixteenth century that the woman question becomes a "public debate". The advent of the printing press in the late fifteenth century and the linguistic drift, which followed, with the standardization of all major European vernaculars led to a significant increase in the reading public. The highly competitive commercial character of the new mode of book production had great cultural implications. It refashioned the identity of the intellectual and redeployed the role of literature. By offering new popularized topics writers began to attend to a wider dissemination of their works.⁵ To a certain extent the spread of the debate about women was part of this development. However, the woman question was not limited to the great number of original works, translations and adaptations which circulated throughout Europe. Similar oral discussions and lectures took place in Courts, Academies, literary salons or even universities. The themes circulating in the contemporary correspondence often reflect the same interest in gender issues.

City of Ladies, or, The Book of the Three Virtues, ed. Lawson (Harmondsworth, 1985); *Christine de Pizan 2000: Studies on Christine de Pizan in Honour of Angus J. Kennedy*, ed. J. Campbell, N. Margolis (Amsterdam, 2000).

⁴ Fahy, "Three Early Renaissance Treatises on Women"; idem, "Un trattato di Vincenzo Maggi sulle donne e un'opera sconosciuta di Ortensio Lando", *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana*, 138 (1961); W. Gundersheimer, "Bartolomeo Goggio: A Feminist in Renaissance Ferrara", *Renaissance Quarterly*, 33 (1980).

⁵ E. L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1983).

The woman question could be better understood as a cultural movement, which at times challenged the patriarchal social order, rather than an integrated body of ideas aiming at immediate changes in the contemporary social and economic system. Wavering between the traditional value systems and the new cultural notions and moving within dominant cultural schemata, certain social circumstances and personal aspirations, the debate took various forms. Authors' particular conditions and the broader socio-cultural environment determined the terms of the debate in each case.

Although the origins of the ideas featuring in the texts in question are not easily traceable, it would be useful to mention the basic trends and key-writings, which conveyed what were to become the normative terms of the debate. Some basic aspects of the debate were strongly influenced by the neo-platonic movement, which flourished in Italy by the late fifteenth century. In 1462 the Florentine philosopher and theologian Marcilio Ficino became the head of the Platonic Academy of Florence, situated at the Medici villa, at Careggi. Supported by the Medici family, Ficino translated the complete works of Plato, which were published in 1484, and the third-century Neoplatonist Plotinus. Ficino's most influential work was his commentaries on Plato's *Symposium*. Attempting to integrate Plato's thought with Christian theology, Ficino offered a new interpretation of Platonic love. According to Ficino, the highest form of human love is a communion based on the soul's love for God. The neo-platonic thought flourished mainly in courtly environments and became the cornerstone of the emerging love philosophy, which followed several directions. Woman held a central, although transitory, role in love philosophy. It is female beauty and the love it inspires in man that lead to the contemplation of God. This idealization of the female body, which is also considered as a reflection of virtue, on the one hand exalted women but, on the other hand, rendered them just the means for men's perfection.

The Venetian writer Pietro Bembo, later a Cardinal, wrote the first vernacular dialogue on love. *Gli Asolani* (1505) takes place in Caterina Cornaro's Court in Asolo, near Venice, which Bembo had visited in 1495. Having at least twenty-two Italian editions and having been translated into French and Spanish, *Gli Asolani* became an important source for emulation. In Bembo's dialogue some learned men from Venice and some Court Ladies deliberate on love. Being the first dialogue to incorporate women as speakers and codifying in a clear way the different forms of

love, it constituted a point of departure for following dialogues and treatises on love.⁶ However, love theory moved in various directions, either rejecting sensual desire and acknowledging only the spiritual senses of sight and hearing, such as Pietro Bembo, or arguing that love requires all the senses to be completed. The latter approach was closer to Mario Equicola's *Libro d'Amore*, written at the end of the fifteenth century, and Leone Ebreo's *Dialoghi d'amore* (1535).⁷ To the same body of literature belong writings exclusively devoted to female beauty, such as Agnolo Firenzuola's *Dialogo delle bellezze delle donne* (1548). It is a dialogue between a gentleman and four noble ladies of Prato, which combines artistic theories of ancient and early Renaissance writers, neo-platonic elements and pro-woman arguments.⁸

Equally important for the dissemination of neo-platonic thought was Baldesar Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*.⁹ Written between 1513 and 1518 and first published in 1528, *Il Cortegiano* was inspired by the cultural environment of the Court of Urbino, under the aegis of the Duke Guidobaldo of Montefeltro and his wife, Elisabetta Gonzaga. Castiglione himself had participated in the literary and intellectual activities of the Court from 1504 to 1515. However, his personal experience was only the basis of the inspiration; in fact, *Il Cortegiano* is an idealization of courtly manners and culture. Castiglione's impact on Italy and abroad was immense. It became the *par excellence* book of good manners. Around sixty-two editions of *Il Cortegiano* were published in Italy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and about sixty editions of the text in languages other than Italian were published from 1528 to 1619.¹⁰

Il Cortegiano had a large and multifarious impact on the debate about women. It exemplified mixed conversations in a courtly setting and idealized women's presence in the court. As has been argued, "for women, its importance consists in having officially sanctioned the female presence in the male world by gracing that presence with the social and moral qualities that the aristocracy had

⁶ P. Bembo, *Gli Asolani*, trans. R. B. Gottfried (Bloomington, 1954); on Bembo's dialogue, see below pp. 176-9.

⁷ R. Russell, "Introduction", in T. D'Aragnona, *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*, ed. & trans. R. Russell, B. Merry (Chicago & London, 1997), pp. 27-32.

⁸ A. Firenzuola, *On the Beauty of Women*, trans. & ed. K. Eisenbichler, J. Murray (Philadelphia, 1992); J. Murray, "Agnolo Firenzuola on Female Sexuality and Women's Equality", *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 22: 2 (1991).

⁹ B. Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. & ed. G. Bull (London, 1976).

¹⁰ For its immense influence, see: P. Burke, *The Fortunes of the Courtier. The European Reception of Castiglione's Cortegiano* (Cambridge, 1995).

come to value".¹¹ The fourth book of *Il Cortegiano* includes an analysis of love in neo-platonic terms. Pietro Bembo, also a member of the Court circle of Urbino from 1506 to 1512, is the main speaker, who reproduces some of the ideas as they had been developed in *Gli Asolani*. However, the most influential part of *Il Cortegiano* in the debate about women was the Third Book. Although mainly dedicated to the depiction of the ideal Court Lady, it is also one of the first discussions on women's nature and position and gender relations at large. It deals with female beauty, women's biological composition, their achievements through history and their moral and intellectual qualities, adducing classical authorities, such as Plato and Aristotle, and naming famous women from the ancient years until Castiglione's time. Furthermore, the debate about women is for the first time structured around a verbal battle between two male speakers, a "defender" and an "enemy" of the female sex. Giuliano de' Medici defends women and their excellence, whereas Gaspare Pallavicino reproduces the dominant stereotypes of female inferiority. Arguments in support of each sex, historical and mythological examples and a long discussion on love, comprise their verbal conflict. The stock of arguments and the structure of the dialogue, around two adversary male speakers deliberating on women's nature, became the norm in the subsequent dialogues.¹²

Works treating exclusively the excellence and superiority of the female sex were not independent from the neo-platonic tradition. The most influential text of this kind was *Declamatio de nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus*, written by the German occult and platonic philosopher Henricus Cornelius Agrippa.¹³ Agrippa is most known for his studies on occult and neo-platonic philosophy. In 1510, he completed the initial version of *De occulta philosophia*, which he dedicated to Johannes Trithemius, one of the most famous occult philosophers of Germany. In 1515, he lectured at Pavia on the hermetic Pimander and composed various treatises

¹¹ R. Russell, "Introduction", in D'Aragnona, *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*, p. 29.

¹² For women's depiction in *Cortegiano*, see also: G. S. Battisti, "La donna, le donne nel Cortegiano", in *La Corte e il Cortegiano*, ed. Carlo Ossola, (Rome, 1980); J. Guidi, "De l'amour Courtois à l'amour sacré. La condition de la femme dans l'œuvre de B. Castiglione", in *Images de la femme dans la littérature italienne de la Renaissance*, ed. idem (Paris, 1980); V. Cox, "Seen but not Heard: the Role of Women Speakers in Cinquecento Literary Dialogue", in *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society*, ed. L. Panizza (Oxford, 2000); S. Kolsky, "Women through Men's Eyes: The Third Book of *Il Cortegiano*", in his *Courts and Courtiers in Renaissance Northern Italy* (Aldershot & Burlington, 2003); M. Zancan, "La donna e il cerchio nel 'Cortegiano' di B. Castiglione. Le funzioni del femminile nell'immagine di corte", in *Nel cerchio della luna*, ed. M. Zancan (Venice, 1983).

¹³ H. C. Agrippa, *Declamation on the Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sex*, trans. & ed. A. Rabil, Jr. (Chicago & London, 1996).

influenced by hermetic and neo-platonic philosophy, such as the *Oratio in praelectione convivii Platonis*, *De triplici ratione cognoscendi Deum* and *Dialogus de homine*. The *Declamatio* was initially delivered at the University of Dôle in Burgundy in 1509. In 1529, it was published in an enriched version and it was dedicated to Margaret of Savoy, princess of Austria and Burgundy. Agrippa's treatise had a great impact. It was soon translated into French (1530), German (1540), English (1542), Italian (1544) and Polish (1575) and it was plagiarized all over Europe.¹⁴

The influences on Agrippa are difficult to trace. Some of his arguments were probably drawn from fifteenth-century defences of women, such as Martin Le Franc's *Le Champion des dames*, Juan Rodríguez' *Triunfo de las donas* and Mario Equicola's *De Mulieribus*. In certain points Agrippa's work is similar to Bartolomeo Goggio's *De laudibus mulierum* (ca. 1487).¹⁵ However, that Agrippa is unlikely to have had access to Goggio's manuscript indicates that most arguments featuring in early modern European debate about women were commonplaces which circulated broadly, but fragmentally, before beginning to take shape and constituting an autonomous and discernible literary body of ideas. It has been noticed that Agrippa's defence of women was "an amalgam of diverse materials: hermetic and cabalistic lore, Neoplatonic reverence for ideal beauty, traditional and not-so-traditional praise of "good women", subversive counter-reading of the Eve myth, and evangelical feminist exegesis based on Pauline doctrine and early Christian praxis".¹⁶ An interrelation between occult philosophy and a positive attitude towards the female sex is implied already in Bartolomeo Goggio's *De laudibus mulierum*, in which the author cites Asclepius and Pimander.¹⁷

No matter which were the literary sources of Agrippa, his stock of arguments became the basis for the subsequent defences of women. In Agrippa's treatise, the superiority of the female sex is proved by authority, reasoning and historical, mythological and literary examples. Most arguments are shaped within the already existing cultural schemata but Agrippa reverses the arguments in women's favour. So, by giving initially a biblical interpretation of women's superiority, he refashions

¹⁴ Rabil, "Introduction", *ibid.*, pp. 3-13.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-27; B. Newman, "Renaissance Feminism and Esoteric Theology: The Case of Cornelius Agrippa", *Viator*, 24 (1993).

¹⁶ Newman, *ibid.*, p. 340.

¹⁷ Gundersheimer, "Bartolommeo Goggio", p. 190.

the orthodox gender ideology. He derives most of his theological proofs from the book of *Genesis*. Since in the contemporary mentality Eve stood for all womankind whereas Adam for all mankind, Agrippa's argumentation is moving along the following axes. Women are superior to men in theological/linguistic terms (in Hebrew Eve means life whereas Adam means earth), in the material of creation (Adam was created by clay, whereas Eve by the living flesh of Adam), in the place of their creation (Adam was created in *Campo Damasceno* whereas Eve in Paradise), in the order of creation (Eve was created after Adam; she was the last created thing and consequently the most perfect), the words of God during the creation of Eve, and the original sin (where Adam is proven to have been more responsible than Eve).

Furthermore, Agrippa claims that men and women are identical in the nature of their soul. Consequently, woman has "the same intelligence, reason, and power of speech as man and tends to the same end he does, that is [eternal] happiness, where there will be no restriction by sex".¹⁸ This statement is based on the Biblical doctrine that God created both Adam and Eve in his image; their difference consists only in their physical composition. It is an idea which rejects the influential authority of Aristotle, who in the *Generation of the Animals* regards female being as an incomplete/defective male, a physiological interpretation with direct implications to the moral and political definition of women as well. Agrippa's interpretation resembles most that of Plato who argues in the *Meno* that virtue is sexless and genderless.¹⁹ Agrippa also criticizes Aristotle's view on procreation. Instead of the Aristotelian view that male contributes motion and form to the embryo whereas the female only matter, which lacks the principle of the soul, Agrippa adopts Galen and the medieval Arabic physician Avicenna's two-seed theory which held mother an active participant in procreation as well.²⁰ The superior nature of women is further proven by several physiological arguments, such as the lack of baldness and beards, women's ability to produce milk and the beneficial qualities of menstrual blood.

¹⁸ Agrippa, *Declamation on the Nobility*, p. 43.

¹⁹ For Aristotle's and Plato's impact on the debate about women, see: Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism*, pp. 29-34.

²⁰ For the different views on procreation in the Ancient, Medieval and Modern period, see: T. Laqueur, *Making Sex. Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Mass. & London, 1990), pp. 25-62; E. Berriot-Salvadore, "The Discourse of Medicine and Science", in *A History of Women in the West*, ed. G. Duby, M. Perrot, vol. 3, *Renaissance and Enlightenment Paradoxes*, ed. N. Zemon Davis, A. Farge (Cambridge Mass. & London, 1993).

Following the neo-platonic tradition, Agrippa takes women's superior physical beauty as granted and as a sign of their divine nature. In addition, the superior nature of women is proven by their superior moral qualities, such as modesty, constancy, piety and mercifulness, and their mental capacities. Women's exemplary deeds from the Biblical, mythological and historical past are cited as proofs of women's abilities and their contribution to the achievements of humanity in theology, philosophy, arts, sciences and politics. In this way, Agrippa acknowledges an important place for women in history. Finally, Agrippa attempts to solve the contradiction between the superior nature of women and their inferior position in society. Women are not recognized in his day, as he says, because men have deprived them of what the divine and natural law has appointed them. Unjust laws, custom, the false interpretation of the Scriptures, the lack of education and home seclusion are what have led women to an inferior social position. All these have excluded women from "the court, from judgments, from adoption, from intercession, from administration, from the right of trusteeship, from guardianship, from matters of inheritance, and from criminal trials...from preaching the word of God".²¹ It is Agrippa's contemporary society rather than natural law that prevents women from exercising public, judicial, ecclesiastical, and academic offices.

Some of Agrippa's exemplary women were drawn from Giovanni Boccaccio's *De Claris Mulieribus*, written between 1361 and 1362 and dedicated to Andrea Acciaiuoli, Countess of Altavilla.²² Boccaccio's collection of biographies of famous women was inspired by Petrarch's lives of famous men, *De viris illustribus*. Boccaccio derived the necessary information from classical authors, such as Livy, Ovid, Pliny the Elder, Statius, Suetonius, Valerius Maximus and Vergil, late ancient writers and some chronicles contemporary to him. *De Claris Mulieribus* includes biographies of women who became famous either for their meritorious deeds or for their evil actions. It is evident that Boccaccio in no way intended to show the excellence of the female sex, which he regards in any case inferior to the male one. Besides, Boccaccio's women are explicitly presented as exceptions to the female sex.²³ However, Boccaccio's vital importance consists in rendering women as historical subjects and furnishing the debate with the necessary examples of famous

²¹ Agrippa, *Declamation on the Nobility*, p. 95.

²² G. Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, trans. and ed. V. Brown (Cambridge, Mass. & London 2003), (first published in 2001).

²³ See also below pp. 137-8.

women. In this sense, *De Claris Mulieribus* became a significant forerunner of the early modern debate about women in Italy and elsewhere in Europe. Several vernacular renderings in Italian, French, German, English and Spanish appeared soon after its circulation in Latin. Furthermore, Boccaccio's work set the example for similar collections of women's biographies, which began to circulate from the fifteenth century, such as Alvaro de Luna's *Libro de las claras e virtuosas mugeres* (1446), Antonio Cornazzano's *De mulieribus admirandis* (c.1467) and Iacopo Filippo Foresti's *De plurimis claris selectisque mulieribus*.²⁴ Sixteenth and seventeenth-century biographies of famous women by writers such as Pietro Paolo Ribera and Francesco Agostino della Chiesa continued the same tradition.²⁵ These biographies were each time adapted to the respective social conditions and dominant cultural norms.

Some years before the publication of the *Declamatio*, in 1526, Agrippa had written a treatise in defense of marriage. The *De sacramento matrimonii declamatio* had also been dedicated to a powerful woman, Marguerite of Navarre. According to Agrippa, marriage is necessary for avoiding fornication. The ideal marriage is portrayed as a relationship between husband and wife animated by love and companionship.²⁶ Agrippa's work was part of a broader debate on marriage, domestic economy and upbringing of children. Already from the fifteenth century some important writings on marriage and household management had been written, such as the Venetian patrician Francesco Barbaro's *De re uxoria* (1415), written for the wedding festivities of Cosimo de' Medici's brother Lorenzo and translated into Italian in 1548, and the Florentine Leon Battista Alberti *Libri della famiglia* (1437-1441).²⁷ Theories on household management and political organization are closely interwoven in these works. Fifteenth-century writings on domestic economy, such as those of Barbaro and Alberti, have been seen as the expression of a new positive attitude toward wealth, within the renaissance value of active life, in contrast with the medieval contempt of the world and its goods. Barbaro's work in particular has been

²⁴ Brown, "Introduction, in *ibid.*

²⁵ P. P. Ribera, *Le glorie immortali de' trionfi, et heroiche imprese d'ottocento quarantacinque donne illustri antiche, e moderne, dotate di conditioni, e scienze segnalate* (Venice, 1609); F. A. Della Chiesa, *Theatro delle donne letterate con un breve discorso della preminenza, e perfettione del sesso donesco* (Mondovì, 1620).

²⁶ Rabil, "Introduction", in Agrippa, *Declamation on the Nobility*, p. 9.

²⁷ F. Barbaro, *Prudentissimi et gravi documenti circa la election della moglie...nuovamente dal Latino tradotti per M. Alberto Lolio Ferrarese* (Venice, 1548).

related to the need of a new social and political redefinition of the Venetian noble class during the first half of the fifteenth century.²⁸ Another equally influential text on marriage was Desiderius Erasmus' *Encomium matrimonii*, published in Basel in 1526 and dedicated to Catherine of Aragon, Henry's VIII wife. It criticized monasticism and celibacy and brought forward the notion of matrimonial chastity. Erasmian thought had a great impact on Italy. Erasmus' ideas on marriage are often found in the subsequent writings on marriage, although the *Encomium matrimonii* was listed in the Index of prohibited books among other Erasmian writings.²⁹

As the sixteenth century progressed, treatises on marriage and domestic economy increased importantly in Italy. The promotion and standardization of the marriage sacrament by the Catholic Church in the decree of the 24th session of the Council of Trent, in 1563, increased the interest in marriage and spouses' proper relations. The debate about women was an integral part of these treatises. In this literature, women's contribution is considered of great importance for the well being of the household. However, focusing on women's domestic responsibilities and certain moral qualities, epitomized in chastity, domestic literature confirmed and enforced women's position in the private sphere of activity. In contrast with the literature on women's excellence, which at least potentially claimed a public role for women, treatises on domestic economy reproduced women's inferior position. In these works, wives' subjection to their husbands is sanctioned by the natural, divine and human law. Furthermore, conduct literature had different implications from love literature and philosophy. Their cultural differentiation is demonstrated in the perception of love. In the neo-platonic view, love can be the means of fulfillment and contemplation of God, independently of the social character of the love affair. On the contrary, in conduct literature either there is no reference to extramarital love or such relations are charged negatively as a menace to domestic harmony. The only permissible form of love is that between consorts, a view epitomized in the

²⁸ H. Baron, "A New Attitude Toward Wealth", in *Social and Economic Foundations of the Italian Renaissance*, ed. A. Molho (New York, 1969); M. L. King, "Caldiera and the Barbaros on Marriage and the Family: Humanist Reflections of Venetian Realities", *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 6 (1976); D. Romano, *Housecraft and Statecraft. Domestic Service in Renaissance Venice, 1400-1600* (Baltimore & London, 1996), pp. 5-13.

²⁹ *Erasmus on Women*, ed. E. Ruminel (Toronto & London, 1996); F. Ambrosini, "Libri e lettrici in terra Veneta nel sec. XVI. Echi Erasmiani e inclinazioni eterodosse", in *Erasmus, Venezia e la cultura Padana nel '500*, ed. A. Olivieri (Rovigo, 1995).

idealization of female chastity as a necessary precondition for the well running of the household and civic welfare.

The proper upbringing of the girls is a standard topic of the literature on domestic management. Of great influence was the Spanish humanist Juan Luis Vives' *De institutione feminae Christianae*, the first writing exclusively treating the education and proper behaviour of women.³⁰ It was first published in Antwerp in 1524 and, like Erasmus' work on marriage, it was dedicated to Catherine of Aragon. Vives' treatise became very popular throughout Europe; it circulated in forty editions and was translated or closely plagiarized into English, Dutch, French, German, Spanish and Italian. Vives had shown a broader interest in education matters, as is demonstrated by his two short manuals for the education of male and female students, which had also been written in the royal environment of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon.³¹ *De institutione* is divided into three books, treating a different stage of women's lifecycle – virginity, marriage and widowhood. The first book discusses the upbringing and education of girls and young women, whereas the second and the third depict the proper female conduct of married women and widows respectively. Already in his dedication, Vives states clearly that women's education is a necessary precondition for the well running of the household and the prosperity of the state. Although he rebuts the traditionally held view that the female sex is unable to engage in letters, Vives draws sharp divisions between women's and men's social role and, consequently, between their educational needs.³² In contrast with men's education, which provides them with the necessary qualifications for a public life, women's education aims at helping them to preserve their chastity, which is the foundation of all other female virtues:

In addition, although rules of conduct for men are numerous, the moral formation of women can be imparted with very few precepts, since men are occupied both within the home and outside it, in public and in private, and for that reason lengthy volumes are required to explain the norms to be observed in their varied duties. A

³⁰ J. L. Vives, *The Education of a Christian Woman*, ed. & trans. C. Fantazzi (Chicago & London, 2000).

³¹ Fantazzi, "Introduction", in *ibid.*, pp. 3-12.

³² On Vives' views on female education, see also below pp. 42-3, 102.

woman's only care is chastity; therefore when this has been thoroughly elucidated, she may be considered to have received sufficient instruction.³³

Vives' heavy criticism of love poetry is indicative of the contrasting approaches between conduct and love literature:

There are those who write filthy and scurrilous poems, and what pretext that has even the semblance of honesty they can adduce for their intent I do not see, save that their minds, corrupted by wickedness and tainted with poison, can emit only poison, with which to destroy everything around them. They say they are lovers, and I do not doubt it, for they too are blind and insane. It is as if you cannot gain the submission of your mistress without at the same time corrupting and defiling all other women along with her.³⁴

The debate about women was developed along these main lines. Nevertheless, contrasting ideological trends are often found in the same author, or even in the same work, since a complex ensemble of factors, both literary and social, contributed to each writer's attitude towards the woman question. Contemporary background both historical and literary, such as literary and social networks of acquaintances, the current dominant ideological orientations, the patronage system, the market forces of the book trade and the specific historical context prescribed each writer's personal choices. Thanks to its central position in the early modern European cultural scene and its enormous publishing industry, Venice can be used as a case study in order to sketch out how the debate about women was shaped and circulated in early modern Italy. A comparison between pre- and post- Tridentine Venice and the respective changes in the debate can also help to detect how the broader socio-cultural circumstances influenced gender perceptions in the early modern period.

³³ Vives, *The Education of a Christian Woman*, p. 47.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

THE VENETIAN SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Before proceeding to examine the development of the debate about women and its cultural agents in early modern Venice, it will be necessary to outline the city's socio-cultural environment and intellectual life in the first half of the sixteenth century. Despite the new challenges Venice faced in the Mediterranean trade, the threat of the Ottoman advance westwards, and in Italy with the War of the League of Cambrai (1509-1517), at the beginning of the sixteenth century the Republic of Venice continued to be one of the most important commercial and intellectual centres of Europe. Venice had survived the French and Spanish invasions and sustained a republican form of government. The relative freedom that the city offered to its habitants and the famous University of nearby Padua, which was under the administration of Venice, rendered the Republic of Venice a very important intellectual centre, where known *literati* from all over Italy and abroad gathered. The intellectuals who frequented Venice had often passed through other Italian cities and had engaged in politics or in literary developments there. In their brief or longer residence in Venice they passed on their experiences to the city's cultural environment. As a crossroad between northern Europe, Italy and the East, Venice was traditionally a significant centre for intellectual associations and traffic of ideas, both producing and channeling the contemporary ideology.

Early sixteenth-century Venice was an important centre of debates on contemporary politics and religious developments. Some of the first steps towards a reformed Catholic Church had taken place in Venice among prominent figures, such as Gian Matteo Giberti, Gasparo Contarini, Alvise Priuli and Marcantonio Flaminio. Due to its proximity to the German lands, Venice was particularly subject to the reform ideas. At the beginning of the century reform ideas permeated the whole Venetian society, ranging from Patrician Evangelicals, such as Carlo Corner, Alvise and Giacomo Malipiero, Antonio Loredan, Francesco Emo and Andrea Dandolo, to the class of artisans, some of whom widely discussed a variety of new religious ideas, indulged in dangerous debates, and some of whom flirted dangerously with Anabaptism. After the failure of the Colloquy of Regensburg (1541) to bring conciliation between Catholics and Protestants, the hardening of Rome, the reorganization of the Holy Inquisition (1542) by Paul III and the opening of the

Council of Trent on December 1545 the traditional Venetian anticlerical trends increased. At the same time, the Venetian intellectual climate was imbued with anti-court tendencies within the Renaissance republican tradition. After the gradual transformation of the Italian Republics to monarchies – the Florentine Republic ended in 1530 – Venice remained the only important Italian Republic along with Genoa. Republican ideals were in close affinity to the evangelical movement. The Venetians Gasparo Contarini and Pier Paolo Vergerio – both important figures in the religious reforms of 1530s and 1540s – also wrote treatises on republican government.³⁵

The economic prosperity of Venice and its lively intellectual life created the ideal circumstances for the quick development of a successful publishing industry, especially from 1530s to 1560s. During this period, Venice offered the best chances to individuals who wished to be involved in the new profitable industry. Besides the already existing printing houses, new ones set up in Venice during the 1530s and 1540s, such as those of Giovanni Andrea Valvassori (1530), Francesco Marcolini from Forlì (1535), Giovanni Giolito from Trino in Piedmont (1536), his son Gabriel (on his own from 1541), Vincenzo Valgrisi (1539), Michele Tramezzino from Rome (1539), Comin da Trino (1539 or 1540) and Giovanni Griffio (1544).³⁶ It has been estimated that of the 8,000 surviving editions of incunabula printed in Italy, more than a third, perhaps nearly one half, were printed in Venice, although less than 14 per cent of Italians lived in the Venetian dominations and only just over 1 per cent lived in the city of Venice.³⁷ According to Paul Grendler, probably surpassing their European rivals in Lyon, Paris and Basel, the Venetian presses published at least about 15,000 editions in the sixteenth century.³⁸

The Venetian presses supplied readers all over Italy. The agents often came from other Italian cities, or even from abroad, such as the Spanish Alfonso di Ulloa, who worked for the publisher Gabriel Giolito on translations of Spanish texts into Italian and editions of original Spanish writings. The publishers, editors and authors

³⁵ J. J. Martin, *Venice's Hidden Enemies. Italian Heretics in a Renaissance City* (Baltimore & London, 2003), (first published in 1993); E. G. Gleason, *Gasparo Contarini. Venice, Rome, and Reform* (Berkeley & Oxford, 1993); S. D. Bowd, *Reform before the Reformation. Vincenzo Querini and the Religious Renaissance in Italy* (Leiden & Boston, 2002).

³⁶ B. Richardson, *Print Culture in Renaissance Italy. The Editor and the Vernacular Text, 1470-1600* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 90.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

³⁸ P. Grendler, *The Roman Inquisition and the Venetian Press, 1540-1605* (Princeton, N.J., 1977), pp. 3-12.

who gathered in Venice often kept connections with the commercial and intellectual circles of their homelands or the areas where they had developed activity before their arrival in Venice. However, Venice offered them the best chances to find work in the dynamically expanding publishing industry. Furthermore, the greater political freedom, which Venice offered, at least during the first decades of the century, attracted people who had encountered difficulties at their homelands, such as Antonio Brucioli, who went to Venice in 1529 as a Florentine exile because of his anti-Medicean activity.

The gradual replacement of Latin by the vernacular, both as a consequence of the printing invention and as necessary precondition for the further flourishing of it, led to a codification of the Italian language. Gian Francesco Fortunio's *Regole grammaticali della vulgar lingua* (1516) was the first printed grammar of the vernacular and Pietro Bembo's *Prose della vulgar lingua* (1525) established fourteenth-century Tuscan as the model for the Italian literary language, with particular emphasis on Petrarch and Boccaccio.³⁹ Vernacular classics, such as Baldesar Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano* (1528) and Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1516) were seminal in the standardization of the vernacular. Furthermore, early sixteenth-century literary academies, such as that of the *Infiammati* of Padua, enforced this development by lectures and editions in the vernacular.

The literary agents in Venice furthered the establishment of the vernacular in every possible way; they translated Latin texts into Italian and wrote linguistic treatises on the proper use of the vernacular, such as those of Francesco Sansovino, Lodovico Dolce and Rinaldo Corso.⁴⁰ In his dedication to the publisher Gabriel Giolito, Lodovico Dolce clarifies that he wrote the *Osservazioni* not to form new linguistic regulations, beyond those already established by Bembo and Fortunio, but to make them more accessible to those who did not know Latin.⁴¹ The large circulation of the writings of Petrarch, Boccaccio and Ariosto, enriched with the editors' linguistic commentaries, demonstrate the same tendency. The bookmen's goal was the greater possible increase in the reading public, which included now less educated male readers and women, as is often indicated by the proems and

³⁹ Richardson, *Print Culture*, pp. 48-78.

⁴⁰ F. Sansovino, *L'arte oratorio secondo i modi della lingua volgare* (Venice, 1546), R. Corso, *Fondamenti del parlar thoscano* (Venice, 1549); L. Dolce, *Osservazioni nella vulgar lingua* (Venice, 1550); idem, *Modi affigurati e voci scelte ed eleganti della vulgar lingua* (Venice, 1564).

⁴¹ "Dolce, Lodovico", in *Dizionario*, vol. 40, pp. 399-405, p. 402.

dedications of the emerging literature. The establishment of the vernacular and the relative popularization of the written culture were of vital importance for expanding the publishing trade. The relatively low prices of the books, usually published in octavos or duodecimos, and the promotion of new topics, which would attract the new reading public, were of equal importance.

In the eighth dialogue of Nicolò Franco, the advice Sannio gives to Cautano on how a bookshop should work is characteristic of the new commercial and intellectual trends:

So, what matters is to stock the bookshop with these small books, which have been translated in this language [Italian] and continue to be translated from hand to hand. Because artisans [*mecanici*], who are not well-versed in letters, will want Pliny to learn *de agibilibus mundi*. Soldiers, who do not know Latin, will want Appian's wars and Caesar's Commentaries. To learn to pass for important, Princes will buy the lives of Plutarch and Suetonius. And friars and priests will want St. Paul's Epistles, the Gospel and Bible. Take no account of learned people's criticism of poets' translations; they are jealous because translators do not write for the scholars but for those who are not learned...⁴²

Within this climate a new type of writer – the so-called *poligrafo* – made his appearance in Venice in the 1530s. The intellectuals' traditional dependence on the patronage mechanisms of the Courts and Church gave way to the close interrelation between the *litterati* and the book market forces. Until then a closed elite, literary agents now developed mutual communication and interdependence with the reading public. *Poligrafi* worked as translators, editors, proofreaders and writers of originals works. They constituted the major link among all the concerned sides: publishers, dedicatees and reading public. Publishers provided the necessary capital, but to

⁴² "Et perciò importerà di tenere la bottega fornita di quelle operine, che in questa lingua sono state tradotte, & si traducono di mano in mano. Perche i mecanici, che non hanno lettere, per imparare de agibilibus mundi, vorranno Plinio. I soldati, che non intendono latinamente, vorranno le guerre di Appiano con i Commentari di Cesare. I Principi per imparare ad essere da qualche cosa, compreranno le vite di Plutarco, e di Suetonio. Et i Frati con i Preti, vorranno le Pistole di San Paolo, & i Vangeli, con la Bibbia. Non guardare che i dotti biasmino le traduttioni de Poeti, perche l'invidia loro è, che i traduttori non scrivono per i dotti, ma per queglii, che non intendono...": N. Franco, *Dialoghi Piacevolissimi* (Venice, 1593), (first published in 1539), pp.112R-V.

surpass their rivals they had to count on charismatic individuals who would be able to keep readers' interest vivid.⁴³

The life and writings of Pietro Aretino exemplify the new type of intellectual. He was born in Arezzo in 1492 into a family of humble origins; his father was a cobbler. In 1510, he was found in Perugia under the protection of the humanist Francesco Bontempi. There, Aretino developed his first important literary acquaintances with the intellectual circles of the city. In 1517, he entered the Roman Court under the protection of the Cardinal Giulio de' Medici but, after the death of Leo X (1521) and the election of Adrian VI, Aretino's relations with the Papal Court deteriorated and he moved to the Mantuan Court of Federico Gonzaga. The election of the Medici Pope, Clement VII (1523), with whom Aretino was on good terms, gave the latter the opportunity to reappear on the scene. However, sometime between 1524 and 1525, Aretino wrote some pornographic sonnets, *Sonetti Lussuriosi*, and published them along with Giulio Romano's erotic drawings, engraved by Marcantonio Raimondi. Raimondi's engravings had already been condemned by the Pope, when they had been first published in 1524, and Raimondi had already been jailed. Aretino's initiative brought him into new conflict with Rome, and especially with the Pope's secretary, Gian Matteo Giberti.⁴⁴ Finally, in 1527, Aretino arrived in Venice, where he stayed until his death, in 1556. There, initially under the protection of the Doge Andrea Gritti, Aretino widened his circle of acquaintances, including important patrician families, such as Corner, Venier, Molin, Querini and Da Lezze. The unofficial politico-diplomatic international missions that he undertook as an agent for Venice further strengthened his position. His writings often reflect a propagandistic favour with the politics of the Republic of Venice.

It was during his long residence in Venice that Aretino formed his personal style, which was to become seminal for the subsequent literary developments. Thanks to his writings and important acquaintances, Aretino became the most important figure of the emergent vernacular literature in Venice. His home, in the

⁴³ For the activities of the *poligrafi*, see: C. Di Filippo Bareggi, *Il mestiere di scrivere. Lavoro intellettuale e mercato librario a Venezia nel Cinquecento* (Rome, 1988); P. Grendler, *Critics of the Italian World, 1530-1560. Anton Francesco Doni, Nicolò Franco & Ortensio Lando* (Madison & London, 1969); A. Quondam, "'Mercanzia d'onore' 'Mercanzia d'utile'. Produzione libraria e lavoro intellettuale a Venezia nel Cinquecento", in *Libri, editori e pubblico nell' Europa moderna*, ed. A. Petrucci (Rome, 1977).

⁴⁴ *I Modi. The Sixteen Pleasures: an Erotic Album of the Italian Renaissance*, ed. & trans. L. Lawner (Evanston, Ill., 1988), pp. 3-10; B. Talvacchia, *Taking Positions: on the Erotic in Renaissance Culture* (Princeton, 1999), pp. 85-100.

Palazzo Bolani, on the Grand Canal, hosted important political and diplomatic figures, intellectuals and well-known artists, such as Titian and Jacopo Sansovino. Aretino represented in the best way the new literary figure who, despite the lack of a humanist educational background traditionally demanded until then, succeeded in exploiting the chances the publishing industry offered and adapting himself to the new economic, social and ideological circumstances. His style found many imitators among the *poligrafi* of Venice during the 1530s and 1540s.⁴⁵

Aretino's writings followed two main directions. On the one hand, he satirized the humanist tradition (*Il Filosofo, Ragionamenti*). On the other hand, he developed a strong anticlerical and anti-court ideology (*Ragionamenti, Il Marescalco*), with specific references to the Roman Court (*Ragionamento delle corti, La Cortigiana*). Castiglione's and Bembo's style became often the target of Aretino's criticism. Being aware of the limitations the new literary rules would put to his less refined literary style, Aretino paradoxically criticized the cultural norms which paved the way for his success. Aretino and his followers - often coming from relatively low ranks of society - attempted to establish themselves as a new type of intellectual, by condemning both the fifteenth-century intellectual who, expert in Latin and often Greek, operated within the Court and ecclesiastical patronage system, and their contemporary Court culture, best expressed by Bembo and Castiglione's neo-platonic and petrarchan style. The literary figure of the pedant, featuring in the comedies of the period, expresses this anti-humanist trend. The pedant of Aretino's *Il Marescalco* (1533) or Dolce's *Il Ragazzo* (1541) is nothing but a derisory version of the Latin-speaking schoolmaster. Aretino's second line of attack was associated with the traditional confrontation between Venice and Rome, which increased from 1536, when Gian Pietro Carafa was called to Rome, made a cardinal by Paul III, was appointed to a committee for ecclesiastical reform, and then promoted the reorganization of the Roman Inquisition. The period between 1540 and 1542 in particular marked the hardening of the Catholic Reformation with the flight of Pietro

⁴⁵ For Aretino's life and works, see: "Aretino, Pietro", in *Dizionario*, vol. 4, pp. 89-105; G. Acquilecchia, "Pietro Aretino e altri poligrafi a Venezia", in *Storia della Cultura Veneta dal Primo Quattrocento al Concilio di Trento*, 6 vols. (Vicenza, 1976-1986), vol. 3/II; C. Cairns, *Pietro Aretino and the Republic of Venice. Research on Aretino and his circle in Venice 1527-1556*, (Florence, 1985); P. Labalme, "Personality and Politics in Venice: Pietro Aretino", in *Titian. His World and his Legacy*, ed. D. Rosand (New York, 1982); *Pietro Aretino nel cinquecentenario della nascita. Atti del Convegno di Roma-Viterbo-Arezzo (28 settembre-1 ottobre 1992), Toronto (23-24 ottobre 1992), Los Angeles (27-29 ottobre 1992)*, 2 vols (Rome, 1995).

Paolo Vergerio and Bernardo Ochino, who escaped to Geneva, and the deaths of Gian Matteo Giberti and Gasparo Contarini. It was in 1538 that Aretino, a friend of Vergerio, and an admirer of Ochino, openly attacked Carafa in the *Ragionamento delle Corti*.⁴⁶

Aretino set the pattern for most *poligrafi* who worked in Venice in the 1530s and 1540s. *Poligrafi* came from several Italian cities and different social origins. Despite the differences in their writings and lifestyle, what shaped them as a discernible group is that they wrote, made commentaries or translated in the vernacular in close association with the emergent Venetian printing industry, without enjoying long-term patronage from the nobility. Apart from Lodovico Dolce, who was from the city of Venice, most *poligrafi* came from other places of origin; Lodovico Domenichi and Girolamo Parabosco from Piacenza, Anton Francesco Doni and Antonio Brucioli from Florence, Ortensio Lando from Milan, Girolamo Ruscelli from Viterbo, in Tuscia, Giuseppe Betussi from Bassano, near Venice, Nicolò Franco from Benevento and Francesco Sansovino from Rome. Some of them were of modest social backgrounds. Doni was the son of a scissors-maker of the district of San Lorenzo, in Florence. Franco's parents were in all probability peasants, despite his declarations of being of high origins. Although nothing is known of Lando's family, his assertion that his mother was a noblewoman is not convincing. The social condition of Ruscelli is not known but his family must have been of relatively poor economic means. Betussi, Domenichi and Dolce came from notary families. Francesco Sansovino was the son of the famous sculptor Jacobo Sansovino. His father left Rome in the aftermath of the sack of 1527 and arrived in Venice, where, in April 1529, he was appointed *protomastro della repubblica* by the *procuratori* of San Marco. He undertook the major building structures of the Library of St. Mark and Mint, the Loggetta at the base of the Campanile and the Palazzo Corner on the Grand Canal. Girolamo Parabosco was the son of a musician, Vincenzo Parabosco, an organist in Brescia.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ For the anti-humanist trends and the criticism of the Bembian style in the 1530s and 1540s, see: Grendler, *Critics of the Italian World*, pp. 136-61; for Aretino and his circle's criticism of Bembo, Castiglione and Carafa and for the figure of the pendant, see: Cairns, *Pietro Aretino*, pp. 49-68, 75-8, 179-202. For Aretino's criticism of Bembo and Castiglione, see: P. Burke "The Renaissance Dialogue", *Renaissance Studies*, 3 (1989).

⁴⁷ Grendler, *Critics of the Italian World*, pp. 20-69; Bareggi, *Il mestiere di scrivere*, pp. 13-40; for Francesco Sansovino, see: E. Bonora, *Ricerche su Francesco Sansovino. Imprenditore Libraio e Letterato* (Venice, 1994); P. Grendler, "Francesco Sansovino and Italian Popular History, 1560-1600" in his *Culture and Censorship in Late Renaissance Italy and France* (London, 1981).

For some of the *poligrafi* Aretino was not only a source of inspiration but also a protector. His fame and important circle of acquaintances made his favour crucial to whoever was at the beginning of his career. In 1536, Aretino took Franco as secretary to assist in the preparation of his letters for publication and translate the Church Fathers for him. This relationship promoted Franco's talent, until 1538, when their friendship broke on the basis that Franco had plagiarized Aretino. The latter's envy forced Franco to leave Venice in 1540. Similarly, Doni was initially on good terms with Aretino, until 1556, when, probably irritated by Aretino's refusal to provide him with a letter of recommendation to the Duke of Urbino, Doni published a defamatory book against Aretino, the *Teremoto*.⁴⁸ For Sansovino, Aretino was an example for imitation as well. Having studied law at the universities of Padua, Florence and Bologna under his father's pressure, Sansovino chose to engage in vernacular literature and joined the Academy of the *Inflammati* in Padua. Having quarreled with his father over his career and having economic difficulties, the young Sansovino wrote to Aretino, a personal friend of his father, asking him for financial help and to intervene between him and his father. This letter, written in October 1540, is also interesting for the distinction Sansovino makes between the humanist tradition and the emergent vernacular literature. Referring to the Academy of the *Inflammati*, Sansovino writes, "not only do they treat the profession of the humanists but ours as well through the declamations that continually are given there".⁴⁹

From contemporary correspondence and literary references a circle of closer acquaintances emerges between Aretino, Domenichi, Doni, Dolce, Betussi and Sansovino, who frequented Aretino's salon. Belonging to the same Academies in Venice, *poligrafi* shared a common culture. Domenichi, Parabosco, Ruscelli and Dolce joined the Academy of Fratta. Sansovino, Parabosco, Domenichi, Dolce and Doni were members of the Academy of *Pellegrini*. Sansovino, Betussi and Dolce belonged to the nearby Academy of *Inflammati* in Padua. During their residence in Venice, *poligrafi* worked with the same publishers as well. Gabriel Giolito was in collaboration with Domenichi, Dolce, Doni, Parabosco and Betussi. Ruscelli, Lando, Betussi and Domenichi worked with Andrea Arrivabene and Doni, Dolce and Franco with Francesco Marcolini, the main publisher of Aretino's writings and a member of *Pellegrini* as secretary and publisher. Their close interests naturally led them not only

⁴⁸ Grendler, *Critics of the Italian World*, pp. 39-40, 53-4.

⁴⁹ Idem, "Five Italian Occurrences of Umanista, 1540-1574", in *Culture and Censorship*, p. 318.

to cultural interchanges but also to antagonisms that often resulted in keen quarrels, such as that between Ruscelli and Dolce.⁵⁰

However, despite their affinity, *poligrafi* were not identical in their attitude towards the contemporary cultural and socio-political developments. The social origins and chances of social advancement often prescribed the different ideological trends found in them. Paul Grendler has stressed the differences between Lando, Franco and Doni, who were of a lower social status than the other *poligrafi*. Inspired by the Erasmian and Evangelical movements, Lando, Franco and Doni expressed strong anticlerical sentiments, criticized the ecclesiastical structures and sought a simpler religion of piety and morality. Lando traveled to Lyon, Geneva and Germanic lands and came into contact with Protestants and persons suspected of having heretical ideas, such as the Latin Scholar Dolet. His writings often expressed ideas which go beyond a simple anticlericalism. He discussed justification by faith in books such as the *Ragionamenti Familiari* (1550) and *Dialogo nel quale si ragiona della consolatione, et utilità, che si gusta leggendo la Sacra Scrittura* (1552), which was published by Andrea Arrivabene in Venice. At the same time, counter-proposing utopian alternatives, Lando, Franco and Doni attacked the contemporary social structure and moral decay. In 1548, Thomas More's *Utopia* was translated by Lando and published by Doni. In 1553, Doni wrote *I Mondi*, another utopian work characterized by strong social and moral criticism. All Lando's works under his own name and his aliases were prohibited from 1564 on, and Franco was tried by the Inquisition for his pasquinades against Paul IV and he was hanged in 1570.⁵¹ It has also been suggested that Venetian artistic theories, epitomized in the comparison between Titian and Tintoretto, demonstrated a broader cultural conflict rooted in social differentiations. Writers with better social prospects, such as Aretino, Dolce and Sansovino, supported Titian, whereas writers of a lower social profile, such as Doni and the comic playwright and actor Andrea Calmo, preferred Tintoretto, who was relatively low born and, despite his professional success, maintained connections with the artisan classes.⁵²

⁵⁰ Bareggi, *Il mestiere di scrivere*.

⁵¹ Grendler, *Critics of the Italian World*; for Lando's religious orientation, see also: S. Seidel Menchi, "Spiritualismo radicale nelle opera di Ortensio Lando attorno al 1550", *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 65 (1974).

⁵² T. Nichols, "Tintoretto, Prestezza and the Poligrafi: a Study in the Literary and Visual Culture of Cinquecento Venice", *Renaissance Studies*, 10:1 (1996).

Reform tendencies are found in the works of other *poligrafi* as well. Domenichi, a close friend for some time with Doni, published writings such as Cornelius Agrippa's *Della vanità delle scienze* (1547), Erasmus and Nicola Granier's *La spada delle fede*. In 1552, Domenichi was condemned to imprisonment for life for printing Calvin's *Nicodemiana* and Johann Sleidan's *Commentarii* on Lorenzo Torrentino's press, in Florence, but rescued thanks to the intervention of Renata of France (Renata d'Este), Duchess of Ferrara, and Calvinist sympathizer. Also Domenichi, and Betussi, belonged to the circle of Capitano Camillo Caula in Venice, known for his philoprottestant tendencies.⁵³ Domenichi, Lando, Doni, Parabosco and Betussi associated with the Academy of the *Ortolani* in Piacenza, where heterodox and anticlerical ideas circulated broadly.⁵⁴ Some Venetian publishers seem to have also associated themselves with reform ideas. The most characteristic case is that of Andrea Arrivabene, a friend of Vergerio, who, in the mid-1540s, began supplying evangelicals in Viadana, near Mantua, with such works as the *Beneficio di Cristo* and the *Sommario della Santa Scrittura*. His bookshop in Venice was a place of heterodox conversations. Arrivabene's publications and circle of acquaintances repeatedly raised the suspicions of the Inquisition.⁵⁵ Similarly, Gabriel Giolito was put on trial by the Inquisition in 1565. The trial began with the accusation that Giolito's bookshop in Naples supplied prohibited books. The inquisitors scouted for suspicious connections in Giolito's circles. Suspicious arose about Giolito's possession of Sleidan's works. According to the defendant, those writings had been necessary to his companion, Lodovico Dolce. Suspicious also arose from Giolito's relationships with Francesco Spinola, who, in July 1564, was arrested for heresy and was executed in 1567. Spinola had been the tutor of Giolito's son about 1562, while he worked for a brief period in Giolito's press. Although Giolito denied any affinity with heterodox ideas, his publications and acquaintances imply he was not indifferent to reform thought.⁵⁶

⁵³ "Domenichi, Ludovico", in *Dizionario*, vol. 40, pp. 595-601; Bareggi, *Il mestiere di scrivere*, pp. 192-228.

⁵⁴ Bareggi, *Il mestiere di scrivere*; Acquilecchia, "Pietro Aretino".

⁵⁵ Grendler, *The Roman Inquisition*, pp. 105-112, Martin, *Venice's Hidden Enemies*, p. 81; Bareggi, *Il mestiere di scrivere*, pp. 198-201.

⁵⁶ On Giolito's trial, see: S. Bongi, *Annali di Gabriel Giolito de'Ferrari da Trino di Monferrato stampatore in Venezia*, 2 vols (Rome, 1890); Bareggi, *Il mestiere di scrivere*, pp. 206-208; M. L. Kuntz, "Lodovico Domenichi, Guillaume Postel and the Biography of Giovanna Veronese", in her *Venice, Myth and Utopian Thought in the Sixteenth-Century* (Aldershot, 1999).

It was in this intellectual environment that the debate about women was developed in Venice, especially in the 1540s and 1550s. As will be shown below, the debate was not exclusively dealt with by the *poligrafi*. More "academic" writers, such as Alessandro Piccolomini and Sperone Speroni, who were connected with the Venetian environment through Padua University and the Paduan Academy of the *Infiammati*, also played a significant and influential role in the evolution of the debate. However, being a topic relatively easy to read and fit to attract male and female readers' interest, the controversy about women was dealt with by most *poligrafi*. Several of those involved in the debate were controversially linked to dangerous religious debates and social comment and criticism. Although the debate about women was not directly associated with such ideas, the broader climate of dispute and novelty was favourable toward new interpretations of gender relations and questions about the established gender order and value system.

THE FORMATION OF THE DEBATE WITHIN AN EMERGING PUBLISHING INDUSTRY

Although the debate about women did not originate in Venice, Venice became the hub of its circulation and popularization. Within the Venetian socio-cultural environment the debate developed in several directions. Although influenced by key European writings about women, the woman question in Venice developed its own special features. The market forces of the expanding publishing trade dictated the terms of the debate. Furthermore, a complex ensemble of factors from the social and literary networks and ideological orientation of each author to patronage mechanisms conditioned the axes along which the debate moved.

Pietro Aretino's most influential work in the debate about women was the *Ragionamenti* (1534).⁵⁷ The dialogue is divided into two parts. The first dialogue takes place in a garden, in Rome, between the aged prostitute Nanna and her friend Antonia. The main topic of the debate is which contemporary social outlet is better for women – the convent, marriage or prostitution. Nanna and Antonia conclude that prostitution is the most secure and honest occupation, since the wife betrays the

⁵⁷ P. Aretino, *Dialogues*, trans. R. Rosenthal (London, 1972).

sanctity of marriage and the nun the religious vow. In the second dialogue, Nanna gives her daughter Pippa professional tips on prostitution. The figures of the courtesans in *Ragionamenti* may stand as symbols of social corruption and moral disruption for the writer to make a social criticism. The *Ragionamenti* is an open attack on contemporary respectability, an inversion of the code of good manners and morality. Furthermore, placing the dialogue in Rome, Aretino implies the corruption of the Papal court life under Leo X and Clement VII. Finally, it is a parody of the neo-platonic dialogues of Bembo and Castiglione. Both the sophisticated literary rules of the former and the refined courtly manners of the latter had also been the targets of other writings by Aretino.⁵⁸ Courtesans as speakers are also found in subsequent dialogues, such as those of Sperone Speroni and Giuseppe Bettusi. However, as will be shown below, in these writings courtesans played a somewhat different role.

Nicolò Franco's writings and life indicate how the debate about women was often shaped according to the peculiar contingencies of individual circumstance. Immediately after his arrival in Venice, Franco published the *Tempio d'Amore* and dedicated it to Argentina Rangona.⁵⁹ The dedicatee was the wife of the Modenese noble Guido Rangone, who was at the services of the Venetian Republic. Franco must have come in touch with him and his wife through Aretino, who was a friend of Rangone and had dedicated his comedy *Il Marescalco* (1533) to Argentina Rangona. *Tempio d'Amore* is a poetical composition in honour of Venetian noblewomen. By eulogizing these women, Franco simultaneously praises the city of Venice and some of the most powerful Venetian patrician families, to establish himself through some important acquaintances. Laudatory writings for Venetian noblewomen circulated broadly in Venice in the 1530s and 1540s, either published, such as those of Troilo Pomeran and Giovambattista Dragoncino, or in manuscript form.⁶⁰ The authors' objective seemingly was to declare their dedication to Venice and its ruling elite.

⁵⁸ On Aretino's *Ragionamenti*, see: Burke, "The Renaissance Dialogue"; G. Aquilecchia, "Aretino's *Sei Giornate*: Literary Parody and Social Reality", in *Women in Italian Renaissance*, ed. Panizza; G. Ruggiero, "Marriage, Love, Sex, and Renaissance Civic Morality", in *Sexuality and Gender in Early Modern Europe. Institutions, Texts, Images*, ed. J. G. Turner (Cambridge, 1993); for some aspects of the literary representation of the courtesans in early modern Italy, see: Rosenthal, *The Honest Courtesan*, pp. 11-57.

⁵⁹ N. Franco, *Tempio d'amore* (Venice, 1536).

⁶⁰ T. Pomeran da Cittadela, *Triomphi composti sopra li Terrocchi in Laude delle Famose Gentil Donne di Venezia* (Venice, 1534); G. Dragoncino da Fano, *Stanze in lode delle Nobil Donne Vinitiane del secolo moderno* (1547); Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Ms.It.XI, cod.XC (6774) with the title "Dame Veneziane. Stanze in loro lode".

However, after Franco had established himself in the Venetian environment and had associated with Aretino, his style gradually changed. In *Pistole Vulgari* (1539), *Il Petrarchista* (1539) and *Dialogi Piacevoli* (1539), obviously influenced by Aretino, Franco developed a strong anti-neoplatonic and anti-petrarchan ideology. The *Pistole Vulgari*, for instance, includes a letter, where a personified lantern argues that by peering into bedrooms it reveals everyday life to be the opposite of what laudatory sonnets and *canzoni* claim about women's beauty and virtue. Instead women are characterized by lasciviousness, pride, perversity, and instability.⁶¹ Similarly, Franco's *Petrarchista* is a parody of the Petrarchan poetry and Petrarch's love towards the famous Laura.⁶²

Nevertheless, Franco's attitude changed again after his departure from Venice. Seeking some professional security, he ended up in Casale Monferrato, in Piedmont, where the local nobility offered him hospitality. There, he wrote the *Dialogo delle Bellezze* dedicated to the Marchesana del Vasto. It is a conventional dialogue on beauty, which praises various Italian noblewomen.⁶³ In 1546, Franco arrived in Mantua to work with the publisher Giacomo Rufinelli. There, he published *La Philena* (1547), a prose epic dedicated to his new patron, Giuseppe Cantelmo, the count of Abruzzi of Popoli. *Philena* is obviously influenced by Boccaccio's *Fiammetta* and Mario Equicola's *Libro di natura di Amore*.⁶⁴ Gradually coming closer to courtly and aristocratic culture, Franco adapted his writings to meet the new socio-cultural requirements.

Similar trends against the neo-platonic courtly culture are found in Antonfrancesco Doni's *Pistolotti amorosi* (1552). The collection includes letters between fictional lovers, portraying the practical side of life and human relations in contradistinction to the theoretical perceptions of love philosophy. It also includes Doni's letters to contemporary *litterati* who lived at the time in Venice or associated themselves with the Venetian circles, including women, such as Francesca Baffa and Laura Terracina. Love is the main topic of discussion. The *Pistolotti amorosi* was written while Doni was in Venice under Aretino's strong influence.⁶⁵

⁶¹ P. Grendler, "The Rejection of Learning in Mid-Cinquecento Italy", in *Culture and Censorship*, pp. 234-5.

⁶² Grendler, *Critics of the Italian World*, pp. 40-42.

⁶³ N. Franco, *Dialogo delle bellezze* (Venice, 1542).

⁶⁴ G. De Michele, "La Filena' di N. Franco", *Rassegna critica della letteratura italiana*, 30 (1925).

⁶⁵ A. Doni, *Pistolotti Amorosi* (Venice, 1552).

When Girolamo Parabosco arrived in Venice is not known, but he must have passed much of his life in the city, working as a writer and musician. In all probability he was there around 1545, when Gabriel Giolito published his *Lettere Amoroſe*, a very popular collection of letters often characterized by an anti-petrarchan tone as well.⁶⁶ Three years later, Parabosco wrote the *Tempio della fama in lode d'alcune gentil donne Venetiane*. Like Franco's *Tempio d'Amore*, Parabosco's work mainly sought to praise some powerful Patrician Venetian families, such as Corner, Pisani, Donato, Loredan, Priuli, Badoer, Venier and Morosino, rather than the women of those families. In his dedication to Andriana Cornaro, wife of the patrician and senator Giovanni Cornaro, *prencipe* of the Accademia degli *Inflammati*, Parabosco makes clear that he had enjoyed the Corner family's favour. Following the dominant cultural currents, Parabosco wrote on women to praise the Venetian aristocracy and Venice itself. An encomium praising the splendour of the city of Venice is included in the same volume. Praising a city through the eulogy of its women was a commonplace in the literature of the period.⁶⁷

Parabosco followed the same schema in his later dialogue, *I Diporti*.⁶⁸ The Venetian patrician women, with their "honest customs, sharp witticisms, wise responses, noble manners and chaste conversation", are again represented as the symbol of Venice's glory.⁶⁹ The *Diporti* is a collection of novellas in the form of conversation among several intellectual and political figures, set in a villa near Venice. They include patricians such as Domenico Venier, Girolamo Molino, Federico Badoer, Marcantonio and Benedetto Cornaro, Alvize Zorzi and the writer and *prencipe* of the Academy of the *Inflammati*, Daniel Barbaro. Also named are known *literati*, such as Ercole Bentivoglio, Pietro Aretino, Sperone Speroni, Giambattista Susio, Fortunio Spira and Anton Giacomo Corso. Some (Molino, Badoer, Speroni, Spira, Corso and Aretino) belonged to the circle of the patrician

⁶⁶ G. Parabosco, *Lettere Amoroſe* (Venice, 1545).

⁶⁷ G. Parabosco, *Il Tempio della fama in lode d'alcune gentil donne Venetiane* (Venice, 1548).

⁶⁸ G. Parabosco, *I Diporti* (Milan, 1814). It was first published in 1550 and it was very popular; in the sixteenth century, it was published four times in Venice (Giovanni Grifio, ca 1550 / Giovanni Griffio, 1552 / Battista Mamello, 1564 / Gio Battista Ugolino, 1586), once in Vicenza by Giorgio Greco in 1598 and once in 1558 without indication of publisher or place of publication.

⁶⁹ "...la virtù che rende eterna questa beata repubblica, quale negli uomini, tale ancora nelle donne alberga; ancorchè l'uso onestissimo, che toglie loro gran parte della conversazione de'forastieri, non lascia che persone d'altra città sieno degne di godere gli acuti motti, le pronte e saggie risposte, le maniere gentili, i leggiadri costumi ed i soavi e casti ragionamenti, che infinite gentildonne di questa città fanno, molte volte che ne' dolci trebbi loro, per usar la voce corrente, si ritrovano...": Ibid., pp. 307-8.

Domenico Venier, whose palazzo at S. Maria Formosa was one of the most respectable literary salons in Venice. Girolamo Parabosco frequented the same salon mainly as a musician.⁷⁰

The first dialogue of the *Diporti* hints at some interesting aspects of the formation of the debate about women in early modern Italy. The discussion begins as a controversy between the Bolognese nobleman Alessandro Lambertini and the patrician Benedetto Cornaro on the woman question. Lambertini speaks against the female sex whereas Cornaro, with Venier's support, defends it. However, the debate shortly shifts from women's moral qualities to the debate about women as such. The writings of Castiglione, Agrippa and Bernardo Spina are cited as exemplary works on female excellence. Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*, published in Venice in 1528, and Agrippa's *Declamatio*, translated into Italian in 1544, had already become the *par excellence* texts on women.⁷¹ In 1544, a work entitled *Illustrazione della Eccellenza delle Donne* was published in Milan and it is attributed to Bernardo Spina.⁷² Parabosco was probably familiar with Spina through Girolamo Ruscelli's detailed analysis of Spina's work in *Lettura*, a defence of the female sex too.⁷³ In the *Diporti*, Parabosco made particular references to Ruscelli's motives in writing the *Lettura*. According to Lambertino, Ruscelli's main object was to please the people of Naples and the dedicatee, Maria d'Aragona, Marchesa del Vasto, whose favour the writer enjoyed, rather than to argue for the superiority of the female sex. Furthermore, Lambertino downgrades the whole debate about women to a rhetorical game. Parabosco's dialogue implies two important perspectives on the debate about women (which will be discussed below); the significant formative role of the female patronage and its rhetorical aspect. Furthermore, Parabosco's work suggests that in the 1550s the debate about women had been quite popular and oral discussions on the matter took place in the Venetian salons or nearby villas.⁷⁴

Ruscelli's *Lettura* is similarly indicative of the development and dissemination of the debate about women in early modern Italy. Ruscelli arrived in

⁷⁰ M. Feldman, "The Academy of Domenico Venier, Music's Literary Muse in Mid-Cinquecento Venice", *Renaissance Studies*, 10: 1 (1996).

⁷¹ *Della Nobiltà et Eccellenza delle donne, nuovamente dalla lingua francese nella Italiana tradotto* (Venice, 1544).

⁷² Fahy, "Three Early Renaissance Treatises on Women", p. 54.

⁷³ G. Ruscelli, *Lettura sopra un soneto dell' illustriss. Signor Marchese della Terza alla divina signora Marchesa del Vasto. Ove con nuove et chiare ragioni si pruova la somma perfettione delle donne...* (Venice, 1552).

⁷⁴ On Parabosco's *Diporti*, see below pp. 136, 222, 224-5.

Venice in 1548, after the death of his patron Alfonso d'Avalos (1546), Marquis of Vasto, Maria d'Aragona's husband. The prince of Salerno Ferrante Sanseverino's rebellion against the Spanish viceroy in Naples, Don Pedro of Toledo, must have hastened Ruscelli's departure from Naples and his arrival in Venice, since Sanseverino was probably the patron of the scientific Accademia Segreta, founded by Ruscelli while in Naples.⁷⁵ In Venice, Ruscelli worked mainly as a writer and editor for the publisher Vincenzo Valgrisi. He remained in contact with the Neapolitan nobility, though, as indicated by the dedication of *Lettura* to Maria d'Aragona. Three years later he published in Venice an encomiastic work honouring Giovanna d'Aragona, sister of Maria d'Aragona.⁷⁶ He also published a history of Naples dedicated to the Neapolitan patrician Pardo Pappacoda. The *Lettura* had initially been a lecture in the Venetian Academy of the *Dubbiosi*, founded one year before by the Brescian nobleman Fortunato Martinengo. As will be shown below, debates on women were common in Academies.⁷⁷ Ruscelli's frequent mention of ancient and modern writings defending the female sex, such as those of Plutarch, Boccaccio, Domenichi and Portio, and the criticism the writer levels at the methodological errors in the respective analyses of Agrippa, Spina and Maggio, demonstrate, like Parabosco's *I Diporti*, that the debate about women was already quite popular and had set off lively discussions in some Venetian literary circles.⁷⁸

Ruscelli was referring to the oration in defence of the female sex which the Brescian Vincenzo Maggi had delivered in Ferrara in 1545 before Anna d'Este, and repeated during the 1545 Brescian Carnival. An anonymous translation from Latin into Italian was published in 1545. It has been suggested that Ortensio Lando, in Brescia in the same period, was in fact the editor of the translation and the writer of the second part of the volume, under the title *Essortatione a gli huomini*. Whereas Maggi's work is a typical treatise on female superiority, Lando's writing has a quite

⁷⁵ For Ruscelli's activities in the Accademia Segreta, see: W. Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature. Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (Princeton, 1994), pp. 147-161.

⁷⁶ G. Ruscelli, *Del Tempio alla divina Signora Donna Giovanna d'Aragona* (Venezia, 1555).

⁷⁷ See below pp. 166-72.

⁷⁸ L. Domenichi, *La nobiltà delle donne* (Venice, 1549); Possibly Ruscelli refers to the Neapolitan philosopher Simone Portio's *Disputa sopra quella fanciulla della Magna, la quale visse due anni o più senza mangiare, e senza bere. Tradotta in lingua Fiorentina da Giovan Battista Gelli* (Florence). It is not clear which Plutarch's writing Ruscelli had in mind. Early modern Italian works defending women traditionally regarded Plutarch as a defender of women. Plutarch's *Mulierum virtutes* presented a series of examples to demonstrate that virtue of men and women is the same. In his *Lives*, *Moralia* and *Præcepta conjugalia*, Plutarch also dealt with issues concerning women. For Plutarch's attitude towards the female sex, see: P. A. Stadter, *Plutarch's Historical Methods: an Analysis of the Mulierum Virtutes* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965).

ambiguous meaning. Lando's main argument is that while contemporary women have gradually improved their moral and intellectual status, men are getting worse and worse. By warning men about the imminent danger of being women's slaves, Lando paradoxically on the one hand criticizes the contemporary society, and on the other hand praises women.⁷⁹ However, Lando did not treat the woman question for the first time in the *Essortatione*. Already in 1535, in the second book of the *Forcianae quaestiones*, written under the pseudonym Pilalcthe Polytopiensis Cive, Lando made a brief reference to the typical arguments in favour of female superiority and cited examples of famous women from antiquity, Holy Scripture and his contemporaries, including Veronica Gambara and Vittoria Colonna.⁸⁰ In *Paradossi*, a collection of sentences "fuori del comun parere", published for the first time in Lyon and later in Venice, Lando also devoted some chapters to the debate about women.⁸¹ In *Paradossi*, by developing paradoxical statements, such as that it is better to be poor than rich, ignorant than learned, of lower social rank than noble etc, Lando criticizes social corruption and inequality. Elsewhere, turning against authorities such as Aristotle and Boccaccio, Lando expresses his disapproval of the dominant culture of his contemporaries.⁸² The paradox II, *Che meglio sia l'esser brutto, che bello*, is an attack on the neo-platonic theories on beauty and the idealization of the female beauty in particular. For Lando female beauty is the agent of arrogance, instability and caprice.⁸³ The paradox XXV, *Che la donna è di maggior eccellentia che l'huomo*, includes some typical arguments in favour of women's dignity. However, the larger part of the chapter is an encomium of women contemporary to the writer, such as Isabella Sforza, Vittoria Colonna, Giulia Gonzaga and Isabella Villamarina, wife of the aforementioned Ferrante Sanseverino, all of them sharing Lando's reform ideas. The relationship between Lando, Isabella Sforza and other *poligrafi* is

⁷⁹ Fahy, "Un trattato di Vincenzo Maggi".

⁸⁰ O. Lando, *Forcianae quaestiones, in quibus varia Italorum ingenia explicantur, multaque alia scitu non indigna* (Naples, 1535).

⁸¹ O. Lando, *Paradossi, cioè sentenze fuori del comun parere* (Lyon, 1543), (in 1544 and 1545³ it was also published in Venice).

⁸² For the paradox in Lando's works, see: A. R. Larsen, "Paradox and the Praise of Women: from Ortensio Lando and Charles Estienne to Marie de Romieu", *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 28: 3 (1997); F. Daenens, "Superiore perché inferiore: Il paradosso della superiorità della donna in alcuni trattati italiani del Cinquecento", in *Trasgressione Tragica e Norma Domestica. Esempi di Tipologie di Tipologie femminili dalla letteratura Europea*, ed. V. Gentili (Rome, 1983).

⁸³ "per me, da che incominciai à saper distinguere la verità dalla bugia, fui sempre di questo parere, che piu fussero da prezzare le donne brutte, che le belle, ne senza ragione il dico, perche le brutte sono piu caste, piu humili, piu ingegnose e hanno maggior gratia: le belle piu altiere, meno stabili, e de modi piu schifi, piene di losenghe e di smancerie": Lando, *Paradossi*, unpaginated.

demonstrated in Isabella Sforza's *Della vera tranquillità dell'animo*, edited by Lando in 1544. It includes eulogies of Isabella Sforza by Antonfrancesco Doni, Giuseppe Betussi and Lodovico Domenichi, indicating a circle of acquaintances based on common religious orientations.⁸⁴ In the proem, Lando praises again the female intellect "that is very apt for the studies of the letters". However, it has been argued that the real writer behind Isabella was Lando himself.⁸⁵

In 1549, Lando published in Venice a collection of letters, written, as the editor claims, by women. The collection aimed at proving that women are "inferior to men neither in eloquence nor in erudition".⁸⁶ However, the presence of ideas characteristic of Lando, such as the frequent attacks against clerical hypocrisy, indicates that at least some letters had been written by him. Indicative of Lando's concerns is the letter of Orsola Maggi to Lucilla Benzona, discussing the accusations against the latter's husband of Lutheranism, or the letter bemoaning the death of a parrot, which recalls Lando's *Sermoni Funebri* (1548), a collection of sermons on the deaths of animals. Lucretia Masippa's letter from Venice to Camilla Palavicina points again to Lando as the real writer. Lucretia wishes she had traveled to Germany and England to know personally "the erudition of the learned daughters of the great Thomaso Moro".⁸⁷ Lando was an admirer of Thomas More and had translated his *Utopia* in 1548. The letters often express contrasting views on the same topic. This may suggest different authors, although Lando himself possibly expressed different viewpoints, since a collection of letters, as with dialogue, offered the author this opportunity. Other letters may have been written by women themselves or after an arrangement between them and Lando.

The letters' aim is to demonstrate the great learning of these women on a variety of issues – everyday topics, such as the birth of a baby or the death of a beloved person, advice on various matters usually relating to the marriage or family etc. Some letters discuss the problems contemporary women faced in domestic life. Portia Melita writes from Rome to her aunt, Genevra, to complain about her mother's decision to marry her off to an evil and ugly husband [*horribilissimo mostro*] and

⁸⁴ For Isabella Sforza's religious orientation and her relations with Lando and the other *poligrafi*, see: F. Daenens, "Isabella Sforza: beyond the stereotype", in *Women in Italian Renaissance*, ed. Panizza.

⁸⁵ "vedrà, quanto possa negli studi delle buone lettere il sesso femminile, pur che vi si applichi, e pur che vi si esserciti", Daenens, "Superiore perché inferiore", p. 20.

⁸⁶ O. Lando, *Lettere di molte valorose donne, nelle quali chiaramente appare non esser ne di eloquentia ne di dottrina alle huomini inferiori* (Venice, 1549).

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 90R.

threatens to kill herself.⁸⁸ Similarly, Lucretia Da Este, writing from Correggio to Emilia Mortella, compares husbands to fierce crocodiles.⁸⁹ Francescha Trivulza writes from Mantua to a certain Tessa, "Vedova della Mirandola AM", to comfort her about her son's bad behaviour towards her. She cites pertinent examples from history to demonstrate women's sufferings from their male relatives.⁹⁰ In a similar vein, Lucretia M. Contessa Beccaria warns SRN to protect her dowry from vultures [*rubbatori*].⁹¹ Other letters discuss women's monastic life, such as those of Contessa di Monte l'Abbate to Sister A.B and Emilia Brembata Solcia to Fulvia Rossa, or women's education and the limitations imposed on it.⁹²

Women's excellence is also discussed in detail. Indicative is Livia d'Arco's letter to Laura Pestalosa. It is a typical defence of the female sex, including examples of learned and virtuous women of the past to demonstrate "that women are superior to men" [*esser le donne di maggior dignità che gli huomini*]. As exemplary writers/women's defenders are named Bernardo Spina, Galeazzo Capra, Cornelius Agrippa and Lando himself.⁹³ Similarly, Beatrice Pia writes from Cattai (Veneto) to Lucia Manfredi, hoping women will awaken to seek their ancient fame, since "they are not born to serve and obey men". Following the common literary pattern, she also cites examples of famous women, such as Semiramis, Hippolita, Zenobia and Cleopatra.⁹⁴ However, other letters reproduce typical misogynist arguments. For instance, writing from Milan to Leonora Forteguenera, Paula Castigliona argues that Forteguenera deserves her husband's maltreatment because she is not an obedient and patient wife.⁹⁵ Even more perplexing is that the same woman is found to develop contrasting arguments – although in one case she is the supposed letter writer whereas in the other the recipient. Lucretia Masippa in her letter to Camilla Palavicina expresses her disappointment at not being able to travel because of her family duties and wishes she were a man. As she writes, she finds consolation in reading writers such as Pliny and Strabo. Nevertheless, the same Masippa is

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 37V.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 102V.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 22R.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 96R.

⁹² See below pp. 80, 99.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 123R; G. F. Capra, *Della eccellenza e dignità delle donne*, ed. M. L. Doglio (Rome, 1988), (first published in 1525 in Rome and in 1526 and 1533 in Venice).

⁹⁴ "Non so quando mai ci risvegliaremo da sì profondo sonno...non so veramente quanto mai ricuperaremo l'antico nostro valore; per certo che altro, non ci riputiamo nate, che a servire, e ad ubidire gli huomini": Lando, *Lettere*, pp. 136R-V.

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 83R-V.

presented as having received a letter from Lucieta Soranza, who accuses the former of condemning women's education.⁹⁶

The collection of letters entitled *Lettere a Gloria del sesso femminile* published in 1552, under Lucrezia Gonzaga da Cazzuolo's name, has also been attributed to Ortensio Lando, who enjoyed Lucrezia Gonzaga's favour between 1548 and 1552.⁹⁷ Women figure in other works by Lando. The *Oracoli de Moderni Ingegneri* is a collection of adages attributed to "the most illustrious *Cavallieri*, the most important *Senatori*, the most reverend Prelates and the most prestigious women of our days".⁹⁸ Similarly, the *Sette libri de cathaloghi*, an encyclopaedia of the most known persons for their beauty, learning, bravery, evilness etc, also includes representatives of the female sex.⁹⁹ Unlike some contemporary writers, Lando's departure from the neo-platonic idealisation of woman did not lead to spurning the female sex but to a defence of the female intellect. Furthermore, it seems that Lando, whose heterodox writings were often published either under pseudonyms such as "Philaethe Polytopiensis Cive", "Anonymo di Utopia" or "Hortensius Tranquillus" or circulated anonymously, might have used at times a female disguise to express his own ideas more freely.

The intellectual climate of nearby Padua played a significant role in the shaping of the debate about women. Most writers under question had studied at the university of Padua – Girolamo Ruscelli, Giuseppe Betussi, Francesco Sansovino, Lodovico Domenichi and Lodovico Dolce. Their works, and especially those of Francesco Sansovino and Giuseppe Betussi, both members of the Paduan Academy of the *Inflammati*, were strongly influenced by the ideological trends circulating in the University and the Academy. The Academy of the *Inflammati* was founded in 1540 by Leone Orsini, main patron and first *principe*, Daniele Barbaro and Ugolino Martelli. Most *Inflammati* were connected with Padua University. Among the Academy's *principi* were Leone Orsini, Giovanni Cornaro, Galeazzo Gonzaga and well-known intellectuals such as Alessandro Piccolomini, a professor of Philosophy at Padua, and Sperone Speroni, a student of Pietro Pomponazzi, who also held a chair in logic at Padua during the 1520s. The Academy's programme focused on

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 31 R.

⁹⁷ See below pp. 140-1.

⁹⁸ O. Lando, *Oracoli de Moderni Ingegneri si d'huomini come di donne ne quali, unita si vede tutta la philosophia morale, che fra molti scrittori sparsa si leggera* (Venice, 1550), pp. 2V-3R.

⁹⁹ O. Lando, *Sette libri de cathaloghi avarie cose appartenenti, non solo antiche ma anche moderne* (Venice, 1552).

Aristotelian philosophy, vernacular compositions, theatrical works and sonnets inspired by Petrarch. Especially under Sperone Speroni's leadership, the Academy favoured the vernacular.¹⁰⁰

Infiammati's cultural roots went back to the Academy of the *Intronati*, founded in Siena between 1525 and 1527. The key link between the two Academies was Alessandro Piccolomini, the main leader of the *Intronati*. The *Intronati* were interested in issues relating to the woman question and were closely connected with the Siennese noblewomen, organizing open activities with the participation of these women as well. In 1545, Piccolomini lectured on women's excellence before the *Intronati* and his oration was published in Venice in 1545.¹⁰¹ He also dedicated some of his works to the Siennese Laudomia Forteguerri and Frasia Venturi, both connected with the *Intronati*.¹⁰² The close relationships of the *Intronati* with the women of the city of Siena does not seem to have been paralleled in the *Infiammati* since the latter were strongly associated with the Padua university, an exclusively masculine institution. However, that two of the Academy's *principi*, Alessandro Piccolomini and Sperone Speroni, showed keen interest in the woman question, with dialogues and treatises on love, women's excellence and domestic economy, implies that such discussions might have taken place between the *Infiammati* as well. Apart from his lecture before the *Intronati*, Piccolomini wrote the *Dialogo della bella creanza de le Donne*, a dialogue on love and female excellence, which takes place in Siena. In *De la institutione* Piccolomini includes chapters dealing with domestic economy and women's position in marriage.¹⁰³ Speroni wrote two dialogues on women's excellence, a dialogue on love and a treatise, in which a father advises his daughter

¹⁰⁰ M. Maylender, *Storia delle accademie d'Italia*, 5 vols (Bologna, 1926-30); S. Richard, "Benedetto Varchi, the Accademia degli Infiammati, and the Origins of the Italian Academic Movement", *Renaissance Quarterly*, 29 (1976); F. Bruni, "Sperone Speroni e l'Accademia degli Infiammati", *Filologia e Letteratura*, 13 (1967); A. Daniele, "Sperone Speroni, Bernardino Tomitano e l'Accademia degli Infiammati di Padova", in *Sperone Speroni* (Padua, 1989).

¹⁰¹ The lecture is published in M. F. Piéjus, "L'orazione in lode delle donne di Alessandro Piccolomini", *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana*, 170 (1993).

¹⁰² For *Intronati's* relationships with women, see also below pp. 166, 168-71.

¹⁰³ A. Piccolomini, *Dialogo della bella creanza de le Donne* (n.p., 1540), (first published in Venice in 1539 and later in 1541, 1542, 1558, 1561 and 1562); A. Piccolomini, *De la institutione di tutta la vita de l'huomo nato nobile e in città libera* (Venice, 1542); several translations or adaptations of Piccolomini's *Dialogo della bella creanza de le Donne*, also known as *Raffaella*, appeared in sixteenth and seventeenth-century France: D. Costa, "'La douceur de ce monde'. Le traduzioni francesi della 'Raffaella, o Dialogo della bella creanza delle donne' di Alessandro Piccolomini", *Studi Francesi*, 40: 2 (1996); on Piccolomini's *Dialogo della bella creanza de le Donne*, see also below pp. 66, 191-3, 217-8.

on marriage, all included in his *Dialoghi*.¹⁰⁴ Alessandro Piccolomini was a speaker in Speroni's *Dialogo in lode delle Donne* and Daniele Barbaro, also a member of the *Infiammati*, in his *Dialogo della dignità delle donne*. It has been suggested that Piccolomini and Speroni's works on marriage were strongly influenced by Francesco Barbaro's *De re Uxoribus*. Barbaro's work must have been familiar to Speroni already in 1542 in manuscript via Daniele Barbaro, Francesco's descendant and member of the *Infiammati*.¹⁰⁵ A circle of intellectuals, who connected with the Paduan literary environment and dealt with various aspects of the debate about women, apparently emerges.

Sperone Speroni and Alessandro Piccolomini's dialogues were imitated by Giuseppe Betussi and Francesco Sansovino, members of the *Infiammati* as well. The dominance of Aristotelian philosophy at Padua University and among the *Infiammati*, and the lack of associations with the courtly environment, led these writers to depart from the typical neo-platonic models of Castiglione and Bembo, without, however, the overall rejection found in Franco and Lando's writings.¹⁰⁶ It has been pointed out that Speroni, Betussi and Sansovino's treatment of love had more points in common with Mario Equicola's *Libro d'Amore* and Leone Ebreo's *Dialoghi d'amore*, which underlined the sensual side of love, rather than its spiritual dimension, as established by Marcilio Ficino and sanctioned by Pietro Bembo. Rather than the Platonist division between the lower senses — touch, smell, and taste — and the senses of hearing, sight and reason relating to the spiritual side of human beings, the *Infiammati* followed the Aristotelian notion of cognition, which "proceeds from sense perception and experience". It was a differentiation which had its roots in two different cultural traditions, the Platonism that mainly flourished in

¹⁰⁴ *Dialogo in lode delle Donne*, *Dialogo della dignità delle donne*, *Dialogo d'Amore* and *Della Cura Familiare*, in Sperone Speroni, *Dialoghi* (Venice, 1596), (first published in Venice in 1542 with eight other editions in the sixteenth century, most of which by Aldo Manuzio). I use a modern edition of the *Dialogo d'Amore*: S. Speroni, *Dialogo d'Amore*, ed. P. Martin (Poitiers, 1998). Speroni's works were also translated in French in the same period. In 1548, an anonymous translation of the *Dialogo della dignità delle donne*, entitled *Dialogue de la dignité des femmes*, and in 1551, a translation of Speroni's dialogues by C. Gruget were published in Paris: J. Lemonnier, *Bibliographie des ouvrages relatifs à l'amour, aux femmes, au mariage, et des livres facétieux pantagruéliques, scatologiques, satyriques, etc* (Paris, 1894).

¹⁰⁵ M. Rogers, "An Ideal Wife at the Villa Maser: Veronese, the Barbaros and Renaissance Theorists on Marriage", *Renaissance Studies*, 7: 4 (1993).

¹⁰⁶ Lectures on Aristotelian philosophy often took place in the *Infiammati*. Vincenzo Maggi had lectured on Aristotle's *Poetics* and Benedetto Varchi on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*: Richard, "Benedetto Varchi, the Accademia degli Infiammati", p. 620. Piccolomini also gave a lecture on *Nicomachean Ethics*, as the publisher Ottaviano Scoto notices in the dedication of Piccolomini's *De la Institutione*.

the courts and the Aristotelian philosophy and its methods prevalent in northern universities, such as Padua and Bologna.¹⁰⁷

In practice, *Inflammati*'s dialogues modulated love philosophy, popularizing and adjusting it to literary backgrounds different from the official courtly settings of Castiglione and Bembo. Their dialogues replaced the known political figures and high-ranking persons with speakers of a lower social profile. In Piccolomini's *Dialogo della bella creanza de le donne*, Raffaella, a poor, old and ignorant woman, persuades a young Sienese noblewoman, Margarita, to find a lover. Raffaella's sensualistic advice coexists with a neo-platonic encomium of love. Speroni's *Dialogo d'Amore* takes place between the contemporary *literati* Bernardo Tasso, Nicolo Grazia and Francesco Maria Molza, and the best-known courtesan, Tullia D'Aragona, a close friend of Speroni, in her home in Venice, which functioned as a literary salon.¹⁰⁸

A similar attitude is found in Giuseppe Betussi's dialogues. Apparently influenced by Piccolomini and Speroni, Betussi wrote two dialogues on love during his residence in Venice (1542-1545). Both dialogues take place in the house of the Venetian courtesan Francesca Baffa: the *Dialogo Amorofo* between Francesca Baffa and Francesco Sansovino and *Il Raverta* between Baffa, Ottaviano della Rovere (Il Raverta) and Lodovico Domenichi.¹⁰⁹ The structure of the dialogue – Baffa's questions on the nature of love along with the explanatory answers of her male interlocutors – helped the lay reader to familiarize himself with the basic terms of love philosophy. Issues on women's nature are also discussed. Like Tullia d'Aragona in Speroni's dialogue, here Francesca Baffa operates as a counterbalance to female speakers who feature in courtly dialogues. Both in *Dialogo Amorofo* and *Il Raverta* Betussi openly criticises courtly culture through his speakers, Francesco Sansovino and Lodovico Domenichi.¹¹⁰ *Il Raverta* portrays a network of acquaintances based in Venice, including members of the *Inflammati*, such as Speroni, Piccolomini, Dolce, Sansovino and Daniel Barbaro, *poligrafi*, such as Domenichi and Doni, publishers, such as Gabriel Giolito de Ferrari, and Venetian intellectual women such as

¹⁰⁷ Russell, "Introduction", in D'Aragona, *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*, pp. 31-2.

¹⁰⁸ On Tullia d'Aragona's salon, see below pp. 148-9, 154-5, 187, 206-7. On Speroni's *Dialogo d'Amore*, see below pp. 149, 185-7.

¹⁰⁹ G. Betussi, *Dialogo Amorofo* (Venice 1543); G. Betussi, *Il Raverta, Dialogo nel quale si ragiona d'amore, et de gli effetti suoi* (Venice, 1544).

¹¹⁰ On Betussi's dialogues, see below pp. 157, 188-90.

Francesca Baffa.¹¹¹ Written during the most prolific period of the Venetian literary production, *Il Raverta*, which was published four times by Giolito (1544, 1545, 1549 and 1562), demonstrates the reading public's demand for such popularisations of love philosophy.

During the same period Betussi translated Boccaccio's *De Claris mulieribus* into the vernacular.¹¹² Betussi enriched his translation with references to contemporary women, supplementary literary commentaries and a biography of Boccaccio to adjust the translation to current readers' needs. Published for the first time in 1545 by Andrea Arrivabene, Betussi's translation continued to be popular during the sixteenth century both in Venice and Florence. However, confronting economic insecurity and professional instability, like many *poligrafi*, Betussi ended up serving Collatino di Collalto, in 1545, and left Venice. Having travelled a lot and having enjoyed brief periods of patronage, in 1556 Betussi wrote an encomiastic work honouring Giovanna d'Aragona.¹¹³ It is a dialogue between two fictional figures, Verita and Fama, dedicated to Aragona's sister-in-law, the poetess Vittoria Colonna. Both women shared Betussi's sympathy with Evangelical ideas. Betussi must have come in touch with those women during his residence in Venice through his friend Luca Contile, secretary of Alfonso d'Avalos, Colonna's brother-in-law. Betussi praises the female sex at large but makes also specific references to contemporary women who were associated with his circle, such as Piccolomini's close friend Laudomia Forteguerri and Maria Soarda da S. Giorgio of Casale, to whom Giolito had in 1544 dedicated the translation of Agrippa's *Declamatio*. In 1557, Betussi wrote a dialogue on beauty entitled *Leonora*, in honour of the poetess Leonora Ravoira-Faletti.¹¹⁴ The dialogue takes place in the casa Falletta in Melazzo, near Monferrato, where the writer had been hosted in 1552. The literary setting is explicitly more "aristocratic" than that of the dialogues of 1543 and 1544. Betussi traveled continually in pursuit of professional stability, moving from his early "profession" of the *poligrafo* in Venice to the services of the *condottiero* Gian Luigi

¹¹¹ On Baffa and her circle, see below pp. 156-8.

¹¹² *Libro di M. Gio. Boccaccio delle Donne Illustri, tradotto per Messer Giuseppe Betussi con una additione fatta dal medesimo delle Donne famose dal tempo di M. Giovanni fino à i giorni nostri* (Venice, 1558).

¹¹³ G. Betussi, *Le Imagini del tempio di Giovanna d'Aragona* (Florence, 1556); the next year it was published in Venice.

¹¹⁴ G. Betussi, *Leonora, ragionamento sopra la vera bellezza*, in *Trattati d'Amore del Cinquecento*, ed. G. Zonta (Bari, 1967), (first published in Lucca in 1557).

Vitelli in 1559, and being a protégé of the Obbizzi family of Padua in 1573. Betussi's shifting concern from the depiction of the unofficial debates, taking place in Bassa's house, to encomiastic works and dialogues adapted to more aristocratic environments indicates his attempt to adjust his works to relevant socio-cultural requirements.¹¹⁵

Francesco Sansovino's *Ragionamento*, written in 1545, is also a popularization of love theory.¹¹⁶ The dialogue's speakers are fictional and the literary setting is not indicated. In Sansovino's dialogue, as in Piccolomini's *Bella Creanza*, an older speaker, Panfilo, instructs a younger one, Silio, on "the art of love", but now both speakers are male. Furthermore, as in Piccolomini's dialogue, the discussion focuses on practical tips on love affairs – depiction of the ideal lovers, their meetings etc. *Ragionamento* is a step-by-step manual on love for the lay reader rather than a sophisticated analysis of love philosophy. Platonists are openly attacked with an ironic comment on their hypocrisy. Sansovino also seems to refer to homosexual relations.¹¹⁷ Like Speroni, Piccolomini and Betussi, Sansovino popularized love philosophy to adjust it to a broader reading public. Sansovino, a successful popularizer of historical knowledge as well, continued to live on the income of his books in Venice, working for Gabriel Giolito and operating his own press, between 1560 and 1570 and between 1578 and 1581.¹¹⁸

However, the representatives of professional writing *par excellence* were Lodovico Domenichi and Lodovico Dolce. Rather than writing original works they preferred to popularize, translate, comment, proofread and plagiarize the works of better known writers; a less time-consuming and even more profitable occupation. While in Venice, in the early 1540s, Domenichi worked for Gabriel Giolito, with whom he collaborated even after leaving Venice. In 1545, he was found in Florence operating with Doni a small press, but after a while the undertaking failed and their friendship transformed to enmity. Domenichi began to work for the Florentine publisher Bernardo Giunta. He also collaborated with Lorenzo Torrentino, the

¹¹⁵ For a biography of Giuseppe Betussi, see: "Betussi, Giuseppe", *Dizionario*, vol. 9, pp. 779-81.

¹¹⁶ F. Sansovino, *Ragionamento nel quale brevemente s'insegna a' giovani uomini l'arte d'amore*, in *Trattati d'Amore*, ed. Zonta, (first published in Venice, in 1545).

¹¹⁷ "Sono i platonici, cioè contemplativi della bellezza più perfetta, che essi dicano che consiste nello uomo, col mezzo della quale ascendano alla divina. Ma lasciamoli andare, essendo sospette le loro azioni. Conciosiaché essi non s'aveggano che, se piacesse tanto loro la perfezione, amarebbero più tosto un uomo attempato che un giovanetto inesperto, e che, quando il giovane entra nell'età virile, non lo lascierebbero. Oltra che, essi non sanno che, là dove può cader il desiderio inonesto del terreno amore, non può cader l'amor contemplativo compitamente perfetto": *Ibid.*, p. 165.

¹¹⁸ For Sansovino's historical works, see: Grendler, "Francesco Sansovino".

official printer for the Accademia Fiorentina, under Cosimo I de' Medici, and Giunta's main rival.

While in Florence, Domenichi published *La nobiltà delle donne* (1549) one of the most detailed defences of the female sex. Although in Florence and in close relation with the local printing industry, Domenichi chose to publish *La nobiltà* in Gabriel Giolito's printing house in Venice, perhaps because Giolito was a "specialist" in the debate about women and the Venetian literary background had already created a tradition on the genre.¹¹⁹ As Domenichi clarifies in a letter to Bartolomeo Gottifredi in September 1548, included in the volume, his main sources were Plutarch, Cornelius Agrippa, Galeazzo Capra, Lodovico Martelli, Vincenzo Maggi, Baldesar Castiglione, Sperone Speroni, Ieronimo della Rovere and one "reverendo padre Macstro Zanobi dell'Aiulle, Fiorentino".¹²⁰ Actually Domenichi's work is a successful combination of the above writings. As he himself writes to Gottifredi, "rambling through several fields of others' works, I collected the opinions and authorities of ancient and modern authors and composed anew the nobility and excellence of women".¹²¹

Most of Domenichi's arguments seemingly were drawn from Agrippa's *Declamatio*, with which Domenichi was familiar from its Italian translation in 1544. Domenichi knew Agrippa's works; two years before he had translated Agrippa's *De vanitate* into Italian.¹²² However, although the main stock of arguments is that of Agrippa, Domenichi, probably influenced by Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*, modified the treatise into a dialogue divided into five books. The dialogue form permitted the writer to incorporate also arguments against the female sex in a verbal conflict between the interlocutors. The Senator Francesco Grasso, the intellectual Girolamo Mutio Iustinopolitano and the *dottore* Lucio Cotta defend the female sex, whereas

¹¹⁹ For Gabriel Giolito's engagement in the debate about women, see below pp 110-22.

¹²⁰ Lodovico Martelli had written some "stanze in lode delle donne" included in his *Opere* (Florence, 1548). Ieronimo della Rovere, Cardinal and Archbishop of Turin, wrote *Ad commendationem sexus muliebris Oratio* (Vicini, 1540). Domenichi probably means these two works. Domenichi must refer to the poet Zanobi da Strada who was born in Florence in 1312. He belonged to the literary circle of Boccaccio and Petrarch. Zanobi enjoyed the lifelong patronage of the Florentine Niccolò Acciaiuoli, brother of Andrea Acciaiuoli, Countess of Altavilla, to whom Boccaccio had dedicated *De Mulieribus Claris*. So, Zanobi also probably wrote some work praising women and dedicated it to the same woman. For Zanobi da Strada, see: *Medieval Italy. An Encyclopedia*, ed. C. Kleinhenz, 2 vols (New York & London, 2004), vol 2, p. 1174.

¹²¹ "...vagando per diversi campi dell'altrui scritture, & raccogliendo l'openioni & autorità di questo, & di quello autore antico, & moderno, nuovamente ho composto la nobiltà, et eccellenza delle Donne": Domenichi, *La nobiltà*.

¹²² H. C. Agrippa, *Della vanità delle scienze tradotto per M. Lodovico Domenichi* (Venice, 1547).

Pier Francesco Visconte and Cavalier Cicogna reproduce the traditional views on male superiority. Domenichi placed the dialogue in the contemporary Italian environment; the dialogue takes place among known Italian contemporaries, during the marriage of Mutio Sforza and Faustina Sforza, in Mutio Sforza's palace, in Milan, in 1546. Members of the family, such as Mutio Sforza's mother, Violante Bentivoglia, and other contemporaries, mostly nobles, attend the conversation.¹²³ *La nobiltà* embodies a great range of ideas, including arguments on the physiological composition of each sex and their role in procreation, arguments based on the Bible, an etymological analysis of the Hebrew, Greek, Latin and Italian words for man and woman, a discussion on female beauty, references to famous women of the past, well known ancient or contemporary authorities and specific social references to demonstrate men's exploitation of women in family and society. The fifth book is exclusively devoted to the praise of known women from all over Italy by city. It is a very long catalogue – about eighty pages –, which includes noblewomen or women who excelled in letters and some information about them. Women's names are capitalized so that the reader could spot them easily.¹²⁴

Incorporating in one volume a great number of arguments, Domenichi's dialogue became an easy-to-use manual for subsequent writers. Three years later, Domenico Bruni da Pistoia wrote a work on female excellence, which included many of Domenichi's arguments, although the writer also developed his own arguments, especially in a detailed analysis of the contemporary legal system.¹²⁵ Instead of dialogue Bruni wrote a treatise but he devoted some chapters to what "women's slanderers" claim about women, which permitted him to develop both sides of the debate. Interestingly, the volume includes an "escusatione dell'autore ai lettori", where Bruni attempts to justify the similarities between his treatise and Domenichi's dialogue. According to Bruni, he had written his treatise before Domenichi's publication and he had sent it to Domenichi to make some corrections and publish it. When Domenichi read it, he notified Bruni of his intention to publish a similar work, which he had already written in dialogue form. It was only after the publication of *La nobiltà delle donne* that Bruni found out that Domenichi had plagiarized from his

¹²³ Such as Conte Filippo Tornello, Conte Giovanfermo Trinulei, Conte Clemente Pietra, Conte Morone Sforza, Conte Giovanni Trivulci, Agostino di Adda Grasso, Camillo Lambugnano and Francesco Abondio Castiglione.

¹²⁴ On Domenichi's *La nobiltà*, see also below pp. 80-1, 118, 181, 214, 220, 229-31, 234-5.

¹²⁵ D. Bruni da Pistoia, *Difese delle donne, nella quale si contengano le difese loro, dalle calunnie dategli per gli scrittori, e insieme le lodi di quelle* (Florence, 1552).

work.¹²⁶ No matter which was the case, Bruni's complaints indicate bitter rivalries between the authors dealing with the topic, especially during the 1540s and 1550s, when the debate about women was at the peak. In fact, most writers repeated again and again the same arguments in their treatment of the woman question through the sixteenth century.

Domenichi's personal course was characterized by his wish to live independently on the income of his translations and publications and his need to enjoy at least occasionally the protection of powerful persons. In 1554 he was in Pescia, near Lucca, where he worked for the publisher Vincenzo Busdraghi. There, Domenichi published another work related to the debate about women, a collection of poems written by women to demonstrate, as he writes, the "greatness of women's intellect".¹²⁷ However, it seems that already from 1547 Domenichi sought De Medici's favour since he dedicated to Cosimo I his translation of Agrippa's *De Vanitate*. Finally, he wrote, on Cosimo's order, the *Storia delle guerre di Siena*, and, in 1559, he succeeded in becoming the official historiographer of the Medici Court and was allotted a room in the palace. During this period Giolito published Domenichi's *Dialoghi* dedicated to the Lucchese nobleman Vincentio Arnolfini.¹²⁸ The *Dialogo amoroso*, included in the volume, is a typical dialogue on neo-platonic love, which takes place in the house of the poetess Lucia Bertana dell'Oro in Modena, where Domenichi had been hosted in 1560. The influence of the Medici Court environment is evident in Domenichi's last work related to the debate about women. In *La donna di corte* Domenichi portrays the ideal Court Lady and idealistically depicts love affairs between the gentlemen and ladies of the Court.¹²⁹ According to the writer, the gentlemen and ladies of the Court can love each other "without dishonest desire" [*senza dishonesto desiderio*], when they are found in the Courts of "religious and honest Principi", as of his patroness, Duchess Eleonora di Toledo.¹³⁰ Written fifteen years after *La nobiltà delle donne*, Domenichi's treatise implies a different attitude towards the female sex, epitomized in the view that woman cannot participate actively in court life, since she remains always a child –

¹²⁶ Ibid., pp. 86R-V; on Bruni's work, see also below pp. 66, 95, 148, 213-4, 216, 232.

¹²⁷ L. Domenichi, *Rime Diverse d'Alcune Nobilissime et Virtuossime Donne* (Lucca, 1559).

¹²⁸ L. Domenichi, *Dialoghi, cioè, d'amore, de' Rimedi d'amore, dell'amor fraterno, della fortuna, della vera nobiltà, dell'impresa, della corte et della stampa* (Venice, 1562).

¹²⁹ L. Domenichi, *La donna di corte, discorso nel quale si ragiona dell'affabilità e honesta creanza. Da dover si usare per Gentildonna d'Honore* (Lucca, 1564).

¹³⁰ Ibid., pp. 8R, 9R-9V.

without attaining adulthood – and since such a participation would corrupt chastity and simplicity, which are the most appropriate moral qualities for women. In contrast to *La nobiltà*, here, Domenichi deprives women of every public role, an attitude which reflects the strengthening of female chastity within the dominant cultural currents of the Catholic Reformation.¹³¹

Lodovico Dolce, after completing his studies in Padua, remained in Venice, where he worked mainly for Gabriel Giolito as a translator, editor and author. His original works were on popular topics, such as treatises on art and language, comedies and tragedies. Following closely the demands of the book market, he edited writings of Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Bembo and Castiglione. In 1538, he wrote the *Paraphrasi nella sesta Satira di Giuvenale*, an attack on marriage, and four years later the *Dialogo in difesa di male aventurati mariti*, with the main speaker Pietro Aretino.¹³² Both writings belong to an anti-marriage tradition, which was developed in parallel with literature praising marriage.¹³³ Dolce followed the dominant cultural currents by translating and publishing writings on love philosophy and love literature, such as Mario Equicola's *Libro di natura d'amore*, Giovanni Boccaccio's *L'amorosa fiammeta* and *Il Corbaccio* and Achilles Tatius' *Amorosi ragionamenti*.¹³⁴

Dolce's greatest contribution to the debate about women was his close adaptation of Luis Vives' *De institutione* under the title *Dialogo della Institutione delle donne*.¹³⁵ Dolce's adaptation made Vives' treatise broadly known in Italy before its translation in 1561.¹³⁶ Following Vives' main arguments, Dolce's work is divided into three parts, each one treating a different status of women's lifecycle – virginity, marriage and widowhood. However, Dolce modified Vives' treatise into a

¹³¹ For a biography of L. Domenichi, see: "Domenichi, Lodovico", in *Dizionario*, vol. 40, pp. 595-600.

¹³² L. Dolce, *Paraphrasi nella sesta Satira di Giuvenale: nella quale si ragiona delle miserie de gli huomini maritati. Dialogo in cui si parla di che qualita si dee tor moglie, e del' modo, che vi si ha a tenere. Lo epithalamio di Catullo nelle nozze di Peleo e di Theti* (Venice, 1538); L. Dolce, *Dialogo nel quale Messer Pietro Aretino parla in difesa di male aventurati mariti* (Venice, 1542).

¹³³ Pietro Aretino's satirical treatment of marriage, *Filosofo* (1546) belongs to the same tradition: Cairns, *Pietro Aretino*, pp. 131-138.

¹³⁴ M. Equicola, *Libro di natura d'amore di nuovo con soma diligenza ristampato e corr. Da M. Lodovico Dolce* (Venice, 1554); L. Dolce, *Amorosi ragionamenti ne i quali si racconta un compassionevole amore di due amanti, tradotti...dai fragmenti d'uno antico scrittor Greco* (Venice, 1547).

¹³⁵ L. Dolce, *Dialogo della institutione delle donne. Secondo li tre stati, cha cadono nella vita humana* (Venice, 1545); see also below pp. 68-9, 103-4, 117-8, 198-201.

¹³⁶ J. L. Vives, *Dell'ufficio del marito verso la moglie, dell'istituzione della femina Christiana, vergine, maritata, o vedova, e dello ammaestrare i fanciullinelli arti liberali* (Milan, 1561).

dialogue between two fictional characters. The speaker Flaminio paternalistically advises Dorothea on the proper female behaviour.¹³⁷ Although the main arguments are those of Vives, Dolce adjusted them to the Italian socio-cultural scene. He cites known Italian women, such as Casandra Fedele, Vittoria Colonna and Veronica Gambara, as exemplars of chastity and erudition and he names Italian *literati* such as Francesco Barbaro.¹³⁸ He also refers to current events, such as a debate on marriage, which had taken place in Aretino's house between Aretino, Fortunio, Paolo Stresio and the author.¹³⁹ The most interesting difference between Vives and Dolce's writings is found in their views on the appropriate reading for the young woman. Vives' strong rejection of European vernacular literatures as immoral and lascivious could not have been adopted by Dolce.¹⁴⁰ Vives' main concern is criticizing the harmful consequences of unsuitable readings for young girls. He proposes only Sacred Scriptures, Cicero and St Jerome. In contrast, Dolce makes suggestions from a broad field of literature, either Latin or vernacular. He excludes only Boccaccio, Virgil, and some parts of Horace and in general "all lascivious books" [*tutti libri lascivi*], though without entitling them.¹⁴¹ Such a differentiation is natural since Dolce writes as a *poligrafo*, whose main concern was to maximize demand for vernacular literature by both men and women. It is probably within this context that Dolce also omitted the term "Christian" from the title in order to have greater latitude for initiative.

¹³⁷ See below pp. 198-9.

¹³⁸ Dolce, *Dialogo della institution*, pp. 18R, 39R, 73R.

¹³⁹ Ibid, pp. 63V-67V. In all probability by the name Fortunio he means Fortunio Spira, a friend of Aretino and Dolce.

¹⁴⁰ "A custom has grown up, worse than any pagan usage, that books in the vernacular - written in that tongue so that they may be read by idle men and women - treat no subjects but love and war. Concerning such books, I think nothing more need be said if I am speaking to Christians. How can I describe what a pestilence this is, since it is to place straw and dry kindling wood on the fire? But these books are written for those who have nothing to do, as if idleness itself were not a strong enough aliment of all vices without laying on a torch that will set a person on fire and devour him in its flames": Vives, *The Education of a Christian Woman*, p. 73. Later on, Vives gives specific examples from Spanish, French and Flemish vernacular literature.

¹⁴¹ Dolce, *Dialogo della institution*, pp. 20R-22R.

THE DEBATE IN POST-TRIDENTINE VENICE / ITALY:
RELIGIOUS CONDUCT LITERATURE AND TREATISES ON DOMESTIC LIFE

Social and cultural developments which took place in Venice and the rest of Italy in the second half of the sixteenth century affected the debate about women. Most developments were related to the gradual establishment of the Catholic Reformation, during and especially after the Council of Trent (1545-63). One of the most significant consequences of the Catholic Reformation for the intellectual world in general, and that of Venice in particular, was the implementation of the *Index librorum prohibitorum* by the Roman Church in 1564.

In the early sixteenth century, Protestant books circulated broadly in Italy. Foreign merchants and students carried them in the peninsula and Italian philoprotectant *litterati*, such as Ortensio Lando, translated them into the vernacular. Especially in Venice, the circulation of protestant books was facilitated by the vicinity of the city to the German Lands. Although in the 1520s and 1530s Venetian government established a prepublication censorship, it made little effort to prevent the entry of foreign Protestant books. The Roman Catholic Church's efforts to persuade the Venetians to pass stricter legislation did not succeed. In 1543 the Council of Ten took some additional measures, ordering the *Esecutori contro la bestemmia* to punish presses for infractions of the law, without though much effect. The reorganization of the Holy Office in 1547 launched a more effective policy in book prohibition. In July 1548, the Council of Ten authorized the Holy Office to search out and destroy heretical books found in bookshops but bookmen succeeded in persuading the government not to enforce the decree except for manifestly heretical titles, and so the Holy Office continued to conduct limited investigations. Although local Indexes had been issued in several Italian cities, including the Venetian Index of 1549, which mainly banned the writings of northern Protestants, the Roman Church did not compose a universal Index until 1554. The 1554 Index was not limited to explicitly heretical books but included a greater variety of books, which were regarded as anticlerical. It was the first Index to prohibit titles of current Italian literature. The Venetian bookmen presented three memoranda to the Holy Office, complaining about the prohibition of nonreligious books, asking for further clarifications and pointing out the financial losses that the Index could cause in the printing industry. The Venetian government sided with them and finally the 1554

Index was suspended. In 1559, a new Index by Paul IV was promulgated in Rome. The number of books it condemned was nearly twice that of the 1554 Index. However, due to Pope Paul IV's death in 1559, the Index was not enforced. In 1564 the Holy Office issued a new Index, expanding the Index of 1559. According to the 1564 Index, every new manuscript had to be read by a clergyman and two laymen before permission to print could be issued. The Inquisition was authorized to pursue not only the publishers, when they brought out illegal editions, but also individuals who sold or possessed prohibited items and to inspect bookshops in pursuit of prohibited Italian editions or banned foreign books. This time the Venetian government supported the Holy Office and the censorship gained control over the Venetian press. Between 1540 and 1560 the Venetian government, anxious over the spread of Protestant ideas in patrician circles, gradually changed its policy, hardening its attitude towards the protestant threat, and was now eager to collaborate with the Roman Catholic Church. Finally, in 1596 the third Roman Index was promulgated.¹⁴²

The socio-cultural implications of the Index were significant. Although initially the Church was mainly preoccupied with the circulation of heretical writings, the Index of 1559 included also writings held to be anticlerical or immoral. The Index of 1564 made clear it aimed at the general moral reform of the reading public: "Books which treat or derive from lascivious and immoral topics easily corrupt not only faith but also morals and should be forbidden; whoever have them should be punished strictly by the Bishops".¹⁴³ Within this context many popular vernacular titles of the 1540s and 1550s were gradually expurgated or prohibited. Among the books which attracted the attention of the Holy Office or the local Inquisitions and were included in the main Indexes or the intermediate instructions and lists were Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*, which was expurgated "for the scant honour that it holds for Religion, as one sees in the second and third part in particular", Boccaccio's *Decameron* (first expurgated and later prohibited), *Filocolo*, *Corbaccio*, *Ameto* and *Fiammetta*, Bembo's *Rime* and *Asolani*, Pietro Aretino and

¹⁴² Grendler, *The Roman Inquisition*, pp. 71-129; G. Fragnito, "The Central and Peripheral Organization of Censorship", in *Church, Censorship and Culture in Early Modern Italy*, ed. G. Fragnito (Cambridge, 2001).

¹⁴³ "Libri, qui res lascivas, seu obscenas ex professo tractant, narrant, aut docent cū non solum fidei, sed & morum, qui huiusmodi librorum lectione facile corrumpi solent, ratio habenda sit, omnino prohibentur: & qui eos habuerint, severe ab Episcopis puniantur": *Index librorum prohibitorum, cum regulis confectis per Patres à Tridentina Synodo delectos, auctoritate Sanctiss. D.N. Pii III. Pont. Max. comprobatus* (Venice, 1564), pp. 7R-V.

Ortensio Lando's *opera omnia*, Girolamo Parabosco's *I Diporti* and *Lettere*, Nicolò Franco's *Dialoghi Piacevoli*, *Philena*, *Dialogo delle bellezze* and *Pistole vulgari*, Sperone Speroni's *Dialoghi*, Alessandro Piccolomini's *Dialogo della bella creanza delle donne*, Lodovico Domenichi's *Facetie, motti et burle*, most writings of Anton Francesco Doni, Brunoro Zampeschi's *L'Innamorato*, Francesco Sansovino's *Lettere Amoroze* and *Novelle*, Scipione Vasolo's *La gloriosa eccellenza delle donne, e amore* and Alvise Pasqualigo's *Lettere amoroze*.¹⁴⁴

Within the changing climate, newly established authors often criticized the writings of their predecessors and the latter renounced their previous works. Already in 1552, Paolo Caggio, a noble from Palermo and a representative agent of the new cultural trends, criticized Piccolomini for the immoral implications of *La Bella creanza delle donne*. In his typical treatise on marriage and domestic economy, he writes that although he appreciates Piccolomini's dialogue, he dislikes Piccolomini's idea that women should develop extramarital love affairs.¹⁴⁵ Actually, Piccolomini himself gradually changed his views. Already in 1542, Piccolomini recanted *La Bella creanza*. In his dedication of *De la institutione* to Laudomia Forteguerri, he declares that he had written *La bella creanza* just for fun and implies that some people did not understand his spirit.¹⁴⁶ Later, in the main text, he repeats his claim, that he wrote *La Bella creanza* just for fun, imitating Boccaccio's *Novelle*.¹⁴⁷ However, and despite his declarations, Piccolomini kept in *De la institutione* some of his previous ideas.¹⁴⁸ It was in the 1560 version of *De la Institutione*, that Piccolomini, an archbishop of Patras now, adopted a more moralistic attitude. The change of the title from *De la institutione di tutta la vita de l'huomo nato nobile, et in città libera* (1542, 1543,

¹⁴⁴ Fragnito, "The Central and Peripheral Organisation", pp. 31-2; U. Rozzo, "Italian Literature on the Index", in *Church, Censorship and Culture*, ed. Fragnito, pp. 204-6.

¹⁴⁵ "Et in questo io lodo molto quella creanza bella, che insegna lo stordito intronato alle Donne di Siena, (non in tutto però, perdonimi la Signoria di sua Eccellenza) perche non mi piace, che una Donna habbia altro amore, che quello del suo marito, e quello abbracci, & in quello si diletta, come conviene à una coppia bella, cinta d'una catena sacra, d'un matrimonio santo": P. Caggio, *Iconomica* (Venice, 1552), p. 17R.

¹⁴⁶ "E insiememente con questa occasione, mi son ritrattato di molte cose, che per scherzo scrissi già in Un Dialogo de la Bella Creanza de le Donne, fatto dà me più per un certo sollazzo, che per altra più grave cagione; come molto miei amici ne pon far fede": Piccolomini, *De la Institutione*.

¹⁴⁷ "E se ben'io già intorno à due anni sono, dissi alcune cose, che par che offöschin la virtù de la donna, e l'amor di quella al marito; in un Dialogo, che domandan la Raffaella, ò ver Creanza de le donne; ritratto in dietro al presente tutto quel che quivi contra la honestà de le donne, già detto havessi. per havere io fatto tal Dialogho per ischerzo, e per gioco; si come alcuna volta si fingan de le Novelle, e casi verisimili, come fece il Boccaccio; per dare un certo sollazzo à la mente, che sempre severa, e grave non può già stare": Ibid., p. 204 R.

¹⁴⁸ See below p. 193.

1545, 1552, 1559) to *Della institutione morale* in 1560 is characteristic. In the new version of *Della Institutione* the role of women has been exclusively limited to family life.¹⁴⁹

A similar development is found in Sperone Speroni's case. In 1575 he was obliged to correct and amend the *Dialogo d'Amore* and to compose an *Orazione contra le cortegiane* to suit the Roman censors. In fact, this oration was a reversal not only of his previous *Dialogo d'Amore* but also a reworking of an earlier oration in praise of courtesans by the Venetian poet Antonio Brocardo, a work to which Speroni refers in *Dialogo d'Amore*. In *Orazione contra le cortegiane*, Speroni "directed to an imaginary courtesan whom he intends to denounce and to a reading public whom he wants to persuade of her wrongdoing and reduces courtesantry to a vulgar and pathetic level".¹⁵⁰ Even the *Dialogo della dignità delle donne* was attacked in 1574 for certain allegedly immoral passages.¹⁵¹ Speroni himself, now an old man, in the third part of his *Apologia dei dialoghi* (1584), criticized his youthful dialogues, which he had defended in the first two parts, confessing that "whatever his satirical intent, an author who imitates with due exactitude the ramblings of 'ignorant' lovers inevitably implicates himself in the levity of his fiction".¹⁵² When in 1596 Speroni's maternal relative Ingolfo Conte de Conti republished Speroni's *Dialoghi*, including *Apologia dei Dialoghi*, he was also apologetic about them. In his dedication to Cardinale Aldobrandino, Ingolfo admits that some of Speroni's dialogues were quite licentious but vindicates his relative, claiming that actually it was the spirit of the times, the immaturity of the years when the dialogues were written, that should be reproached. As he writes, as time went by Speroni changed his mind and he himself refashioned his dialogues, correcting some passages and eliminating others.¹⁵³

Under such circumstances, publishers were better to avoid secular vernacular literature, which risked being regarded as heretical, anticlerical or immoral, and thus

¹⁴⁹ Piéjus, "L'Orazione", p. 544.

¹⁵⁰ Rosenthal, *The Honest Courtesan*, p. 25.

¹⁵¹ Snyder, *Writing the Scene of Speaking*, p. 88.

¹⁵² V. Cox, *The Renaissance Dialogue. Literary Dialogue in its Social and Political Contexts, Castiglione to Galileo* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 29. See also below pp. 204, 227-8.

¹⁵³ "Bene egli occorre, che in così frettolosa impressione furon date in luce alcune cose, non in tutto finite, altre non ben reviste, & finalmente altre un poco licentiosamente scritte; colpa di quel secolo, nel quale poche cose parevano poter nascere, che molto non sentissero dell'accerbità de i costumi di quei tempi, ne i quali lui le compose. Della qual cosa avvertito in progresso di tempo il Signor Sperone, alcune di propria mano mutò, altre corresse, altre affatto levò, & finalmente per intieramente appagarsi, ne fece una lunga giustificazione, da lui Apologia nominata;": Speroni, *Dialoghi*.

prohibited or allowed only after expurgation. Expurgation was a time-consuming and costly procedure. Consequently, editions of religious writings began to surpass all others.¹⁵⁴ The changing attitude of the publisher Gabriel Giolito is characteristic of the new climate. During the first half of the sixteenth century, seeking a broad reading public, and particularly an emerging female reading public, he had published relatively cheap and almost exclusively vernacular literature. His printing program had focused on the popular writings of Ariosto, Petrarch and Boccaccio, annotated and enriched with linguistic and other commentaries by *poligrafi*, such as Domenichi, Dolce and Sansovino, who closely collaborated with him. Giolito had particularly focused on writings related to the emerging debate about women. During the second half of the century, Gabriel Giolito, and from 1578 his descendants, continued to publish vernacular literature for the lay reader, but the character of their editions changed, focusing now on devotional writings, such as vernacular works of piety, compendiums of prayers, and instructional books in religious practices for devout men and women who lacked higher theological education.

Although the Index of prohibited books did not attack the literature on women as a whole, it affected it indirectly. One basic aspect of the debate about women, love literature, apparently suffered a setback in the second half of the sixteenth century. As it was demonstrated above these writings were generally regarded as immoral and lascivious. On the other hand, although discussions of women's nature were still found in the literature as secondary issues, the literature on female excellence in general waned, became more conventional and repetitive, was dealt with by less known writers, or shifted to obscure printing houses of smaller towns or was limited in certain Courts. Significant exceptions to the rule were the works of two female writers at the end of the sixteenth century, Moderata Fonte and Lucrezia Marinella, and those of Arcangela Tarabotti in the mid-seventeenth century.¹⁵⁵ Generally speaking, the focal point of the debate shifted now from

¹⁵⁴ According to Paul Grendler, "in the 1550s, religious titles accounted for only 13 to 15 percent of the total new titles, but the share expanded to about 25 percent during the years 1562 to 1582, and about 33 per cent the rest of the century. Secular vernacular literature made up 25 to 31 percent of the total in the 1550s, but only about 20 percent in the 1560s, and the same or a little less for the duration of the century": Grendler, *The Roman Inquisition*, p. 133.

¹⁵⁵ On Moderata Fonte, see below pp. 75-6, 131, 161, 163, 165-6, 209-11, 244-5, 252-3; on Lucrezia Marinella, see below pp. 131, 162-3, 165-6, 246-8, 252-3; on Arcangela Tarabotti, see below pp. 81-3, 162-6, 171-2, 248-53.

woman as autonomous entity to women's position in family and society and to their religious education.

The shifting interest of the debate was not only due to the limitations imposed by the Index. Broader socio-cultural developments, related to the Catholic Reformation, played an equally significant role. The most important were the revaluation of marriage, the reorganization of religious life and the increasing significance of female chastity in family, church and society. To eliminate "deviant" behaviour, such as extramarital love affairs or concubinage, the Tridentine Reformers promoted and standardized the marriage sacrament with the decree of the 24th session of the Council of Trent in 1563. Although treatises on marriage and domestic economy circulated already from the early fifteenth century, such as those of Francesco Barbaro and Battista Alberti, it was in the second half of the sixteenth century that this literary genre became increasingly popular. The reorganization of the religious life, in women's case with the enclosure of all female religious communities and the greater control over convent life, and the emphasis on the religious education led to an increase in conduct religious books addressing both men and women.¹⁵⁶

Conduct religious books were usually meant for convents, schools of the Christian doctrine or family tutorial use.¹⁵⁷ Giolito's press can offer a good example. Keeping in touch with a female reading public but changing the character of its titles, Giolito's press now published hagiographies of female saints and works praising the Virgin Mary, often written by clerics and dedicated by the writer, publisher or translator to a nun or a powerful woman.¹⁵⁸ Giolito also published clerics' works offering religious lessons and advice for devout Christian women and especially

¹⁵⁶ On these developments, see below pp. 77-83, 102-3.

¹⁵⁷ For the role of nuns as consumers of religious books, see: P. F. Gehl, "Libri per donne. Le monache clienti del libraio fiorentino Pietro Morosi (1588-1607)", in *Donna, Disciplina, Creanza Cristiana dal XV al XVII secolo*, ed. G. Zarri (Rome, 1996).

¹⁵⁸ *Vita della beata vergine Gertuda, ridotta dal reverendo frate Giovanni Lanspergio Monaco della Certosa in cinque libri* (1562), dedicated to the nun Lucentia Farnese in the later edition of 1588; *Libro della Spiritual Gratia, delle Revelutioni, e Visioni della Beata Metilde Vergine...raccolto dal Saniss. Giovanni Lanspergio* (1588), dedicated by the translator Ballardini to Eleonora, Duchess of Mantova and Monferrato and Archiduchessa d'Austria; *Vita della gloriosa Vergine Maria madre di Dio regina de i cieli con l'umanità del Redentor del mondo Giesu Christo nostro Signore del R.P.F. Bartolomeo Meduna conventuale di S. Francesco* (1574), dedicated by Giovanni Giolito, Gabriel's son, also to Duchess Eleonora; *Eccellenze di Maria Verg: in ottava rima. Di Oratio Guarguante da Soncino medico phisico* (1586), dedicated to the Duchess of Savoia. See: Bougi, *Annali*.

nuns.¹⁵⁹ Also featured are writings on the Christian education of children, both male and female, such as the anonymous work of 1560, composed for the *scuola pubblica* of Christian doctrine founded in Venice, and *Jesus Maria*, a dialogue that instructs "boys and girls, the laity and the clergy, men and women...who do not know, the things relating to the faith, the fear of God, the holy commands of God, the precepts and the holy sacraments of the Holy Church".¹⁶⁰ The latter were seemingly often used in the Schools of Christian Doctrine which operated in most Italian cities on Sundays and feast days in post-Tridentine Italy.

The case of the Venetian patrician and Cardinal Agostino Valier, Bishop of Verona, is indicative of the Post-Tridentine concern with women's religious education. In 1583 he was made a cardinal and member of the Congregation of the Index. Valier showed significant interest in the moral guidance and religious instruction of women. In the *Della Istruzione delle donne maritate* (1575), written for his sister Laura Gradenigo, Valier stresses the wife's important role in the domestic harmony and civic welfare, and exhorts married women to lead a pious life.¹⁶¹ His writings mostly remained in manuscript, and probably they circulated in the narrow environment of convents and ecclesiastical circles. They also include a treatise on the proper female conduct in each stage of women's lifecycle and a treatise on the proper way of life of *dimesse*, women whose families were unable to afford dowries for convents and who led a religious life at their homes, taking a vow of celibacy, and often selecting the habit and rule of a particular order.¹⁶² Furthermore, during his visitations, most notably that in Dalmatia-Istria in 1580, Valier showed particular interest in female convents. One work was inspired by a visitation in 1575.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹ *Alcuni avvertimenti nella vita Monacale, utili, et necessari a ciascheduna vergine di Christo. Del R.P.F. Bonaventura Gonzaga da Reggio* (1568); *Avvertimenti Monacali, et modo di vivere religiosamente secondo Iddio per le Vergini, et spose di Giesù Christo. Di diversi eccellentissimi autori Antichi et moderni* (1576); *Michele da Milano, frate osservante di S. Francesco. Confessionale utile per le donne così secolari, come religiose* (1579); *Trattato del Divino Dionisio Certosino della lodevol vita delle vergini. A la Congregazione di Santa Orsola* (1584). See: *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ *Modo breve et facile, utile, et necessario in forma di dialogo, di ammaestrare i figliuoli mascoli, & femine, & quelli che non sanno, nelle divotioni, & buoni costumi del viver Christiano* (1560); *Jesus Maria, Bellissimo, et devotissimo dialogo... Raccolto dal Reverendo P. Don Giovanpaolo da Como, Sacerdote de' Chierici Regolari* (1571). See: *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ A. Valier, *Della Istruzione delle donne maritate* (Venice, 1575).

¹⁶² A. Valier, *Modo di vivere proposto alle vergini che si chiaman Dimesse* (Padova, 1744); A. Valier, *La istituzione d'ogni stato lodevole delle donne cristiane* (Padua, 1744).

¹⁶³ *De Ricordi del cardinale Agostino Valiero vescovo di Verona, lasciati alle monache nella sua visitazione fatta l'anno 1575* (Padua, 1744); on Valier, see: I. Tacchella, *Il Cardinale Agostino Valier e la Riforma Tridentina nella diocesi di Trieste* (Udine, 1974); Romano, *Housecraft and Statecraft*,

Valier's writings and activity indicate not only a growing interest in female religious education, but also the increasing ecclesiastical control over female religious life. Clerical superiors and confessors were the main instructors of nuns or religious women, and the Inquisition trials against religious women who were accused of affected sanctity attempted to control any religious activity that did not operate within the official ecclesiastical system.¹⁶⁴ The Venetian nun Arcangela Tarabotti's critical writings against the forced vocations of women, and the repressive mechanisms of the families over their female members, epitomized a long process of female suppression both by the family institution and ecclesiastical authorities during the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.¹⁶⁵

The reorganization of religious life and the renewal of piety also affected the literature on famous women. Although examples of female Christian martyrs and saints were traditionally cited in such biographies, now the religious achievements of women became the focal point of the debate. The dedicatees of these works were often nuns. Pietro Paolo Ribera's *Le glorie immortali*, treating, among others, womens' achievements in "Sacra Scrittura, Teologia, Santità and Verginità" was dedicated by the Venetian publisher, Evangelista Deuchino, to the Abbess of a convent in Trieste, Valeria Bonomi. The publisher thanks Bonomi for her good treatment of his sister, the nun Tranquilla Deuchina. Most indicative is *Le Vite delle donne illustri della scrittura sacra*, written by Tomaso Garzoni, a monk in Porto di Ravenna, most known for his *La Piazza Universale* (1585) discussing a vast number of occupations and social categories of urban Italy.¹⁶⁶ His *Vite delle donne illustri* was dedicated to Margarita Estense Gonzaga, Duchess of Ferrara, and included Torquato Tasso's sonnet praising the same woman. Garzoni follows the tradition of biographies of famous women but he limits his interest only to women of the Holy

pp. 21-23; Grendler, *The Roman Inquisition*, pp. 266-7; A. Stella, *Chiesa e Stato nelle Relazioni dei Nunzi Pontifici a Venezia* (Vatican City, 1964), pp. 30-3, 40-3.

¹⁶⁴ R. Po-Chia Hsia, *The World of the Catholic Renewal 1540-1770* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 138-51; W. Monter, "Women and the Italian Inquisitions", in *Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance-Literary and Historical Perspectives*, ed. M. B. Rose (Syracouse, N.Y., 1986); A. J. Schutte, "Inquisition and Female Autobiography: The Case of Cecilia Ferrazzi", in *The Crannied Wall. Women, Religion and the Arts in Early Modern Europe*, ed. C. A. Monson (Ann Arbor, 1992); G. Zarri, "Living Saints: A Typology of Female Sanctity in the Early Sixteenth Century", in *Women and Religion in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, ed. D. Bornstein, R. Rusconi (Chicago & London, 1996); eadem, "Gender, Religious Institutions and Social Discipline: The Reform of the Regulars", in *Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy*, ed. J. C. Brown, R. C. Davis (London, 1998); for the sixteenth-century developments in the convents, see below pp. 77-83.

¹⁶⁵ See below pp. 81-3.

¹⁶⁶ For Garzoni's *La Piazza Universale*, see: C. Black, *Early Modern Italy. A Social History* (London & New York, 2001), pp. 79-80.

Scriptures. The proem reflects the religious preoccupations of the period: "And you happened to fall into the hands of learned and skilled persons accepting from them every fraternal and sweet correction; except in matters of the [Christian] faith in which you appear so pure and sincere and with clear conscience... So, God accompanies you in this happy journey and in your fortune".¹⁶⁷ The last part of the volume includes a typical defence of the female sex. The lack of any originality, and the little space it occupies, demonstrates the shifting interest from women as such to their place in family life and Christian society. Works such as Girolamo Razzi's *Delle vite delle donne illustri per santità*, Niccolò Lorini's *Elogii delle piu principali Donne del Sacro Calendario*, the professor of Theology Luigi Torelli's *Delle vite delle donne illustri in santità*, and Pietro Cresci Anconitano's *Le Vergini e Sante Descritte in forma d'elogii*, dedicated to Pope Sixtus V, present a similar attitude.¹⁶⁸

The second genre flourishing in this period was that of treatises on marriage and domestic economy. In this literature the household is represented as a complex unit of strictly defined hierarchies, which are prescribed by age, gender and social standing. This hierarchical order is sanctioned by divine law, justified by medical discourse, and enforced by political metaphors and analogies. Each member of the household (husband, wife, children and servants) is assigned with specific roles and responsibilities and should be characterized by different moral qualities. The relationships between them are strictly defined. The person chiefly responsible for the household is the male owner of the house, who as husband, father and master should control the proper behaviour of his wife, children and servants; their bad or good manners determine the moral qualities and social profile of the master of the household. The relationships between the other members of the household are structured on a hierarchical basis as well. Advice is given on the necessary preconditions for a successful marriage, the proper relations between the members of the household, the regiment and education of the children – according to their sex –

¹⁶⁷ "E avenga che tu cada nelle mani di persone dotte, e perite, accetta da loro ogni fraternal, e dolce correzione; salvo che nelle cose della fede, nella quale ti mostrerai tanto pura, e sincera, che con la fronte aperta... Così Iddio t'accompagni per questo viaggio felice, e fortuna": "Ragionamento galeato dell'autore dell'opera sua", in T. Garzoni, *Le vite delle donne illustri della scrittura sacra... con l'aggiunta delle vite delle donne oscure, e laide dell'uno e l'altro testamento; et un discorso in fine sopra la Nobiltà delle donne* (Venice, 1588).

¹⁶⁸ S. Razzi, *Delle vite delle donne illustri per santità* (Venice, 1595); N. Lorini, *Elogii delle piu principali donne del Sacro Calendario, e martirologio Romano* (Florence, 1617); L. Torelli, *Ristretto delle vite de gli huomini, e delle donne illustri in santità* (Bologna, 1647); P. Cresci Anconitano, *Le Vergini e Sante Descritte in forma d'elogii* (Venice, 1589).

and the organization of the staff of servants. The woman's role in the family is significant. Her main responsibilities are maintaining what the man accumulates, supervising the female staff of servants and attending to the moral guidance of the daughters. However, although the wife and mother's domestic skills and duties are considered vital for the well running of the household, she always remains an extension of her husband; under his strict supervision and in a complete subjection to him. Their different roles are ascribed to their different physical and mental abilities. Women, as imperfectly formed creatures, have to obey their husbands, who in turn should treat them in a gentle but paternalistic way for the family to prosper. Women are held inferior entities and at the same time symbols and agents of domestic harmony and civic morality. This cultural dualism enforces the traditional place of women in the narrow private sphere of activity.¹⁶⁹

Torquato Tasso expresses characteristically the changing attitudes in the debate about women. His *Discorso della virtù femminile e donnesca* is differentiated in key points from previous defences of the female sex.¹⁷⁰ Tasso divides female virtue into *donnesca* (ladylike), which fits women born from heroic and imperial blood, whose destiny is governing, and *femminile* (female virtue), which suits all the others, whose place is at home serving the family. In the second category are included *cittadine*, noblewomen of lesser nobility and power, and the "industrious mothers of the family".¹⁷¹ The heroic women differ in nothing from heroic men and so they should be characterized by "male" qualities such as fortitude, prudence, justice and clemency. As exemplary heroic women the writer cites some contemporary powerful figures from Italy or abroad, making special mention of women belonging to the Ferrarese Este or Mantuan Gonzaga families that Tasso had served. For the rest of women Tasso suggests the traditional "female" virtues of modesty and prudence. In this work Tasso is opposed to the previous defences of the female sex, which had adorned the female sex as a whole with both forms of virtue, without making in general such social distinctions. Although such a distinction was implied sometimes in the writings of the first half of the century, Tasso states now explicitly that the exception proves the rule and that women are predestined to domestic affairs. It is a

¹⁶⁹ For a detailed analysis on treatises on marriage and domestic economy, see below pp. 67-74, 197-201.

¹⁷⁰ T. Tasso, *Discorso della virtù femminile e donnesca*, ed. M. L. Doglio (Palermo, 1997), (first published in Venice in 1582 and also in 1584 and 1612, and in Ferrara in 1585 and 1589).

¹⁷¹ "ad una cittadina o ad una gentildonna privata, ad una industriosa madre di famiglia": Ibid., pp. 62-63.

cultural development found already in Lodovico Domenichi's *La donna di corte* which, contrary to Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*, deprives women from any active role in the Court life.

Most writings on marriage and domestic economy directly refer to issues concerning the contemporary nobility. Although treatises on marriage traditionally addressed the upper class families, the increasing focus on the elite and its lifestyle should be seen within a broader trend throughout Italy towards aristocratization. In Venice the nobility gradually turned away from commerce towards safer investments in land, erecting country houses and adopting a more luxurious living, tending to develop a style of life in closer affinity with the traditional ideals of the European nobility.¹⁷² Similar attempts at a redefinition of the nobility are found in other Italian cities as the sixteenth century progressed. In 1593 the Milan College of Lawyers excluded from the patrician category those directly involved in commerce. In the Viceroyalty of Naples, Sicily and the Duchy of Milan-Lombardy urban elites gradually became aristocratised, narrower and divorced from direct commercial and industrial activities. In Brescia too, there was a similar trend by the mid-sixteenth century. The city councilors abandoned commerce for real estate and obtained a more aristocratic and professional consciousness. In many Italian cities the nobility increased by the inflation of titles and honorifics and allocation of feuds. Though each area developed differently during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the notion of nobility was increasingly stressed and social status more strictly defined.¹⁷³ The literature of the period often reflected attempts at a redefinition of the nobility or depicted the new lifestyle. Writings such as Antonio Possevino's *Dialogo dell'onore* (1553), Girolamo Mutio's *Duello* (1558) and *Il gentilhuomo* (1564), Pompeo Rocchi's *Il Gentilhuomo* (1568) and Francesco de' Vieri, *Il primo libro della nobiltà* discussed the kinds, concepts and origins of nobility and outlined appropriate rules of conduct. In the same context flourished a celebratory literature treating feasts, marriages and funerals of important persons.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² S. J. Woolf, "Venice and the Terraferma: Problems of the Change from Commercial to Landed Activities", in *Crisis and Change in the Venetian Economy in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, ed. B. Pullan (London, 1968); J. C. Davis, *The Decline of the Venetian Nobility as a Ruling Class* (Baltimore, 1962); B. Pullan, "The Occupations and Investments of the Venetian nobility in the middle and late sixteenth century", in *Renaissance Venice*, ed. J. R. Hale (London, 1973); Martin, *Venice's Hidden Enemies*, pp. 154-155.

¹⁷³ Black, *Early Modern Italy*, pp. 129-48; J. M. Ferraro, *Family and Public Life in Brescia, 1580-1650: the Foundations of Power in the Venetian State* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 62-71.

¹⁷⁴ Grendler, *Critics of the Italian World*, pp. 17-19; Bareggi, *Il mestiere di scrivere*, p. 269.

Authors' emphasis on the equal social status of the spouses is related to the nobility's attempts to keep their prestige intact through the practice of endogamy, efforts that were not always successful. The attention paid to the shaping of the appropriate social identity of children, already from their infancy, and the rejection of the wet nurse's milk "as dissolute" symbolizes the intact social status of the family. The stress on wives' complete subjection to their husbands and the continuous admonitions against women's lavish expenditure can be seen as sign of anxiety about a reality that did not always correspond to the desired dominant values. As historians have shown, noblewomen, especially the patrician women of Venice, at times exercised considerable influence both economically and socially, despite the dominant patriarchal ideology.¹⁷⁵

On the other hand, domestic literature repeatedly sanctioned the hierarchical social structure. The relationship between masters and servants is prescribed by natural law. As Tasso notices in *Il padre di famiglia*, published in Venice in 1583, "the difference between servants and masters is firmly rooted in nature; because some are naturally born to command and others to obey".¹⁷⁶ As another treatise underlines, due to his superiority, the master is responsible for the conduct of his servants, whose obedience indicates the master's ability to command.¹⁷⁷ Strictly but not cruelly the master should instruct servants in their duties. However, under no circumstances should the master be on friendly terms with his servants, since such a familiarity "indicates a base soul and inability to command".¹⁷⁸ Interwoven with different types of unequal relations, defined by gender, age, social standing and political status, domestic culture became the model for the social structure and vice-versa, enforcing the dominant gender order and social hierarchy. Gio. Battista Assandri's analysis is characteristic:

¹⁷⁵ See below pp. 62-3.

¹⁷⁶ "questa differenza di servo e di signore è fondata sovra la natura: perciocché alcuni ci nascono naturalmente a comandare, altri ad ubbidire;", "servi propriamente sono coloro che son nati per ubbidire, i quali a gli uffici de la cittadinanza sono inabili per difetto di virtù, de la quale tanto hanno, e non più, quantoli rende atti ad ubbidire", "Pare ancora che la natura abbia generato non solo i bruti a servizio de gli uomini, ma gli uomini che sono atti ad ubbidire a servizio di coloro che sono atti a comandare", T. Tasso, *Il padre di famiglia*, in idem, *Prose*, ed. F. Flora (Milan & Rome, 1935), pp. 114, 116, 130.

¹⁷⁷ "Commette errore il patrone quando non sa comandare, e perciò ben disse il filosofo che le cose le quali conviene al servitore di saper fare, conviene prima al patrone di saperle comandare": S. Guazzo, *La civil conversazione*, ed. A. Quondam (Turin, 1993), p. 251; it was first published in 1574.

¹⁷⁸ "Io voglio bene che 'l patrone tenga il suo grado, perché facendo il compagno e 'l fratello, come voi dite, col servitore, darebbe segno d'animo vile e indegno di comandare, e d'essere servo co'servi, e ne sarebbe biasimato": Ibid., p. 256.

The husband should inspire his wife with love and awe, not the servile fear that is an expression of a base spirit, which forces servants to obey their masters, but the freewill awe which is a proper emotion considering the greater virtue of the person feared, so that children and citizens are persuaded to obey their fathers and rulers.¹⁷⁹

Two best-known treatises on domestic economy were Torquato Tasso's *Il padre della famiglia* and Stefano Guazzo's third book of *La Civil Conversazione*, which deals with "the manners that should govern the domestic conversation between husband and wife, father and son, brother and brother, master and servant".¹⁸⁰ The *Padre di Famiglia* was inspired by a discussion which had taken place during Tasso's visit to a family of Turin. Tasso also wrote another treatise on marriage, *Discorso in lode del Matrimonio*, in which he is opposed to his relative, Hercole Tasso, who was supposed to have written a work against marriage.¹⁸¹ Guazzo's *La civil conversazione* was the most popular writing on good manners during the end of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. It was published for the first time in Brescia in 1574. Its success was enormous. It was published more than thirty times in Venice by 1631 and it was translated into Latin, English, French and German. In contrast with Castiglione's book of manners, *La civil conversazione* is not limited to courtly decorum but treats the broader field of human relations. In the second book, the writer's brother, Guglielmo Guazzo, and the philosopher and physician Annibale Magnovallo discuss the appropriate way of conversation between different social categories prescribed by age, social status, gender, education, cittadinanza etc.¹⁸² The third book discusses the relations between the members of

¹⁷⁹ "che s'ha [il marito] à reggere la Moglie con l'esca dell'amore, & col freno del timore, non servile però se possibile sia, ch'è un'affetto d'animo basso, che sforza i Servi all'ubidienza de i Padroni, mà liberale, ch'è un giusto moto dell'animo, per lo quale mediante l'opinione di maggior virtù nella persona temuta i Figliuoli, & i Cittadini, vengono persuasi all'ubidienza de i Padri, & de i Regi"; G. B. Assandri, *Della Economica, ovvero disciplina domestica* (Cremona, 1616), p. 91.

¹⁸⁰ "i modi che s'hanno a serbare nella domestica conversazione tra marito e moglie, tra padre e figliuolo, tra fratello e fratello, tra padrone e servitore": Guazzo, *La civil conversazione*, p. 177.

¹⁸¹ Both works are included in an edition with the title *Dello ammogliarsi piacevole contesa fra i due moderni Tassi, Hercole, cioè, e Torquato Gentilhuomini Bergamaschi* (Bergamo, 1593). There is no trace of Hercole Tasso's work before this date. Perhaps Torquato Tasso refers to a manuscript.

¹⁸² In Guazzo's words: "Si discorre primieramente delle maniere convenevoli a tutte le persone nel conversare fuori di casa, e poi delle particolari che debbono tenere, conversando insieme, giovani e vecchi, nobili e ignobili, principi e private, dotti e idioti, cittadini e forastieri, religiosi e secolari, uomini e donne": Guazzo, *La civil conversazione*, p. 77.

the household. The dialogue begins on the occasion of the marriage of a Genovese nobleman.

Both Torquato Tasso and Stefano Guazzo were closely attached to courtly culture. Tasso, son of the poet and courtier Bernardo Tasso, was born in Sorrento, in the Kingdom of Naples. In 1556 he was in the Court of Urbino, and in 1565 he entered the services of Luigi, Cardinal d'Este and frequented the Court of Duke Alfonso II d'Este at Ferrara. There he enjoyed the patronage of the Duke's sisters, Lucrezia and Leonora. Finally, in 1586 he entered the Court of Vincenzo Gonzaga, prince of Mantua, who released him from the hospital of Saint Anna, where Tasso had remained for seven years because of his mental illness. It was to Vincenzo's mother Eleonora Gonzaga that Tasso dedicated the *Discorso della virtù femminile e donnesca*, written during his residence in the hospital.¹⁸³ Stefano Guazzo, born in Casale Monferrato, also came from a family of courtly tradition. His father, Giovanni, was an officer of the Paleologhi and later the Gonzaga of Mantua. Stefano too had served in both courts.¹⁸⁴ Other writers of the genre had similar socio-cultural backgrounds. The Brescian nobleman Giacomo Lanteri in his dialogue on domestic economy, dedicated to Duchess Renata di Francia, makes frequent mentions of the Brescian and Milanese nobility. The whole argument refers once more to the noble family.¹⁸⁵

Nevertheless, despite the origins of the authors and the frequent references to the nobility's morals, literature on marriage and domestic economy did not aim exclusively at the close, officially institutionalized nobility, but also at a middle or upper middle class, wishing to adopt a culture which would offer social recognition to it. Tasso's treatise depicts a man who, although he was born in a humble family, succeeded in becoming rich "thanks to his industry, parsimony and ability to govern prudently his house".¹⁸⁶ Other contemporary writings on family and household management were more closely related to post-Tridentine values of religiosity and piety, stressing Christian morality as the ideal object for the decent household. Such a work is the *Della economica Christiana* (1568) written by the Camaldolese monk

¹⁸³ Doglio "Introduction", in Tasso, *Discorso della virtù*.

¹⁸⁴ "Guazzo, Stefano", in *Dizionario*, vol 60, pp. 534-8.

¹⁸⁵ G. Lanteri, *Della Economica, nel quale si dimostrano le qualità, che all'huomo e alla donna separatamente convengono per governo della casa* (Venice, 1560).

¹⁸⁶ "il quale di povero padre nato, e di picciolo patrimonio erede, con l'industria e con la parsimonia e con tutte l'arti di lodato padre di famiglia, molto l'accrebbe: il qual poi ne le mie mani non è scemato, ma fatto maggiore, che da mio padre no 'l ricevei": Tasso, *Il Padre*, p. 103.

Silvano Razzi and to a lesser degree the physician Francesco Tommasi's *Reggimento del padre di famiglia* (1580).¹⁸⁷

Finally, the dominant cultural currents were also reflected in the medical discourse of the period. In the first half of the century the emerging debate about women had discussed broadly the female physiology and women's contribution to procreation, moving between the theories of Aristotle, Hippocrates and Galen. In the second half of the century, within the context of the idealization of marriage and domestic virtue, the healthy and chaste female body becomes the symbol and agent of domestic harmony and civic morality. The Venetian physician Giovanni Marinello in his medical writing about women's illnesses and hygiene, interrelates issues concerning childbearing, such as sterility, pregnancy and midwifery with social aspects such as marriage.¹⁸⁸ His work implies the new revalued role assigned to women within the family and validates the private sphere of activity as the only one appropriate for women.

The debate about women in Venice was apparently influenced by key European works, such as Juan Luis Vives' *De institutione* and Henricus Cornelius Agrippa's *Declamatio*, and Italian well-known writings, such as Giovanni Boccaccio's *De Claris Mulieribus*, Pietro Bembo's *Gli Asolani* and Baldesar Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*. Nevertheless, in Venice, the debate was further advanced and popularized, developing its own special features in accordance with the Venetian intellectual environment, the market forces of the book trade and each author's personal acquaintances and aspirations. Lodovico Domenichi borrowed Agrippa's ideas and arguments but *La nobiltà delle donne* was enriched by specific Italian references to adjust to current readers' needs. Similarly, Lodovico Dolce transformed Vives's treatise into a popular Italian genre of the period – dialogue – and changed certain aspects of it, as with his suggestions about women's proper readings or the elimination of the term "Christian" from the title, to adjust it to his and the publisher Giolito's expectations and the broader contemporary intellectual climate. Giuseppe Betussi translated Boccaccio's *De Claris Mulieribus*, also enriching it with

¹⁸⁷ For the religious orientation in such works and for a broader discussion on the literature on domestic economy, see: D. Frigo, *Il padre di famiglia: governo della casa e governo civile nella tradizione dell' "economica" tra Cinque e Seicento* (Rome, 1985), pp. 38-40.

¹⁸⁸ G. Marinello, *Le medicine appartenenti alle infirmità delle donne* (Venice, 1563).

references to contemporary famous Italian women. Sperone Speroni and Giuseppe Betussi refashioned love theory in accordance with their broader ideological orientations and popularized it, incorporating contemporary male and female figures of their circles of acquaintances in their dialogues. In their works concerning women, Ortensio Lando and Giuseppe Betussi praised women who shared their religious anxieties, and in his collection of letters Lando probably used a female disguise to express his own anticlerical ideas. Furthermore, the cases of Nicolò Franco, Lodovico Domenichi and Giuseppe Betussi indicate that the debate about women was often shaped by individual circumstances; their departure from Venice and their involvement in more aristocratic environments was gradually followed by revisions to their treatment of the debate. Finally, as Girolamo Parabosco's *I Diporti* and Girolamo Ruscelli's *Lettura* indicate, oral discussions on the topic must have taken place among some Venetian literary circles in Academies or in the Venetian literary salons, often with women's participation, as will be shown below.

On the other hand, most writers mentioned in the last section, even those who had their works published in Venice, neither lived in Venice nor had any close link with the city. Venice continued to be a significant printing centre during the second half of the sixteenth and the early seventeenth centuries, but the cultural singularity which had characterized it in the first half of the century gave place to more conventional forms of expression. The intellectual climate was now less original, geared to broader post-Tridentine cultural preoccupations. Most of the aforementioned writers associated either with courtly culture or the ecclesiastical mechanisms of the Catholic Reformation, and their works bore the marks of the broader ideology. Within this context, the literature defending women gradually waned, as religious preoccupations dominated intellectual life. The treatises on marriage and domestic economy took for granted female inferiority, and they just discussed how men and women should function within the household. Moderata Fonte's rejection of marriage in *Il merito delle donne* (1600) can be seen as a critical response both to the limitations imposed on women within the family and to the literature on marriage and domestic economy.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁹ See also below, pp. 75-6, 161, 163.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SOCIAL CONDITION OF WOMEN IN VENICE AND LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS

WOMEN, MARRIAGE AND DOMESTIC LIFE

From the last decades of the fourteenth century, significant political and social developments related to the centralization of power, attempts at a stricter definition of the ruling elites and the reform of the criminal justice system on the base of the new centralized magistracies, transformed the Italian political and social scene.¹ As the main institution between public authority and private life, and the official way of the reproduction of the members of ruling elite, marriage became an issue of great significance for the early modern Italian governments. The Venetian government reorganized the social relations and marriage patterns of the city's ruling class to establish a close and clearly defined hereditary nobility. This would avert potential conflicts within the patriciate and discourage new rich families' ambitions from entering the body of the patriciate. In 1420, the Venetian Senate enacted laws to regulate the dowry transactions among the patriciate and define noble status more strictly. In 1506, the Council of Ten instituted the *Libri d'Oro*, registers of male noble births. Each noble family had to notify the *Avogadori di Comun* of the birth of sons, whose names were then officially recorded.² Similar developments took place in other Italian cities. In Brescia, by 1509 all candidates for the city council were compelled to prove themselves legitimate descendants of the nobility to join the Brescian City Council.³

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as Venetian patricians conformed more and more closely to an aristocratic lifestyle, the debate about who

¹ For an overview on the formation of the early modern Italian states and its impact on aspects of private life, see: S. Chojnacki, "Gender and the Early Renaissance State" in his *Women and Men in Renaissance Venice*.

² S. Chojnacki, "Nobility, Women and the State: Marriage Regulation in Venice, 1420-1535" in *Marriage in Italy 1300-1600*, ed. T. Dean, K. J. P. Lowe (Cambridge & New York, 1998), (reprinted in Chojnacki, *Women and Men*), pp. 140-1.

³ Ferraro, *Family and Public Life*, p. 60.

met the criteria of patrician status and consequently was eligible to join the *Maggior Consiglio* increased. A key point of the debate was over marriages between partners of unequal social status. Already from the early fifteenth century, the 1422 law prescribed that the noble status of the mother was necessary for the son to be eligible to join the *Maggior Consiglio*. Similar laws followed in 1526, 1533, 1550 and 1589. Furthermore, already from the fifteenth century, a specific magistracy, the *Avogaria di Comun*, existed to sort out whether certain non-noble women could count as acceptable partners for nobles and so guarantee the status of offspring. In the sixteenth century the magistracy took complementary measures to solve the problem of identification among aspirant members of the *Maggior Consiglio*. By 1526 the *Avogaria* was demanding notification of all marriages and births of patricians outside the city as well as within it, and at some point it required that a copy of all patrician marriage contracts be deposited with it. Women who wished to marry into the patriciate should submit a petition to the *Avogaria*.⁴

However, as the sixteenth century progressed, the concern with marriage expanded beyond the nobility and state's competence. Within a broader programme, aiming at the spiritual renewal and disciplinary reform, the Tridentine Reformers promoted marriage as a sacrament, and sought to standardize marriage procedures and ceremonies. According to the decree of the 24th session of the Council of Trent in 1563, announcements or banns, for a proposed marriage, had normally to be publicized three times in the parish church or churches, the ceremony then conducted in church in the presence of a priest and two witnesses, and the marriage duly recorded in parish records. Marital disputes had to be brought before ecclesiastical courts. The Church long campaigned against the popular notion that a betrothal, followed by consummation constituted a valid marriage. The Church also tried to stop sexual relations between betrothal and the Church marriage ceremony. The Venetian government collaborated with the Church and passed laws complementary to the Tridentine decrees. In 1577, the Council of Ten enacted laws against those who had sexual relations with women on the false promise of marriage and a special

⁴ A. Cowan, "Love, Honour and the *Avogaria di Comun* in Early Modern Venice", *Archivio Veneto*, 146 (1995).

magistracy, the *Esecutori contro la Bestemmia*, was responsible for prosecuting this crime – among others.⁵

In a series of articles, Stanley Chojnacki has discussed the effects marriage regulations had on Venetian patrician women. In particular, he has suggested that by mid-fourteenth to the early sixteenth centuries, political developments and legal changes, in combination with the peculiarities which characterized the Venetian patrician society, favoured elite Venetian women in comparison with their counterparts in other Italian territories.⁶ Between 1420 and 1535 the Great Council passed a series of laws respecting marriage, which, although they did not aim directly at women, favoured them. By denying noble status to the male offspring of non-noble women, the 1422 law made maternity a determinant of nobility, whereas until then, the social status of the father was sufficient. Furthermore, a law of 1420, by instituting a maximum of 1,600 ducats as dowry for each daughter, offered noble daughters more opportunities to get married, rather than entering a convent against their will or remaining unmarried at home. Complementary measures protected the non-dowry female inheritance and made it easier for widows to take back their dowry after the death of their husbands. Further regulations permitted higher dowries for widows who would get married again, women who were older than twenty-four years old and women who had some disability, which offered more opportunities to these vulnerable categories to get married. Finally, although the law of 1535 increased the maximum of the dowry from 2,000 ducats (in accordance with the 1505 law) to 3,000 ducats, it kept the *corredo* – the husband's share – firm at 1,000 ducats, facilitating women's access to wealth.⁷

Patrician women's economic power and influence was also increased as the strong patrician kinship ties beyond the elementary family were deployed for

⁵ Black, *Early Modern Italy*, pp. 170, 176-9; J. Ferraro, "The Power to Decide: Battered Wives in Early Modern Venice", *Renaissance Quarterly*, 48 (1995); eadem, *Marriage Wars*, pp. 3-6; L. Ferrante, "Il matrimonio disciplinato: processi matrimoniali a Bologna nel Cinquecento", in *Disciplina dell'anima, disciplina del corpo e disciplina della società tra medioevo ed età moderna*, ed. P. Prodi (Bologna, 1994); D. Lombardi, "Fidanzamenti e matrimoni dal Concilio di Trento alle riforme settecentesche", in *Storia del Matrimonio*, ed. M. Del Giorgio, C. Klapish-Zuber (Bari, 1996).

⁶ In contrast with Chojnacki, scholars, such as Christiane Klapish-Zuber, Samuel Cohn, Diane Hughes and Isabelle Chabot, examining the changes in women's position over the course of fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in Florence and Genoa, have pointed out that marriage strategies, patrilinear lineage and inheritance systems gradually disinherited women's economic power and reduced their options of taking decisions. For the different conclusions of these historians, see: S. Chojnacki, "Family, State, Women and Men", in his *Women and Men*; S. K. Cohn, "The Social History of Women in the Renaissance", in his *Women in the Streets*.

⁷ Chojnacki, "Nobility, Women and the State".

political alliances and common interests. Unlike Florence, where women had to leave their dowry to their children or husbands, Venetian women were able to bequeath to heirs of their choice, either in their husband's family or in their own natal family. Moving between the economic interests of their own lineages and those of their husbands, Venetian women had influence on both families. Both the male kin of their natal family, who wished their sisters and daughters to return their wealth to the patrimony, and their husbands, who hoped for a favourable attitude towards them and their kin, were in a sense obliged to protect the interests of their wives, daughters or sisters and conform to their wishes. The common practice of women to choose as their beneficiaries other women, and the increasing inflation of dowries, which after the death of husbands returned to the widows' hands, gradually increased female wealth and offered Venetian patrician women economic, social and cultural power. This power permitted them to play a significant role in their daughters' future, their sons' lives and culture, and the family's decisions in general.⁸ According to Chojnacki, these developments affected the personal relationships between the sexes as well. As the fifteenth century progressed, a higher regard for women and a greater affection between spouses and between fathers and daughters emerged. Husbands more often named their wives as executors of their wills and they used a much more affectionate language towards their wives in their wills. On the other hand, fathers became more open towards their daughters' vocational preferences (marriage, the cloister or lay spinsterhood).⁹

Chojnacki's studies have suggested that at least for the Venetian patrician women the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries saw an increase in their economic and cultural influence. However, patrician women's particularity – due to their families' close associations with political power – does not permit broader generalizations. The marriage patterns and power relations within the middle or upper middle class families, let alone the lower strata of society, might have been quite different. Studying the Venetian women of the middle and upper middle classes

⁸ S. Chojnacki, "Patrician Women in Early Renaissance Venice", *Studies in the Renaissance*, 21 (1974); idem, "'The Most Serious Duty': Motherhood, Gender and Patrician Culture in Renaissance Venice", in *Refiguring Woman: Perspectives on Gender and the Italian Renaissance*, ed. M. Migiel, J. Schiesari (Ithaca, N.Y. & London, 1991); idem, "Kinship Ties and Young Patricians in Fifteenth-Century Venice", *Renaissance Quarterly*, 38: 2 (1985). All reprinted in idem, *Women and Men*.

⁹ S. Chojnacki, "The Power of Love: Wives and Husbands in Late Medieval Venice", in *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. M. Erler, M. Kowaleski (Athens, Ga & London, 1988), (reprinted in idem, *Women and Men*).

in a later period, Virginia Cox has noticed that as the sixteenth century progressed, the adoption of aristocratic practices and aspirations and the tendency to keep family patrimonies intact, by limiting marriages and maintaining inheritance on a single line, gradually became characteristics not only of the patriciate but also of "the *cittadini* class" and "upper strata of *popolani*". These developments had far reaching negative consequences on the lives of the middle class women, since more and more daughters of these families were condemned to forced claustration or secular spinsterhood, so that their families could avoid paying high marital dowries. Deprived of their dowries these women had no financial base for developing some autonomy.¹⁰

The practice of lay spinsterhood expanded in the sixteenth century. *Dimesse* (spinsters) was the term for unmarried women who, not having succeeded in entering a convent (which usually required a dowry – though smaller – and on-going expenses, which might be beyond the means or inclinations of the family), led an ascetic, humble and chaste life at home, often having taken a vow of celibacy. Although these women came frequently from well-off families they were in a disadvantaged position. Belonging neither to the married status nor to the cloister world they enjoyed little social prestige. Furthermore, lacking the safety, which a marriage could offer, or the social network of the convent, they were in a continuous fragile socio-economic position, and often fell victims to the abuses and exploitation of their brothers or other relatives who hosted them.¹¹ Equally precarious was the economic and social position of women who deviated from the social and cultural norms of their environment. Such were women who had illegitimate children or extra-marital relations. Concubinage, especially between patrician men and women from lower social standing, had been a persistent and socially acceptable phenomenon before the Catholic Reformation. Often they were long-lasting relationships and the fathers usually recognized openly the children born of these liaisons. However, both the stricter regulations on the marriages between partners of unequal social status and the post-Tridentine changing climate gradually affected these relations. Towards the end of the seventeenth century, under the increasing

¹⁰ Cox, "The Single Self", pp. 530-44.

¹¹ F. Ambrosini, "Toward a Social History of Women in Venice from Renaissance to Enlightenment" in *Venice Reconsidered: the History and Civilization of an Italian City-State, 1297-1797*, ed. J. Martin, D. Romano (Baltimore & London, 2000), pp. 424-8.

pressure of the Church, many patricians contracted secret marriages with their partners.¹²

The Church and the Venetian state's efforts to regulate marriage are also reflected in their intervention in domestic disputes. Although divorce was not permitted, the Church admitted separation under certain circumstances, such as when one of the spouses expressed a preference for religious vocation, when the wife or husband committed adultery or in instances of cruelty. From the second half of the sixteenth century unhappy spouses were offered the opportunity to apply to the Patriarchal court to dissolve their marriage. Furthermore, secular tribunals, such as the *Giudici al Procurator*, were charged with handling the issue of dividing property in cases of domestic conflict. These developments offered, at least theoretically, married women more legal rights to protect their dowries and their general economic interests, and ensured, to some extent, the proper maintenance of wives by husbands. The overwhelming majority of requests for separation to the Patriarchal court were coming from wives. In contrast with the few husbands who requested separation on the grounds that their wives had committed adultery, most women accused their husbands of violent behaviour or economic exploitation by squandering their dowries or pledging their personal belongings. Sometimes, women tried to dissolve their marriages on the basis that they had been subjected to forced marriage from parents and other kin. In practice, the successful cases could be very prolonged. However, interestingly the cases reveal a broader network of kin, neighbours, parish priests and servants who deposed as witnesses. Along with the Church and the State, the community often intervened in domestic disputes to reform socially unacceptable codes of domestic behaviour.¹³

The increasing interest in marriage and proper relations between partners is also reflected in the contemporary Italian literature. Although each author probably had in mind certain Italian cities, the arguments cover a broader spectrum of relations concerning marriage and domestic life in Italy, without usually making specific references to a particular city. Remarks, such as that of Stefano Guazzo's that in Siena women enjoyed more freedom than in Rome, are rare.¹⁴ Furthermore, the

¹² Ibid., pp. 428-34; A. Cowan, "Patricians and Partners in Early Modern Venice" in *Medieval and Renaissance Venice*, ed. E. E. Kittell, T. F. Madden (Urbana, 1999).

¹³ Ferraro, *Marriage Wars*; eadem, "The Power to Decide".

¹⁴ "Fate ora paragone de'costumi de'cittadini senesi e de'romani, e considerate che i Senesi, per far maggior onore a'forestieri, fanno comparer loro innanzi la moglie, come la più cara cosa che

common practice of plagiarism makes it difficult to ascertain whether the arguments each author developed concerned his place of origin or the city where he lived when he composed his work.

Literature defending the female sex often denounced the existing patriarchal customs and the legislation regulating marriage relationships. In a detailed analysis of the civil law, Domenico Bruni pointed out the injustice against the female sex concerning issues of inheritance, succession and upbringing of children; the practices of the patrilineal line, the precedence of the male relatives in the rights of succession, women's ineligibility to adopt children or undertake the guardianship of their own.¹⁵ Furthermore, Bruni criticised fathers' and brothers' marriage strategies:

Very often, either to give a smaller dowry or to favour one of their friends...they give to the poor girl an old, lame, plebeian husband...or someone similar to an awful monster, similar to somebody suffering from syphilis or some other known illness...or some gambler, whoremaster, stupid, rude, without any virtue, discretion or gentleness...and so girls take the worst possible husbands not because of some defect or fault of theirs but because of the sinister greed of their fathers or brothers...since they do not look for the benefit and comfort of their daughters and sisters but only for their own.¹⁶

Reversing the dominant view on female chastity as the cornerstone of family life, Raffaella, the main speaker in Alessandro Piccolomini's *Dialogo della bella creanza de le donne*, advises the young noblewoman Margarita to pretend that she is a happy, modest and responsible wife. In this way, she will fool her husband so that he buys her dresses and adornments and let her go to feasts, spectacles and banquets, where Margarita will find the ideal lover.¹⁷ In a similar vein, Cervone, the defender of the female sex in David Thomagni's dialogue, justifies women's extramarital

s'abbiano al mondo; e per lo contrario I Romani fanno menare alle loro donne una vita così ristretta, che paiono monache": Guazzo, *La civil conversazione*, p. 190.

¹⁵ Bruni, *Difese delle donne*, pp. 9R-12R.

¹⁶ "molte volte accade che ò per darli minor dota, ò per darli l'amico benevolo...a quella povera fanciulla daranno un'vecchio, un zoppo, uno rozzo, uno ignobile, ò altro simile...che a un horrendo mostro si porta agguagliare, o vero tal'volta se pur'compariscente persona sarà...ò gl'havrà il mal franzese, ò altra notabile malattia...ò sarà giocatore, puttaniere, scempio, inculto, e senza virtù, discrezione, ò gentilezza alcuna; donde che allora ben piglia il peggio si posson' domandare, ma senza colpa ò difetto alcun' loro, ma dalla pessima avaritia de i padri, o fratelli...perche non l'utile ò comodo delle lor'figliuole, ò sorelle, mà il proprio haranno cercato;": Ibid., pp. 55V-56R.

¹⁷ Piccolomini, *Dialogo della bella creanza*, pp. 20-21.

relations in the case they have an "old, wheezy, decrepit or impotent husband" or husbands who enjoy the company of "lusty female servants and vile women".¹⁸ Luigi Dardano, "Gran Cancelliero dell' Illustrissimo Senato Vinitiano", also chastises husbands who kept concubines at home giving them "honey and good wine" whereas to their wives "wax and vinegar".¹⁹ Finally, Pietro Paolo Porro, "Cavalier de' Santi Mauritio, e Lazaro", challenged the contemporary dominant values of marriage, pointing out their relative value by quoting examples of the customs of different peoples around the world:

In some countries, such as the provinces of Quito and Canaria, they [women] govern the lands and the commerce and they are engaged in every trade, whereas men spin, weave, make clothes and govern the house... In Ethiopia, in the kingdom of Prete Ianni [Prester John], men give dowries to women. According to the law of Lycurgus, Lacedaemonian women married without a dowry... In the province of Cartama men marry women who have lost their virginity because they consider it dishonourable to have a virgin wife.²⁰

As the sixteenth century progressed a literature exclusively treating marriage flourished. In contrast with the literature just cited, these writings enforced gender roles and hierarchies within marriage and laid down specific rules of behaviour for each member of the family.

At the centre of the household is the male head of the family and owner of the house. It is around him that everything is arranged. As husband, father and master he has the main responsibility for the proper behaviour of his wife, children and servants, and it is primarily his moral qualities and social profile that will be judged by the public image of the household. Most authors begin their argumentation praising marriage on the basis that it is blessed from God, imposed by Nature and a

¹⁸ "...trovandosi alle mani d'un vecchio rantoloso, decrepito, & impotente...del marito, ilquale a ogni sua voglia si trastulla con le zambracche, & cattive femine...": G. D. Thomagni, *Dell'eccellentia de l' huomo sopra quella de la donna* (Venice, 1565), p. 156R.

¹⁹ "Ne, per ch'altra il miel gusti, essa la cera / Essa l'aceto e altra il miglior vino, / Quando talhor la concubina impera": L. Dardano, *La bella e dotta difesa delle Donne in Verso e Prosa...contra gli accusatori del sesso loro, con un breve trattato di ammaestrare li figliuoli* (Venice, 1554), p. 6R.

²⁰ "in alcun paesi, come nella provincia di Quito, e di Canaria, esse governino i terreni, le mercantie, e in tutti i negotii s'adoperino, e gli Huomini filano, tessono, fanno vesti e governano la casa... In Etiopia, nei regni del Prete Ianni gli Huomini costituiscono la dote alle Donne. I Lacedemoni per legge di Licurgo maritavano le figliuole senza dote... Quegli della Provincia di Cartama maritano le Donne, dopò che hanno perduta la virginità; perche stimano dishonore haver la moglie vergine": P. P. Porro, *L'Eris d'Amore* (Milan, 1575), pp. 166-8, 201, 203.

necessary precondition for the city's welfare. After a strong rejection of polygamy and incest, writers continue giving advice on what constitutes a happy marriage.

The social status of the spouses is of prime importance. The consorts should be of an equal social status to be mutually respectful. Of equal significance is a mother's nobility as a determinant of the social status of the offspring. Making specific reference to the Venetian nobility, Alessandro Piccolomini advises prospective husbands:

Choose for wife a woman of equal nobility to yours, because the nobility of the mother is very important for the succession of the nobility in the children; and the opinion is very false of those who believe that when the father is noble, the status of the mother does not count, since the children belong to the family of the father. The Venetians know well the falseness of this opinion and consider it impossible to marry a woman not equal to them in nobility.²¹

Marriages between nobler women and men of lower social status are also strongly disapproved. Such a conjunction would rupture the hierarchical structure of the household by bringing into conflict the determinants of gender and social status. According to Torquato Tasso, if the wife happens to be of nobler origins, her husband would respect her more than he would have respected a woman equal or inferior to him; anxiously the author stresses that in such a case the wife should always have in mind that her superior social standing cannot transcend what nature itself has decreed, that is the natural subjection of women to men.²² A similar anxiety about wives' potential economic or social superiority is reflected in Lodovico Dolce's advice already in the 1540s: "Prudent women should not regard the dowry, wealth, beauty or nobility they bring in their husband's home as their own; honesty, chastity, virtue, obedience and diligence in the management of the household should

²¹ "elegger per vostra consorte, donna nobile ugal' à voi, però che è grandemente importante la nobilità de la donna, à la successione de la nobilità de i figliuoli; essendo falsissima l'opinion di coloro, che credano, che pur chel padre sia nobile, de la madre non importi poi: seguendo i figli la fameglia del padre. La falsità de la qual'opinion, ben conoscano i Signor Venetiani; appresso de i quali è quasi cosa impossibile, che altra donna prendin mai che de i lor nobili non sia nata": Piccolomini, *De la Institutione*, p. 219V.

²² "Ma quando pur avenga che per qualche accidente di fortuna l'uomo tolga donna superiore per nobilità in moglie, dee, non dimenticandosi però d'esser marito, più onorarla che non farebbe una donna d'eguale o di minor condizione... Ed ella dee pensare, che niuna differenza di nobilità può esser sì grande, che maggiore non sia quella che la natura ha posta fra gli uomini e le donne, per li quali naturalmente nascono lor soggette": Tasso, *Il padre*, p. 105.

be their treasures".²³ As Stefano Guazzo underlines, the equal economic status of the partners is just as significant, so that the richer consort would not behave towards his/her poorer partner as if she/he were a servant.²⁴

The age of the spouses is equally important. According to Giovanni Marinello, the bride should be at least eighteen years old to be fit for childbearing but she should not have exceeded the age of twenty-five because she will have got used to the customs of her natal household and it would be difficult for her to follow the habits of her husband.²⁵ The ideal marriage age for men is about thirty to be mature enough to govern the household and inspire respect in their wives, who "naturally will honour her elders and those who they will depend on".²⁶ Similarly, Guazzo recommends prospective husbands to choose a young woman [*fanciula*] rather than a mature one [*giovane matura*], but to avoid marrying a very young girl [*zitelle tolte dal latte*] who will be unable to undertake domestic duties.²⁷

The subjection of the wife to her husband is sanctioned by nature, custom and divine and human law. According to Paolo Caggio, "all over the world, women follow the customs of their husbands as the law of their life; this rule is established by the Rector of Heaven, Nature and the holy institution of Marriage".²⁸ The proper relationships between husbands and wives are further compared to various types of political intercourse. Giacomo Lanteri compares the household to a small city in which the husband is the supreme authority [*Principe*], whereas his wife is his Castellan or Lieutenant [*Castellano, Luogotenente*].²⁹ According to Bernardo Trotto's speaker, Aleramo, the relationship between husband and wife is like that

²³ "Ma non dee la prudente moglie istimar suo, dote, denari, bellezza, o nobilità, che ella porti seco in casa del marito; ma la honestà, la castità, la bontà, la virtù, la obedientia, la diligentia nel governo della famiglia, e si fatti thesori": Dolce, *Dialogo della Institution*, p. 53V.

²⁴ "Perché se l'uomo sposando una povera la fa divenire serva, la donna parimente sposando un povero, se lo fa servitoro, e vuol essere la signora, onde il tutto torna ad un segno": Guazzo, *La civil conversazione*, p. 181.

²⁵ "Pervenuta la Damigella al decimo ottavo anno della sua età, debbono i parenti di lei porre grandissima cura, & diligenza in cercarle marito...percioche assai agevolente potrà sostenere la noia della gravidanza... Ma però non vogliamo che ella trappassi il vigesimoquinto: conciosia che due mali, & forse piu ne nascerebbono: l'uno, che per la ferma età non apprenderebbe se non con grandissima amaritudine del marito; costumi di moglie, & di donna da governo: percioche gli anni ne la havrebbero confermata ne vezzi della casa paterna": Marinello, *Le medicine*, p. 1.

²⁶ "che pur ragionevolmente si vuole honorare i maggiori di casa, & quelli da cui la moglie tutta dipende": Ibid., p. 1.

²⁷ Guazzo, *La civil conversazione*, p. 189; Tasso, *Il Padre*, pp. 105-6.

²⁸ "Et tutto questo facilmente sarà à tutte le donne del Mondo, s'elleno si porran dinanzi i costumi de'lor mariti come legge della lor vita, impostale, e dal Rettor del Cielo, e dalla maestà Natura, per la congiuntion sacra del Matrimonio santo": Caggio, *Iconomica*, p. 19R.

²⁹ Lanteri, *Della Economica*, p. 160.

between the Prince and his Vassal. If the Prince behaves well towards his vassal, the latter "loves, honours and serves" the former [*amato, servito e lodato*]. Otherwise, the vassal is "troublesome, cruel and full of hate for his master" [*importuno, crudele, odiato e povero*].³⁰

The determinants of social status and age had to correspond to the dominant gender order, which was justified by divine law, contemporary medical discourse and political metaphors and analogies. Husbands' and wives' moral qualities were also divided along the same lines. Although both partners were advised to love and respect each other, special emphasis was given to women's obedience to their husbands. Guazzo clarifies:

In divine law the husband is commanded to love his wife, but in the same law the wife is commanded not only to love but also be subject to and obey her husband... So, we would say that this is a fair rule, and, according to the nature, the stronger things dominate the weaker ones, and woman, being inferior in the strength of the soul and body, has to obey her husband.³¹

The main person responsible for the wife's behaviour is her husband. He should instruct and correct her as "the shepherd guides the sheep".³² Women should always love and respect their husbands above everything else, since they are their "head, guide and governor", their "heart, eyes and tongue".³³ The wife should be humble not only before her husband but also before "every person he honours and loves, such as his father and mother and other kin of his".³⁴ However, most writers agree that the husband's guidance should always be followed with love and patience and in no case with maltreatment. The husband's conduct sets the example to his

³⁰ B. Trotto, *Dialoghi del matrimonio e vita vedovile* (Turin, 1583), (first published in 1578), p. 307.

³¹ "dalla divina legge vien comandato al marito che ami la moglie, dalla medesima legge è comandato alla moglie non solamente che ami il marito, ma che gli sia suddita e gli ubidisca... Diremo adunque ch'egli è giusto imperio e secondo la natura, che le cose più potenti signoreggino le più deboli, e che la donna, come inferiore di forze e d'animo e di corpo, dee ubidire al marito": Guazzo, *La Civil Conversazione*, pp. 197-8.

³² "l'huomo esser tale per rispetto alla donna, quale è il pastore alle pecorelle, alle quali sarebbe danno lo spatiare à lor modo": Speroni, *Della Cura familiare*, p. 60.

³³ "Il marito è il capo, la guida, e il governatore della moglie": Trotto, *Dialoghi del matrimonio*, p. 102; "Così è ragione, che l'tuo marito sia il cor tuo, gl'occhi tuoi, e la lingua tua": Speroni, *Della cura familiare*, p. 60.

³⁴ "Sia adunque la buona moglie verso il marito humile; e non solo verso lui, ma anco d'ogni persona da lui honorata e amata... il padre, o la madre, o d'altri parenti suoi": Trotto, *Dialoghi del matrimonio*, p. 151.

wife and so he should love, respect and be faithful to her. Trotto's speaker, Aleramo, justifies women who abandon their cruel husbands [*il marito crudele non era degno di una donna paziente*].³⁵ However, other writers require the wife to be patient. According to Guazzo, "when the husband shouts, the wife should remain silent, since the response of wise women is silence, and when he is obstinate she should yield".³⁶

Female chastity is the cornerstone of domestic welfare. It keeps intact the legitimate lineage of the family and shapes the public image of the household.³⁷ The wife and mother should lead a modest life, in accordance with her social status and the customs of the city. Her chastity is reflected in her external appearance. According to Caggio, unless she follows the habits of the city, her neighbours, and especially the young male ones, will laugh at her.³⁸ Women's lavish expenditure on clothes, ornaments or cosmetics is considered not only a sign of unchastity but also a threat to the household's economy, and especially to men's profitability. According to Tasso "the extravagant luxury rather fits the theatres and the stage than the honest lady".³⁹ According to Guazzo, female luxury "offends God, raises lovers' hopes and ruins husbands".⁴⁰ Thomagni refers also to the "impudent women", who aspire only to disburse the property that their husbands have "earned by the sweat of their brow".⁴¹ Finally, Giuseppe Passi points out the ruinous consequences of female luxury both for the household and the polity:

What does it matter whether the husband sweats and shows diligence in earning a ducat if his wife is mad for display and tricks? What does it matter whether the husband inherits power if the wife destroys everything in buying damascene,

³⁵ Ibid., p. 304.

³⁶ "s'egli grida, ella taccia, perché la riposte delle sagge donne è silenzio, e aspetti a parlare e a dichiarargli la volontà sua quando egli avrà animo tacito e tranquillo; s'egli è ostinato, ella gli ceda": Guazzo, *La civil conversazione*, p. 205.

³⁷ "qualità principalissima in lei, poiche con quella conserva legitima la generatione, & la descenza della famiglia": Assandri, *Della Economica*, p. 83.

³⁸ "mediocre nel vestire, che non si abbassa al meno, ne si avanza al piu. non niego gia per questo, ch'ella non si debbia confare al modo piu usato nella città; perche sarebbe sciocchezza grande; e tanto sarebbe tenuta da poco non facendo come si costuma, quanto se volesse avanzare i portamenti dell'altre. Ma so ben che in ogni minima cosa ove ella potesse venir biasmata da questi giovanastri, che se ne guardi, come dal centopaia": Caggio, *Economica*, p. 17 R.

³⁹ "perché, se ben la soverchia pompa par cosa più conveniente a'teatri ed a la scena, ch'a la persona d'onesta matrona": Tasso, *Il padre*, p. 108.

⁴⁰ "Offesa a Dio, speranza agli amanti, ruina a'mariti": Guazzo, *La civil conversazione*, p. 202.

⁴¹ "alcune sfacciate femine, che ad altro non aspirano, che a tirannigare a fare nelle case delle sette, a furare la robba, con sudor del marito acquistata...": Thomagni, *Dell'eccellentia de l'huomo*, p. 38V.

clothes embroidered with gold, embroideries and chains... It seems to me that this precipitates most of the disorders and miseries that the household or the Republic can suffer.⁴²

Finally, a strict division between male and female spheres of activity is drawn. Women's main responsibilities are maintaining what their husbands accumulate, supervising the female staff of servants and attending the moral guidance of their daughters. Their place is the private sphere, explicitly defined by Trotto as "under the roof and inside the walls of the house".⁴³ Wives' diligent care of the domestic matters must always be under the close supervision of their husbands. On the other hand, husbands are responsible for the public affairs, the accumulation of commodities, the family budget and the general management of the household. The division between the female private and the male public is prescribed explicitly. According to Caggio, "it is not so shameful if the father of the family is engaged in the domestic matters as it is if a woman is engaged in what happens outside of the house".⁴⁴ However, although women's place is the narrow private sphere of activity, their behaviour has far-reaching repercussions on the public image of the household and the whole of society. According to Astemio, a speaker in Trotto's dialogue, unchaste wives are hated not only by their husbands but also by all the *cittadini* "who will mock and insult them for their former arrogance, when they become widows and poor".⁴⁵ According to the same speaker:

There is no other tree that from so small seed becomes so big, as female infamy, which, although it is born from a small action, plants its roots in its own city and

⁴² "Che occorre, che il marito s'affatichi, e usi diligenza per acquistare un'ducato, se la moglie nelle sue sfoggie e inventioni è pazza? che importa, che il marito heredita facoltà, se la moglie il tutto distrugge, in damaschi, in tele d'oro, ricami, e catene...e che è precipitio al mio parere il maggiore di tutti i disordini, e miserie, che patisca e la casa e la Republica": G. Passi, *I donneschi difetti* (Venice, 1618), (first published in 1599), p. 298.

⁴³ "Questa s'hà da reggere da loro in modo tale, ch'essa donna prenda cura delle facende che s'haveranno à fare sotto il tetto e dentro le mura della casa sua": Trotto, *Dialoghi del matrimonio*, p. 132.

⁴⁴ "non esser così villuperoso à un padre di famiglia trattar le cose, che si fanno in casa, quanto è dishonesto à una Donna cercar le cose, che si praticano fuor di quella": Caggio, *Iconomica*, p. 19R.

⁴⁵ "Non con tante sfoggiate bizzarrie cercarebbono di fastidire i mariti, e generar invidia nel cuore de i cittadini i quali quando poi esse saranno vedove e povere, sono per schernirle, e rinfacciar loro il passato orgoglio", Trotto, *Dialoghi del matrimonio*, p. 153.

expands to the whole country. It spreads the branches over the whole family, it reeks of corruption all over the world and its fruits extend as far as hell.⁴⁶

Standing as symbol of domestic harmony and civic morality, female chastity binds together the private with the public.

The formation of a clearly defined gender identity is fundamental to the upbringing of children as well. As Guazzo notices characteristically, "neither men should behave as *Sardanapali* nor women as Amazons; it is the father's duty to make sure that his sons and daughters know that after all they should behave in a different way, sons to be bold whereas daughters modest".⁴⁷ Mothers are responsible for the children of both sexes in infancy but when they reach the age of puberty boys should come under the guidance of their father. With the help of a learned and virtuous tutor, the father should instruct his sons in the "discipline of the city" [*la disciplina de la città*] so that they become "respectable citizens and faithful servants to their superiors", as Tasso writes.⁴⁸ On the other hand, girls' education is considered necessary as long as it prepares women for their expected roles as devout Christians and virtuous wives and mothers. Giulio Cesare Cabeo's depiction of the ideal upbringing of girls, in 1574, reflects the emerging concern with female chastity. His work is dedicated to the Venetian Ginevra Salviati de Baglioni "signora di soma honestà, e d'infinita prudenza". According to the writer, the mother should take care of her daughter's religious education and formation of a chaste character. For this reason the girl should by an early age be taught religious lessons [*sacre letioni*]. When she grows up she should under no circumstances go out without the company of her mother, since "the lascivious young men will follow her with their dishonest glance" [*a giovani lascivi, & importuni, che con sguardi meno che honesti la seguitano*]. She also has to be always apart from the servants' conversations and not share her secrets with them. She should associate herself only with chaste girls of her age. Public spectacles are strictly prohibited. She should also be very moderate in her

⁴⁶ "Ne vi albero alcuno, che con si picciol seme s'inalzi a tanta grandezza, quanto l'infamia della donna, che da un picciol'atto nasciuta, ferma le radici nella propria città, e poi le distende per tutto il paese. Spande i rami sopra tutta la famiglia, manda il fetore de i fiori per tutto il mondo, e i frutti cadono fino nell'inferno", *Ibid.*, p. 168.

⁴⁷ "Non avendo gli uomini ad essere Sardanapali, né le donne Amazoni, sia ufficio de' padri di procurare che 'l figliuolo e la figliuola sopra tutto si conoscano nel conversare differenti, quello nell'ardire e questa nella modestia": Guazzo, *La civil conversazione*, pp. 240-241.

⁴⁸ "buoni cittadini de la tua città, e buoni servitori del tuo principe": Tasso, *Il Padre*, pp. 112-3.

meals and avoid alcohol. And, finally, avoid warm baths or seeing herself nude, since such things "raise lust" [*à destare la libidine sono molto pronti*].⁴⁹

The treatises on marriage and domestic economy reflected an increasing attempt at reinforcing and making clearer gender roles within the family. They refused any public role to women, reconfirmed their inferior physical and mental abilities, underlined their domesticity and idealized female chastity as the foundation of domestic harmony and civic welfare. However, they can also be seen as signs of anxiety about a reality that did not always correspond to the desired dominant values, in cases of women, who due to their economic or social power, close relations with their natal family or even strong character, did not conform to the rules defining the acceptable gender roles.

Although treatises and dialogues on marriage and domestic economy mostly referred to the noble or upper middle class family, family relationships were a common topic of discussion in popular literature as well. Some popular *canzoni* discussed women's domestic problems, such the following one, which describes the complaints of an unhappy wife who asks to return to her mother's home:

Good morning dear mother / I come here to find you, / And please not be unwilling
/ To hear me, / I am married, and among other miseries / I am full of worries and
hardships, and I do not eat enough. / I am no longer in the mood / For entertaining /
I always weep and wail / And I do not know what else to do / And if you do not
mind I would like to return to you / And afterwards we will manage to bring the
dowry back...⁵⁰

On the other hand, the anonymous *Historia Nova* in a humorous misogynist way advised men not to trust women, describing husbands' sufferings from their wives. Again, special attention is paid to the lavish expenditure of women, a defect characteristic of women of every social class, as the author claims:

⁴⁹ G. C. Cabej, *Ornamenti della gentil donna vedova, nella quale ordinatamente si tratta di tutte le cose necessarie allo stato vedovile* (Venice, 1574), pp. 119-20.

⁵⁰ "Bon giorno madre cara / Io vi vengo a trovarvi, / e non mi siate avara / In volermi ascoltar, / Son maritata, e tra le mal contente / Piena d'affani e stente, e con mal da mangiar. / M'è passata la voglia / D'andare a sollazzar, / Sto sempre in pianto, e in doglia, / E non so più che far, / e se vi piace voio tornar con voi / E la mia dota poi famela ritornar...": *Tre canzoni del fortunato: Nella prima la figliuola chiede marito alla madre: nella seconda la madre gli dà la risposta: nella terza si lamenta che è malmaritata: con una essortazione alli padri di famiglia* (Florence, 1576), unpaginated (the quotation is from the beginning of the third part).

Do not trust women / ... They spend the whole dowry / on dresses and ornaments / during the night they think nothing / but how to dress up... / Dressed in silk / is the wife of a craftsman / and she wants to wear a wedding ring / and even the wife of a fisherman / wants to be dressed in velvet...⁵¹

At the end of the sixteenth century, the Venetian Moderata Fonte refuted the patriarchal values, which figured in the literature on marriage for over half a century, writing the most complete attack on marriage, *Il merito delle donne*.⁵² Instead of the endless admonitions for a happy marriage – based on the absolute domination of the father and husband – Fonte described the everyday reality of marriage, criticising women's confinement at home and husbands' maltreatment of their wives:

...so that the poor things, thinking that by marrying they are winning for themselves a certain womanly freedom to enjoy some respectable pastimes, find themselves more constricted than ever before, kept like animals within four walls and subjected to a hateful guardian rather than affectionate husband... Then there are those husbands who spend all their time shouting at their wives and who, if they don't find everything done just as they like it, abuse the poor creatures or even beat them over the most trivial matters, and who are always picking fault with the way in which the household is run, as though their wives were completely useless...while others undergo some kind of humiliation outside the home and then come home and try to give vent to their frustration by taking it out on their hapless wives...⁵³

Fonte underlined the actual problems of contemporary women, making specific references to the economic exploitation of women of every social class from their male relatives:

For how many fathers are there who never provide for their daughters while they are alive and, when they die, leave everything or the majority to their sons,

⁵¹ "De le donne non te fidare / ... Consumarien ogni gran dote / in vestirsi & adonarsi / altro non pensa di notte / sol in vestirsi... / Portata veste di seda / la moglie dun affaitore / & vorra portar fede / e anchor dun pescatore / si vorra portar velluto...": *Historia nova, piacevole laquale tratta delle malitie delle donne e le pompe che cercano adonarsi* ([N.p.],[15..]), pp. 2-3.

⁵² See also below pp. 161, 163, 165-6, 209-11, 244-5, 252-3.

⁵³ M. Fonte, *The Worth of Women. Wherein is Clearly Revealed their Nobility and their Superiority to Men*, ed. and trans. V. Cox (Chicago & London, 1997), (first published in 1600), pp. 68, 70-1.

depriving their daughters of their rightful inheritance... And then the poor creatures have no choice but to fall into perdition, while their brothers remain rich in material goods and equally rich in shame... Then there are others who are lucky enough to be left a dowry by their father, or to receive a share in his estate along with their brothers if he dies intestate, but who then find themselves imprisoned in the home like slaves by their brothers, who deprive them of their rights and seize their portion for themselves... and they spend the rest of their lives buried alive... if she were alone, without a husband, she could live like a queen on her dowry (more or less so, of course, according to her social position). But when she takes a husband, especially if he's poor, as is often the case, what exactly does she gain from it, except that instead of being her own mistress and the mistress of her money, she becomes a slave, and loses her liberty and, along with her liberty, her control over her own property...⁵⁴

Fonte not only attacked women's marital condition and economic exploitation by their male relatives but also rejected explicitly marriage on the grounds that it deprived women of their freedom, an idea which had also been developed by Bernardo Trotto's female speaker Hippolita in *Dialoghi del matrimonio*, nine years earlier.⁵⁵ Fonte's criticism was a reaction to the restrictions imposed on middle class women in the second half of the sixteenth century, although she, a married woman herself, apparently enjoyed a certain amount of freedom, as her intellectual activities and her family's attitude towards her indicate. In a poetical proem to her work, her son, Pietro de' Zorzi, shares her pro-woman views, writing: "But here we see, contrary to all expectations, a woman restoring her sex to its rightful honor and, moreover, exalting women to the skies by the power of her pen".⁵⁶ Furthermore, having its literary origins in treatises and dialogues defending women, Fonte's dialogue also answered the later sixteenth-century flourishing literature on marriage and domestic life, which presented an idealized image of family life based on women's complete subjection to their husbands' rule.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 62-4, 113.

⁵⁵ On Trotto's dialogue, see also below pp. 145-6, 183.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 29.

CONVENT LIFE AND REFORM

The dominant cultural norms did not permit women to live without some male guidance. Unmarried women and widows were generally seen with suspicion. In his letter to an anonymous widow, the Bishop of Sessa wrote in the 1570s:

I send you the spiritual books that I promised you...and since you are a widow, do not think that you are without husband, because the natural law has prescribed that every woman must have a husband, either a secular one or the eternal one [Christ]. Because women are by nature weak and sick and for this reason they cannot control themselves, and so, it is necessary to have a husband to govern them.⁵⁷

Actually, the most common alternative for women who did not marry was to become Christ's Brides. In the fifteenth century, women's admission to convents began to increase, reaching its peak in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Since convents required a quite large amount of money for accepting a nun, the issue of female monasticism is almost exclusively related to the women of the upper social classes. In Venice 70-80 percent of the choir-nuns were from patrician families. Only a few convents in major cities, mostly Franciscan, offered lower-class women the opportunity to become choir-nuns.⁵⁸ It has been estimated that in sixteenth-century Florence almost half of the elite women were delegated to convents and that close to 54 percent of Venice's patrician women resided in convents in 1581.⁵⁹ Becoming a nun was not always a woman's choice. On the contrary, families often forced some of their daughters to enter a convent. In this way families saved money since the conventual dowry – fixed from the early seventeenth century at 800-1,000 ducats – was much lower than the dowry demanded for a decent

⁵⁷ "Mando a V.S. Illustriss. uno de libretti spirituali, ch'io promisi mandarle...E cioè, che se ben V.Sig. è vedova, non per questo si pensi stare senza marito, percióche la legge della natura ha voluto, che ogni donna habbia marito, & quella che non l'ha temporale, debba haverlo eterno. Però che essendo la donna, per sua natura, debole & inferma, non possendo reggersi da per se stessa, fu necessario, che havesse marito, che la governasse": *Della Nuova Scelta di Lettere di Diversi nobilissimi Huomini, et eccellentissimi ingegni...con un discorso della commodità dello scrivere di M. Bernardino Pino* (Venice, 1574), Libro Quatro, pp. 264-5.

⁵⁸ For the differences between choir-nuns and *converse*, see below p. 85.

⁵⁹ C. Black, *Church, Religion and Society in Early Modern Italy* (Basingstoke & New York, 2004), pp. 150-1; Sperling, *Convents and the Body Politic*, p. 18; M. L. King, *Women of the Renaissance* (Chicago & London, 1991), pp. 82-3.

marriage.⁶⁰ Besides, daughters lived in a place where their chastity would not run much risk. Wishing to marry some of their daughters into other wealthy and powerful families and because of the gradual dowry inflation during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, upper class families preferred to cancel the marriage prospects of some of their daughters. A similar development has been pointed out for the sons of the noble families, who often remained unmarried to avoid dispersing collective patrimony.⁶¹ Significantly the confinement of the noble daughters in convents excluded them from the family patrimony, a strategy that has been associated with Venice's transition from an international centre of trade to a land-based economy.⁶²

In the sixteenth century the management of convents and the daily life of nuns underwent significant changes. Until then, Italian convents enjoyed a great amount of liberty and independence. They were places of social conversation, open to friends and relatives, and cultural centres, which often produced musical performances and plays. At times, convents' autonomy had led even to excesses. Often nuns did not hesitate to transfer into convents the habits of their social environment by wearing jewelry, extravagant dresses and high-heeled clogs. At times, the morals were so loose that fifteenth-century Venetian convents had repeatedly been compared to "public brothels".⁶³

In the sixteenth century, secular and ecclesiastical authorities attempted to discipline convents' life. In 1563 the Council of Trent ordered the enclosure of all female religious communities, a decree that was confirmed again by Pius V in 1566 and Gregory XIII in 1572. The declaration of the Council of Trent that celibacy is superior to the married state, the Church's general attempts at moral renewal and the central place of female chastity in the post-Tridentine Italy contributed to this decision. On the other hand, already from the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Venetian state had made efforts to limit the contacts of the nuns with the outside world and keep their chastity intact. In 1509, the Venetian Senate passed the first law against those who entered without permission the convents' walls or took nuns out of the convents and, in 1521, a specific magistracy, the *Provveditori sopra monasteri*, was established to control the city's convents. Moreover, the Council of Ten passed a

⁶⁰ Laven, *Virgins of Venice*, p. 48.

⁶¹ S. Chojnacki, "Subaltern Patriarchs. Patrician Bachelors in Renaissance Venice", in *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. C. A. Lees (Minneapolis & London, 1994), (reprinted in Chojnacki, *Women and Men*).

⁶² Sperling, *Convents and the Body Politic*, pp. 42-50.

⁶³ Laven, *Virgins of Venice*, pp. 140-160; Hsia, *The World of the Catholic Renewal*, p. 34.

series of laws (1514, 1566 and 1605) for the protection of nuns' chastity and the punishment of the corrupters. The last was the severest one. Instead of the exile, fines and prison banishments of the previous laws it instituted the death penalty for those who had sexual relations with nuns.⁶⁴

The enclosure of the Venetian convents was arguably related to the Venetian authorities' anxiety and crisis of confidence caused by the War of the League of Cambrai (1509-1517) and the negative economic consequences which followed the military defeat of Agnadello (1509). This led to a new policy of stricter discipline and social order; the segregation of the Jews, the restriction of prostitution and the residence patterns according to ethnic groups were part of the same trend.⁶⁵ Attention has been paid to the symbolic meaning of enclosure as well. Becoming the metaphor of a closed, intact nobility and the purity of its blood, the virgin bodies of nuns – almost exclusively daughters of the nobility – represented the Venetian nobility's autonomy, virtue and spiritual superiority.⁶⁶ The symbolic power of nuns' intact body for the Venetian State sovereignty and the public image of the city was manifested in rituals such as the metaphorical marriage between the doge and the abbess of one of the most important convents, *Santa Maria delle Vergini*, on Ascension Day.⁶⁷

Nevertheless, apart from the moral and symbolic perspective of convents' enclosure, specific political and economic factors determined these strategies. Nuns' isolation from the outside world and reforms in the economic management and administration of convents was meant to eliminate the intervention of powerful individual families in manipulating the management of convents where their daughters lived. To limit such influence Venetian authorities passed laws so that convents become economically self-sufficient entities, but at the same time did not accumulate further capital, which would offer them undesirable power. Convents' great economic importance for the secular and ecclesiastical authorities is manifested in their sharp conflict when the 1605 mortmain law prohibited the acquisition of real estate by ecclesiastic institutions anywhere in the Venetian republic, a development which contributed to the Interdict of 1606.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Laven, *Virgins of Venice*, pp. 140-160; Sperling, *Convents and the Body Politic*, pp. 115-58.

⁶⁵ Laven, *Virgins of Venice*, pp. XV-XXX.

⁶⁶ Sperling, *Convents and the Body Politic*, pp. 72-114.

⁶⁷ Laven, *Virgins of Venice*, pp. 73-78.

⁶⁸ Sperling, *Convents and the Body Politic*, pp. 14-5, 170-205.

Beyond the issues relating to the economic management and administration of convents, the reform programme affected the daily life of nuns as well. Nuns' contacts with outsiders were put under strict prohibition. Apart from the confessor, only physicians and close relatives were permitted access to convents under specific circumstances and strict supervision, and occasionally some workers, deliverers of supplies and members of the clergy. The architecture of the convents with the high walls and the securing of the widows and balconies with bars reflected the new spirit. Close relations between nuns were also disapproved. Inspections by Venetian convent magistracies and apostolic visitors checked convents on a regular basis to ensure that nuns did not have personal property in their cells and were dressed properly and that the convent library did not hold any improper books. Although convents continued to offer educational opportunities to nuns, the prohibition against performing in front of lay audiences, cultivating relationships with writers and musicians outside the convent, taking singing lessons, or reading secular literature reduced nuns' literary and artistic activities. The trials against fugitive nuns or nuns that had love affairs with outsiders, the networks of lay contacts that convents continued to maintain, the laxity of morals during the Carnival period and the social gatherings of outsiders in convent parlors, despite the strict prohibitions, indicates nuns' difficulty to conform to the new rules.⁶⁹

Convent life and enforced claustration often featured in contemporary literature. Unhappy nuns and their misconduct are frequently the topic of discussion in Ortensio Lando's collection of letters. Contesa di Monte l'Abbate, from Venice, tries to persuade Sister A.B. to return to the convent and stop associating with "dissolute scholars", offending "God, the honour of her family and her reputation". Emilia Brembata Solcia, from Bergamo, consoles the unhappy nun Fulvia Rossa and exhorts her to ask her father to change his mind and find her a "handsome and honest husband".⁷⁰ Already from the first half of the sixteenth century, the issue of enforced claustration had attracted the attention of the defenders of the female sex. Lodovico

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 115-69; Laven, *Virgins of Venice*; for the consequences of the enclosure on convent life generally in Italy, see: Zarri, "Gender, Religious Institutions and Social Discipline"; for convent life and culture in early modern Italy, also see: Black, *Church, Religion and Society*, pp. 149-66.

⁷⁰ "Deh ritornate al monistero, dove ad un tratto meno offenderete Iddio, e l'honor della casa vostra e qual reputatione credete voi che vecar vi possi l'abidua prattica de dissoluti scolari qual voi havete?", "Dite, dite a vostro padre che ponga giu questo pensiero di farvi monaca, e che vi procuri un bello e onesto marito": Lando, *Lettere*, pp. 63V, 52R-52V.

Domenichi criticizes the contemporary practice of women's confinement either at home or in convent:

From an early age woman is buried in the idleness of home; as if she came into the world for nothing else, and she is instructed in nothing but needle and thread. Few are those fortunate who are permitted to engage in the study of letters. When she reaches the age for marriage, she resigns herself to the servitude and jealousy of her husband or, even worse, she is confined in the perpetual prison of a convent.⁷¹

Similarly, Cervone, the defender of the female sex in Thomagni's dialogue (written two years after orders for the strict convent enclosure), accuses fathers of not taking into account their daughters' will:

In marrying or not, in marrying to one or another, in becoming a nun or not, fathers wrongly do not follow their [daughters'] free will, desire of the soul and mind...and what would you say if you entered a convent for the rest of your life against your will, such as these poor girls, I speak about those who go there against their will...Would you ever believe that fathers weigh up the situation justly when putting one daughter in a good world remain indifferent to suffocating three or four others.⁷²

However, the heaviest criticism came from a Venetian nun, Arcangela Tarabotti in the mid-seventeenth century, initially in *La tirannia paterna* and later in *L'inferno monacale*.⁷³ A nun against her will herself, she described in a bitter way nuns' despair in convent's "hell":

⁷¹ "che la femina e nata da i primi anni e sepolta nell'ocio della casa; & quasi ch'ella non sia venuta al mondo per altro, a nessuno altro negotio imparare è posta, se non all'ago, et al filo. Poche sono quelle aventure, a cui sia concesso il potere dare opera agli studi e alle lettere. Quando ella è giunta poi all'età del matrimonio, e consegnata nella servitu e nella gelosia dal marito; o quel che e assai peggio rinchiusa nella perpetua prigione d'un monistario di monache": Domenichi, *La nobiltà*, p. 117V.

⁷² "...i padri nel maritarsi, ò non si maritare, in pigliar questo, ò in rifiutarlo, quell'altro in farsi religioso, ò in non voler entrare nel monasterio si portò poco saviamente in non seguire in ciò il loro libero arbitrio, & appetite dell'animo, & mente loro...è che direste se voi contro a vostra voglia fosse riscritto tal volta in un monasterio per sempre come sono le meschine, parlo di quelle, che ci vanno mal volentieri...giudicherete voi mai, che i padri tenghino le bilancie dritte quando puo metter'una figliuola al mondo bene, non si curano di affogarne tre, ò quattro in altre.": Thomagni, *Dell'eccellentia de l'huomo*, pp. 156V-157R.

⁷³ On Tarabotti, see also below pp. 162-6, 171-2, 248-53.

...women [nuns] should live all together, alike in dress, dwelling place, food, and conduct...betrayed by parents and relatives almost they lie sleeping, one could say, and imprisoned...they find themselves, too, entangled in a net from which they cannot extricate themselves, a net woven by human malice... They despair of finding an escape and live dying, if they live at all, tormented by a thousand rages and anxieties – their bodies bound up in religious habits and their souls ready to fall into Hell's abyss.⁷⁴

Tarabotti's criticism goes further to reveal the economic profits of fathers, brothers and other male relatives from the enforced enclosure of their daughters or sisters:

...these inhumane men who mass together wealth, titles, and prestige for their male offspring...but who cast away as wretches their own flesh and blood that happens to be born female... Such are the scandalous abuses within the bosom of the Roman Church, deriving from no other source than men's greed and arrogance, as I have shown, in giving advantage to males at the expense of denying females the dowry owed them.⁷⁵

However, in contrast with her male predecessors, Tarabotti's condemnation goes even deeper to the religious superiors, who due to "political expediency...end up giving their permission for women to become nuns".⁷⁶ Finally and most interestingly, she attacks the Republic of Venice and its rulers. By shifting her criticism from certain families to the heart of the political and social system, Tarabotti develops an explicitly political speech. With a bitter sarcasm, she dedicates her work to "the most serene Venetian Republic", which has been founded on the power of the male ruling class:

From the first foundations of your city on these lagoons, Fame penetrated its depths and drew forth Paternal Tyranny. Hidden under the majesty of your senators' garments, Fame has at last set its seat in the Ducal Palace and dominates the entire city...Your most noble lords have found this infernal monster of Paternal Tyranny so welcome that they have gladly embraced it... This *Paternal Tyranny* is a gift that

⁷⁴ A. Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*, ed. and trans. by L. Panizza (Chicago & London, 2004), (first published in 1654), pp. 67, 71.

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 68, 82.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 92.

well suits a Republic that practices the abuse of forcing more young girls to take the veil than anywhere else in the world...it is fair, however, to dedicate my book to your great senate and its senators, who, by imprisoning their young maidens so they chant the Psalter, pray, and do penance in their stead, hope to make you eternal, most beautiful virgin Republic, Queen of the Adriatic.⁷⁷

NEGOTIATING FEMALE CHASTITY: WOMEN AT RISK, PROSTITUTES AND COURTESANS

The concern about the protection of female virtue was not exclusively a concern of convent enclosure or of upper-class women. A parallel can be found in the establishment of a number of institutions for women in the course of the sixteenth century. Initially, these institutions were not meant exclusively for women. Their broader aim was to house the poor, orphans, ill and other vulnerable members of the society. However, ex-prostitutes, maltreated women and women whom poverty could lead to an unchaste life were eligible to these institutions as well. Religious concern for improving the moral climate and the Catholic Reformation mission of salvation through the elimination of sin and through philanthropy, had formed the spiritual bases for the efforts to return prostitutes and other moral deviants to "reputable" society. Ignatius Loyola, Carlo Borromeo and Nicolò Sfondrati, and the religious Order of the Jesuits had supported and inspired these movements, and many institutions had patterned themselves upon similar establishments in Rome. In 1520, Leo X confirmed the establishment of the nunnery of the *Convertite* in Rome for repentant prostitutes, which became the model for similar foundations in other Italian cities. Often the institutions originated in the initiatives of noble women, or women who had been found in a similar condition of "moral corruption", such as the courtesan Veronica Franco, who in a petition to the Senate asked for the foundation of a supplementary institution for women in need who run the risk of follow a "sinful path".⁷⁸ The concern about prostitution was also related to the broader anxiety about the spread of syphilis and other diseases. By 1539 the Venetian government passed a

⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 37-8.

⁷⁸ B. Pullan, *Rich and Poor in Renaissance Venice. The Social Institutions of a Catholic State, to 1620* (Oxford, 1971), p. 392.

series of laws for the control of prostitution and the magistracy of the *Provveditori alla Sanità* was charged with this specific duty.⁷⁹

Gradually institutions were founded for the protection of girls and young women who ran the risk of lapsing from virtue, or who had shown repentance for their previous life. The cloistered order of *Convertite* on the Giudecca housed imperiled girls, reformed prostitutes and poor women who could not afford to enter a convent. Two more institutions were founded in the decades of 1570 and 1580; the *Casa delle Zitelle* for young girls and the *Casa del Soccorso* for women of loose morals. The latter was inspired by the *Casa Santa Marta* in Rome. In order to enter the *Soccorso* women had to take a vow never to leave unless they entered the *Convertite*, got married or reconciled with their husbands if, although married, they lived without their husbands. The *Zitelle* aimed at protecting and providing moral guidance and Christian education to young girls who, because of poverty or insufficient supervision, were in danger of losing their virtue. The girls had to be over nine years old, beautiful and healthy, since otherwise their virtue was not regarded to be at great risk. The inmates were taught some skill, like sewing, and reading. Special attention was given to the instruction in the Christian doctrine and conduct. The girls were prepared to get married, enter a convent, work as domestic servants or stay as employees of the institution. The institution offered a dowry to them and continued to attend them even after their departure from the house. If a woman faced some problem with her husband or her employers she could apply for help to the institution. The financing of these institutions was based on donations, Venetian state aid and the work of the inmates themselves. In *Zitelle* girls were expected to produce specific amount of work – mainly lacemaking and embroidery – in order to pay for their keep. The orphan girls of *Santi Giovanni and Paolo* had also to support themselves by finding work outside as soon as possible, usually as domestic servants. Their employers paid the girls' wages at the hospital.⁸⁰

In many aspects these institutions were similar to convents. Both required a harsh discipline according to strict regulations. High walls, similar to those found around convents, enclosed the building of the *Casa delle Zitelle* and the girls' contact with the outside world was under close supervision and within specific limitations. In

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 372-422; M. Chojnacka, *Working Women of Early Modern Venice* (Baltimore & London, 2001), pp. 121-37.

⁸⁰ Pullan, *Rich and Poor*, pp. 372-94; Chojnacka, *Working Women*, pp. 121-37.

both cases the engagement in certain religious observances and the religious education played a central role. Furthermore, both institutions were structured on a strict hierarchical basis according to gender, age and social status. The superiors of the *Zitelle* and *Soccorso* – the *Madonna*, the *Governatrici* and the *Coadjutrici* – were coming exclusively from the upper social classes of Venice. Only the *maestre*, the lowest rung in the staff hierarchy, were not expected to be of noble origins. The *Madonna* had to be at least forty and the *coadjutrice* at least thirty years old. Furthermore, whereas the staff was exclusively female, the governors, the body which was charged with selecting inmates and electing the *coadjutrice*, consisted of at least twenty men but only twelve women.⁸¹

Similar arrangements, according to social status, were found in convents as well. The convent population was divided between the choir-nuns, who had taken full, solemn vows and progressed from the status of the novice to be first professed and then concentrated, and the *converse* (lay-sisters) who had taken simple vows. However, the *converse* were of an inferior social standing as well. They offered the convent a lower dowry of 300 instead of 800-1,000 ducats and worked as domestic servants in the convent, or even as the personal servants of the noble choir-nuns. In 1560, the Patriarch Giovanni Trevisan ruled that illegitimate girls or those of artisan origins would be refused the opportunity to become choir-nuns.⁸² Finally, although they were meant for women of different social status, both institutions – convents and refuges – had as top priority to protect female chastity and discipline female sexuality.⁸³ Just as the preservation of nuns' chastity had a symbolic value for the construction of the Venetian patriciate's positive identity, the safeguard of female honour on every level of social stratification stood as symbol of the social order, civic morality and formation of Venice's public image as a moral, decent and licit city.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Pullan, *Rich and Poor*, pp. 388-9; Chojnacka, *Working Women*, pp. 126-7.

⁸² Laven, *Virgins of Venice*, pp. 8-10, 48.

⁸³ For the increasing concern about female discipline and the gradual confinement of women in convents and female institutions, see: S. Cohen, "Asylums for Women in Counter-Reformation Italy", in *Women in Reformation and Counter-Reformation Europe. Public and Private Worlds*, ed. S. Marshall (Bloomington, Ind., 1989); S. Cohen, *The Evolution of Women's Asylums Since 1500. From Refuges for Ex-Prostitutes to Shelters for Battered Women* (New York & Oxford, 1992); G. Zarri, "Disciplina regolare e pratica di coscienza: le virtù e i comportamenti sociali in comunità femminili (secc. XVI-XVIII)", in *Disciplina dell'anima*, ed. Prodi; L. Ferrante, "L'onore ritrovato. Donne nella casa del Soccorso di S. Paolo a Bologna (sec. XVI-XVII)", *Quaderni Storici*, 53 (1983).

⁸⁴ For the significance of the establishment of institutions for the confinement of poor, beggars, ex-prostitutes and other moral deviants and social unacceptable categories for the preservation of the

Within the same context, Venetian authorities attempted to control prostitution. Already from 1485, a specific council, the *Provveditori alla Sanità*, attempted to limit prostitutes to specific places, within its broader responsibility to deal with issues relating to public health. In 1514, the *Provveditori alle Pompe* was created to deal with excessive display in general. One of the main focuses, however, was the dress and public display of prostitutes. The *Provveditori alle Pompe* and the *Provveditori alla Sanità* were joined in the late 1530s by the *Esecutori contra la Bestemmia* to discipline and control prostitution. Actually, Venetian authorities did not intend to eliminate prostitution but rather to highlight the dividing lines between the "respectful" society and the "immoral" world of prostitution. While the maintenance of prostitution helped to protect "respectable" women's chastity and to reduce homosexuality, prostitution's association with the dissemination of disease, especially plague and syphilis, and spread of moral corruption caused a general anxiety. The legislation of 1539 and 1572, which expelled prostitutes who had entered Venice in the past two years and in the past five years respectively, suggests the authorities' attempt to keep prostitutes to a limited number. In a similar vein, a series of measures were introduced for protecting young girls from corruption. Those who impelled young girls to prostitution were prosecuted and no woman under the age of thirty might work as a servant in brothels.⁸⁵

A strict division of space reflects the authorities' efforts to make clear the boundaries between the world of prostitution and the rest of society. Prostitutes were expected to practise their profession only in brothels and within specific public areas. Prostitution was legally permitted in an officially prescribed area, known as the *Castelletto*, near Rialto. Prostitutes who disobeyed this restriction faced the penalty of six months in jail, twenty-five lashes and a fine of 100 lire.⁸⁶ The legislation of 1539, 1571, 1582 and 1613 regulated a morally arranged division of the space in churches as well. According to these laws, prostitutes could not enter churches on the day of their principal festival or celebration and, when they went to the church, they were not permitted to "stand, kneel or sit upon the benches to which our noblewomen and citizenesses of good and respectable rank betake themselves". Furthermore, as the

exciting social and political order and stability and the construction of the public image of Venice, see: Pullan, *Rich and Poor*, pp. 631-642; Ruggiero, *Binding Passions*, pp. 51-56.

⁸⁵ Ruggiero, *Binding Passions*, pp. 48-56; Pullan, *Rich and Poor*, pp. 380-2.

⁸⁶ Ruggiero, *Binding Passions*, pp. 48-56.

law regulated, prostitutes could go to confession only between Nones and Vespers.⁸⁷ The legislation interestingly identified female honesty with higher social status.

The anxiety about the blurring of the social order and its symbolic representation is also manifested in the Venetian Senate's rhetoric, when, in 1543, it asked the *Provveditori alle pompe* to put limitations on prostitutes' luxurious appearance: "The prostitutes in this city...adorned and dressed so handsomely that often our noble women and our citizens are dressed in much the same way, so that not only foreigners but local people as well are unable to tell the good from the bad...".⁸⁸ Of course, the measure was aimed at the wealthier prostitutes, mostly the *cortegiane*. Although legally there was no differentiation between courtesans and the common prostitutes, *meretrici*, the former, because of their refined ways, cultivation and important acquaintances with known literary and political figures, enjoyed a different social status. Common prostitutes, mostly lower-class women, often immigrants, of a precarious social and economic position, and usually unmarried, remained on the fringe of society as social outcasts, although they often succeeded in accumulating a respectable amount of wealth.

Although some learned and well connected courtesans, such as Tullia d'Aragona, enjoyed prestige among the literary circles both in Venice and Florence, kept their own literary salons, figured as speakers in contemporary literary dialogues of well known writers, and participated in the intellectual developments of the period, the broader discourse was critical of them.⁸⁹ Both common prostitutes and courtesans were regarded as a symbol of corruption, venality and avarice. They were also considered a dangerous temptation for the "innocent young men", and a threat to the city. The writers/defenders of the female sex often drew a strict distinction between chaste women and "common and impudent women", clarifying that they will not include them in their defence since they do not deserve the "sacred name of woman".⁹⁰ Crisologo, the defender of women, in Porro's dialogue, also excludes courtesans from his defence, since "we know well that courtesans seek only money

⁸⁷ Pullan, *Rich and Poor*, p. 381.

⁸⁸ Rosenthal, *The Honest Courtesan*, pp. 59-60.

⁸⁹ On Tullia d'Aragona and other learned courtesans, see below pp. 148-51, 154-8.

⁹⁰ "Non parlo delle pubbliche e impudiche, lequali, come che difender si potessero, non intendo io oggi sotto così sacro nome di donna comprendere": Piccolomini, *L'Orazione*, p. 548.

from their practice, believing that it is proper to use all these artifices and tricks to earn their living".⁹¹

In a collection of engravings, picturing Venetian female dressing, Giacomo Franco discerns five categories of women: *Gentildonne*, *cittadine*, wives of the *mercanti*, *artigiane* and *cortegiane*, or otherwise "*meretrici* with some wealth". The commentaries accompanying the engravings reveal anxiety about courtesans' corruptive nature: "So adorned and attractive, this woman casts the nets of lustfulness for catching frivolous young men, who are rashly caught in the insidious snares of love".⁹² Paolo Caggio attacks the expensive tastes and extravagant clothes that courtesans enjoyed consuming "Venice's Treasure" and "earning per year more than a nobleman does".⁹³ Battista Doglioni's oration in the Academy of the *Incogniti* is similarly critical: "Which serpent, enemy of human society, which fire-breathing Chimera, which voracious Charybdis or Scylla, which terrible and abominable Sphinx or Hydra, Viper or Harpy, coming from Hell, is superior to prostitutes in cruelty?".⁹⁴ After reciting the damage famous courtesans have done to several men through history, Giuseppe Passi proceeds to underline prostitutes' menace to society and claims their segregation:

Prostitutes should not associate with honest women...For this reason, these women should be isolated and removed from the honest places...it is very bad to let impudent and lascivious women live and associate freely and unconcernedly among honest people, within the streets of *cittadini*; who could doubt that gradually all young people would be infected and corrupted? ...Giving them such a liberty would have been such as letting the Devil's dogs pursue our souls; and how many honest ladies and modest girls suffer through proximity from seeing and hearing their continual dishonesties and run the risk of being contaminated with these evil

⁹¹ "che ben sappiamo, che le Corteggiane per lo prezzo solo si dispongono a quello essercitio; et a loro pare lecito usar tutti quelli inganni, e fraudi per guadagnarsi il vivere": Porro, *L'Eris d'Amore*, p. 31.

⁹² "la quale così ornata, e vaga tende le reti della lascivia per prender gl'incauti giovani, che precipitosamente cadono nelli insidiosi lacci d'amore": G. Franco, *Habiti delle donne Venetiane intagliate in rame* (Venice, 1610), p. 12.

⁹³ "Che pensate che vi entri di spese à vivere alla cortegiana? Lo splendido delle vivande, il garbo delle vesti, e l'abbondantia delle foggie de' vestimenti, che s'usano hoggidi, consumerebbono il Tesoro di Venegia, non che quell d'un cento oncie di rendita l'anno, e poco più d'un privato gentilhuomo": Caggio, *Iconomica*, p. 19V.

⁹⁴ "Imperciocché qual serpente, nemico della società humana, qual chimera fiamma spirante, qual vorace Cariddi, o Seilla, qual sfinge Hidra, Vipera, od Arpia uscite dall'inferno terribili, & abominevoli più supera di crudeltà la Meretrice?": B. Doglioni, "La bellezza e le meretrici", in *Discorsi Academici de' Signori Incogniti* (Venice, 1635), p. 78.

examples... the superiors should take care of cleaning the city of these immodest women.⁹⁵

Learned courtesans or the intellectuals around them often attempted to reverse the negative public image of them. In his dedication of the *Trattato di Matrimonio* to Tullia d'Aragona, on the occasion of her marriage some time after 1543, her lover Girolamo Mutio Iustinopolitano sought to eliminate any potential negative image of Tullia by downgrading the sensual dimension of their affair, underlining Tullia's intellectuality and pointing out that, instead of what people may hold, his love for her originated in her "beauty of intellect, gentleness of spirit and virtue of the soul" rather than in her corporal beauty [*al primo volo si levò alla bellezza del bel vostro intelletto, del gentil vostro animo, & della virtuosa vostra anima*]. He further underlines that with marriage Tullia will escape "all these calumniators, who are ready to lacerate whoever lead a more virtuous life than they do" [*poteste fuggire i denti de' maligni atti à mordere, & à lacerare ogni qualunque s'è piu virtuosa vita*].⁹⁶ Some years later, in his preface to Tullia's dialogue on love, Mutio drew a distinction between himself and Tullia, and those who are not able to understand their relationship. He attributes their negative attitude towards their love affair to their ignorance and the spirit of the times, probably implying an increasing moralization of the society:

Since these matters [concerning love philosophy] are not perhaps understood by everyone, there have been some people who were amazed that, at the very age when they imagine one ought to have put an end to the pangs of love, I still manifest no less a love for you than I used to all those years ago. And in their minds, they have perhaps condemned me for this and have lowered their esteem for me. I wish to

⁹⁵ "Meretrici non devono conversare con le donne onorate... Perche starano all'hora tanto ritirate simili donne, e tanto da i luoghi honesti separate... piu brutta cosa assai il lasciare habitare, e conservare così liberamente in mezzo all'honeste persone così indifferente per tutte le strade delle cittadi le donne impudiche, e lascive, chi può dubitare, che a poco a poco non ne rimanghi tutta la gioventu infetta, e amorbata? Che altro à dar loro tanta libertà, eccetto, che lasciar tanti cani del diavolo in caccia dell'anime: e quante honeste matrone, e quante pudiche donzelle, le quali per la vicinanza sono sforzate vedere e udire continuamente tante dishonestà, corrono rischio evidente di contaminarsi da così tristi essemi... Principe deve haver cura, che le città siano nette dalle donne impudiche": Passi, *I donneschi difetti*, pp. 184-5.

⁹⁶ G. Mutio Iustinopolitano, "Trattato di Matrimonio", in his *Operette Morali* (Venice, 1550), pp. 51V-53R.

testify openly to them that not only do I love you just as much as in the past, but actually now love you more than then...⁹⁷

Similarly, in *Ragionamento*, Francesco Sansovino, constructs a refined and intellectual identity for his friend, Gaspara Stampa, who led a salon in Venice and was also known for her loose morals. He also implies a distinction between *cortegiane* and "those women who sell themselves at a low price" [*quelle donne che per piccolo pregio vendano lor medesime*].⁹⁸

As the sixteenth century progressed, the condemnation of prostitutes and courtesans was increased. Tullia d'Aragona's moral shift and repentance, either sincere or not, in her last work, *Il Meschino* (1560) reveals her need to cope with the growing unfavourable climate towards courtesans.⁹⁹ The composition of the *Orazione contra le cortegiane* by Sperone Speroni, in 1575, reflected the same development. The author, who in 1542 had put Tullia d'Aragona as a speaker in *Dialogo d'Amore*, claimed now that "Courtesan means nothing but prostitute".¹⁰⁰ The strong efforts of the Venetian Courtesan Veronica Franco to shape a positive identity for herself in the second half of the sixteenth century can be seen from the same point of view. By "publicizing her connections with influential political leaders and intellectuals and associating herself in her lyric poems with the honorific image of Venice as sublime protectress, she placed herself, as honest courtesan and citizen poet, at center stage" and set her apart from the venal courtesan.¹⁰¹

WOMEN AND WORK

Lower-class women enjoyed more freedom to develop networks of social relations in comparison with the elite ones. The latter have often been depicted as strictly confined in domestic space. Elite women's chastity was closely associated with the honour of their families and functioned as barometer of the virtue of their husbands and fathers, whose public image was of great significance. This web of symbolic

⁹⁷ D'Aragona, *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*, p. 51.

⁹⁸ Sansovino, *Ragionamento*, p. 177; On Gaspara Stampa, see below pp. 155-6; see also below p. 195 on Pietro Aretino's defence of the courtesan Angela Zaffetta.

⁹⁹ See below pp. 120-1.

¹⁰⁰ Rosenthal, *The Honest Courtesan*, p. 27.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

representations between female virtue and political sovereignty prevented patrician women's presence in public. Even when they went to church or visited their female kin in convents they used to transfer in their private gondolas or under the escort of their servants, without coming in direct contact with people or remaining alone in the public eye.¹⁰²

On the other hand, women of the lower class worked and socialized in the neighbourhood, developing social and business relationships beyond the narrow limits of the family. Due to their daily occupations, and since their honour was perceived in a looser way, lower-class women were not restricted to their residence and immediate vicinity. Their living patterns were also different, ranging from typical households consisting of parents and children to alternative household models, unfamiliar to the upper classes, where single women came together to pool their resources, a common practice especially for prostitutes, who often lived with their mothers or fellow prostitutes.¹⁰³

The period from the late fifteenth to the end of the sixteenth centuries in Europe has been regarded as an era which marked new restrictions on the employment of women, such as exclusion from guilds, shift to unskilled poorly-paid occupations and a general decline in their participation in the labour market in association with a greater emphasis on their domestic role.¹⁰⁴ Studying the position of women in the labour market of Renaissance Florence, Judith Brown has argued that there was a declining participation of women from the beginning of the fifteenth until the late sixteenth centuries, when once again women began to appear as part of the urban labour force. The increasing participation of women in paid employment in late Renaissance was due to the shift of male labourers from the production of the textiles to the emerging artisan sector of luxury crafts. This development permitted women to take men's place in the low-skilled and worst-paid occupations which were offered in textile industries.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² For the public presence of noblewomen, see: D. Romano, "Gender and the Urban Geography of Renaissance Venice", *Journal of Social History*, 23: 2 (1989); R. C. Davis, "The Geography of Gender in the Renaissance" in *Gender and Society*, ed. Brown, Davis.

¹⁰³ Chojnacka, *Working Women*, pp. 21-4.

¹⁰⁴ K. Honeyman, J. Goodman, "Women's Work, Gender Conflict, and Labour Markets in Europe, 1500-1900", in *Gender and History in Western Europe*, ed. R. Shoemaker, M. Vincent (London, 1998).

¹⁰⁵ Brown, "A Woman's Place was in the Home".

Similar studies of women in the Venetian workforce are lacking. The growth of the Venetian cloth manufacturing from the middle of the sixteenth to the first decades of the seventeenth century might have resulted in an increase in women's participation in textile manufacturing.¹⁰⁶ In 1570, the *Provveditori* expressed reservations about the application of a new working technique in the silk industry, which would demand less time and fewer workers, on the grounds that "it would be to the detriment of the poor, because this machine would cause unemployment among the poor female spinners and other sorts of poor women who ply the aforementioned crafts, that is winding silk, doubling, and spinning, thanks to which they earn their living".¹⁰⁷ However, for the seventeenth-century, it has been suggested that female involvement in the Venetian "domestic industry" was less than in other pre-modern textile centres, even if Venetian women undertook preliminary processes in silk making.¹⁰⁸ Women were also occupied in the traditional Venetian luxury industries of lace making and glassware, especially on the Venetian Islands of Burano, Murano and Pallesina. Their skill training must have taken place at home. Female institutions also produced lace either for internal consumption or for sale openly. However, it has been suggested that the "semi-religious" and "philanthropic-institutional" character of lace making kept this trade outside of the prevalent guild system.¹⁰⁹ Following the general schema, suggested for early modern Europe, one could argue that a gender division of labour was characteristic of the Venetian economy as well. Women due to childbearing, childcare and domestic labour had less opportunity to acquire high skilled training and consequently, when they worked, they were occupied in worst paid trades. The cultural notions of the period about female chastity and inferiority played a role in women's secondary position in the workforce as well.

Apart from the industrial factor, Venetian women helped in family trades, such as shops or renting rooms. Certain guilds allowed widows to maintain their deceased husband's shops.¹¹⁰ Sometimes, printers' or publishers' wives continued the book business after the death of their husbands and before the coming of age of a

¹⁰⁶ D. Sella, "The Rise and Fall of the Venetian Woolen Industry", in *Crisis and Change*, ed. Pullan.

¹⁰⁷ L. Molà, *The Silk Industry of Renaissance Venice* (Baltimore & London, 2000), p. 199.

¹⁰⁸ R. Rapp, *Industry and Economic Decline in Seventeenth-Century Venice* (Cambridge, Mass & London, 1976), pp. 27-9.

¹⁰⁹ S. Dalla, *Women and Men in Early Modern Venice. Reassessing History* (Hampshire & Burlington, 2003), pp. 183-218.

¹¹⁰ Romano, "Gender and the Urban Geography", p. 340.

son or a remarriage. Such was the case of Elisabetta Rusconi, widow of the printer Giorgio Rusconi, between 1526-27 in Venice, who, contrary to the common practice, signed her own name in colophons rather than designating herself simply as the heir of the master printer.¹¹¹ Furthermore, Venetian women were engaged in traditional female occupations, such as midwifery, wet-nursing and domestic service. Most women worked as servants in order to accumulate a dowry. At times their employers undertook to marry them off. Although noble houses had a preference in employing male servants, female servants worked there as well, either as ladies-in-waiting, who served the mistress, or as serving girls, who served the house. Often noblewomen included their servants in their wills. Usually, women worked as housekeepers for the parish clergy, or were employed by well-off prostitutes. Women servants' wages were lower than men's already from the fifteenth century. The differentials in pay between male and female domestics widened further during the course of the sixteenth century. Wet nurses' wages also declined from the last decades of the fifteenth century until the last decades of the sixteenth century when they begun to recover.¹¹² Female servants often fell victims to financial or sexual exploitation. Immigrant women from Venice's Mediterranean dominions, the Terraferma, other Italian territories and German-speaking areas formed an important part of the servant population. Lacking social and kin networks these women were even more vulnerable to bad treatment and usually their wages were even lower.¹¹³

Magical arts can also be seen as a profession, in the sense that they were, among others, a way of earning one's living. Of the total number of persons denounced for or accused of witchcraft in the Venetian Inquisition, approximately 70 per cent were women. In the records, most prominently figured poor, single women, who very often had their origins outside Venice, especially Friulians, Greeks and Slavs. Lacking supporting kin and social networks, on the one hand, these women might have practiced witchcraft to gain a securer living and, on the other hand, they were regarded with more suspicion because of the absence of male guidance and, in the case of immigrants, due to their relatively isolated position in the new environment.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ D. Parker, "Women in the Book Trade in Italy, 1475-1620", *Renaissance Quarterly*, 49: 3 (1996).

¹¹² Romano, *Housecraft and Statecraft*, pp. 26-27, 49-54, 116-117, 138-45, 171-2.

¹¹³ Chojnacka, *Working Women*, pp. 85-7.

¹¹⁴ R. Martin, *Witchcraft and the Inquisition in Venice 1550-1650* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 226-39.

Love and healing magic and divination for gaining information for the purpose of gambling or about lost property were the most frequent practices. Either practising magic for themselves or for someone else, in exchange for money or food or some help, these women tried to solve every day problems concerning love, health and money. Rarely did women acquire a highly-specialized training of magic. Their low social and literacy standing prevented them from access to "magic books", such as the most popular Clavicle of Solomon or popular manuals on herbals and medical advice. Known for their healing art, Friulian women rather transferred the folk culture of their homelands by a combination of charms, prayers and ceremonies and herbs, unguents and powders.¹¹⁵ At times, as the case of the "famous Venetian witch" Laura Malipiero indicates, magical arts could open "career options" for women who succeeded in being promoted to more "professional" and high paid practitioners.¹¹⁶ However, as the sixteenth century wore on, due to the gradual appearance of urban hospitals and other respective institutions, the increasing concern with public health and the professionalization of medicine, women practitioners, who in their great majority were not officially licensed and of course not university-educated, were gradually excluded from medical practice. Ecclesiastical authorities' concern with eliminating superstition and the unequal competition between women healers and exorcists officially recognized by the church worked also against women practitioners.¹¹⁷

The Venetian Inquisition began to be seriously concerned with witchcraft in the early 1570s. This date coincides with the launch of the broader witch-hunting in Europe, from 1570 to 1650. However, in contrast to other European areas, such as the Holy Roman Empire, France and Switzerland, in Venice, as in the rest of Italy, the prosecutions never grew to become a witch-craze or to lead to mass executions. That the cases of witchcraft in Italy were under the jurisdiction of the Inquisition instead of the secular courts played a determinative role in this differentiation, since the Inquisition adopted a less aggressive and more tolerant attitude towards witchcraft offences.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 101-47.

¹¹⁶ S. Scully, "Marriage or a Career? Witchcraft as an Alternative in Seventeenth Century Venice", *Journal of Social History*, 28; 4 (1995).

¹¹⁷ K. Park, "Medicine and Magic: The Healing Arts", in *Gender and Society*, ed. Brown, Davis.

¹¹⁸ Martin, *Witchcraft and the Inquisition*, pp. 253-8; for an overview on witchcraft in early modern Europe, see B. Levack, *The Witch-hunt in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1987).

Rarely did the literature about women refer explicitly to the women of the lower social classes. The argumentation for the defence of the female sex was mostly structured around gender (man/woman) or moral categories (chaste/unchaste woman), avoiding social stratifications. Hortensia, the defender of women in Luigi Dardano's dialogue, clarifies that she will defend "not only noblewomen but also the ordinary women [*anchille*]"¹¹⁹ Similarly, Domenico Bruni argues that artisan and peasant women should be equally honoured since their contribution to the well-being of the household is not at all inferior to that of their husbands.¹²⁰ However, such clarifications were rare. Women were mostly defined as a biological category, and even when they were seen as a sociological group the context was quite vague, although it rather corresponded to the conditions of middle or upper class women.¹²¹

As the sixteenth century progressed, and the interest gradually shifted from women as a biological category to women's role in the family, the references to upper class women became explicit. The treatises on household management drew a clear distinction between upper and lower class women, which is often accompanied by a strong anxiety about the potential association between them, and especially between the young girls and the female servants. Authors advise that children should shape an identity appropriate to their social status already from their infancy. Mothers rather than wet nurses should nurse infants since milk was regarded as a vehicle of moral qualities.¹²² "Vile women" lacked these qualities and their milk was not "so gentle and delicate".¹²³ Furthermore, authors constantly warned parents of the risk children run in their associations with people of lower social ranks and their customs, especially servants "whose nature is so dissolute, lascivious and immoral".¹²⁴ According to Cabei, girls should always "stay away from the servants' jokes and conversations and in no way associate with them", and according to Trotto, "the prudent mother should make sure that children of both sexes do not learn these

¹¹⁹ "e non solo da donne d'alto sangue, ma anchor, di anchille": Dardano, *La bella e dotta difesa*, p. 121R.

¹²⁰ Bruni, *Difese delle donne*, p. 26.

¹²¹ On the attitude of the popular literature towards women, see below pp. 237-8.

¹²² "però che col latte non meno si prende la virtù, & il vizio dell'animo, che si prenda l'essere, & il nutrimento del corpo": G. Passi, *Dello stato maritale trattato* (Venice, 1602), p. 104.

¹²³ "ma essendo le nutrici per l'ordinario vili femminelle, è con venevole che quell primo nutrimento che da lor prendono i bambini, non sia così gentile e delicate, come quel de le madri sarebbe": Tasso, *Il padre*, p. 111.

¹²⁴ "Non li lasci in modo alcuno conversare con la servitù, la cui natura essendo per lo più dissolute, licenziosa e contaminate, bisogna che dia loro in prestito delle parole e de' costume servili che non si rendono mai, ed è cosa certa che non tanto adornano le belle parole quanto le sconcie imbrattano l'anima de' giovanetti": Guazzo, *La civil conversazione*, p. 232.

vulgar words that little insignificant women use with a rustic and barbarian accent".¹²⁵

The gradual centralization of power and tighter control over family, religious life and aspects of individual life, on the part of the secular and ecclesiastical authorities, signified a gradual shifting of the boundaries between the public and private. Authorities' effort to consolidate their control over family in some cases might have limited the authority of fathers, husbands and other male kin within the family, or even outside it (for instance in convents). However, the official regulations and centralized institutions functioned on the base of the existing patriarchal structures and values, which were further enforced. The emerging central control at times came in conflict with traditional male authority. It has been suggested, for instance, that husbands often perceived ecclesiastical institutions and practices, such as the confession, as institutions competing with them for authority over their wives. The privatization and central place of the confessional in the sixteenth-century often helped women to discuss their domestic problems with priests, which at times led to revelations which could even result in the denunciation of heretical husbands in the Inquisition.¹²⁶ Seemingly, the intervention in the domestic life of the couples helped the ecclesiastical authorities to exercise better control over everyday life. Under different circumstances, the Church cooperated with the traditional family male authority. For instance, the tribunal let women accused of practising magic return home after their fathers' or husbands' requests, handing over them the responsibility to reform their daughters or wives.¹²⁷ The policy of the *Casa del Soccorso* to permit women to leave the institution only if they entered the *Convertite*, got married or reconciled with their husbands is indicative. Unless women were under the guidance of their family, they had to be under the control of a central institution. The targets of Fonte's and Tarabotti's criticism, marriage and convent, were *par excellence* the

¹²⁵ "stia lontana da giuochi, da ragionamenti de servi, ne delle cose loro punto si prende cura": Cabej, *Ornamenti della gentil donna*, p. 120; "Proveda anco la savia madre, che i figliuoli dell'uno, e l'altro sesso, nella fanciullezza loro, non imparino quelle parolacche plebie, che sogliono insegnare le donnicciuole con accenti villaneschi, e barbari": Trotto, *Dialoghi del matrimonio*, p. 187.

¹²⁶ J. Martin, "Out of the Shadow: Heretical and Catholic Women in Renaissance Venice", *Journal of Family History*, 10: 1 (1985), pp. 21-33.

¹²⁷ Martin, *Witchcraft and the Inquisition*, p. 230.

institutions that represented the strict division of gender roles and women's limitation in the private sphere of activity.

The growing public focus on civic morality, with an emphasis on female chastity and domesticity and its symbolic meanings, had multifarious effects as well. The newly established female institutions could offer ex-prostitutes, maltreated wives or orphan girls some refuge, if they were prepared to conform to the rules, and the laws against pimps procuring young girls might protect women from sexual exploitation. The other side of the coin was the stigmatization of women who deviated from these cultural norms, such as prostitutes and women of loose moral behaviour, or even single women, who often aroused suspicion, as the accusations of witchcraft manifest. The strict enclosure imposed on convents is part of the same development. A sumptuary law of 1544 characterized as prostitutes also women who "not being married, have intercourse and contact with one or more men. Those are also said to be prostitutes who, having married, do not live with their husbands but remain apart and have intercourse with one or more men".¹²⁸ Furthermore, the reordering of the Venetian public space reinforced social dichotomies and carried strong symbolic and moral associations. The sustained effort by city governments to assert public control over urban space, public and private, sacred and profane, male and female, or Christian and not Christian, in the case of the Jewish Ghetto (1516), was paralleled in the division of the female space.¹²⁹ The division of female space, between convents, domestic life, charitable institutions and the *Castelletto*, reflected and helped define more clearly gender, social status and moral quality. Adopting the words of Lyndal Roper, we could say that "the whore had become a moral category, not a professional prostitute; and she stood for the lust of all women".¹³⁰

The sixteenth century saw the redefinition of female identity and a broader interest in the proper position of women within family, church and society. It was a development that, as Stanley Chojnacki has shown, had begun for elite women already from the fifteenth century with the reevaluation of the role of women in the reproduction, economic transactions and political alliances of the patriciate. This development is manifested both in the social developments and the cultural environment. Despite its competing ideologies and the changes it underwent over the

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 235.

¹²⁹ Romano, "Gender and the Urban Geography".

¹³⁰ L. Roper, "Discipline and Respectability: Prostitution and the Reformation in Augsburg", in *Feminism and History*, ed. J. W. Scott (Oxford, 1996), p. 356.

sixteenth century, the literary debate about women was also part of this trend. The gradual replacement of writings defending the female sex with texts that reinforced the traditional patriarchal values, reflected, among others, the maturing and stabilization of a socio-cultural mesh in which gender roles were put on a firmer basis. Encountering complex cultural constructs and fields of power, women often became the focus of the interest. In this context, the manifold contingencies of each individual woman, her social standing, her vocational status and after all her will, or ability, to conform, or not, to the new established rules defining the acceptable gender roles, prescribed her identity and the opportunities offered to or the limitations imposed on her.

CHAPTER THREE

THE EMERGENCE OF A FEMALE READING PUBLIC (1540-1560)

THE CONTROVERSIAL ISSUE OF WOMEN'S EDUCATION: PATH TO MORAL LIFE OR VEHICLE OF CORRUPTION?

From the first half of the sixteenth century, writings on female superiority, by citing famous learned women of the past and present, suggested that women were equally able to excel in letters, and claimed an advanced education for them. Furthermore, they often imputed the inferior social position of women to the lack of education. To demonstrate women's ability in learning, Galeazzo Capra cited learned women of the past and clarified that all Muses and Minerva, the ancient Greek goddess of wisdom, were women. Furthermore, he argued that actually women's intellect is superior: "as thousands of acknowledged philosophers dealing with the nature of animals have shown, the female is generally more trainable and apt at learning, and women are not an exception to the rule".¹ In Ortensio Lando's collection of letters the issue of female education is also discussed. Lucietta Soranza advises Lucretia Masippa to concern herself with letters since "this is the best way of fleeing from men's tyranny". Ippolita Crema encourages Fulvia Rulla in her studies so that men "remain speechless with admiration", and Paula Trecca exhorts Livia Portia to continue her studies in the hope that one day women will be equal to men.² According to Giovanni David Thomagni's speaker, Cervone, if women were not confined at home or convent and enjoyed an advanced education instead of "needle and thread" [*l'ago & il filo*], they would have been equal to men. He further exhorts women to study so

¹ "avenga ci siano mille autorità de filosofanti che parlando de la natura degli animali, dicono generalmente le femine esser più disciplinabili e agevoli de imparare, non excettuando più la donna che altra specie." Capra, *Della eccellenza*, p. 94.

² "Detevi anchora voi alle buone lettere...non ci è il miglior modo per fuggir la tirannia de gli uomini", "Attendete pur figliuola mia a li studi e lasciategli gracchiare quanto vogliono, che alla fine saranno astretti cheti e ammirar la donnesca virtù", "Perservate (vi supplico) come avete incominciato perche si comprenda un Giorno non esser le donne men atte all' honorate imprese de gli huomini": Lando, *Lettere*, pp. 32R, 17R, 118R.

that their subjection to men comes to an end.³ Similarly, according to Pietro Paolo Porro, if women studied at Padua and Bologna and spent some of the time that men spend in studies, they would have been superior to men in sciences.⁴ The Udinese Pompeo Caimo, a professor at Padua University, also gives a sociological interpretation of women's secondary position in society:

Just as one's own industry in moral virtues is employed in usage and practice, so in intellectual virtues learning and teaching, and without these helps men will not become great *virtuosi*, and if not using them remain ordinary, how much more so could women reach them? Who, according to custom, neither engage in the study of the letters nor participate in public life, but they are confined within the domestic walls...bringing up the children and taking care of the household...and their natural gifts without practice languish... This is not a natural defect of women, who are born capable of every distinction, but it is a defect of the custom, which opposes nature...⁵

Nevertheless, these exhortations remained on paper. An advanced education continued to be broadly regarded not only useless for women, since they would not hold public positions, but also a potential threat to their chastity. Most Italian women of the upper classes enjoyed an elementary education either in convents or at home. Many girls, often orphan or motherless, but not necessarily, were sent to a convent, either as novices or as boarding pupils, in order to receive an elementary education and learn "the virtues", that is the proper religious and moral female behaviour. In convents they learned the fundamentals of the Christian faith by chanting and memorizing various prayers such as *Our Father* and *Hail Mary*, reading and writing, often music and needlework. Their training focused on the fundamental female

³ "Deh perche non viene a tutte le donne che possono la voglia di studiare, acciò non fossero così dall'huomo suppeditate, come a torto sono": Thomagni, *Dell'eccellentia de l'huomo*, pp. 49V-50R.

⁴ "Che credete voi forse, che perche le Donne non vanno a studiar a Bologna, o a Padoa, che per questo manchi loro l'ingengo? Nol crediate; che, quando le Donne vi spendessero pur'una particella del tempo, che gli Huominivi consumano, molto più eccellenti nelle scienze de gli Huomini si fariano": Porro, *L'Eris d'Amore*, p. 141.

⁵ "...la propria industria, che nelle virtù morali adopra l'uso, e 'l costume, nelle intellettuali la dottrina, e l'insegnamento. senza questi aiuti non arrivano gli huomini ad essere gran virtuosi, e non gli usando rimangono comunali, come per lo più possono dunque arrivarci le donne? Lequali per l'ordinario non si danno a gli studi, non si avoigono in negozi, ma chiuse fra i muri domestici...nel nutrire i figli, nel regger la casa...i doni naturali dell' arte negletti languiscono... Questo non è difetto del sesso nato ad ogni forte di laude, è difetto del costume fatto tiranno della natura...": P. Caimo, *Dell'Ingegno Humano, De' suoi segni, della sua differenza ne gli Huomini, e nelle Donne, e del suo buono Indirizzo* (Venice, 1629), p. 405.

virtues of chastity, silence and obedience. Learning a disciplined control of the body, consisting mainly in modest gait and keeping eyes down, was also part of convent schooling. The main target of convent education was preparing women for convent or family life.⁶

Education at home followed a similar path, although it varied according to the initiatives of parents. As Stefano Guazzo wrote in 1574, some fathers wished their daughters "to be instructed in reading, writing, poetry, music and painting whereas others in nothing but spinning and the management of the household".⁷ Some parents employed a tutor or a female teacher whereas in other households it was mainly the mother who undertook the moral guidance and the reading and writing education of her daughters. Reading and writing in the vernacular, some arithmetic, singing or playing an instrument and needlework were the main skills that a daughter of the upper classes was expected to know. The instruction in these skills was interwoven with the moral shaping of the girl's character. For instance, needlecraft carried a moral charge since it averted the girl's mind from the lascivious thoughts that idleness caused.

Female education was generally regarded as necessary to the extent that it served the preparation of women to fulfill their expected roles as good Christians and virtuous wives and mothers. The practical skills – spinning, weaving and sewing – were necessary for the good management of the household. Learning reading and writing had the same target; it helped women to keep some accounts in the household and be able to instruct their daughters and young sons in a moral and religious conduct with the help of home-teaching manuals or simple devotional texts. Scarcely did parents or other relatives encourage women's advanced education. Fifteenth-century humanists Isotta Nogarola, Cassandra Fedele, Laura Cereta and Alessandra Scala, who had received private tutoring in Latin, and, in the sixteenth century, Lucrezia Marinella's and Moderata Fonte's relatives' interest in offering them

⁶ S. Strocchia, "Learning the Virtues. Convent Schools and Female Culture in Renaissance Florence", in *Women's Education in Early Modern Europe. A History, 1500-1800*, ed. B. J. Whitehead (New York & London, 1999), pp. 18-32.

⁷ "Alcuni [padri] le [figliuole] fanno ammaestrare nel leggere, nello scrivere, nella poesia, nella musica e nella pittura. Altri a niente più le aizzano che alla conocchia e al governo della casa": Guazzo, *La civil conversazione*, p. 235.

opportunities for further reading and an advanced education, were rather the exception to the rule.⁸

Juan Luis Vives advised parents that the girl should learn "things that contribute to the cultivation of the mind and the care and management of the home", that is "she will learn, together with reading, how to work with wool and flax, two arts... of great usefulness in domestic affairs and contributing to frugality, which should be a matter of prime concern for women" and a "sign of a prudent and chaste wife".⁹ Furthermore, the girl should learn "the art of cooking, not the vulgar kind associated with low-class eating-houses... but a sensible, refined, temperate, and frugal art".¹⁰ However, the most important is to learn reading, since the "sober and chaste learning forms our character and render us better".¹¹ This learning consists in "those splendid exhortations of the church fathers concerning chastity, solitude, silence, and feminine adornment and attire".¹² Under these circumstances, reading "lifts the mind to the contemplation of beautiful things and rids it of lowly thoughts".¹³ However, at the same time, dangers might lurk in reading. Chivalric romances or love stories, such as Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron*, which "treat no subjects but love and war", have ruinous effects on female chastity. For the girls who "give themselves to this reading in order to find pleasant gratification in amorous reveries of this kind... it would have been preferable not only that they had never learned literature but that they had lost their eyes so that they could not read, and their ears so that they could not hear".¹⁴

In the sixteenth century, Catholic Reformation laid the foundations of an elementary education for the girls of the lower classes as well. As part of the Tridentine Reform program, an extensive network of Schools of Christian Doctrine was established for the instruction in Christian knowledge and morality of boys and girls of every social status. These schools operated on Sundays and feast days under the parish priest, often with the assistance of members of the religious Orders or confraternities. They were based on the parish church or in some confraternity

⁸ P. Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy. Literacy and Learning, 1300-1600* (Baltimore & London, 1989), pp. 87-102; King, *Women of the Renaissance*, pp. 164-72; Strocchia, "Learning the Virtues", pp. 18-32.

⁹ Vives, *The Education of a Christian Woman*, pp. 58-60.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 65.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

buildings, or those of religious Orders. The main object of their programme was the religious guidance of the young pupils. However pupils sometimes were taught to read – primarily for reading prayers, catechisms and devotional texts – and, less frequently, to write. Both boys and girls attended those schools, separately though; men taught boys and women taught girls.¹⁵ In Venice, the central organisation responsible for these schools was the spiritual fraternity of the *Compania dell'Oratorio*, which met in the hospital of the *Incurabili* and worked in conjunction with the Jesuits and Theatines. Each school was headed by a priest as Prior and a layman as Subprior and teachers were recruited from the members of the *Compania dell'Oratorio*. The education consisted mainly in reading, devotional instruction and moral conduct. Female institutions, such as the *Zitelle*, included in their everyday program the religious education of girls as well.¹⁶ However, at the same time, the warnings about the dangerous consequences of some readings were increased. Regarding reading as a means for the Christian education and moral formation of the character, clerical pedagogical theorists, such as Agostino Valier and Silvio Antoniano, suggested only spiritual writings.¹⁷

Giovanni Boccaccio's works, especially the *Decameron*, were broadly regarded as pernicious readings. In the sixteenth paradox of the *Paradossi*, Ortensio Lando writes that the *Decameron* "is known as a bad example to honest girls and chaste ladies and to decent young men; it also gives a clear sign of contemning the holy religion".¹⁸ Sabba Castiglione suggested girls read the Bible, the *Little Office of Our Lady*, the *Vite dei Santi Padri*, saints' legends and other spiritual works whereas they should avoid *La Vita Nova* of Dante, the sonnets and *canzoni* of Petrarch, the *Decameron*, *La Fiammetta* and *Il Filocolo* of Boccaccio.¹⁹ Lodovico Dolce is more moderate, although he also chastises the *Decameron* and "all the lascivious books that women should avoid in the same way they stay away from the vipers and other poisonous animals".²⁰ Instead of these, the girl should begin her education with

¹⁵ C. F. Black, *Italian Confraternities in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 223-8; idem, *Church, Religion and Society*, pp. 119-27; P. Grendler, "The Schools of Christian Doctrine in Sixteenth-Century Italy", *Church History*, 53: 3 (1984).

¹⁶ Pullan, *Rich and Poor*, pp. 402-6.

¹⁷ Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance*, p. 89.

¹⁸ "si conosca esser di mal essemplio alle honeste fanciulle alle caste matrone, & alli accostumati giovani: dia anchora chiaro inditio di spregiare la santa religione": Lando, *Paradossi*, unpaginated.

¹⁹ Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance*, p. 88.

²⁰ "tutti i libri lascivi, come si fuggono le Serpi & gli altri animali velenosi": Dolce, *Dialogo della institution*, p. 22R.

"some small devotional books full of excellent instructions in order to learn the alphabet and at the same time the rules of virtue".²¹ She should proceed to the New and Old Testament and the comments of Ambrose, Augustine, and Jerome. Among ancient writers, Dolce suggests Plato, Seneca and "all the philosophers from whom devout and honest customs can be drawn".²² Among Latin poets, he permits the "chaste and moral" excerpts of Virgil and Horace, and also the writings of Prudentius, Prosperus, Juvenius and Paolinus. Among prose writings he suggests Cicero and all the historians such as Livy, Sallustius, Quintus Curtius, Tranquillus and Sventonius, who give only examples of virtue and decent lessons, since "history is the master of life". Finally, women can read Petrarch and Dante, since "in the former we find both the beauty of the vernacular poetry and Tuscan language and examples of honest and chaste love and in the latter an excellent portrait of the Christian Philosophy".²³

WOMEN READERS IN THE 1540s AND 1550s

A closer examination of the contemporary proems and dedications indicates that at least in the first half of the sixteenth century, and despite the common admonitions, women did read for finding "pleasant gratification" not only in the "amorous reveries" of Boccaccio but also in the witty contemporary debates. Of course, only a small number of the female population was able to read with facility, and probably an even smaller number of them were interested in broadening their reading horizons, could afford to spend for books or could borrow some book from their family and social networks.²⁴ However, although few in number, these women had a cultural influence as readers on the development of some aspects of the vernacular literature.

²¹ "da alcuni libretti santi & ripieni di ottimi ammaestramenti, accio ch'ella impari insieme gli elementi delle lettere, & le regole della bontà", Ibid., p. 20V.

²² "e tutti quei Filosofi, da i quali si possono ritrar santi, & honesti costumi", Ibid., p. 21R.

²³ "nell'uno troveranno insieme con le bellezze della volgar Poesia & della lingua Thoscana esempio d'honestissimo & castissimo amore, & nel altro un'eccellente ritratto di tutta la Philosophia Christiana", Ibid., pp. 21V-22R.

²⁴ It has been estimated that 33 percent of the boys and about 13 percent of the girls acquired basic literacy in 1587 Venice: Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance*, p. 46.

Vernacular translations offered women the opportunity to read Latin authors. Women often formed a motive for some of these translations, either as patronesses or as readers. In his dedication of Virgil's *Dafni* to the "gentle and loving ladies", "Luttareo" indicates that he translated Virgil's work for them.²⁵ Similarly, Virgil's *Eneide* were translated in 1540 and each book was dedicated by the translators to a different woman – Giulia Gonzaga and the Sieneſe noblewomen Aurelia Tolomei de Borghesi, Giulia and Avrelia Petrucci, Girolama Carli Piccolomini and Frasia Venturi.²⁶ The translation apparently was related to the Sieneſe circle of *Intronati*. The sixth book was dedicated to Frasia Venturi by Alessandro Piccolomini, who also dedicated to the same woman the translation of Xenophon's *Economics*.²⁷ Sometimes even scientific works were written in the vernacular so women could read them, or at least so the authors claimed. In his dedication of the astrological treatise *Sfera del mondo* to Laudomia Forteguerri, Piccolomini says that the dedicatee was always unhappy because having been born woman she could not study the sciences, although she very much liked astrology. Furthermore, he points out that scientific treatises are usually written in Latin, and so most women are excluded from engaging in these studies.²⁸

Forteguerri's interest in astrology was an exception to the rule of course. In his biography of Irene di Spilimbergo, Dionigi Atanagi points out his biographee's wide reading interests, ranging from translations of Latin and Greek authors to books on the rules of language. Specifically, Irene

had always many books in her hands, such as the works of Plutarch, Piccolomini's *L'Institutione*, the *Cortigiano*, Bembo's *Gli Asolani*, Petrarch and other similar books, which she did not read in the way most women and even men use to do, for simple pastime or at random; on the contrary, she paid judicious and particular attention to the matters they dealt with, concepts and use of language...she read the

²⁵ *Il Dafni di Vergilio Egloga. V. Per il Luttareo dal latino al volgare tradotta* (Venice, 1525).

²⁶ *I sei primi libri del Eneide di Vergilio, Tradotti à piu illustre & honorate Donne. E tra l'altre à nobilissima & divina Madonna Aurelia Tolomei de Borghesi, à cui ancho è indirizzato tutto il presente volume* (Venice, 1540).

²⁷ A. Piccolomini, *La Economica di Xenofonte tradotta di lingua greca in lingua Toscana* (Venice, 1540).

²⁸ Piéjus, "L'Orazione", pp. 531-2.

aforementioned books taking notes in the margin and picking up those that she regarded worthy of further observation.²⁹

In all probability Atanagi had not met Irene. His detailed depiction reveals though what a woman of the social and learning status and cultural and family environment of Irene was expected to read. Irene was born in Spilimbergo, a small Friulian castle town, near Udine. Her father, Andriano di Spilimbergo, was a member of the local nobility. After the death of her father and the second marriage of her mother, at the age of fifteen or sixteen, Irene was taken to Venice by her maternal grandparents. There she enjoyed a good education consisting of reading, writing, music and painting. According to her biographer, Titian himself instructed her in painting. The memorial collection, which was compiled after Irene's early death, at the age of twenty-one in 1559, was probably commissioned from Atanagi by the patrician Giorgio di Andrea di Taddeo Gradenigo, a family friend. Well-known literary figures contributed to this volume, such as Giuseppe Betussi, Lodovico Dolce, Lodovico Domenichi, Girolamo Mutio and Bernardo and Torquato Tasso. It seems that Irene's family had important literary acquaintances in Venice, which must have contributed to her familiarity with the contemporary literary currents. It is evident that Irene, who at the age of twenty-one was neither married nor a nun, belonged to a family that appreciated female education.³⁰

However, Irene was not an exceptional case, at least regarding her readings. Poetry, especially Petrarch and the imitators of his style, not only attracted the female reading public but also was a literary genre that contemporary women writers concerned themselves with either to publish or exchange through correspondence with men or other learned women. Both Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano* and Bembo's *Gli Asolani* treated issues related to women. Piccolomini's *De la Institutione* devoted some chapters to women's issues as well. In his dedication of *De la Institutione*, the

²⁹ "Haveva etiando di continuo molte altre opere per le mani, come sono le operette di Plutarco, L'Institutione del Piccolomini, Il Cortigiano, gli Asolani del Bembo, Il Petrarca, e cotai libri: i quali ella leggeva, non come il piu delle donne, & anco de gli huomini fanno, per semplice passatempo, o come a caso; ma con giuditioso, & particolare avvertimento delle materie, che trattano, de concetti, e delle elocutioni... leggeva i libri nominati di sopra notando nelli margini, & cavando in soglio quello, che pareva a lei degno d'osservatione": "Vita della Signora Irene", in *Rime di diversi nobilissimi, et eccellentissimi autori, in morte della signora Irene delle Signore di Spilimbergo* (Venice, 1561), pp. 6R-7V.

³⁰ A. J. Schutte, "Irene di Spilimbergo: The Image of a Creative Woman in Late Renaissance Italy", *Renaissance Quarterly*, 44 (1991).

publisher's relative, Ottaviano Scoto, expressed his wish that the work "will bring fruits not only to boys, teenagers, young men and women but also to the elders".³¹

Most titles concerning the controversy about women's nature and generally women's issues were dedicated to women and were meant for a female reading public. The interrelation between the use of the vernacular and the female reading public often became explicit. In one of the earliest treatises on female superiority, Galeazzo Flavio Capra underlines that such a work, concerning women, could not have been written in Latin, and especially the Latin in which "those wiseacre friars write their sophistries for ameliorating their trifles".³² He continues pointing out the novelty of the matter and saying that he chose the vernacular for pleasing his readers. Among his readers he considers men in love and women. Similarly, in his treatise on female cosmetics dedicated to the "chaste and young ladies", Giovanni Marinello elucidates that although Greeks, Arabs and Latin writers have dealt with the same topic in the past, he is the first to treat it in the vernacular. Finally, he expresses the certainty that contemporary women, who are the "most illustrious ever regarding their blood and virtue" will read "this sweet work", which has been written for them, with pleasure.³³

The "corruptive" Boccaccio seems to have also been *par excellence* female reading, despite the persistent admonitions of some of the contemporaries. Women not only read but also wrote in the Boccaccian style, such as Giulia Bigolina from Padua who, according to Francesco Agostino della Chiesa, wrote comedies and novels similar to those of Boccaccio in the mid-sixteenth century. However, as her biographer clarifies, even if she treated lovers' passion, her works were written

in a so modest and honest way that every chaste girl could read them without any hesitation, since they contained nothing with even the slightest smell of anything less than wholesome, nor any other taste, but only the lingering solicitude, false

³¹ "prender frutto non solo i Fanciulli, gli Adolescenti, i Gioveni, le Donne, ma anchor i piu maturi di tempo di qual si voglia grado": Piccolomini, *De la Institutione*.

³² "si hanno eletto scrivere questi baccalari de' frati i suoi sofismi per meglio chiarirne de l'inezie loro": Capra, *Della eccellenza*, p. 62.

³³ "...di cotanto mi posso contentare, che io sia il primo, che nella nostra favella habbia particolarmente ragionato di questa materia: & molto più mi debbo gloriare di esser nato in una età, laquale ha le più illustri donne per sangue, & per virtù, che forse nel preterito siano state: le quali vivo io certissimo, che volentieri leggerano questi dolci affani à lor cagione sostenuti; & so, che benignità vostre di voglia il faranno, & ne gli havranno cari": G. Marinello, *Gli Ornamenti delle donne* (Venice, 1610), (first published in 1562), pp. 6R-V.

hopes, vain thoughts and the continuous servitude of the young people, who resemble more madmen rather than lovers.³⁴

It was a common practice among publishers, editors or translators of Boccaccio's works to dedicate them to women, and make clear references to a female reading public in their proems. Tizzone Gaetano di Pofi dedicated *La Fiammetta* to Dorothea Gonzaga, Marchesana di Bitonto, Antonio Bruccioli the *Decameron* to Madalena de Buonaiuti and Francesco Sansovino the *Ameto* to Gaspara Stampa.³⁵ In his dedication to Camilla Pallavicina, Marchesa di Corte Maggiore, Giuseppe Betussi presents women readers as his main motive for his translation of Boccaccio's *De Claris Mulieribus*:

I have translated this work into the vernacular not for ornament and benefit of the studious and learned men but for the noble and virtuous ladies. Since he [Boccaccio] did this small memorial to their great honour and dignity, it seemed more honest to me that it should have been written in Italian rather than Latin, in order to serve all women; because most women do not know Latin. So, if until now it was known to few of them, from now on, it will be in the hands and will be read by many, who will be able to learn easily that the illustrious noble women, who want to become immortal and eternal, should conserve with great effort their nobility.³⁶

This tradition originated in Boccaccio himself who had dedicated *De Claris Mulieribus* to Andrea Acciaiuoli, Contessa d'Altavilla. The *Decameron* and *La*

³⁴ "hà nulla di meno ogni cosa sì pudicamente e modestamente scritto, che può tali cose senza alcun rispetto leggere ogni pudica fanciula, poiche non hanno pur un minimo odore di cosa meno ch'honesta, ne c'habbi altro sapor, che quei continui affanni, quelle fallaci speranze, quei vani pensieri, e quella durissima servitù de' giovani più presto pazzi, ch'amanti": Della Chicsa, *Theatro delle donne letterati*, pp. 171-2.

³⁵ T. Gaetano, *La Fiammetta del Boccaccio per messer Tizzone Gaetano di Pofi novamente rivista* (Venice, 1524); A. Bruccioli, *Il Decamerone di Messer Giovanni Boccaccio con muove e varie figure... con nuova dichiarazione di più regole dela lingua Toscana neccesarie a sapere a che quella vuol parlar o scrivere* (Venice, 1542); F. Sansovino, *Ameto, Comedia delle Ninfe Florentine, di M. Giovanni Boccaccio... con la dichiarazione de' luoghi difficili* (Venice, 1545).

³⁶ "L'ho ancho fatto volgare per maggior ornamento, & beneficio non de gli huomini studiosi, & letterati, ma delle donne nobili, & virtuose. In memoria del molto honore, & dignità delle quali, havendo egli fatto questo puoco ricordo, m'è paruto più honesto, che stia meglio scritto in parlare Italiano, che latino, accioche a tutte habbia a servire. Imperoche la maggior parte non è capace della lingua latina. La onde averrà forse, che essendo stato fin hora in cognitione di poche, da qui inanzi andrà per le mani & sarà letto da molte, le quali di qui potranno leggermente conoscere con quanta fatica alle donne illustri per sangue volendo vivere immortali, et eterne, sia bisogno conservare la nobilità loro": Betussi, *Libro di M. Gio. Boccaccio delle Donne Illustri*.

Fiammetta had also been written for a female reading public, at least so the author alleged. In the proem of the *Decameron*, Boccaccio writes that his aim was to encourage the ladies, who "out of fear or shame, conceal the flames of passion within their fragile breasts... forced to follow the whims, fancies and dictates of their fathers, mothers, brothers and husbands, so that they spend most of their time cooped up within the narrow confines of their rooms". Men do not need such an encouragement since "whenever they are weighed down by melancholy or ponderous thoughts, have many ways of relieving or expelling them", such as "fowling, hunting, fishing, riding and gambling, or attend to their business affairs". So, Boccaccio would "provide succour and diversion for the ladies, but only for those who are in love, since the others can make do with their needles, their reels and their spindles". Women readers "will be able to derive, not only pleasure from the entertaining matters therein set forth, but also some useful advice".³⁷ Similarly, addressing female readers, *Fiammetta*, the main character of the homonymous work, says:

I do not care if my speech does not reach the ears of men; in fact if I could, I would entirely keep it away from them, for the harshness of one of them is still so alive in me that I imagine the others to be like him, and I would expect jeering laughter from them rather than compassionate tears. I pray that you alone, in whom I recognize my own open-mindedness and inclination for misfortunes, may be my readers.³⁸

What Boccaccio suggested was reading as an outlet for women whose limited activities could not offer them any comfort. The great satisfaction that reading could offer women is also pointed out by Tullia d'Aragona in the mid-sixteenth century:

In reading we can govern ourselves of our own volition, alone or with company, less or more, without expense, without danger, without damage, without labour, but with great satisfaction and joy with ourselves. And although this perfect solace and great uplift of the soul is common and universal to every man and every woman,

³⁷ G. Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, ed. and trans. G. H. McWilliam (London, 1995), pp. 2-3.

³⁸ G. Boccaccio, *The Elegy of Lady Fiammetta*, ed. and trans. M. Causa-Steindler, T. Mauch (Chicago & London, 1990), p. 1.

unless they have a base and vile soul, it is even more useful and necessary for women.³⁹

"BORN TO BE IN WOMEN'S SERVICE":

THE VENETIAN PUBLISHER GABRIEL GIOLITO DE FERRARI

An examination of the printing activities, management strategies and shaping of the public profile of the publisher Gabriel Giolito de Ferrari can throw further light on women readers' role in the formation of the debate about them and the development of some aspects of the vernacular literature in the period between 1540 and 1560. Giolito's case also indicates literary and social networks which, having their base in Venice, connected men and women, writers and dedicatees, and bookmen and readers around the emerging vernacular literature, an important aspect of which was the debate about women.

Gabriel Giolito was born in Trino, near Casale of Monferrato. In 1536, Gabriel with his father, Giovanni Giolito, came to Venice, where they established their press. From 1541 Gabriel Giolito continued on his own – the period 1550-1556 with his brothers – until 1578, when his sons, Giovanni and Gio. Paolo, undertook the business until 1606. During this period Giolito maintained close relations with his homeland, as his dedications to the nobility and political figures of Casale and Monferrato indicate.⁴⁰ Some members of the family seemingly continued to run a press in Trino; a certain Clara Giolito de Ferrari still operated a press there from 1585 to 1595.⁴¹ Giolito's success was great. He collaborated with the most known *poligrafi*, such as Lodovico Domenichi, Antonio Brucioli, Lodovico Dolce and

³⁹ "Là ove nel leggere, noi possiamo da noi stessi governarci à tutto voler nostro, soli, accompagnati, poco, molto, senza spesa, senza pericolo, senza danno, senza travaglio, ma con piena satisfattione, & contenezza di noi medesimi. Et se questo sì perfetto solazzo, & questo sì gran sollevamento dell'animo è commune universalmente ad ogni huomo, & ad ogni donna di non in tutto basso & vil'animo, alle donne è poi tanto più utile & necessario": T. D'Aragona, *Il Meschino altramente detto il Guerrino fatto in ottava rima* (Venice, 1560), p. 1.

⁴⁰ In 1543, he dedicated the *Specchio di Croce* of Domenico Cavalca to the Duchess of Mantova Marquise of Monferrato, in 1544 *Della nobilità et eccellenza delle donne* to Bona Maria Suarda, noblewoman of Monferrato and in 1562 Giovanni Boccaccio's *L'amorosa fiammetta* to the "Gentili et valorose donne della città di Casale di Monferrato". His son, Giovanni, continued this tradition. In 1574, he dedicated the *Vita della gloriosa Vergine Maria* to Eleonora d'Austria, Duchessa di Mantova e Monferrato.

⁴¹ Parker, "Women in the Book Trade in Italy, 1475-1620", p. 524.

Francesco Sansovino and he published the writings of most popular authors of the period, such as Pietro Aretino, Ortensio Lando, Nicolò Franco, Claudio Tolomei, Bernardo Tasso, Antonfrancesco Doni, Girolamo Mutio Iustinopolitano and Girolamo Parabosco. Apart from his bookstore, called *Libreria della Fenice*, in Rialto, the mercantile centre of Venice, Giolito had in 1565 bookstores in Ferrara, Bologna, and Naples.⁴²

Giolito's great success consisted in his ability to respond to the evolving demands of a broader reading public. He published exclusively vernacular literature (poetry, treatises, dialogues), avoiding Latin or specialized titles. With the help of his collaborators he made successful decisions, publishing original works, editions and translations which could attract the attention of the lay reader. He also published the works of the most popular Ariosto, Petrarch and Boccaccio, enriched with linguistic annotations and critical notes for the help of the less learned reader. Unlike other publishers who just invested their capital, Giolito was well informed about the current cultural developments. In his proems and dedications he often expressed his views on contemporary issues, promoted his printing activity and presented himself as a man of letters.

Giolito's ability to adapt himself to the book market is also manifested by the three different qualities of his publications; the most expensive and opulent in *quarto* form with reclining characters, the *ottavo* form, with round characters and lower price, and the *duodecimo*, which was the cheapest one. Sometimes, the same work was published in two different editions, an expensive and a cheaper one. The *Decameron* was published in 1542 in three different editions. In comparison to other contemporary publishers Giolito kept prices low. The average price per piece between the years 1549 and 1591 was 1 lire and 16 soldi whereas that of Aldine press, in 1592, was considerably higher, 3 lire and 8 soldi.⁴³ Unlike the Aldine press, which specialized in the classics for better-educated and well-off readers, Giolito's cheaper vernacular literature was meant for a broader reading public.⁴⁴

⁴² For a biography of Gabriel Giolito de Ferrari, see: Bongi, *Annali*, vol. I.

⁴³ Grendler, *The Roman Inquisition*, pp. 13-4.

⁴⁴ According to Grendler, "a master mason or carpenter earned from 30 to 50 *soldi* per day, while a semi-skilled workman in the building trades earned from 20 to 37 and if they had the inclination to read and the cost of living permitted any surplus, these craftsmen and laborers could easily buy the less expensive titles. A merchant or professional could afford a library of moderate size, and a patrician could support hundreds or thousands of volumes", *Ibid.*, p. 14.

Giolito's keen interest in original works, translations or adaptations related with the debate about women and love literature was part of his general effort to attract the broader possible reading public, and especially a female reading public, which seemingly was of vital importance for his business. His proems, dedications and correspondence indicate the same effort. By presenting himself as a publisher in women's services, on the one hand, he satisfied women dedicatees and readers and, on the other hand, he adopted for himself an identity very popular in contemporary literary circles: the defender of the female sex.⁴⁵ The prices of such books, which were issued almost exclusively in *ottavo* or *duodecimo*, were quite low. Lodovico Domenichi's *Nobiltà delle Donne* in *ottavo* cost 1 lire and 10 *soldi*, Laura Terracina's *Rime* in *ottavo* 8 *soldi*, Boccaccio's *L'amorosa Fiammetta* in *ottavo* 12 *soldi* and *Laberinto d'Amore* in *duodecimo* only 6 *soldi*.⁴⁶

In the 1540s Giolito brought to light some of the most important writings on women, such as the Italian translation of Cornelius Agrippa's most popular treatise on female superiority.⁴⁷ The Italian translation had been based on a French translation of 1530 and the anonymous translator was probably Francesco Angello Coccio. It was dedicated by Giolito to "one of the principal noblewomen of Monferrato", Bona Maria Suadra da S.Giorgio. The translation was quite popular and had three editions, all in *ottavo*. The last edition of 1549 embodied the oration on women that Alessandro Piccolomini had delivered in the Academy of *Intronati* in Siena.⁴⁸ Lodovico Dolce's adaptation of Vives' treatise on female education was also published in the same period.⁴⁹ Again Giolito dedicated it to a woman, Violante da San Giorgio, Presidente di Casale. Once again Giolito's choice was successful. The work had four editions, all in *ottavo* form. Francesco Barbaro's classic treatise on marriage, *De re uxoria*, was translated by Alberto Lollio and published in 1548.⁵⁰ The same year, Ortensio Lando's collection of women's letters was published, in *ottavo* as well.⁵¹ Finally, Lodovico Domenichi's defense of women was published in 1549 and 1551, both times in *ottavo* form.⁵²

⁴⁵ See below chapter six, esp. pp. 212-21.

⁴⁶ *Indice copioso, e particolare, di tutti i libri stampati dalli Gioliti in Venetia fino all'anno 1592* (Venice, 1592).

⁴⁷ *Della Nobiltà et Eccellenza delle Donne* (1544, 1545 & 1549).

⁴⁸ Piccolomini, *L'Orazione*.

⁴⁹ Dolce, *Dialogo della Institutione* (1545, 1547, 1553 & 1560).

⁵⁰ Barbaro, *Prudentissimi et gravi documenti*.

⁵¹ Lando, *Lettere* (1548 & 1549).

⁵² Domenichi, *La nobiltà* (1549 & 1551).

During the same period, Giolito promoted the writings of women who associated themselves with Venetian literary circles. These works were published in *ottavo* or *duodecimo* form and were equally successful. In 1547, he published Tullia d'Aragona's *Rime* and her *Dialogo della Infinità di Amore*.⁵³ In 1548 came to light Laura Terracina's *Rime* with a dedication of Lodovico Domenichi to Vincenzo Belprato, count of Aversa, where Domenichi introduces Terracina's first work to the public. In the following editions a *Diceria d'Amore* written by Antonfrancesco Doni was embodied in the volume.⁵⁴ Similarly successful was Terracina's *Discorso*, which was first published in 1549 with five more editions in the next ten years.⁵⁵ Finally, Vittoria Colonna's *Rime* were published in 1552 and 1559 under the editorship of Lodovico Dolce.⁵⁶

In the 1540s and 1550s Giolito published another very popular genre of the period, love literature; philosophical treatises on love, love letters, poetry or romances. Mario Equicola's classic treatise on love was published enriched with Lodovico Dolce's critical notes.⁵⁷ Tullia d'Aragona's dialogue on love belonged to the same literary tradition. The works of prolific contemporary authors who had passed some time in Venice, such as Giuseppe Betussi's *Il Raverta* and Girolamo Parabosco's and Antonfrancesco Doni's love letters were brought out in the same period.⁵⁸ Lodovico Dolce's translation of Achilles Tatius' love dialogue was published in 1546.⁵⁹ Finally, in 1555 Giolito published Bernardo Tasso's *I tre libri de gli Amori* that had already published by other presses from 1531. All these titles were published either in *ottavo* or *duodecimo* form.⁶⁰

Giovanni Boccaccio's writings were also a priority for Giolito. Already from the end of the fifteenth century, the writings of Boccaccio, like those of Dante and Petrarch, had been established as the main models for the spelling, syntax and vocabulary of the vernacular, the standardization of which had been mainly based on

⁵³ T. D'Aragona, *Rime della signora Tullia di Aragona et di diversi a lei* (1547 & 1560); eadem, *Dialogo della Infinità di Amore* (1547, 1548 & 1552).

⁵⁴ L. Terracina, *Rime* (1548, 1550, 1553, 1554, 1556, 1560 & 1565).

⁵⁵ L. Terracina, *Discorso sopra tutti i primi canti d'Orlando Furioso* (1549, 1550, 1551, 1554, 1557 & 1559).

⁵⁶ V. Colonna, *Le Rime della sig. Vittoria Colonna marchesana illustrissima di Pescara corrette per M. Lodovico Dolce* (1552 & 1559).

⁵⁷ Equicola, *Libro di Natura d'Amore* (1554 & 1561). It had already published in Venice by Lorenzo Lorio da Portes (1525), Sabio (1526) and Bindoni (1531).

⁵⁸ Betussi, *Il Raverta* (1544, 1545, 1549 & 1562); Parabosco, *Lettere amoroze* (1545, 1546, 1547, 1549, 1551, 1553, 1556 & 1558); Doni, *Pistolotti amorosi* (1552 & 1558).

⁵⁹ Dolce, *Amorosi Ragionamenti* (1546 & 1547).

⁶⁰ Bongi, *Annali*.

Trecento Tuscan. In the first half of the sixteenth century, both in Venice and Florence, publishers competed for the domination of their annotated editions of Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio.⁶¹ However, Giolito's publications suggest that women readers were also keenly interested in Boccaccio's writings. In his dedication of Dolce's edition of Boccaccio's *Decameron* to Delfina di Francia (Caterina de' Medici), Giolito implies that this work would mainly interest women. Some years before he had dedicated Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* "corrected and adorned with many beautiful and useful things by his press" to Delfina's husband, since it concerned "the worth of arms and the prudence of the virtuous Prince".⁶² But, as he writes, he decided to dedicate the *Decameron* to Delfina, since it contained pleasant matters and, for the greatest part, related to women; furthermore the author had written it for women.⁶³

Giolito made continuous efforts to create a close relationship with the female reading public. In Lodovico Dolce's edition of Boccaccio's *Il Corbaccio*, Giolito's collaborator, Lodovico Domenichi undertook the task to justify Giolito's choice and present him as a devout defender of the female sex. In a letter to Bernardin Merato, included in the volume, Domenichi reports that a debate about Gabriel Giolito's decision to publish *Il Corbaccio* had taken place the afternoon before, on 13 July 1545, in Venice. Some of the attendees held the opinion that Giolito should not have published such a slanderous writing against women. Challenging them, Merato argued that "it is more complimentary for women to be vituperated by Boccaccio's pen rather than be praised by plebeian writers, who bury them alive whereas they make them believe that they can raise them to heaven".⁶⁴ Domenichi continues his support of Giolito, claiming that "we should remind those, who express disgust at reading *Il Corbaccio*, about some ancient and modern writers who have cited holy

⁶¹ For the circulation of Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio's works in Venice and Florence in the 1540s, see: Richardson, *Print Culture*.

⁶² "corretto, & di molte belle et utili cose ornato nelle mie stampe...del valore delle armi, & della prudenza di virtuoso Principe": L. Dolce, *Il Decamerone di M. Giovanni Boccaccio nuovamente alla sua vera lettione ridotto...aggiuntovi separatamente un' indice copiosissimo di vocaboli e delle materie...* (Venice, 1552).

⁶³ "Così l'altro, che materie piacevoli contiene, & per la maggior parte di Donne, & per cagion di Donne dal suo Autore fu composto, portasse parimente quello della più nobile, della più saggia, e della più virtuosa Signora, che Italia produsse giamai": Ibid.

⁶⁴ "che egli è più d'honore alle femine esser vituperate dalla penna del Boccaccio, che lodate dall'inchostro di molti scrittori plebei, che le sotterran vive, mentre si danno a credere di potere inalzarle al cielo": L. Dolce, *Il Corbaccio, altrimenti Laberinto d'amore di M. Giovanni Boccaccio, di nuovo corretto...con la tavola delle cose degne di memoria* (Venice, 1551), (first published in 1545), p. 2R.

men and philosophers to slander women".⁶⁵ Finally, and most interestingly, Domenichi proclaims Giolito's defence of and love for the female sex, claiming that Giolito would prefer to burn this volume rather than disappoint women:

...and actually, as Giolito said, even if there was only one copy of this work in the world, and it was in his hands, maybe it would not be of reproach if he burnt it to please this charming sex; but since there are many copies, and in a so bad condition, it is not improper that the adorable Mr Gabriel concerned himself with it, as he has done with other publications as well, with such diligence that renders him famous to prudent people.⁶⁶

Whether it is based on facts or not, Domenichi's letter manifests Giolito's efforts to be presented as a defender of the female sex, an identity that many *literati* wished to adopt for themselves, especially in the first half of the sixteenth century. In their rhetoric, *Il Corbaccio* was traditionally regarded as a misogynist text *par excellence*. Four years later, in *La nobiltà delle donne*, Domenichi himself regarded Boccaccio, because of *Il Corbaccio*, as one of the greatest of women's enemies, Domenico Bruni quotes *Il Corbaccio* as an example of misogynist literature, Lucrezia Marinella devotes a whole section to chastising Boccaccio's *Il Corbaccio* and Cristofano Bronzini explicitly ranks it among the misogynist literature.⁶⁷ Domenichi's letter attempted to anticipate such a criticism. Giolito knew that *Il Corbaccio* would attract readers due to its close relation to the popular debate about women. However, at the same time, he had to show that in this dispute he was on women's side.

The thematic contents, compiled for the same volume by Lodovico Dolce, further indicate the publisher's and editors' attempt to incorporate *Il Corbaccio* into the literary controversy about women's nature. The contents are structured around key contemporary issues of the debate, mostly epitomizing misogynist stereotypes,

⁶⁵ "benche a coloro, che sono schifi di leggere il Corbaccio si potrebbe addurre l'esempio d'alcuni antichi, & moderni: i quali per tassare le donne n'hanno perciò riportato nome di santi, & di filosofi": Ibid., p. 2V.

⁶⁶ "& pure, come disse il Giolito, quando una copia sola di tale opera si fosse al mondo, & nelle sue mani, forse non era degno di biasmo se l'avesse data alle fiamme, per piacere a questo gratioso sesso: ma poi che tante altre ce ne sono, & si male in arnese, e non è disconvenuto, che la amorevolezza di M. Gabriello si sia impiegata in questa, quale ha fatto nelle altre con quelle lodi che lo rendono famosissimo appresso gli huomini di giudicio": Ibid., p. 2V.

⁶⁷ Bruni, *Difese delle donne*, p. 16R; for the rest, see below pp. 229-30, 246.

such as: "What is woman", "Women are born to serve men", "Women adore luxury and feel they never have enough", "The female sex is above all suspicious and choleric", "All female thoughts aim at stealing, dominating and deceiving men", "All women are inconstant", "Men are nobler than women", "Women's nature is vicious, wretched and vile", "Women hate those who happen to meet them without looking at them or complimenting their beauty", "Detailed description of female beauty", "What is the female vanity", "No woman is wise and so she never operates in a wise way", "Women are fierce, horrible, spiteful and vile animals" etc.⁶⁸

Women readers' interest in Boccaccio and Giolito's interest in the female reading public are also indicated in Giolito's dedication of Boccaccio's *L'amorosa Fiammetta* to the "Gentle and courageous women of Casale of Monferrato". It is not indicated who was the editor. Here, Giolito manifests once again that his publication would be of great interest for the female reading public:

Among the excellent Giovanni Boccaccio's most beautiful vernacular proses, written for your consolation and utility, most noble ladies, you should consider dearest and most appreciate the present volume, under the title *L'Amorosa Fiammetta*. Because it includes the sighs, tears, and lingering sufferings of a young woman in love, who was abandoned by her lover... Who does not understand that this is a unique example and lesson for you? Not because you will learn to despise in the same way all men, because of the ingratitude of one of them, but because you will bear in mind, among others, how dangerous is rashly believing in anyone's promises.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ "Le femine quell che siano", "Le donne nate per esser serve de gli huomini", "Lussuria delle donne è focosa, & insatiabile", "Il sesso femineo oltre ad ogni comparatione è sospettoso, iracondo", "Tutti i pensieri delle femine tirano a rubbare a signoreggiare, ad ingannar gli huomini", "Le donne tutte sono mobili, et senza alcuna stabilita", "Quanto la nobilita dell'huomo eccede quella della femina, & d'ogni altro animale", "Natura vitiosa, spiacevole, et cattiva delle donne", "Grave dispetto fanno alle donne coloro che gli passano dappresso, senza guardarle, & comendare la lor bellezza", "Discretion particolare della bellezza delle donne", "Quanta sia la vanita delle femine", "Niuna femina è savia, & perciò non puo saviamente operare", "Le femine sono fiero, horribile, dispettoso, & vile animale", Ibid.

⁶⁹ "Tra le bellissime volgari prose dallo eccellente M. Giovanni Boccaccio a vostra consolatione e utilità scritte; niuna ve n'ha Nobilissime donne, che piu da voi tenersi cara & apprezzare si debba' della presente opera chiamata l'amorosa fiammetta. Percioche in lei contenendosi i sospiri, le lagrime, & le lunghe miserie di una innamorata giovane dal suo amante abbandonata...chi non comprende cotesto essere a solo essemplio, & ammaestramento di voi? Non, che perciò dalla ingratitudine d'un solo giovane impariate a comunemente tutti gli huomini disprezzate. Anzi perche conoscendo in altrui, quanto pericolosa cosa sia a creder leggiermente alle promesse d'ogn'uno;" G. Boccaccio, *L'amorosa Fiammetta di M. Giovanni Boccaccio di nuovo corretta e ristampata con le postille in margine, et con la tavola nel fine delle cose notabili* (Venice, 1562), pp. 3-4.

In a similarly paternalistic way, Giolito advertises his choice, stressing that whatever he publishes is for the benefit of the female reading public, and proclaiming his faithful services to women. He almost forces them into reading:

So, I, who was born to be in your service, after correcting and republishing this book with every diligence, judged that it is proper to dedicate it to you so that you read it more voluntarily...so read it...become more prudent and sensible...since the ornament of women does not consist in cruelty or wretchedness and no woman has ever been known as enemy of human activities. And so, I will always donate the most noble and worthy things to you.⁷⁰

A similar presentation of himself as a faithful defender of the female sex is found in Giolito's dedication of the *Dialogo della Institution* to Violante da S. Giorgio, Presidente di Casale. Initially, he stresses the vital importance of education both for men and women, which is indeed much more important for women who are "of a weaker nature". However, he continues correcting the misogynist tone of his words by arguing that women, with the appropriate education, reach such excellence that they almost approach "the perfection of the angels".⁷¹ Finally, and once again, he underlines his contribution to the circulation of texts pleasant and useful to women:

Whereas many ancient authors have in several books described the principles of men's life, no one, as far as I know, has laid down particular rules for women; so, I wished to bring to light the present dialogue of Mr Lodovico Dolce in order to be useful to them [women]; following the custom of bees, he has picked up several philosophers' instructions in what consists a good and virtuous life that a woman should lead in each state... So, with the honest and devout lessons of this small

⁷⁰ "La onde io; che a'servigi di ciascuna di voi nacqui; havendo questo libro con ogni diligenza fatto correggere & ristampare, ho giudicatto convenevole ufficio di mandarlo fuori sotto il nome vostro: accioche piu volentieri leggendolo...legetelo adunque...divenite sempre piu prudenti & piu accorte... Percioche l'ornamento delle donne non è risposto nella crudeltà, o nella spiacevolezza: & niuna per essere nemica de gli affetti humani fu commendata giamai. In tanto io nell'avenire cose sempre piu nobili & piu degne vi porgerò": Ibid., p. 4.

⁷¹ "Ilche se avviene all'huomo; alla donna è da conchiudere, che avvenga parimente, & in parte molto più, per essere il sesso femminile non così forte, come è quello de gli huomini. Ma se allo 'ncontro si rivolgono alle virtù & a i costumi lodevoli; ambedue pervengono à tanta perfettione, che s'avvicinano à quella de gli Angeli": Dolce, *Dialogo della Institution*, pp. 2R-V.

volume, and following the example of your Majesty..., virgins will learn from your majesty purity, married women faith and widows tolerance and chastity.⁷²

The formation of Giolito's "feminist identity" was further constructed in Lodovico Domenichi's proem in *La Nobilità delle Donne*:

Nowadays, [Gabriel Giolito] is known as a man affectionate and devoted to women, thanks to all his acts of kindness, and especially thanks to his beautiful publications, which bring to light and in people's hands the praise of the female sex; from those [women] Giolito has received not only every respect but also reward.⁷³

Domenichi implies here that some women, most probably some of the dedicatees, had funded Giolito's publications. Although there is no concrete information about such transactions, Giolito certainly anticipated the favour of these dedicatees. In a letter to Giolito, dated the day of San Martino of 1544, Buona Maria Soarda da S. Giorgio thanked him for his dedication of *Della nobilità et eccellenza delle donne* to her, and acknowledged him as defender of the female sex:

By this treatise on the excellence, in which women are superior to men, it seems that I have been figured too much, and I alone have undertaken the task that should have been for all women, who, thanks to this ingenious author, have been put before men; so, it seems honest to me that all women together should have concerned themselves with expressing their gratitude to him, who wrote it for them... Sincerely, I have to thank you my dear Mr Gabriel...because you honoured and immortalised me...so that words fail me to reciprocate...and I am sure that God Almighty blesses you for your devotion to the female sex and, for this reason, he

⁷² "Onde havendo molti antichi Scrittori in diversi libri descritti à gli huomini i precetti della vita; nessuno alla Donna havendo (che io sappia) lasciare particolari regole: ho voluto io, per giovar loro, dare in luce il presente Dialogo di Meser Lodovico Dolce: nel quale egli, seguitando in ciò il costume delle Api, ha raccolto da molti Philosophi gli ammaestramenti, che appartengono alla buona & virtuosa vita, che dè tenere una Donna in qualunque stato... Havrauno adunque le donne nel picciolo volumetto honesti & santi ammaestramenti: & in V.S. l'esempio... E le Vergini impareranno da V.S. la purità, le Maritate la fede, & le Vedove la tolleranza & la castità": Ibid., pp. 2V-3V.

⁷³ "hoggimai conosciuto affettionalissimo, & devoto delle Donne, per tutte le sue costumate attioni, specialmente per procurare ogni che dalle sue bellissime stampe escano in luce & nelle mani del mondo le lodi del sesso Donnesco: diche a lui ne vien honore tuttavia, & guiderdone anchora da quelle": Domenichi, *La nobilità*.

has offered you a so beautiful and honest wife, who makes you a so happy husband.⁷⁴

It was Lucretia Bini whom Gabriel Giolito married in the autumn of 1544.⁷⁵

The shaping of Giolito's identity as defender of the female sex was part of the general rhetoric among the contemporary *literati* to construct a positive social identity for themselves. However, at the same time, the formation of this social profile fulfilled specific needs. In this way Giolito enjoyed the favour of powerful women and won women readers' preference.

In the 1560s, the gradual change of the intellectual climate and the imposition of the Index of prohibited books had a profound influence on Giolito's printing activities. Giolito's press continued its operation, until 1578, under Gabriel Giolito, and afterwards, until 1606, under his descendants, but the character of the titles changed dramatically. As Paul Grendler has aptly noticed, "a keen observer and shrewd businessman, Gabriel completely changed the subject emphasis of his list, though he continued to publish almost exclusively in the vernacular. Instead of Arctino, he offered the devotional works of Luis de Granada in Italian translation, which reprinted again and again".⁷⁶ Apart from some re-publications, titles connected with the debate about women, gender relations or love literature were abandoned and vernacular devotional works took their place; hagiographies, especially of female saints, works in praise of the Virgin Mary and writings on the Christian education. Most of these works were written by clerics and dedicated by the writer, translator or some member of the Giolito family to a nun or a powerful woman.⁷⁷ In a sense Giolito and his descendants continued to show interest in the female reading public but the context was now different. These books had a clear instructional character and were often meant for convents, schools of the Christian

⁷⁴ "Perche per trattare dell'eccellenza, i che la donna è piu nobile dell'huomo, fui di parere, ch'io troppo havrei presento di me; quando io sola havessi preso l'assunto; che dee essere di tutte le donne, le quali, poi che mercè del bel ingegno, che l'ha composta, si veggono antiposte a gli huomini; mi pare bene honesto, che tutte insieme devriano tanto affaticarsi in renderne gratie a chi ha scritto per loro... Veramente Signor Gabriel mio io ho detto, che m'affatico a ringratiarvi... Perche veggendomi da voi honorata, & perpetuata...che non possa sodisfarvi con parole convenevoli...quanto son certa, che pei vostro esser devoto del sesso domnesco, non s'è la bontà d'Iddio dimenticata di darvi qualche merito. Perche havendovi conosciuto per tale vi ha fatto marito contentissimo di si bella. & honestissima donna": *Della Nuova Scelta di Lettere*, Libro Secondo, pp. 336-7.

⁷⁵ Bongi, *Amali*, vol. I, p. LX.

⁷⁶ Grendler, *The Roman Inquisition*, p. 133.

⁷⁷ See above pp. 49-50.

doctrine or family tutorial use. In one of his latest publications, the *Avvertimenti Monacali* (1576), a collection of spiritual writings, Gabriel Giolito continues his old practice of advertising his publications, but his identity "has been transformed". Instead of a devout defender of the female sex and a keen publisher of Boccaccio's works, the image of a spiritual man has emerged. Addressing to the "Virgins and Brides of Christ" [*Vergini et sponse di Christo*], he writes:

I, who felt for years an incredibly strong desire to be useful to people in every possible way with spiritual works, which nowadays are very popular (Thank God), ...offer you in one volume all these that you should read to help you reach peace and the perfection of your virginal status...⁷⁸

The period of dynamic interaction between women readers, female patrons, the network of the *poligrafi*, who wrote, translated and proofread titles connected with the emerging debate about women or Boccaccio's works, and the figure of Gabriel Giolito as an aspiring exponent of these ideas, had passed. The changing intellectual climate had certainly affected the taste of the female reading public as well. The admonitions of Luis Vives and authors such as Valier and Antoniano, which became more frequent over the course of the sixteenth century, finally met the target. The shifting attitude of the courtesan Tullia d'Aragona reflects the new climate. In her last work, *Il Meschino*, either sincerely or most probably in a tone of irony, she shows signs of repentance for the past sins and chastises some of the most characteristic "lascivious" writings which had dominated in the first half of the sixteenth century, such as Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Aretino's *Ragionamenti* and Piccolomini's *Dialogo della bella creanza*:

...so many lascivious, dishonest and truly wicked things are found in every part of this book [the *Decameron*], impermissible to the honour of married women, widows, nuns, spinsters, their godmothers and godfathers, their friends, clerics, friars and finally the prelates of Christ and God..., that it is wonder that not only the princes and the superiors but also the thieves and traitors, who pretended to be

⁷⁸ "Io, che da molti anni in qua mi sento incredibilmente acceso di desiderio di giovar a ogni forte di persone col mezzo delle mie stampe nelle cose spirituali allequali hoggi (mercè di Dio) gran parte del mondo si vede impiegata...vi desse in un volume à legger tutto quello, che può aiutarvi ad arrivar al colmo, e alla perfezione del vostro stato virginale...": *Avvertimenti monacali*.

Christians, could ever hear this name [*Decameron*] without making the sign of the cross and shutting their ears to the most wicked thing that the human ears could hear. But our nature is so corrupt that not only we do not avoid it as something abominable, but also we desire it and hold it in high esteem, such as the father of Language, the Tuscan Cicero, and DOLCE, RUSCELLI and my BEMBO and many other rare geniuses did...so, it is not strange that others, moved by its glory, wrote *Nanne* and *Pippe* [the main characters of the *Ragionamenti*] and *Puttane erranti* and finally this book that has certainly offended a lot the majesty of the most noble city of Siena [Piccolomini's dialogue]... So, I, who in my younger days paid more attention to wordly things, now, with sounder judgement, have regretted and see how harmful to me and many other women were the discussions about, and, even more, the reading of lascivious and nasty things, which endangered our youthful souls.⁷⁹

Focusing on Gabriel Giolito's printing activities and advertising policy, this chapter suggests that women readers, although few in number, played a significant role in the development of the debate about them, and that at least one aspect of the debate was related to publishers' and writers' commercial worries. It also proposes that proems and dedications may be a pointer towards women's reading preferences, especially when other kinds of studies, for instance through inventories, are lacking. Furthermore, although, discussing what women should, and should not, read, conduct literature cannot reveal what women actually read, the frequent admonitions against specific books or literary genres might raise the suspicion that women were actually

⁷⁹ "tante cose lascivissime, dishonestissime, & veramente scelerate, quante se ne veggono dall'un corpo all'altro di tutto quel libro, non perdonando ad onor di donne maritate, non di vedove, non di monache, non di vergini secolari, non di cammari, non di compari, non d'amici fra loro, non di preti, non di frati, & finalmente non di Prelati, nè di Cristo, & di Dio stesso...che per certo è cosa da stupire, come non solamente i principi, & superiori, ma nè anco i ladri, & i traditori, che si facciano pur chiamar Cristiani, habbiano mai comportato d'udir quel nome, senza segnarsi della sante croce, & senza serrarsi l'orecchie, come alla più orrenda, & scelerata cosa, che possano udire l'orecchie umane. Ma la natura nostra è tanto corrotta, che non solamente non si è fuggito come cosa abominevole, ma si è desiderato da ciascheduno, et è salito in tanta stima, che l'han chiamato il padre della Lingua, il Cicerone Toscano, & per fino a moversi il DOLCE, il RUSCELLI, il mio BEMBO, & tant'altri rarissimi ingegni... Onde non è poi stato maraviglia se ambiziosi di questa sua gloria, si sien posti de gli altri à far le Nanne, & le Pippe, le Puttane erranti, & per fino à quel libro, che ha per certo offesa troppo altamente la maestà della gentilissima Città di Siena... Io adunque, la quale ho ne'primi anni miei havuta più notitia del mondo, che ora con miglior senno non vorrei haver'havuta, & la quale in me stessa, & in altre molte ha veduto di quanto gran danno sia ne i giovenili animi il ragionamento, ma molto più la lettione delle cose lascive, & brutte;" D'Aragona, *Il Meschino*, pp. 1-2.

interested in such readings, as Boccaccio's case indicates in the first half of the sixteenth century.

In the second half of the century, due to the changes contemporary literature underwent after the establishment of the Index of prohibited books, and the stricter cultural norms and social practices concerning female behaviour, women's readings would seem to have shifted mostly to religious conduct literature. Reading Boccaccio's works and literature defending women required a high literacy level whereas religious conduct literature was usually written in a simpler way and was also probably read aloud in convents, female institutions, Schools of Christian Doctrine and within the family. Generally speaking, one could argue that, in the later sixteenth century, not only women's readings changed but also the practice of reading often shifted from an individual activity aiming at pleasure to a joint effort for the moral formation of the character, which also included women of the lower classes. On the other hand, the other contemporary popular genre, literature on marriage and domestic economy, also required a high literacy level and only women of the upper classes might have been interested in it.

CHAPTER FOUR

WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEBATE

PARTICIPATION IN THE LITERARY PRODUCTION

The sixteenth century witnessed not only an increase in women readers but also in women writers. Already in the 1960s, Carlo Dionisotti underlined the increased participation of women in the literary developments of the sixteenth century, and their contribution to the emergence and establishment of the vernacular literature. The most fertile period of women's literary production was between 1540 and 1560. The first collection of poems written by a woman to be published was Vittoria Colonna's *Rime*, published in 1538, in Parma, and republished later in other Italian cities.¹ Colonna's example was followed by other women writers both in verse and prose, with most prominent among them Veronica Gambara, Gaspara Stampa, Tullia d'Aragona, Laura Terracina, Laura Battiferri, Moderata Fonte, Lucrezia Marinella and Veronica Franco.

In fact, already from the fifteenth century, some women appeared in the literary scene, participating in the Italian humanistic movement, writing in Latin or even Greek, which they had learned at home with the help of their male relatives or private tutors. Women humanists came in their majority either from the Court cities of Northern Italy or from the Veneto and they belonged to prominent families of the urban aristocratic and professional elite. The best known among them were Battista Malatesta, the Florentine Alessandra Scala, daughter of a humanist chancellor of Florence, the Brescian Laura Cereta, daughter of a physician, the Venetian Cassandra Fedele, daughter of a Venetian state secretary, and the Veronese noblewoman Isotta Nogarola.²

¹ C. Dionisotti, *Geografia e storia della letteratura italiana* (Turin, 1999), (first published in 1967), pp. 233-43.

² M. L. King, "Book-Lined Cells: Women and Humanism in the Early Italian Renaissance", in *Beyond their sex. Learned Women of the European Past*, ed. P. Labalme (New York & London, 1980); P. O. Kristeller, "Learned Women of Early Modern Italy: Humanists and University Scholars", in *Beyond their sex*, ed. Labalme; King, *Women of the Renaissance*, pp. 172-218; L. Panizza, "The Fifteenth Century Humanism", in *A History of Women's Writing in Italy*, ed. L. Panizza, S. Wood (Cambridge,

Of course these women were exceptional cases in the sense that their families took care of giving them an advanced education. They wrote letters, orations or treatises and they had correspondence with contemporary male humanists, who often expressed their great admiration for them. Having studied Latin, Greek, rhetoric, history, philosophy and sacred studies, Cassandra Fedele had public appearances as a reciter of orations at the university of Padua, and also before the Venetian Doge Agostino Barbarigo, whose favour she and her family enjoyed. The Florentine poet and humanist Angelo Poliziano's great appreciation for Fedele has been depicted in his correspondence with her. Although his speech remained within the gendered cultural notions of the period, he did not hesitate to compare Fedele with great intellectual figures, such as Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. Towards the end of the fifteenth century he wrote to Fedele:

But in our own time when few men have achieved much in literature, only you, a girl, exist, who would rather comb a book than wool, paint with a quill rather than rouge, stitch with a pen rather than needle, and who would rather cover papyrus with ink than her skin with white powder... I used to admire Giovanni Pico Mirandola in the old days, nor did I think there was anyone more handsome or more superior in every realm of scholarship than he. But now I have begun to respect you, Cassandra, next after him, and perhaps even already right beside him.³

Both the erudite figure of Cassandra Fedele and Angelo Poliziano's great admiration for her became part of the sixteenth-century pro-woman discourse. In *La nobiltà delle donne*, Lodovico Domenichi ranked Fedele among the exemplary women of the past and referred to Poliziano's great admiration for her as a proof of her value.⁴ Similarly, Ortensio Lando, refers to Cassandra Fedele, along with Battista Malatesta and Isotta Nogarola, to show women's achievements in letters. He also repeats Poliziano's encomiastic comments: "Politianus honoured her greatly and he said that she quit the wool for the book and instead of the spindle she took the quill,

2000); D. Robin, "Humanism and Feminism in Laura Cereta's public letters", in *Women in Italian Renaissance*, ed. Panizza; L. Jardin, "Isotta Nogarola: Women Humanists – Education for what?", *History of Education*, 12: 4 (1983).

³ C. Fedele, *Letters and Orations*, ed. and trans. D. Robin (Chicago & London, 2000), pp. 90-91.

⁴ Domenichi, *La nobiltà*, p. 88R.

instead of the needle the pen, and she wrote greatly elegant letters...".⁵ In 1589, in his defence dedicated to Flavia Peretti Orsina, Hercole Marcscotti also ranked Fedele, along with Isotta Nogarola, Battista Malatesta and Laura Cereta, among the most learned women of the past and used almost the same words to depict Poliziano's admiration.⁶ Cassandra Fedele's legend continued in the seventeenth century. In 1620 Francesco Agostino della Chiesa mentioned Fedele's Latin and vernacular orations before the Doge Agostino Barbarigo and many ambassadors, senators, orators, philosophers and theologians, "who had been invited for this reason [for hearing her]" in a banquet that took place during Christmas. He also describes her orations at the university of Padua where "she dazzled everybody with her philosophical reasoning". Finally, he does not omit to refer once again to Poliziano, who "adorned her with countless compliments and exalted her by calling her honour and light of Italy, lady of celestial merit and infinite value".⁷

However, for diverging from the roles which the dominant values of society prescribed for them, fifteenth century lettered women faced also the strictures of their contemporaries. In 1437, Isotta Nogarola wrote to Guarino Veronese, who had hurt her feelings by not replying to her letter:

There are already so many women in the world! Why then was I born a woman, to be scorned by men in words and deeds? ...For they jeer at me throughout the city, the women mock me. I cannot find a quiet stable to hide in, and the donkeys [the women] tear me with their teeth, the oxen [the men] stab me with their horns.⁸

⁵ "Il Politiano loda molto costei, et dice, che lasciata da canto la lana, si haveva tolto il libro, invece del fuso, havesse eletto il calamo, in luogo del ago, tolse lo stile, & haver scritto elegantissime pistole...": Lando, *Sette libri de cataloghi*, p. 52.

⁶ "Dottissima in Venetia fu ancora Cassandra Fedele, contanto dal dotto e giudizioso Politiano esaltata: quella dico, che per la lana adoperò il libro, per lo fuso la penna, e per l'ago lo stile": H. Marescotti, *Dell'eccellenza della donna* (Fermo, 1589), p. 168.

⁷ "...al tempo di Agostino Barbarigo Doge di Venetia, facendo egli conforme all'usanza nel secondo giorno di Natale il convitto à tutti gl'Ambasciatori, che si trovarono in Vinegia, & à tutti i Senatori di quella Republica, per far apparer lo splendor di questa donna che all'ora era ancor giovinetta... poiche venuta al superbissimo convito, subito levate le tavole, in presenza di molti Oratori, Filosofi, e Teologi, invitati à quest'effetto, la saggia, e dotta fanciulla, tinta di casto rossore, con molta gratia, e facondia fece, e recitò un'oratione latina vaga, dotta e piena di tutte quelle parti, che se le convengono; ne bastando questo, propose delle questioni, e sostenne conclusioni in Filosofia, e Teologia con tutti quei huomini dotti, e celebrati, che à tal effetto erano stati invitati... Finita la disputa di nuovo fece un'oratione volgare à tutti quei Signori, non men bella nel grado suo, che fosse stata la Latina. Spesse volte lesse pubblicamente nel studio di Padova, dove con grandissima meraviglia d'ogn'uno sostenne conclusioni filosofiche... Angelo Politiano, il quale con infinite lodi ne fa memoria, e l'essalta, chiamandola honor e lume d'Italia, donzella di celeste merito, e d'infinito valore": Della Chiesa, *Theatra delle donne letterati*, pp. 111-112.

⁸ King, *Women of the Renaissance*, p. 196.

Although fifteenth-century women humanists functioned as examples of female erudition in the pro-woman literature of the next century, they themselves did not defend openly the female sex. The most remarkable endeavour was made by Isotta Nogarola in her dialogue on Adam and Eve. By defending Eve's innocence of the original sin, she reshaped the traditional identification of woman with sin. However, her defence was based on the weakness of female nature and imperfection, which rendered woman not responsible for universal sin.⁹ The debate about original sin became the norm in the sixteenth-century debate about women. In *Declamatio de nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus* Cornelius Agrippa attributed the original sin to Adam, since "it was to the man that the fruit of the tree had been prohibited, and not to the woman who had not yet been created".¹⁰ Several versions of the issue came up again and again in the sixteenth-century literature on women.

Women also participated in the first formations of the Italian vernacular literature, which took place in the intellectual environments of the late *Quattrocento* and early *Cinquecento* Courts. Although more as patronesses and ideal public rather than as writers, those women played a significant role in the shaping of the new Italian literature. For instance, Isabella d'Este encouraged and sponsored the production of vernacular literature, and important representatives of the Italian vernacular literature and theory, such as Vincenzo Calmeta, Antonio Tebaldeo, Mario Equicola, and Pietro Bembo, frequented her Court in Mantua. Isabella took part in their poetic exercises, financed them, and had been their pupil.¹¹ In the sixteenth century women played an important role in the Court culture as literary and art patronesses, especially after their husbands' death, which often was followed by their refusal to get married again. Most prominent among them were Elisabetta Gonzaga, at the court of Urbino, Giulia Gonzaga, who governed after her husband's death and created a cultural centre in Mantua, Veronica Gambara, ruler of Correggio after her husband's death, and Vittoria Colonna, Marchionness of Pescara, a widow as well. Many works, and especially those treating gender issues or female excellence, were

⁹ Ibid., p. 198.

¹⁰ Agrippa, *Declamation on the Nobility*, p. 62.

¹¹ N. Caanata Salamone, "Women and the making of the Italian Literary Canon", in *Women in Italian Renaissance*, ed. Panizza.

dedicated to such powerful women. Literary dialogues often depicted the intellectual activities taking place at the Courts of those women.¹²

However, it was the sixteenth century that marked a more ambitious participation of women, of middle origins as well, in the intellectual life, although they remained a tiny minority in comparison with the male participants of course. The replacement of Latin by the vernacular and the expanding publishing industry facilitated women's participation in the literary production. In Venice, both publishers and *poligrafi* favoured this development. The apex of women's literary production, during 1540 and 1560, coincided with the emergence of the *poligrafi* and the establishment of new printing presses. *Poligrafi* were connected with women writers and they often promoted and prologued their works. Both Tullia d'Aragona's and Laura Terracina's works were published by Gabriel Giolito de Ferrari. Terracina's publications included an introduction by Lodovico Domenichi and a laudatory poem by Antonfrancesco Doni.

Generally speaking, women's intellectual activities developed in two main directions; on the one hand, within the Court environments, and, on the other hand, in the context of printing expansion, vernacular literature and the broader increase in the literary production. Most women writers came from Central and Northern Italy, with the exception of Laura Terracina, who belonged to a noble family of Naples, and Isabella Morra born into an illustrious family in the fief of Favale, between the regions of Calabria and Basilicata. Furthermore, whereas in the first half of the sixteenth century women coming from the Marquisates and Duchies of Central and Northern Italy dominated the literary scene, the course of the sixteenth century witnessed an increase in women writers from the Republic of Venice, such as Veronica Franco, Moderata Fonte, Lucrezia Marinella, Isabella Andreini, Maddalena Campiglia, Valeria Miani, Arcangela Tarabotti and Sara Copio Sullam. Most of these women belonged to the middle or upper middle class. Another social category of women who excelled in letters and participated forcefully in the intellectual life were courtesans, such as Tullia d'Aragona, Veronica Franco and Lucrezia Cognati. Their important literary and political acquaintances and their particular social/sexual place

¹² See below pp. 176-85.

in society allowed them more latitude to enjoy intellectual activities and even set up their own literary salons.¹³

Until around 1580 women writers mainly wrote poetry, following Vittoria Colonna's and Veronica Gambara's Petrarchist lyric, whereas after 1580 they begun dealing with fiction writing as well. An exception was Tullia d'Aragona, who, apart from her *Rime*, wrote a philosophical dialogue on love in 1547 and the chivalric romance *Il Meschino*, which was published posthumously in 1560.¹⁴ Poetry was traditionally regarded as more appropriate to women. To prove that female intellect is equal or even superior to that of men, the Sicilian "Dottor dell'Arti" in Bologna, Girolamo Camerata, refers to the great erudition of a woman, whose name is not given, by stressing that she wrote not only poetry but "she also dared to engage in more difficult fields", such as Aristotelian Philosophy, Logic and Natural Philosophy.¹⁵

However, although early modern Italian women focused on poetry, they engaged in every literary genre. Already from the fifteenth century, women, most often nuns, such as Caterina Vegri, Eustochia Calafati and Caterina Fieschi Adorno, wrote religious and devotional works. In the sixteenth century, the most prominent figure in this genre was the Carmelite Maria Maddalena de' Pazzi, who wrote towards the end of the century. Nevertheless, most of those writings did not appear in print during the writers' lifetimes but were edited by priests after their deaths and it was often their confessor who wrote down their mystical experiences. The main aim of those writings was their circulation in the narrow circle of the convent.¹⁶ Nuns also performed religious plays written by women, such as those of the fifteenth-

¹³ *Women Poets of the Italian Renaissance. Courtly Ladies and Courtesans*, ed. and trans. L. A. Stortoni, M. P. Lillie (New York, 1997); *A History of Women's Writing*, ed. Panizza, Wood.

¹⁴ V. Cox, "Fiction 1560-1650", in *A History of Women's Writing*, ed. Panizza, Wood.

¹⁵ "à gli studii della Poesia, ne i quali mostra frutti eletti, et maravigliosi, hà hauto ardire porsi à piu difficili studii, che siano, cioè alla Filosofia d'Aristotele, della qual dopo la Logica hà piu d'una volta letto, & notato tutto il volume della Filosofia naturale, & della divina & della attiva, & questo hà fatto in così poco tempo, che dimostra bene, quanto sono le Donne piu facili all'imparare, & quanto hanno intelletto piu acuto & disposto alle discipline, che non hanno gli Huomini": G. Camerata, *Trattato dell' honor vero e del vero dishonore con tre questioni qual meriti piu honore ò la Donna, ò l' Huomo. Ò il Soldato, ò il Letterato. Ò l' Artista ò il Legista* (Bologna, 1567), p. 17V.

¹⁶ G. Zarri, "Religious and devotional writing, 1400-1600", in *A History of Women's Writing*, ed. Panizza, Wood; E. B. Weaver, *Convent Theatre in Early Modern Italy. Spiritual Fun and Learning for Women* (Cambridge, 2002).

century Florentine Antonia Pulci, who reshaped in her plays the traditional misogynist stereotypes featuring in contemporary hagiography.¹⁷

Women such as Cecilia Romana, Veronica Franco, Chiara Matraini and Isabella Andreini engaged in letter writing. Their main model was Vittoria Colonna's spiritual letters.¹⁸ Pastoral drama also attracted women writers' attention towards the end of the sixteenth century, with the best known being Barbara Torelli, Isabella Andreini, Maddalena Campiglia, Valeria Miani, Isabetta Coreglia, Eleonora Bernardi Bellati and Laura Guidiccioni Lucchesini.¹⁹ Finally, women entered literary genres traditionally regarded as masculine, such as chivalric romance and epic. The first woman writer to treat these genres was Tullia d'Aragona with *Il Meschino*. Her example was followed by Moderata Fonte, Lucrezia Marinella, Barbara degli Albizzi Tagliamocchi and Margherita Sarrocchi.²⁰

It was only towards the close of the sixteenth and the middle of the seventeenth centuries that women dealt in detail with the repressive mechanisms of gender order (Lucrezia Marinella, and especially Moderata Fonte and Arcangela Tarabotti). However, during the course of the sixteenth century fragments of pro-feminist thought featured in women's works. In *Discorso sopra tutti i primi canti di Orlando Furioso*, Laura Terracina included two polemical poems with the titles "Chi nemico è di donna, in altro a cura" and "A gl'huomini nimici delle donne". Participating in the broader literary debate about women's defenders and enemies, Terracina attacks men who develop a misogynist rhetoric. The first poem begins demonstrating Terracina's chagrin and feeling of isolation:

I would like to speak but I am filled with anger / at being alone in my defence of
our sex. / But now my desire increases and gallops / to take revenge and not yield /
towards those whose mind is so foolish / to often vilify us, women; / But I hope that

¹⁷ J. W. Cook, "Antonia Pulci and her Plays", in A. Pulci, *Florentine Drama for Convent and Festival*, ed. and trans. J. W. Cook, B. C. Cook (Chicago & London, 1996).

¹⁸ M. L. Doglio, "Letter Writing, 1350-1650", *A History of Women's Writing*, ed. Panizza, Wood.

¹⁹ Isabella Andreini's *Mirtilla* (1588), Maddalena Campiglia's *Flori* (1588), Valeria Miani's *Amorosa Speranza* (1604), Isabetta Coreglia's *Dori* (1634) and *Erindo* (1650). Laura Guidiccioni Lucchesini's three lost pastoral dramas were performed at the Florentine court in the 1590s, set to music by Emilio de' Cavalieri. Most of those women, with the exception of Isabella Andreini, came from the major or minor nobility of their cities: Cox, "Fiction, 1560-1650".

²⁰ Moderata Fonte's *Tredici canti del Floridoro* (1581), Barbara degli Albizzi Tagliamocchi's *Ascanio errante* (1640), Margherita Sarrocchi's *Scanderbeide* (1640) and Lucretia Marinella's *L'Enrico* (1635): *Ibid.*

heaven-sent thunderbolt will come / and I believe that this will be a revenge against you.²¹

Terracina's interest in women's position is reflected in other poems in the same volume. A typical motif of hers is eulogizing powerful contemporary women, by praising at the same time the whole female sex. By comparing those women with past illustrious women, she creates an imaginary continuity of women's achievements through history. At the same time, the presentation of those powerful women as paragons of female excellence aims at proving the potential abilities of women's intellect. Indicative are her poems honouring Veronica Gambara, Isabella Colonna, Princess of Solmona, Isabella Villa Marina, Princess of Salerno, Clarice Drusina, Princess of Ostiliano and Vittoria and Hieronima Colonna of Aragona.

Similarly, in her philosophical dialogue on love Tullia d'Aragona discussed gender issues, and the female speaker, Tullia herself, defended the female sex and questioned the dominant stereotypes of the period.²² Isabella Andreini, in her letter to an anonymous father, who was upset for having sired a girl, used an ambiguous language to defend women. By praising women for their passiveness, she denounced contemporary practices and pointed out the problems women suffered:

The patient women are happy to live under that subjection into which they are born and to lead a regimented and modest life; they contentedly regard the limited confines of their houses as a sweet prison, enjoying the continuous servitude; it does not burden them to be subjected to the strict command of others; it does not displease them to live in constant fear; ... How many women are there who, to obey the will of their parents, lock themselves up forever within solitary walls without protest? And how many women are there who, having to submit their neck to the marital yoke in order not to displease others, without any contradictions, marry a man who deserved to die before being born?²³

²¹ "Vorrei parlar ma l'ira il dir m'intoppa / poi che io sola difendo il nostro sesso. / Già il desiderio mio brama, e galoppa / Di vendicarsi, e pur non m'è concesso / Contra costor c'han sì la mente zoppa / Appo noi Donne; in darne oltraggi spesso: / Ma spero che dal ciel verrà saetta, / Et credo che di voi sarà vendetta": Terracina, *Discorso*, p. 11R.

²² See below pp. 207-9.

²³ *Women Poets*, ed. and trans. Stortoni, Lillie, p. 229.

From a different point of view, in her letters, Veronica Franco pointed out the dangers to which poverty exposed Venetian women, stigmatized the sexual abuse of poor girls, and gave a gloomy account of prostitutes' lives. Instead of the common moralistic approaches to the issue, Franco underlined the actual reality of the prostitution; the prostitutes' exposure to cruelty, robbery or disease, the lack of free will and the servile subjection of their body to many people.²⁴ Virginia Cox argues that women writers also reshaped the traditional gender identities and order in pastoral drama and chivalric romance and epic. In the pastoral drama *Flori* (1588), underlining female desire and depicting a friendship and erotic attachment between women, Maddalena Campiglia diverged from male-authored literature and inverted the traditional gender relations found in Neoplatonic literature. Similarly, Modcrata Fonte's chivalric romance *Tredici canti del Floridoro* (1581) diverged from the misogynist tendencies found in other contemporary romances; the female figure of Risamante, instructed at an early age in the military arts, stands as emblem of women's potential in arms and letters. Finally, in *L'Enrico, overo Bisanzio acquistato* (1635), Lucrezia Marinella, although influenced by Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*, reworked gender conventions; instead of a sexually charged duel between the heroine and her male admirer from the opposing camp, Marinella depicted an encounter between two heroines, the Byzantine Meandra and her Venetian counterpart Claudia.²⁵

POWERFUL WOMEN AS PARAGONS OF FEMALE EXCELLENCE AND PATRONS OF PRO-WOMAN WORKS

Apart from women readers and writers, women, who operated as paragons of female excellence, and the patronesses, who promoted works defending the female sex, played a central role in the formation of the early modern Italian debate about women. Moreover, women patrons often helped women writers to abandon the "needle, thread and cloth" and engage in letters, contributing to the reshaping of gender roles and perceptions. In exchange, their protégées constructed the laudatory image of women's inspirational leader for them.

²⁴ Rosenthal, *The Honest Courtesan*, pp. 126-136.

²⁵ Cox, "Fiction, 1560-1650".

Veronica Gambara and Vittoria Colonna were considered the two paragons of female virtue. Their image was structured around two main elements: erudition and chastity. Both of noble origin, having been widows at an early age, and having important literary and political acquaintances, they had the opportunity to devote themselves to studies and participate in contemporary religious debates and activities. Although they did not write works defending the female sex, their personalities were highly praised by both male and female *litterati* and their lives became an influential model for women intellectuals.

Veronica Gambara was born in 1485, in Pratoalboino near Brescia, one of the feudal holdings of the Gambara family. The sister of her paternal grandmother was Isotta Nogarola and her maternal aunt was Emilia Pia, the main female speaker in Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*. Following the example of her female ancestors, Gambara enjoyed an excellent education including Latin, some Greek and studies in philosophy. In 1518, ten years after her marriage to Giberto X, Lord of Correggio, she was widowed. From then on, she undertook the management of the state. Both her social and marital status and her great erudition helped her to excel in letters, develop political and diplomatic activity and participate in the religious debates of the period. She gathered around her a network of important political and literary figures and Correggio under her rule became a well-known and refined Court. Ariosto and Titian were among her guests and even Emperor Charles V, to whom she was bound by family loyalty and military alliance, and who she often refers to in her poetical compositions, stopped at her Court twice. Among her circle of acquaintances were important literary figures, such as Pietro Aretino, Pietro Bembo, Bernardo Cappello, Francesco Maria Molza, Giangiorgio Trissino, Lodovico Dolce, Lodovico Rosso and Bernardo Tasso. It was Pietro Bembo to whom she submitted her work for literary advice. Gambara wrote poetry on the Petrarchan model, along with literary and political letters. Her poetical compositions included devotional poems, love sonnets addressing her husband and poems dedicated to contemporary political and ecclesiastical figures, such as Charles V, Francis I and Pope Paul III. Her letters indicate a profound interest in political and ecclesiastical developments, such as the course of the Council of Trent, which she discusses with the Bolognese Agostino Ercolani. Gambara also had deep sympathy with reform ideas and she probably

associated with the circles of the Lutherans of Modena and the Calvinists of Ferrara.²⁶

Vittoria Colonna was born in Marino, near Rome, in 1492. She belonged to the illustrious family of the Colonna princes. In 1509, she married Ferrante d'Avalos, Marquis of Pescara, but in 1525 D'Avalos died leaving Colonna widowed at the age of thirty-five. Although her brother encouraged her to get married again, she refused, and in the following years she devoted herself to studies and a religious life. From 1525 until her death, in 1547, Colonna lived in several convents in Rome, Viterbo, and Orvieto. She was profoundly influenced by the teachings of Juan de Valdés and developed close relationships with evangelical groups in Italy. During the 1530s she was a member of the Rome-based reform group of *Spirituali* and participated in the reform initiatives in Viterbo, in connection with Cardinal Reginald Pole. She was also in correspondence with Gasparo Contarini. Her religious orientation and her relationship/correspondence with Bernardino Ochino attracted the attention of the Catholic Church. Already before Ochino's flight, in 1542, she was surveyed and her correspondence watched by Roman orders. After the failure of the colloquy at Regensburg, the establishment of the Inquisition and the more aggressive stance adopted by the Church, the movement of *Spirituali* weakened and the investigation of Colonna's activities became more serious, without, however, any specific outcome until her death. Colonna kept a wide circle of acquaintances among significant intellectual figures, such as Pietro Bembo, Baldesar Castiglione, Pietro Aretino, Paolo Giovio, Bernardo Tasso and Francesco Maria Molza. She also formed a close friendship with Pole's friend Michelangelo, who exchanged poetry with her, and after her death wrote encomiastic verses acknowledging her as his literary and spiritual guide. She has been identified as one of the women next to Mary in Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* in the Sistine Chapel. Colonna's *Rime*, which can be divided between love, spiritual and epistolary *rime*, were first published in 1538. Her complex literary style was deeply influenced by the Petrarchan model in its amatory and spiritual variants, and especially her religious poetry was imbued with Neoplatonism. In her religious poetry she often expressed her concerns about the

²⁶ Veronica Gambara e la poesia del suo tempo nell'Italia settentrionale. *Atti del Convegno*, ed. C. Bozzetti, P. Gibellini, E. Sandal (Florence, 1989); K. A. McIver, "Two Emilian Noblewomen and Patronage Networks in the Cinquecento", in *Beyond Isabella*, ed. Reiss, Wilkins; A. Chimenti, *Veronica Gambara. Gentildonna del rinascimento. Un intreccio di poesia e storia* (Reggio Emilia, [1994]); *Women Poets*, ed. and trans. Stortoni, Lillie, pp. 23-7; "Gambara, Veronica", in *Dizionario*, vol. 52, pp. 68-71.

corruption of the Church whereas in her love lyrics, she mainly addressed her deceased husband with feelings of nostalgia. Colonna's influence was considerable, establishing the literary model for the following women poetesses.²⁷

Apart from the influence of their literary style, Gambara's and Colonna's personalities played a central role in the emerging configuration of a new model of woman, who could excel in letters and participate in political and religious activities, while still remaining chaste. In contrast with the traditional stereotype of the widow who, by taking advantage of the lack of male guidance, indulges in every sinful desire, Gambara and Colonna personified the model of the intellectual widow, who is a paragon of chastity, spirituality and virtue. Both of them were repeatedly cited in the works defending the female sex as exemplars of female excellence. They were compared to illustrious women of the past, and used to signify the spiritual regeneration of the female sex, as symbols of an imaginary historical continuity of female excellence, originating in the Ancient lyric poetesses Sappho and Corinna. In *Orlando Furioso*, Ariosto cites both Gambara and, in more detail, Colonna as the most illustrious women of his time.²⁸ In his translation and enrichment of Giovanni Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris*, Giuseppe Betussi writes concerning Vittoria Colonna that there is no "other learned intellect of nobler soul to have so much elevated the female sex as she has done with her literary studies and especially her poetry".²⁹ In his letter to Conte Agostino Landi, in 1543, Antonfrancesco Doni, describing how the *Museo del Giovio* will be decorated, places Veronica Gambara and Vittoria Colonna, the former on horseback and the latter on a carriage, just below Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio and among leading lights of Italian literature, such as Molza, Ariosto, Alamano, Navagiero, Marullo, Giovio, Sanazzaro, Sadoletto, Bembo and Fracastoro.³⁰ A century later, Agostino Francesco della Chiesa wrote that

²⁷ G. Rabitti, "Vittoria Colonna as Role Model for Cinquecento Women Poets", in *Women in Italian Renaissance*, ed. Panizza; M. Och, "Vittoria Colonna and the Commission for a Mary Magdalene by Titian", in *Beyond Isabella*, ed. Reiss, Wilkins; L. Doglio, "Letter Writing, 1350- 1650"; *Women Poets*, ed. and trans. Stortoni, Lillie, pp. 49-53; Gleason, *Gasparo Contarini*, pp. 149-51; T. Mayer, *Reginald Pole. Prince and Prophet* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 131-3, 153-4.

²⁸ L. Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso*, ed. and trans. B. Reynolds, 2 vols (Harmondsworth, 1975-77), XXXVII. 16-22, XLVI. 3.

²⁹ "spirito dotato di maggior nobiltà d'animo, ne che ne gli studi delle lettere, e sopra il tutto della poesia habbia avanzato il donesco sesso più di lei": Betussi, *Libro di M. Gio. Boccaccio delle donne illustri*, p. 209V.

³⁰ "Lascio Dante, Petrarca, & Boccaccio, che erano i padroni del luogo. Ma saliva il Tibaldeo, la signora Veronica Gambara, & la signora Marchesa di Pescara. Una in carretta, l'altra a cavallo. Seguiale l'Ariosto... Il Molza...l'Alamano...il Navagiero...il Frate Carmelita...il Marullo...il Pontano...il Sanazzaro...il Marchese del Vasto... Benedetto Giovio...il Sadoletto...il Bembo...il

Veronica Gambara quitted the usual feminine occupations [*industri femminili*] and at an early age she entered the intellectual life, and that Vittoria Colonna, thanks to her poetical gift and her chastity, fidelity and constancy towards her deceased husband, became the model of female excellence not only in Italy but all over Europe [*un lume all'età sua non pur di Roma, e d'Italia, ma di tutt'Europa*].³¹

Besides men writers' eulogies, Veronica Gambara and Vittoria Colonna were also presented as inspirational mentors in women's works. The Bolognese poetess Lucia Bertana compares Gambara and Colonna to the Ancient lyric poetesses Sappho and Corinna, and expresses her gratitude to them for "inspiring her to strive to bring her light out of the shadow".³² Similarly, Laura Terracina considers Veronica Gambara a woman devoted to the intellectual promotion of the female sex, and a defender of women against those men who slander them in their "cruel prose and sharp verses". Terracina wishes more women abandoned "the needle, thread and cloth" and excelled in letters to silence men.³³ In a poem dedicated to Vittoria Colonna (as cited in Domenichi's collection), Veronica Gambara gives once more a gender dimension to Colonna's value, noticing that "our sex should build for you a sacred and noble temple of excellent marble, like that of Pallas and Phoebus".³⁴

The great significance of Veronica Gambara and Vittoria Colonna consisted in the influence they had on subsequent women writers and their establishment as

Vescovo Vida...il Giovio...il Fracastoro": A. Doni, *Tre Libri di lettere e i termini della lingua Toscana* (Venice, 1552), p. 83.

³¹ Della Chiesa, *Theatro delle donne letterate*, pp. 196-8, 298-9.

³² "Ebbe l'antica e gloriosa etade, / Saffo e Corinna, che con dotte piume / S'alzaro insino al bel celeste lume / Per molte, degne e virtuose strade. / Or due, che allor il crin cinge e bontade, / Non pur fan d'Aganippe nascer fiume; / Ma spengono ogni falso e rio costume / Con opre eccelse, eterne, uniche e rade; / Tal che l'alta lor fama i pregi ingombra / De le due prime; e in questa e quella parte / Sonar si sente Gambara e Pescara / Quest'alme illustri son cagion che ogni arte / Tanto per torre alla mia luce d'ombra, / Sol perchè al mondo un dì si mostri chiara": *Women Poets*, ed. and trans. Stortoni, Lillie, pp. 132-3.

³³ "Deh; fosser molte al mondo, come voi, / Che desser freno a gli scrittor superbi. / Ch'a tutta briglia vergan contra noi / Prose crudeli, e duri versi, e acerbi / ... Deh; se lasciasser l'ago, il filo, il panno / E togliesser del studio la soma, / Creggio ch'a voi scrittor sarebbon danno, / Anzi piu mal, che fer Arabbi, a Roma: / Ma perche poche son, che questo fanno / poca fama circunda nostra chioma, / Non molte donne al scriber, qual ragiono, / Affaticate notte, e di si sono / Non restiate per cio Donne ingeniose / Di por la barcha de verlude al scoglio, / Lasciate l'ago, e fativi bramose / sovente, in operar la penna, e il foglio, / Che non men vi farete gloriose / Di questi tai, di cui molto mi doglio, / Hor stiate adunque attente in la lettura / Con somma diligenza, e lunga cura...": Terracina, *Discorso*, pp. 59R-60R.

³⁴ "O de la nostra etade unica gloria / Donna saggia, leggiarda, anzi divina, / A la qual reverente oggi s'inchina. / Chiunque è degno di famosa istoria, / Ben fia eterna di voi qua giù memoria, / Né potrà il tempo con la sua ruina / Far del bel nome vostro empia rapina, / Ma di lui porterete ampia vittoria. / Il sesso nostro un sacro e nobil tempio / Dovria, come già a Palla e a Febo, farvi / Di ricchi marmi e di finissim'oro. / E poichè di virtù siete l'esempio, / Vorrei, Donna, poter tanto lodarvi, / Quanto vi riverisco, amo e adoro": Domenichi, *Rime diverse*.

exemplars of women's virtue and ability. However, as William Kennedy argues, although they did not write works defending explicitly the female sex, their poetry reshaped the gender order. According to this literary analysis, although remaining in a neo-Platonic setting, Veronica Gambara and even more Vittoria Colonna revised Petrarch's text and reworked Petrarchan figures on feminine lines. In the poems honouring their husbands, they "attribute the transcendent excellence of a Petrarchan beloved, but they manage to overcome any putative ideal of passive and inert feminine virtue". With "a radical realignment of syntax and semantics, starting with the elementary gender markings of nouns and pronouns and proceeding to the indubitably complex psychic, social, and material resistances embedded in them" Gambara and Colonna offer a different version of gender roles.³⁵

Of equal importance was the role of powerful female literary patrons who often concerned themselves with the debate about women. Conte Alessandro Lambertino, a speaker in Girolamo Parabosco's *I Diporti* underlines that one basic aspiration, which motivates authors to write in support of the female sex, is the benefit of patronage. For example he cites Girolamo Ruscelli's *Lettura* dedicated to Maria d'Aragona, Marchesa del Vasto. According to Lambertino, Ruscelli's main purpose was to please this powerful woman [*si è posto a far quell'opera più per affezione che per penarsi di dire il vero*].³⁶ Indeed, works defending the female sex were usually dedicated by the writer or the publisher to women. Those dedicatees were often women whose Courts had offered hospitality to the author. Sometimes, they were friends of the writer and belonged to the same literary circle with him or shared the same religious and intellectual opinions. At times, works were dedicated to a whole group of women as well.³⁷ As a common practice the dedications to women praise their whole family, and especially their male relatives, sometimes even more than the dedicatees themselves. Although we do not find a particular woman gathering a large number of such dedications, committing herself exclusively to the promotion of such texts, many women encouraged this initiative. Furthermore, most works written by female authors were dedicated to women, indicating a gendered system of patronage.

³⁵ W. J. Kennedy, *Authorizing Petrarch* (Ithaca, 1994), pp. 116, 118.

³⁶ Parabosco, *I Diporti*, p. 14.

³⁷ The publisher Gabriel Giolito dedicated Giovanni Boccaccio's *L'amorosa Fiammetta* to the "gentili et valorose donne della Città di Casale di Monferrato", and Agnolo Firenzuola his *Discorsi sulla bellezza delle donne* to the Ladies of Prato.

Generally speaking about patronage mechanisms (as suggested by a study of music publishing), the most traditional relationship concerned a writer in the service of a particular patron, who would pay either part or all of the printing expenses for the publication. At times, writers or publishers dedicated a publication to their patron in exchange for another favour. Writers might dedicate a book to a potential patron, seeking employment. Finally, some authors wrote a work first and then looked for a dedicatee, hoping for a substantial subvention for the publication. When some work was dedicated not to a noble but to another writer or a friend, the author seldom anticipated direct rewards but new acquaintances, or wished to express his intellectual proximity and sympathy to a certain literary circle.³⁸

However, limited research has been done on the role of women as literary patrons, although one could raise interesting questions on the relations between women dedicatees and the broader social and cultural networks. The role of female literary and art patron apparently becomes more important during the sixteenth century. However, it is difficult to answer questions about the personal acquaintances of the dedicatee with the writer, whether the dedicatee asked the author to write a certain work or, hoping to please her and enjoy her protection, he took such an initiative. We cannot usually tell whether there was any direct financing for the publication and, if not, what kind of protection the dedicatee offered to the writer. It seems that in certain cases the dedicatee offered financing help. In Ortensio Lando's collection of letters written by women Isabella Sforza appears to criticize those "starving writers" who wish to squeeze money out of noblewomen.³⁹ A similar implication is made by Lodovico Domenichi in *La nobiltà delle donne* when he refers to Gabriel Giolito's relations with women.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, dedications cannot offer much help since they are mostly written in an artificial and formulaic style inspired from the letter writing tradition. I will attempt here, however, to trace some general trends by studying several specific cases.

The dedication of works on the excellence of the female sex or gender relations to women had a long tradition. One of the first and most influential works on women, *De Mulieribus claris*, had been dedicated by Giovanni Boccaccio to Andrea Acciaiuoli, Countess of Altavilla, a Tuscan noblewoman living in southern

³⁸ J. A. Bernstein, *Music Printing in Renaissance Venice* (New York & Oxford, 1998), pp. 148-150.

³⁹ Dacens, "Isabella Sforza", p. 48.

⁴⁰ See above p. 118.

Italy. She was the sister of Niccolò Acciaiuoli, Boccaccio's friend. The great influence of this work as the first collection of biographies of women has already been noticed. Boccaccio's dedication to Acciaiuoli also functioned as a literary model. As Boccaccio explicitly remarks in his dedication, "since women are the subject of the book, I saw that it ought to be dedicated, not to a prince, but to some distinguished lady".⁴¹ He continues underlining the exceptional virtue of his dedicatee. Paradoxically, what made his dedicatee so worthy was that she was an exception to the "weaker sex".⁴² The motif of the woman/exception came up again and again in the sixteenth-century literature on women. Furthermore, Boccaccio asks for Acciaiuoli's protection, presenting himself vulnerable to attack, a pattern also very common in the sixteenth century.⁴³ Similarly, towards the end of the fifteenth century, Vespasiano da Bisticci, dedicated *Il libro delle lodi delle donne*, a work profoundly influenced by *De Mulieribus claris*, to Maria Piccirillo Pandolfini and her daughter.⁴⁴ In the fifteenth century, Eleonora d'Aragona, Duchess of Ferrara, showed a profound interest in the debate about women and gathered around her a group of intellectuals who supported female excellence. Another pro-woman work, Bartolommeo Goggio's *De laudibus mulierum* was found in her library. Furthermore, she figured prominently in *De claris mulieribus*, another work on female superiority written by the Carmelite Jacopo Foresti da Bergamo and published in Ferrara in 1493.⁴⁵

The traditional link between women dedicatees and works defending the female sex continued through the sixteenth century. In 1529, Cornelius Agrippa dedicated the *Declamatio de nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus* to Margherita d'Austria. Margherita d'Austria was also considered a paragon of female excellence.

⁴¹ Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, p. 1.

⁴² "For as I reflected on you character, both gentle and renowned; your outstanding probity, women's greatest ornament; and your elegance of speech; and as I noted your generosity of soul and your powers of intellect far surpassing the endowments of womankind; as I saw that what nature has denied the weaker sex God has freely instilled in your breast and complemented with marvelous virtues, to the point where he willed you to be known by the name you bear (*andres* being in Greek the equivalent of the Latin word for "men") – considering all this, I felt that you deserved comparison with the most excellent women anywhere, even among the ancients", *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

⁴³ "If you judge it worthy, most excellent lady, give this book the boldness to appear in public. Under your auspices it will go forth, I believe, safe from malicious criticism, and it will make your name and the names of other illustrious women glorious on the lips of humankind. As you cannot be physically present every-where, my book will make you and your merits known to those now alive and will preserve you forever for posterity", *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁴⁴ V. Da Bisticci, *Il libro delle lodi delle donne*, ed. G. Lombardi (Rome, 1999).

⁴⁵ W. L. Gundersheimer, "Women, Learning, and Power: Eleonora of Aragon and the Court of Ferrara", in *Beyond their Sex*, ed. Labalme.

Her rule in the Netherlands exemplified women's ability to reign prudently. Having been widowed after two marriages, she devoted herself to the governing of her State and became an important patroness of prominent intellectuals such as Agrippa, who had dedicated to her John Reuchlin's *De verbo mirifico* as well. She also assembled a remarkable collection of artifacts and she had one of the finest art collections in the Netherlands, especially religious art works and secular portraiture.⁴⁶ In the letter preceding the dedication, Agrippa writes to Lord Maximilian of Transylvania, Counsellor of the Emperor Charles V, that he decided to dedicate his work to Margherita d'Austria since she was the paragon of female excellence, hoping at the same time for her favour and protection against women's slanderers.⁴⁷ In his dedication to Margherita herself, Agrippa repeats this fear.⁴⁸

In the dedication of the 1546 publication of Boccaccio's *Il Decamerone* to Caterina de' Medici, the Venetian publisher Gabriel Giolito de Ferrari recalls the traditional association between women's dedicatees and works relating to women.⁴⁹ Caterina de' Medici was another powerful widow, who, after the death of her husband, Henri II of France, played a leading role in the Court, seeking to stage her newly fashioned persona in the works of art she commissioned.⁵⁰ The 1542 publication of *Il Decamerone* had been dedicated by Giolito's collaborator, Antonio Brucioli, to Maddalena Bonaiunti, one of the protégées of Caterina de' Medici. Similarly, Giacomo Lanteri dedicated the first part of his work concerning men's role

⁴⁶ D. Eichberger, "Margaret of Austria's Portrait Collection: Female Patronage in the Light of Dynastic Ambitions and Artistic Quality", *Renaissance Studies*, 10: 2 (1996).

⁴⁷ "I then chose as a subject for the work *The Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sex*, thinking it appropriate that I should consecrate and dedicate it to that princess who, more than all the illustrious women of our age, seems to be a unique paragon of the nobility and excellence of women. For with her as a protector and witness, this little book would gain considerable authority against those whose sole occupation is to censure women...And I hope that I shall readily be granted pardon for having defended the superiority of women over men, since it is for such a noble princess that I have written this book and at the urging and protection of your lordship that I have published it." Agrippa, *Declamation on the Nobility*, p. 41.

⁴⁸ "For on the one hand, I thought it the height of ambition and boldness to seek to enumerate in a discourse the innumerable merits of women, their virtues, and their complete superiority. On the other hand, to accord women preeminence over men seemed the height of shame, almost the sign of an emasculated spirit. This is perhaps the reason very few have attempted to set forth in writing the praises of women and no one I know of has yet dared to affirm their superiority over men. But I thought it would be the height of ingratitude and a sacrilege to begrudge in silence the genuine praises owed so worthy a sex, and to snatch them away, so that the sex is defrauded of its merits and its glory by suppression of the known truth. I vacillated anxiously, caught between diverse and contradictory attitudes, but my powerful fear of ingratitude and sacrilege triumphed over my sense of shame and gave me the boldness to write this treatise, since I feared appearing more bold if I kept silent." Ibid., pp. 41-42.

⁴⁹ See above p. 114.

⁵⁰ S. Sfolliott, "Catherine de' Medici as Artemisia: Figuring the Powerful Widow", in *Rewriting the Renaissance*, ed. Ferguson, Quilligan, Vickers.

in family to the Brescian nobleman, Gioanandrea Palazzo, whereas the second one regarding women's duties was dedicated to Lucretia Bóna de Lanteri.⁵¹

Lucrezia Gonzaga da Gazuolo, daughter of Pirro Gonzaga, Marquis of Gazuolo, and Camilla Bentivoglio, was also interested in the promotion of works defending the female sex. Having been an orphan at an early age, she grew up with some relatives of hers. She enjoyed a good education, including Latin, under the guidance of Matteo Bandello, the famous writer of *Novelle* but also Petrarchan poetry. After getting married to Gianpaolo Manfrone against her will, she settled first in Verona and finally in Fratta, near Rovigo, in the Veneto. It was mainly after her husband's death, in 1552, that Lucrezia Gonzaga began to develop her literary interests and enlarge her circle of acquaintances. Lodovico Dolce, Luca Contile, Lodovico Paternò, Diomede Borghesi and Orazio Toscanella dedicated their works to her or evoke her in them. In 1565, Cornelio Cattaneo, Lodovico Domenichi and Giuseppe Betussi edited a collection of laudatory *Rime* for her in Bologna.⁵²

In 1552, some letters entitled *Lettere a Gloria del sesso femminile* were published under Lucrezia Gonzaga's name. It has been suggested that Ortensio Lando was the real author. However, the letters would not have been published under Gonzaga's name without her encouragement. Actually, Lando had close relations with Gonzaga, and enjoyed her favour. Already in 1549, Lando included a letter of Lucrezia Gonzaga to Livia Posetta in his collection of letters.⁵³ Lando's *Cataloghi* include a letter of the author to Gonzaga, according to which the first draft of the *Cataloghi* had been elaborated in her Court after her encouragement.⁵⁴ Besides, Lando mentions Gonzaga in his collection of adages attributed to known men and women.⁵⁵ In Lando's panegyric to Gonzaga, written in 1552, the traditional pattern of the woman/exception emerges once more. According to Lando, in contrast with other women, Gonzaga is not characterized by "hidden artifices, harmful thoughts, rapacious delusions, shrewd insignificant words, affected shame, false disdains, lascivious glances, immodest acts or some other shameless desire". When her

⁵¹ Lanteri, *Della Economica*.

⁵² "Gonzaga, Lucrezia", in *Dizionario*, vol. 57, pp. 796-7.

⁵³ Landi, *Lettere*, p. 33.

⁵⁴ "Voi mi havete piu volte Illustrissima donna sollecitato a dar perfettione a i Cataloghi, che gia cominciai nella vostra honorata casa & sotto il vostro felice auspitio, & i quali haveva io distribuito a diversi miei benvoli per testimonio dell'osservanza, che lor porto": Lando, *Sette libri de cataloghi*, p. 564.

⁵⁵ Lando, *Oracoli de moderni ingegni*.

husband was taken prisoner of war "she showed stronger self-control than a Spartan woman and she neither shed tears (as other women do) nor mourned in a womanly way... her feminine body covered a really masculine soul".⁵⁶ Lucrezia Gonzaga was also connected with Girolamo Ruscelli. In a letter, included in Lando's *Due Panegirici*, Ruscelli assured Gonzaga of his deep devotion to the female sex and reminded her that he had already written a work defending women.⁵⁷ Two years later, Ruscelli's dedication of the Udinese Federico Luigini's work on women to Gonzaga indicates once more her interest in the debate about women.⁵⁸

The case of Isabella Pallavicino-Lupi, Marchioness of Soranga, near Parma, is a good example of the patronage relationships between women. Though not a writer herself, she promoted arts and letters at her Court. She was celebrated by known literary figures, such as Torquato Tasso, Muzio Manfredi, Angelo Ingegneri and Gregorio Ducchi. One of her protégées was the poetess Maddalena Campiglia from Vicenza.⁵⁹ In her dedication of the pastoral drama *Flori* to Isabella Pallavicino Campiglia acknowledges her patroness' help and dissociates herself and the dedicatee from women's traditional occupations and roles:

At the same time, I hope to repay in part the debt I have incurred with you for the many favours you have shown me... Mothers today, when they are sending their daughters out into the world, always dress them in the finest way possible, drawing on all the most recondite and abstruse artifices at their disposal. But this is not my way; on the contrary, I seek instead to depart from the normal habits of women. When this daughter of mine comes before you, then, let your serene eyes not seek in her the gaudy vanities of extrinsic appearance, for she was born in the wild woods and learned from her mother to disdain all such vain politick trappings. Rather, let

⁵⁶ "occolte arti, ne dannosi pensieri, ne rapaci losinghe, ne sagaci parolette, ne articiose menzogne, ne finti sdegni; ne lascivi sguardi, ne atti impudichi, ne alcun sfrenato ardore...che il suo consorte era stato condotto nelle forza del suo nemico, che ella mostrò una gravità più che di Donna Spartana, non spargendo lagrime (si come le altre femine sogliono) non facendo di quei femminili romori; che tutto di veggiamo farsi, anzi sotto femminile vesta mostrò ella animo più che virile": O. Lando, *Due Panegirici nuovamente composti de quali l'uno è in lode della S. Marchesana della Padulla et l'altro in comendatione della S. Donna Lucretia Gonzaga da Gazuolo* (Venice, 1552), p. 51.

⁵⁷ See below p. 219.

⁵⁸ F. Luigini, *Il libro della bella donna* (Venice, 1554).

⁵⁹ I obtain this information from Lisa Sampson's conference paper "Isabella Pallavicino Lupi and Literary Patronage in Late Sixteenth-Century Parma", presented at the *Renaissance Society of America* Conference (Toronto, March, 2003). I am grateful to my supervisor, C. F. Black, for information from handouts and notes he brought back for me.

the light of your most noble intellect search out the candour and devotion with which she is so richly adorned...⁶⁰

Similarly, in Campiglia's sonnet to Pallavicino, there emerges again the schema of female solidarity between the dedicatee and the protégée, and the patroness' leading role in the promotion of women's emancipation:

Since ISABELLA, blessed soul of our sex, reigns as celestial goddess amongst us, women shall no longer be wretched or unhappy, however much men deprive us of our freedom. / Rather, through this unique Phoenix that rekindles itself in divine ardour, let our glory live eternally and our life be happy and joyful.⁶¹

Campiglia was indeed determined to devote herself to studies and abandon "the normal habits of women". In 1585 she unexpectedly cancelled her marriage to Dionisio Calzé, wishing to "spend her time in spiritual writings to divert her mind from vain thoughts".⁶²

In the seventeenth century, Christine of Lorraine and Maria Maddalena d'Austria, both Duchesses of Tuscany, played a similar role as promoters of the debate about women. In 1629, Pompeo Caimo dedicated *Dell'Ingegno Humano* to Christine of Lorraine.⁶³ The dedication indicates that Pompeo was in Medici service for twenty years. Although not a work exclusively devoted to the female sex, it explicitly declared the equality between male and female intellect. Among Caimo's examples of virtuous women is, apart from the dedicatee, Christine of Lorraine's daughter-in-law, Maria Maddalena d'Austria. Christine of Lorraine was the dedicatee of another work on female excellence entitled *Della virtù e valore delle donne illustri*, written by Cristofano Bronzini.⁶⁴ Maddalena Salvietti Accaiuoli, one of Christine's protégées, dedicated to her the *Rime Toscane* (1590). In a laudatory sonnet, Salvietti Accaiuoli presents Christine as a defender of the female sex and

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² "Campiglia, Maddalena", in *Dizionario*, vol. 17, pp. 541-2, p. 541.

⁶³ Caimo, *Dell'Ingegno Humano*.

⁶⁴ "Bronzini, Cristoforo", in *Dizionario*, vol. 31, pp. 463-464; on his books his first name appears as "Cristofano".

asks for her protection, now that she has "escaped the base occupations of women".⁶⁵ In her dedicatory letter, Salvietti Accaiuoli underlines again Christine of Lorraine's role in the spiritual evaluation of the female sex:

...that debt that the entire world owes to you as a tribute to your lofty valour and the greatness of the royal blood from which you descend – the entire world, but more particularly women, for your Ladyship is that true light whose reflected rays serve to illustrate and burnish the merits of our entire sex.⁶⁶

Ten years before his dedication of *Della virtù e valore* to Christine of Lorraine, Cristofano Bronzini had dedicated to Maria Maddalena d'Austria the *Della dignità e nobiltà delle donne*.⁶⁷ *Della virtù e valore* was a kind of second part of the same work, the "second week" of the debate. In *Della dignità e nobiltà* Bronzini praises the "Nobile Fiorentina e virtuosa" Maddalena Salvietti Accaiuoli and cites verses from her *Rime Toscane* and her "heroic poem" *Il David perseguitato*.⁶⁸ The same Maria Maddalena d'Austria was the dedicatee of Accaiuoli's *David perseguitato* (1611). Furthermore, Bronzini mentions Niccolò Lorini's *Elogii delle piu principali Donne del Sacro Calendario*, published in Florence, in 1617, and dedicated to Maria Maddalena d'Austria as well.⁶⁹ Christine of Lorraine and Maria Maddalena d'Austria, who in 1621, after the death of Cosimo II, remained the only rulers of the State, gathered around them a circle of male and female writers, including Cristofano Bronzini, Niccolò Lorini, Maddalena Salvietti Accaiuoli and

⁶⁵ "Alma felice e gloriosa Donna, / Luce di questa notte ombrosa e nera / Che da la più lucente ed alta spera / Scendeste dentro a la terrena gonna; / O de la bella Esperia alta colonna / Cui tempo non potrà, che 'l Mondo impera / Sveller, ne pur collar Fortuna fera, / Tal è l'alto valor che in voi s'indonna. / Se me, che in grembo de la bella Flora / Nacqui, e nudrita fui data dal Cielo / A schivar de le Donne i vili uffici, / Sotto l'ombra real del vostro velo / Accogliete benigna, i Cieli amici / Forse havrò sì, che vivrò eterna ancora": Virginia Cox's conference paper "Gender and the Art of Book Dedication in Sixteenth-Century Italy", presented at *Renaissance Society of America Conference* (Toronto, March, 2003). I am again grateful to my supervisor for providing me with this conference handout.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ On Bronzini's dialogue, see also below pp. 222, 224-5, 230, 232-4, 241-3.

⁶⁸ C. Bronzini, *Della dignità e nobiltà delle donne*, (Florence, 1622), Giornata Prima, p. 66; in the same year it was also translated in French with the title *L'Advocat des femmes, ou de leur fidelité et constance. Dialogue...contre les médisans de ce temps. Traduit d'italien en françois par S. D. L.* (Paris, 1622).

⁶⁹ "& il Lorini Uomo di quel gran valore, e sapere, che è noto ad ognuno, nelli Elogii delle piu principali Donne del Sacro Calendario (dedicati alla Serenissima Arciduchessa d'Austria Maria Maddalena Gran Duchessa di Toscana) ne quali chiama le Donne perfettissime, e lumi non meno risplendenti di quelli di Cielo; sapendosi molto bene, che la voce Homo, non dinota varietà di Sesso, ma l'istesso, & una istessa cosa;": Ibid., pp. 5-6.

Pompeo Caimo, promoting writings defending the female sex and favouring women writers.

In some cases the dedicatee's intervention in the writing of a pro-woman work is stated quite explicitly. Such is the case of Girolamo Borro, "Lettor Ordinario di Philosophia nello Studio di Pisa", who dedicated to Isabetta Cibo della Rovere, Marchioness of Massa, in Tuscany, the *Ragionamento della perfettione delle donne*.⁷⁰ In his dedication, he points out that Isabetta herself had asked him to write this work:

If I had not been reliable, when you, Illustrissima Signora Marchesa, commanded me to write about what could spontaneously be said about women's incommensurable virtue and excellence under Heaven, I would have asked one day time to do it; afterwards I would have deferred it for two days and, two days later, I would have asked four days and I would have got more and more extension of time without coming to an end...but since I wanted nothing but to obey the commands of your Most Illustrious Ladyship and serve you, I embarked (as one might say) without a biscuit [without preparation]... Now, (by God's and your grace) I have reached the port, and I wrote what I knew and was able to in order to exalt women's great excellence.⁷¹

⁷⁰ The *Ragionamento della perfettione delle donne* is included in the same volume with another work of Girolamo Borro on the ocean's tides, entitled *Del flusso e refluxo del mare*, which was dedicated to Isabetta della Rovere's husband, Alberigo Cibo Malespina. In both works Borro has used pseudonyms; in *Ragionamento* the pseudonym Telfilo Filogenio and in *Del flusso* the pseudonym Alseforo Talascopio. Both dialogues were translated from Latin into Italian by Girolamo Ghirlanda, who in his dedication to the same persons reveals the author's real name. Girolamo Borro held the chair in Philosophy at the University of Pisa and his heretical ideas, especially concerning the mortality of the soul, had attracted the Roman Inquisition's attention twice, in 1559 and 1583. It should also be noticed here that in the 1540s Borro was in Venice where he was associated with Pietro Aretino. The debate about women then flourishing in Venice might have influenced Borro's *Ragionamento*. For Girolamo Borro's life, see: *Dizionario*, "Borri (Borro, Borrius), Girolamo", vol. 13, pp. 13-7.

⁷¹ "Se io fossi stato punto accorto, quando voi illustrissima Signora, Marchesa, mi comandaste, che io scrivessi tutto quello, che allo improvviso si disse della virtù, e grandezza delle Donne sotto il Cielo senza pari, io havrei chiesto un giorno di tempo à farlo; dopo il quale, ne havrei addimandati due; e passati, i due ne havrei voluti quatro, & sempre havrei raddoppiato il tempo, senza venire a'l fine già mai...ma per che io all'ora ad altro non pensai, che allo obedire à commandamenti di vostra Sig. Illustrissima desideroso di servirla, mi imbarcai (come si suol dire) senza biscotto;... Hora (per la gratia d'Iddio & vostra) io son'giunto al porto, & ho scritto quello, che io ho saputo e potuto per inalzare la meravigliosa grandezza delle Donne": G. Borro, *Dialogo del flusso e refluxo del mare d'Alseforo Talascopio con un Ragionamento di Telfilo Filogenio della perfettione delle donne* (Lucca, 1561). According to the *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca* (Venice, 1612), *senza biscotto* is a proverb (*entrare in mar senza biscotto*) [to embark without a sea-biscuit, or hard tack, a very basic survival ration for ships], ie "mettersi alle imprese, senza i debiti provvedimenti" [to do something without the necessary preparation].

The dialogue takes place at the Court of Isabetta della Rovere, at Villa d'Agnano, between the author and six Court Ladies, who were in Isabetta's service.⁷² In 1560, Laura Terracina also dedicated her *Seste Rime* to Isabetta Cibo della Rovere.

The dedication of Bernardo Trotto's *Dialoghi del Matrimonio e vita vedovile* (1583) to Hippolita Scaravella Castelliera indicates a similar pre-arrangement between the dedicatee and the author. The main aim of the work was to present several different views on marriage, both from a man's and a woman's point of view. However, according to Trotto's dedicatory letter, it was the conversations he had with Hippolita Scaravella that inspired his work, and her encouragement that exhorted him to bring it to light.⁷³ One of the main interlocutors is Hippolita herself, who expresses the female view against marriage. Having been a widow and refusing to get married again, the speaker Hippolita underlines the negative consequences of marriage which women suffer. Her criticism covers a broad spectrum of issues from women's deprivation of freedom to their economic exploitation through the violation of their dowries. According to Hippolita, women are able to live alone without any male guidance. Furthermore, she recommends poor women to prefer working rather than getting married, implying that women's economic dependence on men could stop. Hippolita rejects even bearing children since children are named after their fathers' name and consequently they offer no fame to their mothers. On the contrary, widows have enough time to devote themselves to letters. So, Hippolita suggests for women the traditionally male role of the intellectual. The idea that the intellectual should remain a bachelor often features in the contemporary literature. Later in Trotto's dialogue, claiming celibacy for men, the male speaker, Antonio, remarks that women distract men from their studies; after marriage men have to "abandon their books and everything else, to love their wives and satisfy their feminine desires, which are as insatiable as fire and sandy land".⁷⁴ Although written in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, Trotto's work constructs a model of woman similar to that

⁷² See also below p. 182.

⁷³ "...così questi dialoghi nati da V.S. Illust. per la cagione principale che n'è stata, e per la buona parte, che ci hanno i suoi bellissimi discorsi: appresso di me si grossamente si sono allevati, e cresciuti, senza quella vaghezza, che dovea corrispondere al natio loro splendore, che da me stesso mi vergognai di lasciarglieli comparire davanti. e tante volte quante ella me gl'hà richiesti, mi sono andato scusando. E volentieri havrei voluto che se ne fosse scordata. Ma volendo ciò essere impossibile, e riconoscendo quanto sia grave errore il tenere lungamente celati i patri altrui; hò voluto, senza più resistenza, mandarglieli tali, quali sono;": Trotto, *Dialoghi del matrimonio*, pp. 2V-3R.

⁷⁴ "dar bando a i libri, e alle scienze, e far tuo studio del suo letto, e della sua faccia un'arca de tuoi pensieri; e finalmente lasciare ogn'altra cura per amare lei, e soddisfare al femminile desiderio, non meno insaziabile del fuoco, e dell'arenosa terra": Ibid., p. 211.

which Veronica Gambara and Vittoria Colonna had personified in the early sixteenth century.

Actually, the problems women confronted in marriage, as depicted by the speaker Hippolita, corresponded to the real life of the historical Hippolita, "cittadina illustre", daughter of a Senator and also widow of a Senator from Piedmont. The dialogue is set during Hippolita Scaravella's second marriage with Giovanni Castelliero in Turin. According to Trotto, that marriage had been solemnized against Scaravella's will [*vinta dal volere del padre, e da l'autorità altrui*]. Trotto informs readers that he was present at this marriage and after having heard Hippolita, "who excelled all women and many men in eloquence", reasoning with forceful arguments against marriage, he decided to write his dialogue inspired by her words. Trotto's exact relations with Scaravella are not indicated. However, both the writer and Scaravella's new husband must have been connected with Emmanuel Philbert, Duke of Piedmont from 1559. The title C.A. before Trotto's name indicates that he might have been a *Consigliere Aulico* in the Duchy of Piedmont, and Giovanni Castelliero is presented as "very esteemed" among those French who were in the services of Henry II, whose sister Emmanuel Philbert had married.⁷⁵ As far as I know, Trotto had not published any other book, although Stefano Guazzo's two laudatory poems included in the volume, where Trotto is presented as women's "faithful lover" [*fido amante*], indicate Trotto's relations with contemporary literary circles. However, not being a professional writer, he rather wrote this work to please Hippolita Scaravella, who, forced by her family to get married again after the death of her first husband, probably attempted to express her opposition through a male writer's work.⁷⁶ Some years later, Moderata Fonte expressed her opposition to marriage in her own work, using a similar argumentation.

It follows that powerful women played an important role in the promotion of works defending the female sex, either indirectly, functioning as paragons of female excellence, or directly, promoting these works, which must have often been written after their commission. Furthermore, noblewomen, and especially widows, of the Courts of Central and Northern Italy often took important initiatives at least concerning the cultural life of the Court. They promoted arts and letters and their

⁷⁵ According to A. Cappelli, C.A. stands for *Consigliere Aulico*: A. Cappelli, *Dizionario di abbreviature latine ed italiane* (Milan, 1999), (first published in 1899), p. 41.

⁷⁶ On Trotto's dialogue, see also below p. 183.

Courts gathered male and female literary figures. Among the conversations, which took place at these Courts, debates about women's nature often held an important place. Furthermore, for women writers the Court was often a place which offered them opportunities to enlarge their personal acquaintances, play a part in the contemporary cultural life and participate in fashionable literary and philosophical debates. Since women did not participate in university activities and rarely did they associate themselves actively with literary Academies, Courts offered one of the few opportunities women had to enter into intellectual life.

WOMEN INTELLECTUALS IN THE FLORENTINE CULTURAL MILIEU:
TULLIA D'ARAGONA AND LAURA BATTIFERRI AT THE COURT OF
COSIMO I AND ELEONORA DE' MEDICI

A closer examination of the Court of Duke Cosimo I de' Medici and his wife, Eleonora, can offer a better understanding of how the patronage relationships were shaped in the cultural environment of the Court and the city in relation to social and gender power relations. The role of Cosimo I in the Florentine cultural life and *Accademia Fiorentina* is well known.⁷⁷ However, Eleonora's initiatives were not negligible. She often replaced her husband in the administrative duties of the State when he was absent and she played an important role as literary and art patroness. Eleonora supported poetry in particular, and contributed to the foundation of the Academy of the *Elevati*, whose meetings were often held at the ducal residence with Eleonora personally involved. She also showed interest in education issues, caring for the reopening of the Studio of Pisa and finding accommodation for the professors and students.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ A. Ricci, "Lorenzo Torrentino and the Cultural Programme of Cosimo I de' Medici", in *The Cultural Politics of Duke Cosimo I de' Medici*, ed. K. Eisenbichler (Burlington, Vt., 2001); C. Di Filippo Bareggi, "In nota alla politica culturale di Cosimo I: L'Accademia Fiorentina", *Quaderni Storici*, 23 (1973); J. Bryce, "The Oral World of the Early Accademia Fiorentina", *Renaissance Studies*, 9 (1995); S. Bartelli, "Egemonia linguistica come egemonia culturale e politica nella Firenze Cosimiana", *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 38: 2 (1976); E. Cochrane, *Florence in the Forgotten Centuries 1527-1800* (Chicago & London, 1973), pp. 67-87.

⁷⁸ B. L. Edelstein, "Bronzino in the Service of Eleonora di Toledo and Cosimo I de' Medici: Conjugal Patronage and the Painter-Courtier", in *Beyond Isabella*, ed. Reiss, Wilkins; "Eleonora de Toledo", in *Dizionario*, vol. 42, pp. 437-41.

In 1552, Domenico Bruni da Pistoia dedicated to Eleonora de' Medici his treatise on the superiority of female sex. The author first declares his devotion to Eleonora's male relatives, her husband and her father.⁷⁹ However, soon after he passes to the debate about women. Following a common literary pattern of the period, Bruni presents himself as defender of the female sex, and consequently vulnerable to attack by women's enemies. Eleonora's name will lend prestige to his work and discourage these "enemies" [*poco amici delle donne*].⁸⁰ Within this schema, Bruni attempted to place his work in the "broader movement" against women's enemies and make Eleonora an ally to this common endeavour, and a favorable patroness towards him as well.

Related to the Medici Court through social, literary and family networks, two women writers, Tullia d'Aragona and Laura Battiferri, dedicated their works to Eleonora de' Medici: Tullia d'Aragona *Rime* in 1547 and Laura Battiferri *Primo libro delle opere toscane* in 1560.⁸¹ D'Aragona's and Battiferri's contacts with the Medicean Court, the Duchess Eleonora and the Florentine intellectual circles can function as a case study to detect some networks of acquaintances, including men and women, and trace the roles and opportunities such networks offered to women in sixteenth-century Italy.

Born in Rome around 1510, Tullia d'Aragona was one of the best known courtesans and female writers of the sixteenth-century Italy. There is no information about D'Aragona's education but she must have enjoyed an advanced one, including Latin and music. Her will included about thirty-five Latin and Italian volumes on a variety of subjects, thirteen books of music and many books and papers in tattered condition unspecified in number and content.⁸² From about 1535 to 1548, she traveled to Adria, Venice, Ferrara, Siena, and Florence with her mother, a courtesan as well. The information on her life dies away after 1548, when she left Florence for Rome for unknown reasons; in 1556 she died in Rome in poverty and obscurity. Already while in Rome she was acquainted with circles of noblemen, high prelates

⁷⁹ "Havendo io fra me stesso piu volte pensato illustriss. & Eccellentiss. Signora, in che modo con le debolissime forze mie havessi potuto mostrare almanco in qualche parte la cordialiss. servitu mia, & il sincero affetto che allo illustriss. et Eccellentiss. Signor'suo consorte ho sempre portato & porto; si per la altezza della sua illustriss. casa, come per la anchora terribil'memoria dello illustriss. Signor Giovanni suo padre, & mio singularissimo padrone": Bruni, *Difese delle donne*, p. 2R.

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 2V-3R. See also below p. 213.

⁸¹ D'Aragona, *Rime*; L. Battiferri, *Il primo libro delle opere toscane*, ed. E. M. Guidi (Urbino, 2000).

⁸² Russell, "Introduction", in D'Aragona, *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*, p. 23.

and intellectuals, such as Lodovico Martelli, Claudio Tolomei, Filippo Strozzi, Francesco Molza, and Paolo Emilio Orsini. During her brief residence in Venice she established her fame as intellectual courtesan, enlarged her circle of acquaintances and set up a literary salon at her home. Sperone Speroni set his *Dialogo d'amore* in her home at Venice and placed Tullia as a central speaker among the important intellectual figures of Bernardo Tasso, Nicolo' Grazia and Francesco Maria Molza.⁸³ Although Speroni's dialogue reflected a social reality (that of the contemporary literary salons kept by women, and usually courtesans), it also aimed at lending more prestige to Tullia d'Aragona. The dialogue was circulated in Venetian and Paduan intellectual circles already before its publication in 1542. In 1537, D'Aragona moved to Ferrara under the Este Court's protection. There, she got in touch with important figures, such as Vittoria Colonna and Ercole Bentivoglio. It was in Ferrara that D'Aragona made her important acquaintance with the writer Girolamo Mutio, then in the service of Duke Ercole II. They became lovers and Mutio constantly promoted her reputation. He dedicated to her his treatise on marriage, on the occasion of her brief marriage to a certain Silvestro Guicciardini in Siena in 1543, and various poetical love compositions and eclogues. He also prologued D'Aragona's dialogue on love, bearing full responsibility for its publication and expressing his great admiration for her.⁸⁴

In 1546, D'Aragona moved from Siena to Florence. There she was welcome among other refugees who had been driven out of Siena by the faction which had rebelled against the government installed there by Charles V, with whom Cosimo was allied himself. In Florence D'Aragona broadened further her circle of acquaintances. Her home became once again a literary salon. Contemporary fashionable debates took place there. Her dialogue on love is set in her own home, where she herself converses with Benedetto Varchi and the Siennese poet Lattantio Benucci.⁸⁵ The intellectual role of D'Aragona's home was also highlighted in *Ercolano*, in which Benedetto Varchi refers to a debate that took place there, with Mutio present, on the correct use of the Tuscan language.⁸⁶

⁸³ See below pp. 185-7.

⁸⁴ See also above pp. 89-90 and below pp. 206-7.

⁸⁵ See below pp. 206-9.

⁸⁶ G. Masson, *Courtesans of the Italian Renaissance* (London, 1975), pp. 84-131; Russell, "Introduction", in D'Aragona, *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love; Women Poets*, ed. and trans. Stortoni, Lillie, pp. 81-85; R. Russell, "Tullia d'Aragona", in *Italian Women Writers. A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook*, ed. eadem (Westport & London, 1994).

D'Aragona's most decisive acquaintance in Florence was Benedetto Varchi, one of the most important intellectual figures of the Florentine cultural life. Varchi was then in the service of Cosimo I, and acquired a dominant position at the *Accademia Fiorentina*, which was to a great extent under Cosimo's guidance.⁸⁷ D'Aragona participated in the cultural gatherings organized by Varchi and the *Accademia Fiorentina*. She was more familiar with the *Umidi* group, those who had taken part in the foundation of the *Accademia degli Umidi*, as the *Accademia Fiorentina* was initially known. The members of the *Umidi* group used to distance themselves from the new members, wishing to keep a kind of independence from Cosimo's not always welcome intervention. In this framework, *Umidi* organized some informal literary meetings, known as *tornatelle*. D'Aragona participated as well in those gatherings, among Benedetto Varchi, Antonfrancesco Grazzini, Niccolò and Ugolino Martelli, Simone della Volta and Benedetto Arrighi; besides, some of those gatherings must have taken place at her own home. Lodovico Domenichi refers to one of those *tornatelle* in *Facetie motti, et burle* (1548) when he describes a debate held at D'Aragona's house over the influence the Tuscan and Provençal poets had on Petrarch. A poem of Alfonso de' Pazzi makes similar references.⁸⁸

Tullia d'Aragona's dedication of *Rime* to Eleonora de' Medici should be seen in this socio-cultural context. In 1547, when D'Aragona was charged with violating the sumptuary laws regarding prostitutes, which prohibited them from wearing certain garments, Cosimo I granted her a ducal exception on the basis of her "rare knowledge of poetry and philosophy". For his favour, D'Aragona dedicated to him her dialogue on love.⁸⁹ D'Aragona's close relations with the Florentine literary circle and Benedetto Varchi in particular played a determinative role in the ducal grant. A complicated network of acquaintances and interests led Cosimo I to his favour, such as the need for being on good terms with Varchi, whose help was necessary to his cultural hegemony, and his policy of tolerance and balance, which did not permit him a direct conflict with *Umidi* group. Besides, Cosimo decided to be tolerant to a

⁸⁷ F. A. Yates, "The Italian Academies", in her *Renaissance and Reform: The Italian Contribution. Collected Essays*, 2 vols (London, 1983); Samuels, "Benedetto Varchi, the *Accademia degli Infiammati*"; Bryce, "The oral world of the early *Accademia Fiorentina*".

⁸⁸ D. Basile, "*Fasselli gratia per poetessa*: Duke Cosimo I de' Medici's Role in the Florentine Literary Circle of Tullia d'Aragona", in *The Cultural Politics*, ed. Eisenbichler.

⁸⁹ "I was also driven by a keen desire of my own to show a small token of the affection and devotion I have always felt for Your illustrious and blessed house and to give You special thanks for the favors I have received": D'Aragona, *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*, p. 54.

woman writer who belonged to a literary movement which promoted the Tuscan vernacular, since the support of that idiom was of main interest to Cosimo's cultural dominance.⁹⁰ In her dedication to Cosimo, D'Aragona underlines the Duke's interest in the promotion of the Tuscan vernacular.⁹¹ However, it must have been Eleonora who interceded with the Duke on behalf of D'Aragona.⁹² Eleonora's mediation indicates another case of interplay between female patrons and writers. D'Aragona's dedication of *Rime* to Eleonora aimed at thanking her for her support. D'Aragona declares her devotion both to the Duke and the Duchess, and claims that she composed *Rime* to avoid idleness and not insult those who had encouraged her, rather than to win fame. She implies that among those who had encouraged her were Varchi, Mutio and the brothers Niccolò and Ugolino Martelli.⁹³

Laura Battiferri developed similar social networks in Florence. Born into a noble family of Urbino in 1523, she enjoyed a remarkable education including Latin, Greek, Philosophy and History. At an early age she was affiliated to the Urbino Court and its literary circles, especially to the poet Antonio Galli. Her *Sette salmi penitenziali di David* (1564) was dedicated to the Duchess of Urbino, Vittoria Farnese della Rovere. Having been widowed at an early age, in 1550 she got married again to the Florentine sculptor and architect Bartolomeo Ammannati. She settled with her husband in Florence, in Villa of Maiano, which Eleonora de' Medici offered to Ammannati. In Florence, Battiferri associated herself with the cultural circles of the Medicean Court and the *Accademia Fiorentina*. Among her friends were Anton Francesco Grazzini, Luca Martini, Giambatista Gelli and the painter Bronzino, who also made her portrait. Particularly close were Battiferri's relations with Benedetto Varchi, with whom she had regular correspondence, exchanging sonnets and literary views.⁹⁴ Her correspondence and dedications indicate her relationships with Bernardo Tasso, Annibal Caro, Girolamo Razzi, Pietro Aretino, Aldo Manuzio and Michelangelo Vivaldi. Battiferri's and Varchi's common acquaintances and their participation in the same literary gatherings have also been depicted in Don Silvano

⁹⁰ Basile, "*Fasseli gratia per poetessa*".

⁹¹ "On the other hand, I was comforted and even encouraged in my enterprise by the certainty that Your Highness takes deep joy in all literary compositions, especially those which are written in the vernacular tongue so favorably viewed and promoted by Your Illustrious Self and which deal with subjects either useful or entertaining": D'Aragona, *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*, p. 54.

⁹² Basile, "*Fasseli gratia per poetessa*".

⁹³ See also below p. 176.

⁹⁴ L. Battiferri, *Lettere di L. Battiferri Ammannati a B. Varchi* (Bologna, 1968).

Razzi's *Della economia Christiana e civile* (1568), in which both Battiferri and Varchi, among Lionardo Salviati, Baccio Valori and Bronzino participate in a dialogue which takes place in the Medici Villa "La Topaia".⁹⁵

Battiferri's dedication of *Primo libro delle opere toscane* to Eleonora de' Medici indicates a social and family network which surrounded both women, giving them opportunities and imposing limitations at the same time. Battiferri points out that she herself would not have published the work, if she had not the permission of her husband and the advice of a group of friends. Furthermore, Battiferri underlines that she dedicates her work to Eleonora for the favours she and her husband, Cosimo, have offered to her and her husband, Bartolomeo Ammannati.⁹⁶ By this group of friends Battiferri apparently implies Benedetto Varchi and their common Florentine acquaintances. Before coming to light, Battiferri's work had the approval of her husband and a group of male intellectuals. The relationship between Battiferri and Eleonora as dedicator and dedicatee was not a simple direct one but was supported by references to famous husbands and other male intellectuals.⁹⁷

Belonging to different social ranks and having a different marital status, both Tullia d'Aragona and Laura Battiferri took part, the former only for some years and the later for a much longer time, in the same intellectual and social milieu, which surrounded the Florentine Court. That Battiferri was settled in Florence two years after D'Aragona's departure does not permit many assumptions of possible personal acquaintance between them. Their social, literary and family relationships offered them opportunities to participate in the intellectual scene and enjoy the protection of

⁹⁵ V. Kirkham, "Cosimo and Eleonora in Shepherdland: a Lost Eclogue by Laura Battiferri degli Ammannati", in *The Cultural Politics*, ed. Eisenbichler; G. Rabitti, "Laura Battiferri Ammannati", in *Italian Women Writers*, ed. Russell; *Women Poets*, ed. and trans. Stortoni, Lillie, pp. 160-1.

⁹⁶ "Io pensava ad ogn'altra cosa più, Illustrissima ed eccellentissima Signora Duchessa, che a dover fare in questi tempi alcuno stampare de' componimenti miei, ma avendo io da persone degne di fede per cosa certissima inteso che alcuni, avendone già buona quantità ragunati, e cercando tuttavia di ragunarne de' gli altri, volevano, senza non dico licenza, ma saputa mia pubblicargli, mi commossi non poco e, sapendo altro che farmi, mi risolsi per minor male, con licenza di mio Marito e consiglio di più Amici, di dargli alla stampa io medesima, ed indirizzargli al glorioso nome di vostra Eccellenza Illustrissima, non perché io gli credessi degni di tanta altezza, ma per mostrarle in quel modo che io potevo, se non del tutto grata, almeno ricordevole in parte de' benefizii che ella e l'Illustrissimo Signor Duca hanno fatto e fanno tutto il giorno molti, e grandissimi, a me ed a M. Bartolomeo mio Marito, il quale non desidera altro, insieme con esso meco, che di potere sì come fedelmente, così degnamente ancora, servirle": Battiferri, *Il primo libro delle opere toscane*, p. 33.

⁹⁷ Laura Battiferri also showed her and her husband's gratitude towards Cosimo and Eleonora in "Terza Ecloga", recorded in a late manuscript anthology. There, Battiferri depicted Cosimo and Eleonora, herself and Bartolomeo Ammannati, and an unidentified fifth person, gathering for a day in the countryside, all masked under pastoral alias, to praise in song Cosimo and Eleonora: Kirkham, "Cosimo and Eleonora in Shepherdland".

the Medici. At the same time limitations were imposed on them. Two hierarchical systems defined the activities of these women; on the one hand, the traditional patronage mechanism as a power relationship between the patron and the protégé and, on the other hand, the order imposed by the gender role structure with the establishment of a group of male mediators between the patroness and the protégée.

LITERARY SALONS AND SOCIAL NETWORKS OF VENETO

In Venice, the debate about women was disseminated through different channels. As has already been pointed out, an important corpus of works on gender issues and women's nature was published in Venice, especially between 1540 and 1550. The authors of these works were in contact with women who maintained literary salons in the Veneto, and kept regular correspondence with women writers who lived in other Italian cities. These relationships and the mixed conversations, which often took place in these salons, undoubtedly influenced these writers' works. In the Republic of Venice, the unofficial literary salons replaced to a certain point the cultural role of Northern and Central Italian Courts, which Venice lacked. In contrast to traditional masculine institutions, such as the Universities and Academies, literary salons, like Courts, permitted at least some women to participate in the contemporary literary scene.

The Venetian patrician Domenico Venier's salon, in Santa Maria Formosa, is known for such mixed conversations. Girolamo Molino, Federico Badoer, Sperone Speroni, Fortunio Spira, Lodovico Dolce, Bernardo Cappello, Girolamo Mutio, Girolamo Parabosco and Pietro Aretino were some of the best known *literati* and political figures who frequented there.⁹⁸ However, some Venetian women, such as Gaspara Stampa and later Veronica Franco also took part in these meetings. Besides, Domenico Venier lent his protection to a number of women poets and intellectuals, such as Veronica Franco, Irene di Spilimbergo and Tullia d'Aragona.⁹⁹ Women singers and musicians, such as Franceschina Bellamano, Polissena Perocina and Polissena Frigera, were also associated with Venier's salon.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Feldman, "The Academy of Domenico Venier".

⁹⁹ Rosenthal, *The Honest Courtesan*, p. 89.

¹⁰⁰ Feldman, "The Academy of Domenico Venier".

Issues concerning gender relations or women's nature and position were frequent topics of debate in these meetings. Indicative of this is Girolamo Parabosco's *I Diporti* (1552), set in a villa near Venice. Important intellectual and political figures are present, including *litterati* related to the Venier's circle. The first chapter is dedicated to the debate about women, with particular reference to Girolamo Ruscelli's treatise on female superiority, *Lettura*. The subsequent discussions deal with some key-questions concerning love philosophy. As the speaker Girolamo Molino's words imply women also attend the conversation.¹⁰¹

Furthermore, and most important, women themselves often kept such salons. Most often they were courtesans who thanks to their particular position, free from the strict moral standards of the period, could undertake such an intellectual project. Some of these salons were quite prestigious since important political and intellectual figures frequented them. Through her speaker Lattantio Benucci, Tullia d'Aragona depicts her own salon in Florence, comparing it to a "prestigious academy" and implying that this intellectual activity of hers had begun long before her arrival in Florence:

...she can be reputed as the most fortunate among all women. This is because there have been, and still are, few men in our society, whether they be excellent in military or literary pursuits, or in any other esteemed profession, who have not paid a tribute of affection and honor to her. I was drawing up a list of all the gentlemen, the host of literary experts in all the various fields, the aristocrats, the princes, and the cardinals who have flocked to her house in different periods of her life – and still do – as to a universal and prestigious academy. What is more, all of these admirers have paid her respects and have honored her, and even now honor and heap their respects upon her... I wanted to mention the city of Siena, where she is admired and venerated rather than merely treated with warm affection, especially by the most distinguished and virtuous of its citizens.¹⁰²

Of course D'Aragona's depiction is aimed at the shaping of a positive and prestigious identity of herself. However, such an elevation would not have been

¹⁰¹ See below p. 225.

¹⁰² D'Aragona, *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*, pp. 108-9.

permitted by the contemporary literary and social norms if it did not correspond to a certain reality.¹⁰³

Gaspara Stampa's salon was another indicative example of the active role some women played in Venetian society. Gaspara Stampa was born in Padua but at an early age, after her father's death, she moved with her mother and siblings in Venice. She enjoyed a good education, including musical training. The Stampa home gathered intellectuals and artists, who enjoyed musical performances and poetry readings. So, Gaspara Stampa had the opportunity to make important acquaintances and develop her literary talent. Most of her writings circulated at these gatherings. Only three of her sonnets were published during her lifetime in Ruscelli's anthology *Il sesto libro delle rime di diversi eccellenti autori* (1553), whereas her sister, Cassandra, published her *canzoniere* posthumously, in 1554.¹⁰⁴

Furthermore, Gaspara Stampa was one of the few sixteenth-century women who joined the world of the Academies. She was a member of the Academy of the *Dubbiosi*, which operated in Padua and Venice, where she adopted the name "Anassila". Stampa was well affiliated with the intellectual circles of Venice and Padua, having contact with Domenico Venier, Girolamo Parabosco, Luigi Alamanni, Sperone Speroni, Girolamo Molino and Trifone Gabriele, a member of the *Dubbiosi* as well. She was also connected with Francesco Sansovino, who was a family friend of the Stampa house. Sansovino dedicated to Gaspara his *Ragionamento d'Amore*. His dedicatory letter advises her to beware of suitors' flattery and continue her studies without letting anything interrupt them.¹⁰⁵ He also dedicated to her his edition of Giovanni Boccaccio's *Ameto*. In his dedication he refers to Stampa with great appreciation and "discusses" with her the literary style of Boccaccio, implying that

¹⁰³ Sperone Speroni and Cornelio Frangipane had portrayed Tullia d'Aragona's salon in a similar way; see below pp. 185-8.

¹⁰⁴ S. Abdelkader, "Madonna Gasparina Stampa secondo nuovi indagini", *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana*, 62 (1913); eadem, "Madonna Gasparina Stampa e la società Veneziana del suo tempo", *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana*, 66 (1917); F. A. Bassanese, "Gaspara Stampa", in *Italian Women Writers*, ed. Russell; *Women Poets*, ed. and trans. Stortoni, Lillie, pp. 134-7; *Three Women Poets. Renaissance and Baroque. Louise Labé, Gaspara Stampa and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*, ed. and trans. F. J. Warnke (London & Toronto, 1987), pp. 53-60; M. Zancan, "L'intellettualità femminile nel primo Cinquecento: Maria Savorgnan e Gaspara Stampa", *Annali d'Italianistica*, 7 (1989).

¹⁰⁵ "...per ricordo vi mando la presente bozza da me fatta, per ricreamento delle più gravi lettere, acciochè col mezzo di questa possiate imparare a fuggir gli inganni, che usano i perversi uomini alle candide e pure donzelle, come voi siete. E con questa vi ammaestro e vi consiglio a procedere ne' vostri studi, fuggendo ogni occasione, che disturbar vi potesse dalla impresa vostra": Sansovino, *Ragionamento*, p. 184.

he had similar conversations with her in the past, always trusting her "perfect judgment" [*perfettissimo giudicio*].¹⁰⁶

Stampa's lively participation in public intellectual activities, the lack of male guidance in the Stampa household, after the premature death of her brother, Baldassare, her refusal to get married and her extramarital affairs endangered her reputation. In August 1544, Stampa's relative, Sister Angelica, the Abbess of the Convent of San Paolo in Milan, wrote to her:

Open your eyes and do not believe the adulators, do not be seduced by those who love only your body; I beg you to quit these habits and conversations, which estrange you from Christ and expose you to danger or can put in risk the beautiful honesty, which grace you, among other virtues, for which it is not surprising that I love you, I love you and I will always love you.¹⁰⁷

Apart from her way of life Stampa's literary style also disassociated her from the chaste model of writers such as Vittoria Colonna or Veronica Gambara. According to Giovanna Rabitti, free from religious issues and spiritual devoutness, focusing on love matters and having only a superficial reliance on Petrarchan model, Stampa's poetry initiated a different female literary tradition, which was later followed by Veronica Franco.¹⁰⁸

Another woman who kept her own salon in Venice in the same period was the courtesan Francesca Baffa. Little information survives about her life. Only some of Baffa's *rime* appeared in print. However, some compositions of hers probably circulated in manuscript among the Venetian intellectual circles.¹⁰⁹ In the seventeenth century, Francesco Della Chiesa wrote concerning Baffa that "such was her fame of erudition and learning that many illustrious men came from distant countries to Venice exclusively to visit her and see for themselves all these amazing

¹⁰⁶ Sansovino, *Ameto*.

¹⁰⁷ "Aprete voi gli occhi sopra di voi, & non credete alli adulatori, a quelli che vi amano secondo la carne, non v'ingannate, vi priego, & tagliate da voi quelle pratiche & conversationi, che vi alienano da Christo & mettonvi in pericolo, o ponno dare nota di suspitio ne a quella bella honestà, che in voi riluce, oltre le altre virtù vostre, per le quali dissi, che non vi dovea essere maraviglia se io vi amo, vi amo & amarò sempre": *Della nuova scelta di lettere*, p. 227.

¹⁰⁸ Rabitti, "Vittoria Colonna as role model".

¹⁰⁹ G. Blanchini, *Franceschina Baffo. Rimatrice Veneziana del secolo XVI* (Verona & Padova, 1896); R. Casagrande de Vallaviera, *Le Cortigiane Veneziane nel Cinquecento* (Milan, 1968), pp. 167-9, 178-80; "Baffo, Franceschina", in *Dizionario*, vol. 5, p. 163.

things that many people said about her".¹¹⁰ Her intellectual activities have been best portrayed in Betussi's two dialogues on love, both taking place in Baffa's home. The *Dialogo Amorofo* has as central interlocutors Francesca Baffa and Francesco Sansovino, and *Il Raverta* features Baffa, Ottaviano della Rovere (Il Raverta) and Lodovico Domenichi.¹¹¹ Betussi's dialogues outline a circle of *litterati* who had frequent meetings and exchanged letters and sonnets between them, including Francesco Sansovino, Francesca Baffa, Conte Collaltino Collalto, Lodovico Domenichi, Baldessare Stampa, Bartolomeo Gottifredi, Antonfrancesco Doni, Ottavio Raverta and the publisher Gabriel Giolito. The *Sonetti di Messer Giuseppe Betussi et d'altri autori*, which follows *Dialogo Amorofo* in the same volume, includes poetical compositions of the same circle of persons. That Conte Collaltino Collalto, Gaspara Stampa's lover, and Baldassare, her brother, belonged to this social network indicates that Gaspara too was associated with the same persons and most probably with Baffa as well.

Baffa also figures in the contemporary correspondence, especially among the Venetian circle of the *poligrafi*. In his letter to Lodovico Domenichi in 1544, Bartolomeo Gottifredi gave his compliments to Giuseppe Betussi, Campessano and Baffa.¹¹² In 1545, Giovanni Brevio declared his devotion to Baffa in a letter to Betussi [*Magnifica Madonna Francesca Baffa, le cui virtù me le hanno fatto servo*] and in another to Lodovico Domenichi, in June of 1545 [*Signora Francesca Baffa, le cui virtù me le hanno fatto servo*].¹¹³ A month later, Brevio sent a letter to Baffa, in which he thanked her for her mediation with the publisher Gabriel Giolito for his edition of a Petrarchan work.¹¹⁴ In Nicolò Franco's fictitious letter to Dante, Francesca Baffa is presented as Domenichi's most dear woman next to the Queen of Poland.¹¹⁵ Baffa was also in correspondence with Antonfrancesco Doni. In a letter Doni informed her that he had written a dialogue on women and confirmed to her that it had been written in favour of them, since he had removed from the female sex

¹¹⁰ "...con sì gran fama di dottrina, e scienza, che molte persone illustri etiandio da lontani paesi andarono à quella Città solo per visitarla, e conoscer in lei gl'effetti di quelle meraviglie, che molti raccontavano": Della Chiesa, *Theatro delle donne letterati*, p. 157.

¹¹¹ See below pp. 188-90.

¹¹² *Della Nuova Scelta di Lettere*, Libro Secondo, p. 310; on a love dialogue written by Bartolomeo Gottifredi see below p. 192.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 357, 366.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 301.

¹¹⁵ "Lettera di M. Nicolo Franco B. Scritta novellamente a Dante Aligieri, Poeta Fiorentino, sovra gli avisi della sua Comedia", in *Delle Lettere di diversi autori, raccolte per Venturin Ruffinelli, Libro Primo, con una oratione a gli amanti* (Mantova, 1547), p. LXIII.

a "rabble of sows". He continues saying that he intends to publish another work on women entitled *La Bella Donna*, which he wishes to dedicate to her since "men name you the first among women".¹¹⁶ Whether Doni wrote these works is not known. In any case, none of them was published. Nevertheless, Doni's letter indicates that Baffa too, like many intellectual women in sixteenth-century Italy, showed interest in the contemporary debate about women.

Of equal importance was the literary salon of Beatrice Pia degli Obizzi, in Padua. Although her permanent residence was in Ferrara, her literary salon in Padua hosted from time to time important figures of the Venetian and Paduan intellectual circles, such as Sperone Speroni and Benedetto Varchi, both belonging to the Academy of *Inflammati* of Padua. Giuseppe Betussi, an *Inflammato* as well, ranked her among the most important women of his day. Initially, he underlines her devotion to her husband: "Like every wise woman she obeys her husband's customs and adapts her life to them as if they were laws and orders imposed by God".¹¹⁷ However, he continues referring to the most active side of Beatrice's personality, claiming that whenever she was an "academy" of learned men gathered around her, and that many intellectuals frequented her house, discussing "useful, honest and pleasant matters".¹¹⁸ Many years later, Agostino della Chiesa, refers to Pia degli Obizzi in similar words: "she was such a lover of the learned and honourable persons that she always sought their company to have the opportunity to discuss with them and ask them fruitful questions; it is said that wherever she was an academy of true *virtuosi* and learned persons gathered around her".¹¹⁹ Sperone Speroni portrayed the

¹¹⁶ "Il mio Dialogo del mio poco cervello de le femine viene a Vinegia in barca; non vi spaventate. Perche se voi lo legerete tutto, troverete ch'egli è in favor delle donne; per haver cavato del numero di voi altre una marmaglia di scroffe. Ora io fornirò un di una operetta detta la bella Donna del Doni. Quando non vi fosse in dispiacere la dedicherò a V.S. ch'è somma d'ogni dolcezza, & perfetto de chiari spiriti; come bene ho veduto nella risposta fattami con le dignissime rime. Certo che non è da maravigliarsi se gl' huomini vi danno il titolo fra le prime valorose donne...": Doni, *Tre libri di lettere*, pp. 73-4.

¹¹⁷ "& come saggia donna i costumi del marito le sono state l'institutioni, & ordini della vita sua a se da Iddio imposte": Betussi, *Libro di M. Gio. Boccaccio delle donne illustri*, p. 201V.

¹¹⁸ "Si puo dire, che dove ella sempre è stata, & ivi si sia veduta l'Accademia d'i veri virtuosi, & dotti. Imperoche ordinariamente nella casa sua dove di continuo i degni spiriti concorrono come a novo miracolo di virtù si dispensa il tempo in ragionamenti utili, honesti, & dilettevoli. Et partendosi ella di Padova, o di Ferrara, dove per lo piu è la sua ferma stanza, sempre parve, che si partisse quanta consolatione, & quanta gioia puo gustare spirito virtuoso nelle attioni, che degnamente puote essercitare", Ibid., p. 202R.

¹¹⁹ "fu tanto amatrice de letterati, e persone honorate, che cercò d'haverne sempre in compagnia, per poter con quelle ragionare, e dimandarli qualche bella questione, e communemente si diceva, che dove ella era, ivi si vedeva l'Academia de i veri virtuosi, e dotti": Della Chiesa, *Theatro delle donne letterati*, pp. 92-93.

atmosphere of Beatrice's villa in *Dialogo delle laudi del Cathaio*. Benedetto Varchi and Luigi Alamanni are present among others.¹²⁰ Speroni's *Della Dignità delle Donne*, also takes place in Beatrice's villa in Padua, and Beatrice Pia degli Obizzi is one of the interlocutors among Conte di San Bonifatio and Daniele Barbaro.¹²¹

Laura Terracina was also in contact with the writers of the Venetian environment in the 1540s. Terracina was born into a noble family of Naples, where she remained for the most part of her life. Marcantonio Passero, a former professor at the University of Padua, undertook her education. Only later in life she married a relative of hers, Polidoro Terracina, and in her last years she settled in Rome. She published nine volumes of poetry inspired by the Petrarchan tradition. Apart from her six volumes of *Rime*, one of her most successful writings was the aforementioned *Discorso sopra tutti i primi canti di Orlando Furioso*, dedicated to Bernardino Bonifacio, Marquis of Oria. In 1561, she published in Naples some elegiac stanzas, *Sovra tutte le donne vedove di questa nostra città di Napoli*, commenting on the state of widowhood in her time. She was a member of the Neapolitan Academy of *Incogniti* from 1545 to 1547, with the name "Febea", and she had important literary acquaintances in Naples, such as Angelo Di Costanzo, Marco Antonio Epicuro, Minurno and Tansillo.¹²²

It is not known if Terracina had ever passed through Venice. However, she associated herself with some of the writers who operated in the Venetian literary environment. Lodovico Domenichi edited the first volume of Terracina's *Rime* in 1548 on Gabriel Giolito's Press. In his dedicatory letter to Vincenzo Belprato, Count of Aversa, Domenichi claimed that Terracina was unaware of this publication. This was a typical literary device broadly found in women's writings, and especially in their first works; it aimed at demonstrating their chastity and modesty. It was also customary for the first work of a woman to be prologued by a known male author in

¹²⁰ S. Speroni, *Dialogo delle laudi del Cathaio*, in his *Dialoghi*.

¹²¹ On Speroni's *Della Dignità delle Donne*, see below pp. 196-7.

¹²² Cola Antonio Simeone di Capua's poem is indicative of Terracina's reputation in Naples. He compares her to Sappho and Corinna and says that just as those women honoured their countries, Terracina has exalted Naples: "Se Lesbo di sua Sappho ha Gloria tanta / S'Hellicon, cinto, e pindo, e le nove / Figlie de l'immortale, e sommo Giove / Se di Corynna sua patria si vanta, / Napoli esalta del suo allor la pianta, / Da cui immensa dolcezza, e gratia piove / Di vaghi versi, de rime alte, e nove / Che parthenope dorme, quando c(e)i canta / Tanto piu degno, è questo di quel lauro / Che dal dotto cultor, con tanta cura / Fu celebrato, dal mare Indo, al Mauro / Quanto maggior de l'arte, e la Natura / Però che ricco ha fatto il suo thesoro / senza uopo d'altrui studio, o coltura": Terracina, *Discorso*, p. 77V; for Laura Terracina, see: N. Dersofi, "Laura Terracina", in *Italian Women Writers*, ed. Russell; *Women Poets*, ed. and trans. Stortoni, Lillie, pp. 104-107.

order to make a better public impression. In her proem to Lodovico Dolce, referring to her reworking of Ariosto's *canti*, Terracina indicated again the anxiety women writers often felt over their literary initiatives.¹²³ In *Libreria*, Antonfrancesco Doni dedicated the letter "L" to Terracina. He pointed out that her works have surpassed many men's writings and her intellect graces Naples.¹²⁴ Furthermore, Doni's *Pistolotti amorosi* include a letter to Terracina, which discusses philosophical questions on love and beauty. Doni's words imply that although he had already been in correspondence with Terracina, he had not met her personally: "...and although I have not seen your virtuous figure but in woodcut, I have always your lively image before my eyes".¹²⁵ Doni probably had in mind the woodcut portrait that appears in front of Terracina's first volume of *Rime*, published by Giolito in Venice in 1548.

Another interesting relationship was that between Lodovico Domenichi and the poetess Lucia Bertana Dell'Oro. She belonged to the Bolognese family Dell'Oro and she was married to a certain Guronc Bertani of Modena. Little information has come down to us about Bertana's life but it seems that, although she wrote little, she had a quite important role in contemporary literary activities.¹²⁶ It is not known when Domenichi met Bertana and how their relationship developed. However, Domenichi placed her as speaker in *Dialogo Amorofo* among Silvia Boiarda, Contessa di Scandiano, Battista Varana, Conte Hercole Rangone, a relative of Bertana, and Gherardo Spini.¹²⁷ Silvia Boiarda was also a woman with important literary acquaintances; she was in correspondence with Ariosto, Domenichi, Tasso and other contemporaries.¹²⁸ According to Domenichi, this conversation had taken place in Bertana's house in Modena, in 1560. That Bertana's husband does not figure anywhere in the dialogue indicates that these literary gatherings were Bertana's own initiative. A year before, Domenichi had praised her in his dedicatory letter to the Milanese nobleman Giannoto Castiglione in his collection of poems written by

¹²³ See below p. 176.

¹²⁴ "Lode grandissima meritano hoggi gl'huomini che fanno opere; ma molto piu mi pare che si debba lodare una Donna maggiormente, avanzando infinite compositioni scritte da gl'huomini. Ecco Signora che con l'elevato vostro ingegno date parte di luce alla realissima città di Napoli. Ecco la fama che s'ode per tutto delle bellissime vostre Rime, lequali mostrano al mondo la nobiltà del vostro spirito, unite con l'animo suo virtuoso. Onde io mi v'inchino & fo riverenza." A. Doni, *La Libreria nella quale sono scritti tutti gl' Autori vulgari con cento discorsi sopra quelli* (Venice, 1550), p. 28V.

¹²⁵ "...& anchora che io non habbia veduto la virtuosa persona vostra se non in disegno, non dimeno a tutte l'hore vi veggio sempre viva inanzi a gli occhi miei": Doni, *Pistolotti amorosi*, pp. 92R-94R.

¹²⁶ She actively participated in the literary dispute between Annibal Caro and Ludovico Castelvetro, and vainly attempted to reconcile them: *Women Poets*, ed. Sturtoni, Lillie, p. 128.

¹²⁷ Domenichi, "Dialogo Amorofo", in his *Dialoghi*.

¹²⁸ McIver, "Two Emilian Noblewomen and Patronage Networks in the Cinquecento", p. 165.

women.¹²⁹ The same volume includes Bertana's panegyric poems to Veronica Gambara and Vittoria Colonna and two poems dedicated by her to Lodovico Domenichi and Gherardo Spini, indicating the same circle of acquaintances.

It follows from the above that the Venetian environment of the 1540s and 1550s offered opportunities of mixed intellectual activities and conversations. Usually, although not always, the women who participated in these activities were courtesans or women who diverted from the dominant norms of female behaviour. A circle of acquaintances emerges among these women and authors who associated with the Venetian literary environment of the period, and especially the so-called *poligrafi* and all those who related with Gabriel Giolito's Press.

However, the most substantial works written by women in defence of the female sex were not born in such a favourable socio-cultural environment. On the contrary, these works were written in a period in which the debate about women was on the decline, and their authors had not the same opportunities with their female predecessors to participate actively in intellectual projects. All three women who wrote polemical works to defend the female sex and reject the dominant gender order were born and lived in Venice.

Moderata Fonte (or Modesta Pozzo) was born into a middle class family in 1555. Having been orphaned at an early age, she grew up with some relatives of hers until she entered the convent of Santa Marta, where she enjoyed a primary education. At the age of nine she returned to her relatives' home, where she continued her studies with her brother's help. About 1582 she married Filippo Zorzi, a Venetian lawyer and civil servant. Having written the chivalric romance *Il Floridoro* (1581), some verse narratives of the *Passion of Christ* (1582) and the *Resurrection of Christ* (1592), in 1592 she wrote *Il merito delle donne*, which was published posthumously in 1600 in Venice, and was dedicated by Fonte's daughter, Cecilia de' Zorzi, to Livia Feltria della Rovere, Duchess of Urbino. Fonte's dialogue forcefully attacked marriage, condemning the economic exploitation, maltreatment and home seclusion women suffered by their husbands and other male relatives.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Domenichi, *Rime diverse d'alcune nobilissime et virtuossime donne*.

¹³⁰ On Moderata Fonte's life and works, see: Cox, "Introduction", in Fonte, *The Worth of Women*; P. Labalme, "Venetian Women on Women: Three Early Modern Feminists", *Archivio Veneto*, 117 (1981); Cox, "The Single Self"; P. Malpezzi Price, *Moderata Fonte. Women and Life in Sixteenth-Century Venice* (Madison & London, 2003); eadem, "A Woman's Discourse in the Italian Renaissance: Moderata Fonte's *Il Merito delle donne*", *Annali d'Italianistica*, 7 (1989); B. Guthmuller, "Non taceremo più a lungo. Sul dialogo *Il Merito delle donne* di Moderata Fonte",

Born in 1571, Lucrezia Marinella was the daughter of the physician and natural philosopher Giovanni Marinello. Her brother was also a physician and she was married to a physician as well, Girolamo Vacca. Marinella enjoyed an advanced education, including Latin. Apart from her treatise on the superiority of the female sex, she engaged in other literary genres. She wrote the sacred epic poem, *La colomba sacra*, the *Vita del serafico et glorioso San Francesco*, a sacred narrative in prose and epic poem under the title *La vita di Maria Vergine Imperatrice dell'universo*, sonnets, madrigals and longer poems in *Rime Sacre*, the pastoral drama *Arcadia Felice* and the epic poem *L'Enrico overo Bisantio acquistato*. Marinella's family did not consider female education superfluous. On the contrary, her father had shown profound interest in women's issues, writing two treatises on female beauty, hygiene and gynaecology.¹³¹ *La nobiltà et l'eccellenza delle donne, co' difetti et mancamenti de gli uomini* was published in 1600 mostly as an answer to Giuseppe Passi's misogynist *I donneschi difetti*, published in 1599. *La nobiltà* was dedicated to the doctor Lucio Scarano, a family friend.¹³²

The third writer, Arcangela Tarabotti, was born in Venice in 1604. The modest means of her family, who had nine other children to bring up, forced Tarabotti to become a nun at an early age at the Benedictine convent of St. Anna in Castello, in Venice. The decision was taken against her will. Tarabotti's bitterness about her forced enclosure never waned. On the contrary, it became the source of inspiration for her polemical works. In *La tirannia paterna*, later rewritten and entitled *La semplicità ingannata* and published posthumously (1654) and in *L'inferno monacale*, which remained in manuscript until recently, Tarabotti strongly criticized the forced vocations of women and the repressive mechanisms of the families over their daughters. Furthermore, in 1644 Tarabotti wrote *Antisatira*, a

Filologia e Critica, 17 (1992); B. Collina, "Moderata Fonte e il merito delle donne", *Annali d'Italianistica*, 7 (1989); A. Chemello, "La donna, il modello, l'immaginario: Moderata Fonte e Lucrezia Marinella", in *Nel cerchio della luna*, ed. Zancan; M. F. Rosenthal, "Venetian Women Writers and their Discontents", in *Sexuality and Gender*, ed. Turner; on Fonte, see also below pp. 209-11, 244-5, 252-3.

¹³¹ Marinello, *Gli ornamenti*; idem, *Le medicine*.

¹³² On Lucrezia Marinella's life and works, see: L. Panizza, "Introduction", in L. Marinella, *The Nobility and Excellence of Women and the defects and vices of men*, ed. and trans. A. Dunhill (Chicago & London, 1999); Labalme, "Venetian Women on Women"; Cox, "The Single Self"; A. Chemello, "The Rhetoric of Eulogy in Lucrezia Marinella's *La nobiltà et l'eccellenza delle Donne*", in *Women in Italian Renaissance*, ed. Panizza; Conti Odorisio, *Donna e società*; P. Allen, F. Salvatore, "Lucrezia Marinelli and Woman's Identity in Late Italian Renaissance", *Renaissance and Reformation*, 16: 4 (1992); Chemello, "La donna, il modello, l'immaginario"; on Marinella, see also below pp. 246-8, 252-3.

forceful response to Francesco Buoninsegni's satire of women's dress and vanity, *Del lusso donnesco, satira menippea*, published in 1638. Finally, in 1651 she published *Che le donne siano della spezie degli huomini* under the pseudonym Galerana Barcitotti; it was a forceful answer to the anonymous *Disputatio nova contra mulieres, qua probatur eas homines non esse* (1595) translated into Italian by a certain Orazio Plata in 1647.¹³³

Moderata Fonte and Lucrezia Marinella, restrained by the cultural norms imposed on middle class women, especially in the second half of the sixteenth century, and Arcangela Tarabotti, in veil seclusion, had not the same opportunities as their female predecessors to indulge in a social intellectual life. Although both Fonte and Marinella were encouraged by their families to engage in studies, their social profile was mostly limited to their family circles. As far as it is known, their only personal acquaintances were among family friends and relatives, such as Marinella's relationship with the physician and intellectual Lucio Scarano, who promoted the publication of her treatise on female superiority. Fonte's and Marinella's familiarity with the contemporary literary developments accomplished more through reading rather than personal contacts. Referring to Marinella, Francesco Sansovino noticed: "She gained marvelous advantage from remaining confined in her room all day, studying literature with an eager mind".¹³⁴ Fonte and Marinella lived in a period which witnessed the increasing idealization of female chastity, marriage, and domestic virtues. Towards the end of the sixteenth century, treatises on marriage and religious conduct books had to a great extent replaced the writings defending the female sex. The words of Giovanni Niccolò Doglioni, Fonte's relative and biographer, are indicative of the new climate: "as a woman, she had to attend to womanly tasks like sewing, and she did not wish to neglect these labors because of the false notion, so widespread in our city today, that women should excel in nothing but the running of the household".¹³⁵

¹³³ On Arcangela Tarabotti's life and works, see: Panizza "Introduction", in Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*; L. Panizza, "Introduction", in A. Tarabotti, *Che le donne siano della spezie degli uomini*, ed. Panizza (London, 1994); E. Weaver, "Introduction", in F. Buoninsegni, A. Tarabotti, *Satira e Antisatira*, ed. Weaver (Rome, 1998); E. Weaver, "Suor Arcangela Tarabotti", in *Italian Women Writers*, ed. Russel; D. De Bellis, "Attacking Sumptuary Laws in Seicento Venice: Arcangela Tarabotti", in *Women in Italian Renaissance*, ed. Panizza; Cox, "The Single Self"; Conti Odorisio, *Donna e società*; Labalme, "Venetian Women on Women"; on Tarabotti, see also below pp. 171-2, 248-53.

¹³⁴ Panizza, "Introduction", in Marinella, *The Nobility*, p. 6.

¹³⁵ Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, p. 39.

Tarabotti's case, half a century later, is more perplexing. Although confined in the convent, Tarabotti succeeded in developing a circle of acquaintances that helped her to keep in touch with the contemporary intellectual life outside the convent. Tarabotti's case may suggest that the Venetian or ecclesiastical authorities' restrictive rules on convents had weakened in the mid-seventeenth century. However, Tarabotti's acquaintances with libertine and anticlerical circles also raise the query about her own ideological orientation, and to what extent she might have been influenced by such ideas. Among her acquaintances, the most significant was Doge Giovan Francesco Loredan, the founder of the Venetian Academy of the *Incogniti*, many members of which had strong anticlerical sentiments. In 1648, the publisher of the Academy, Francesco Valvasense aroused the suspicion of the Inquisition for the publication of *Che le donne non sono della spetie delli huomini*. Apart from its misogynist statements, this work had heretical inclinations as well. Valvasense was also accused of the publication or circulation of other prohibited or suspicious books, such as the *Inframezzati istorici della guerra di Candia di Sertono Anticano* and Ferrante Pallavicino's *L'anima*. Pallavicino, a member of the *Incogniti* as well, was known for his anticlerical sentiments, which led to his death on Papal instructions in 1644. Pallavicino was accused of his opposition to the Jesuits, Pope Urbano VIII and the family Barberini.¹³⁶ In all probability it was Tarabotti's brother-in-law, the *Incognito* Giacomo Pighetti, who introduced her to the other members of the Academy, to Loredan, Francesco Pona and Girolamo Brusoni. She was also in regular correspondence with the Venetian patrician Giovanni Polani. Furthermore, Tarabotti was in contact with French intellectuals connected to libertine circles, such as Nicolas Bretel de Gremonville, the French ambassador to Venice, and Gabriel Naudé, the librarian of Cardinal Mazarin.¹³⁷

Tarabotti's acquaintances helped her to participate in the contemporary intellectual scene. Polani and Loredan provided her with books not circulating in the convent, or even prohibited ones, such as the Pallavicino's *L'anima*. It was Loredan who supervised the publication of her *Paradiso monacale* (1643) and *Lettere*

¹³⁶ Ferrante Pallavicino's polemic against the Church and Barberini family was mainly developed in *Il Corriero svaligiato*, *La Baccinata ovvero batterella per le Api Barberine* and *Dialogo tra due gentiluomini Acanzi* (1642).

¹³⁷ M. Miato, *L'Accademia degli Incogniti di Giovan Francesco Loredan, Venezia (1630-1661)* (Florence, 1998), pp. 113-120, 130-66. Panizza "Introduction", in Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*; Panizza, "Introduction", in Tarabotti, *Che le donne siano*; Weaver, "Introduction", in Buoninsegni, Tarabotti, *Satira e Antisatira*.

familiari (1650), and Francesco Valvasense who published her *Antisatira* along with Buoninsegni's *Contro 'l lusso donnesco* (1644). However, at the same time, Tarabotti's relations with these circles must have aroused suspicions. Tarabotti's attack on Pallavicino in *La tirannia paterna* and her answer to the heretical *Che le donne non sono della spetie delli huomini* should be seen not only as a defence of the female sex but also as an attempt to dissociate herself from potential accusations of anticlerical sentiments.¹³⁸ *La tirannia paterna* and *L'inferno monacale* must have also been targets of criticism. When the *Paradiso monacale* was published, in 1643, *La tirannia paterna* and *L'inferno monacale* had already been written. Although not published, they circulated in manuscript form. So, the *Paradiso monacale* was probably an attempt on the part of Tarabotti to retrieve her reputation, which had been at risk. Actually, in 1660, *La tirannia paterna* was condemned by the Holy Office and its circulation was prohibited.¹³⁹ Tarabotti leveled her criticism at certain aspects of the religious life, and especially women's enforced enclosure, and not against the whole Catholic faith. However, despite Tarabotti's declarations of her devotion to the Catholic Church, one could argue that the anticlerical and libertine ideas circulating in her environment could not but have influenced her.

Virginia Cox has underlined some significant differences between Fonte's, Marinella's and Tarabotti's attitude and their male predecessors' works, most importantly female writers' concern with the economic realities of women's condition. Cox argues that their works were an answer to the limitation of marriage and dowry opportunities that middle-class women suffered towards the end of the sixteenth century, due to the broader economic and social changes the Venetian society underwent.¹⁴⁰ Patricia Labalme has also suggested that Fonte's, Marinella's and Tarabotti's writings expressed the paradoxical dichotomy of female experience in early modern Venice; on the one hand, women were confined and cloistered, and, on the other hand, political legend and ritual, social custom and artistic and literary culture had made them self-aware.¹⁴¹ Moderata Fonte, Lucrezia Marinella and Arcangela Tarabotti expressed a forceful reaction to the limitations imposed on women within family, church and society and the cultural norms which prescribed these constraints. However, the literature on women had given these writers the

¹³⁸ See below pp. 248-52.

¹³⁹ Panizza "Introduction", in Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*, p. 27.

¹⁴⁰ Cox, "The Single Self".

¹⁴¹ Labalme, "Venetian Women on Women".

analytical tools for treating these problems, and the activities of their female predecessors in Venice had offered them the example. It could be said that their works were the response to a socio-cultural milieu that constrained their power but at the same time offered them the potentiality to express their anxieties.

WOMEN AND LITERARY ACADEMIES

Early modern Italian Academies were traditionally masculine institutions, which, as a general rule, did not accept women in their activities. Female presence within the world of the Academies was mainly in the neo-platonic sense, as the stimulating muses of the male intellectuals. In his *Oratione* praising Academies before the Academy of *Accesi* in Siena, Scipion Bargagli presented as one of the determinants for the successful function of the Academies "the divine grace and celestial favour that always pours down from the beautiful, lovable and courageous women; they always keep the virtuous young men cheerful and fit, and lead them to pleasant and honourable undertakings".¹⁴² With a similar tone, in 1545, in his *Orazione* honouring women, before the Sienese Academy of the *Intronati*, Alessandro Piccolomini, claimed that his oration aimed not only at defending women but also at manifesting to the *Intronati* that only through their love for, and services to, women they can fulfill themselves. At the same time, Piccolomini implied his disappointment at some members' improper attitude towards women.¹⁴³

The debate about women was a commonplace in Academies' lectures. Similar to Piccolomini's oration was Thomaso Pellegrini's lecture defending the female sex, which was delivered before the Academy of the *Occulti* in Brescia.

¹⁴² "Et questa sì è la divina gratia, e 'l celestic favore, che dalle belle, amabili, & valorose donne ogni hor ne piove; mezzi attissimi a tener continuamente allegri, & pronti i leggiadri, & virtuosi giovani a liete et honorate imprese": S. Bargagli, *Delle lodi dell'Academie, Oratione da lui recitata nell'Academia degli Accesi in Siena* (Florence, 1569), p. 23.

¹⁴³ "Se non fosse cosa a voi più per aventura giovevole, Intronati, il parlar oggi in lode delle donne per mostrarvi la vera via di andare al Cielo — la quale è riposta nella riverenza e quasi venerazione che doviamo aver loro, come a vero pegno di Iddio datoci per fede e testimonio della vera bellezza e beatitudine — dalla qual via vi veggio omai troppo smarriti; e se parimente non fosse più questo medesimo a me necessario per acquistar quanto ad un mortal si conviene la grazia d'esse, la quale per colpa non so di chi, ma forse d'alcun di voi, m'è impedita, che egli si fosse necessaria appresso di coloro i quali, illuminati da un vero raggio di ragione, conoscono l'eccellenza e divinità delle donne, e conoscendola si beeno una certa contentezza, che gli fa felicissimi...": Piccolomini, *L'Orazione*, pp. 546-7.

Drawing on Piccolomini's oration, Pellegrini appealed to the audience and the Academy's members to defend women, and implied a close relationship between the *Occulti* and women.¹⁴⁴ Similar were the orations of Girolamo Ruscelli before the Venetian Academy of *Dubbiosi*, Mutio Manfredi before the Academy of *Confusi* in Bologna and Cipriano Giambelli before the Academy of *Solletici* in Treviso.¹⁴⁵ A dispute about women's nature also took place in the Academy of *Invaghiti*, in Mantua, with Giovanni Francesco Pusterla lecturing against women and Pompeo Baccusi defending them.¹⁴⁶ Even more lectures might have taken place in early modern Italian Academies without ever being published. To what extent women attended these lectures is not known. However, some orations, such as that of Olimpico Pigro, before the Bolognese Academy of *Sonnacchiosi* at the end of the sixteenth century – addressing the beautiful women listeners directly –, imply that the audience frequently included women too.¹⁴⁷ Alessandro Piccolomini, a member of the Academy of the *Infiammati* of Padua as well, mentions a sonnet defending the female sex that he had delivered in Padua, in presence of some noble women.¹⁴⁸ Cristofano Bronzini's attack against Giuseppe Passi for having compromised the reputation of the Ravenna Academy of *Informi* with his misogynist treatise *I donneschi Difetti* also demonstrates Academies' trend to present themselves as institutions favourable towards women.¹⁴⁹

Furthermore, in comparison with the Universities, Academies sometimes accepted women as members. A small minority of women succeeded in entering the

¹⁴⁴ "e voi nobilissimi Auditori, che di Donne purfete nasciuti, se non volete esser ingrati, e smentichevoli de i beneficii da loro ricevuti, siate ogn'ora pronti, e iuanimiti à difenderle da coloro, equali cercassero in conto alcuno offenderle, il che tanto maggiormente siamo di far noi, Nobilissimi OCCULTI, che viviamo continovamente fra Donne, lequali dirò solamente, poi che più non mi si conviene, che di nobiltà, di prudenza, e di Altezza di animo non sono punto inferiori à quali altre si sieno: T. Pellegrini, *Discorso del costante accademico occulto in laude delle donne* (Venice, 1579), p. 22R.

¹⁴⁵ C. Giambelli, *Discorso alla maggioranza dell'huomo e della donna, fatto nell'Accademia de' Solletici di Trevigi* (Treviso, 1589); for Mutio Manfredi's oration, see: C. Fahy, "Women and Italian Cinquecento Literary Academies", in *Women in Italian Renaissance*, ed. Panizza, p. 446.

¹⁴⁶ Daenens, "Superiore perché inferiore", pp. 42, 49.

¹⁴⁷ "De'quai misterii sendo voi bellissime Donne intendenti, non dovete per veruna cagione privare della benignità vostra quelli, che v'amano, per non fare misero l'estiglio delle loro alme, ch'è giocondo mentre possono habitare dove voi sete: perciò che così gli indurrete al ben fare, & allontanandogli dal volgo gli scorgerete à glorioso fine, non senza far immortale il nome, e 'l sesso vostro, delquale con isdegno fù scritto": O. Pigro, *Discorso d'amore...e raccolto dal Sonnacchioso nell'Accademia* (Vicenza, 1595), p. 22V.

¹⁴⁸ "che secondo diversi rispetti, la donna e l'huomo d'ugal perfettion si trovino...una parte delle quai ragioni, feci chiare questo anno passato, esponendo un sonetto quà in Padova, à la presentia di una bellissima scelta di Gentil donne...": Piccolomini, *De la Institutione*, p. 132V.

¹⁴⁹ See below pp. 241-3.

world of the Academies. Veronica Gambara was associated with the *Sonnacchiosi*, as her letter to Paolo Emilio Veralli, head of the Academy, in March 1543, indicates.¹⁵⁰ There are also indications that Gambara had founded an Academy in Correggio.¹⁵¹ Apart from her close relationships with the members of the *Accademia Fiorentina*, which included no woman member, Laura Battiferri participated in the gatherings of the *Orti Oricellari*, and she was an enrolled member of the *Intronati*, with the name "Sgratiata" (The Displeased, or Graceless). Battiferri wrote some sonnets honouring the *Intronati* and Girolamo Bargagli, a member of the Academy. These sonnets were probably written on the occasion of her election. That Battiferri belonged to the *Assorditi* of Urbino remains, however, a hypothesis.¹⁵² Moreover, Gaspara Stampa was a member of the *Dubbiosi* in Padua and Venice, Laura Terracina of the *Incogniti* in Naples, Tarquinia Molza of the *Innominati* in Parma, Virginia Salvi of the *Travagliati* in Siena and Barbara Callina of the *Occulti* in Brescia.¹⁵³

The enrolment of known women in certain Academies was often just a matter of form, since a woman often belonged to an Academy in a city where she did not live, as with Laura Battiferri in the Sienese *Intronati*. By accepting known women as members, Academies increased their own prestige; many of these women exalted the Academies and their members in their poems. Angelo Spannocchi's letter to Belisario Bulgarini is indicative of this practice. Referring to the election of Virginia Salvi in the *Travagliati* of Siena in 1560, he remarked that the main reason for her acceptance was *Travagliati's* rivalry with *Intronati*, who included among their members "the great Battiferri".¹⁵⁴ Be that as it may, the enrolment of a woman in a certain Academy or her association with it undoubtedly offered her intellectual stimuli and helped her to broaden her acquaintances.

Although Academies usually kept women out of the limelight, they offered them some opportunities to participate in the intellectual life of their cities. As has already been discussed, Tullia d'Aragona and Laura Battiferri's relations with the members of the *Accademia Fiorentina* helped them to keep in touch with the literary developments, without being officially members. Moreover, many Academies were open to a broader public, including women in some of their activities. These open

¹⁵⁰ Chimenti, *Veronica Gambara*, p. 85; E. Selmi, "Per l'epistolario di Veronica Gambara", in *Veronica Gambara*, ed. Bozzetti, Gibellini, Sandal, p. 162.

¹⁵¹ Chimenti, *Veronica Gambara*, p. 85; McIver, "Two Emilian Noblewomen", p. 162.

¹⁵² Guidi, "Introduction", in Battiferri, *Il primo libro*.

¹⁵³ Fahy, "Women and Italian Cinquecento Literary Academies".

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 444.

performances often took place during feast occasions, especially during Carnival. In particular the Sienese *Intronati* developed close relationships with the noblewomen of the city. The proem of the *Intronati*'s comedy *L'Hortensio* declares the close relationships between the Academy and women. A personification of Comedy comes to the stage to underline that the establishment of the Academy originated with women, and that the "beautiful and prestigious women" inspire each virtuous activity of the *Intronati*. Furthermore, Comedy's words imply that women attended the play as well.¹⁵⁵ The *Intronati*'s *Comedia del Sacrificio* also implies the presence of a female audience. The comedy, presented during the Carnival of 1531, begins with a eulogy of women.¹⁵⁶ In their lectures too, *Intronati* often dealt with love matters.¹⁵⁷ Another comedy, *Gli Ingannati*, implies the performance of some plays and social events organized by the members of the Academy, before and during the Carnival, for the amusement of the Sienese noblewomen. Furthermore, *Intronati* organized public lectures, taking care to choose subjects that would appeal to women. The *Inflammati* of Padua, the *Invaghiti* of Mantua and several Ferrarese Academies organized similar performances.¹⁵⁸ Agostino della Chiesa probably had in mind such performances, when he mentioned a certain Angela di Barcellona, in the mid-sixteenth century, who "was often found in public Academics to discuss with learned men, testifying how skillful and erudite female intellect can be", and the Neapolitan Margherita Sarrocchi who Della Chiesa had heard "reciting nice poems at the public Academies of Rome".¹⁵⁹

Especially in Siena, noblewomen, such as Camila Mandoli, Frasia Bandini, Frasia Venturi, Giulia and Avrelia Petrucci, Frasia Marzi, Margarita Salvi and Laudomia Forteguerri, participated in the intellectual life of the city through their association with the *Intronati*. The poetess Laudomia Forteguerri had a close

¹⁵⁵ "La voglia che io tengo di compiacere a questi Intronati, & il desiderio di vedere, & di conoscere queste belle donne, che fioriscono hoggi; havendomi esci affermato, che, ne di bellezza, ne di valore non sono punto inferiori à quelle, che io ci lasciai, dalle quali nacque l'origine della loro Academia, & d'ogni loro virtuosa operatione": *L'Hortensio, comedia de gl'accademici intronati di Siena* (Venice, 1574), pp. 3V-4R.

¹⁵⁶ "Donne leggiadre, a cui l'alto Motore / Tanto diede di gratia, e di bellade / co meritevolmente il primo honore / vi si verrebbe in questa nostra etade...": *Comedia del Sacrificio de gli Intronati da Siena celebrato ne' giochi del Carnovale in Siena, l'Anno MDXXXI* (Venice, 1559).

¹⁵⁷ *Dieci Paradosse degli Accademici Intronati di Siena in vulgar Toscano Sanese dettate, e nuovamente ristampate* (Venice, 1608).

¹⁵⁸ Fahy, "Women and Italian Cinquecento Literary Academies".

¹⁵⁹ Della Chiesa, *Theatro delle donne letterati*, pp. 77, 253; Margherita Sarrocchi was associated with the *Ordinati* of Rome and *Oziosi* of Naples: E. Graziosi, "Arcadia Femminile: Presenze e Modelli", *Filologia e Critica*, 17 (1992), p. 322.

relationship with Alessandro Piccolomini, the leading member of *Intronati*. Both in his dedicatory letter and the main text of *De la Institutione*, which Piccolomini offered as a present to Forteguerri's newborn son Alessandro Colombini, he implies the stimulating conversations he had with her on Dante's *Paradiso*.¹⁶⁰ Piccolomini also dedicated to Forteguerri two scientific works, *De la sfera del mondo* (1540) and *De le stelle fisse* (1540). In the dedicatory letter of the *Sfera del mondo* Piccolomini notices that Forteguerri had expressed her displeasure for having been born a woman and not having the opportunity to study the sciences. He continues underlining that Latin does not permit women to engage in the sciences and that he wrote his work in the vernacular so that women could be able to read it.¹⁶¹ It was probably the discussions Piccolomini had with Forteguerri about the problems women confronted that inspired him to write works and give lectures defending the female sex. Piccolomini also promoted Forteguerri's poetical talent, giving a lecture on one of her sonnets before the *Inflammati* of Padua in 1541.¹⁶²

Piccolomini was associated with another Siennese noblewoman, Frasia Venturi. The dedication of his translation of Xenophon's *Economics* to her indicates again Piccolomini's interest in helping women readers who knew neither Greek nor Latin. Furthermore, in *Della Institutione*, Piccolomini implies Venturi's participation in the *Intronati*'s gatherings. He refers to a debate on marriage, in which Venturi had disagreed with Piccolomini's relative, Marcantonio Piccolomini, also member of the *Intronati*.¹⁶³ Marcantonio Piccolomini also placed the Siennese noblewomen Laudomia Forteguerri, Frasia Marzi and Girolama Carla Piccolomini as speakers in his philosophical dialogue, which remains in manuscript.¹⁶⁴ It seems, however, that the Siennese intellectual climate favouring the participation of some women of the upper classes in such cultural performances declined towards the close of the sixteenth century. In *Dell' imprese* (1594), Scipione Bargagli remarked: "this was, that in the happy days of their [*Intronati*] youth they used to mix more often and with

¹⁶⁰ "...e havendo poco innanzi letto il XXXI canto del Paradiso di Dante; dove de la soma felicità si ragiona: qual voi già, con gran mio stupore, se ben vi ricordate, m'interpretaste: tutto m'ero col pensiero profondamente rivolto à molte bellissime cose, che voi sopra la Felicità humana e angelica, dottissimamente mi ragionaste... a stupir del giuditio vostro...": Piccolomini, *De la Institutione*.

¹⁶¹ Piéjus, "L'Orazione", pp. 531-532; see above p. 105 on Forteguerri's interest in astrology.

¹⁶² Fahy, "Women and Italian Cinquecento Literary Academies", p. 443.

¹⁶³ "Molte altre ragioni potrei dire intorno à questo; le quali sentii già allegare al nobilissimo M. Marcantonio Piccolomini, altrimenti il Solo Intronato; sostenendo egli questa parte contra la immortal M. Frasia Venturi", Piccolomini, *Della Institutione*, p. 219R.

¹⁶⁴ Piéjus, "L'Orazione", p. 532.

greater freedom with the beautiful and virtuous women of Siena than happens in these present wretched and corrupt times".¹⁶⁵

In the mid-seventeenth century, Arcangela Tarabotti's relationships with the Venetian *Incogniti* indicate the influence some women intellectuals had, or wished to have, on Academies' life. *Incogniti* showed some interest in gender issues, and some of their members, such as Francesco Pona, had published works praising women.¹⁶⁶ Furthermore, learned women, such as Arcangela Tarabotti, Lucrezia Cornaro Piscopia, Zenobia Porto, Sara Copia Sullam, Barbara Strozzi and the painter Artemisia Gentileschi, were associated with this Academy. However, the *Incogniti*'s treatment was not always favourable to the female sex. When, in 1638, Francesco Buoninsegni, a member of the Academy, published the misogynist *Del lusso donnesco, satira menippea*, Arcangela Tarabotti expressed her vexation to other members of the Academy, so that in 1644 the publisher of the Academy, Francesco Valvasense, published in the same volume *Del lusso donnesco* together with Tarabotti's response. Tarabotti's attack further attracted the *Incogniti*'s attention and aroused polemics against her. The Augustinian Angelico Aprosio, an *Incognito* as well, wrote *La maschera scoperta*, a direct attack against Tarabotti, but the latter succeeded in deterring its publication (although in his *La Biblioteca Aprosiana* (1673) Aprosio claimed that *La maschera scoperta* had been finally published by Francesco Valvasense in 1648). In 1646, Aprosio partly answered Tarabotti's *Antisatira* with another work, *Lo scudo di Rinaldo ovvero lo specchio del disinganno*, which he published in Venice under the pseudonym Scipio Glareano. In this work Aprosio attacked the female sex at large, chastising women's habits and claiming that women were incapable of engaging in arms and letters. Another *Incognito*, Girolamo Brusoni, also wrote a polemic against Tarabotti entitled *Antisatira satirizzata* which was never published.¹⁶⁷ Tarabotti's endeavour to affect the debate about women and intervene in *Incogniti*'s things is also evident by her correspondence with Giovan Francesco Loredan, the founder of the Academy. When Tarabotti made her complaints to Loredan for having delivered a speech against women before the Academy, the latter answered her in an apologetic tone. Probably it was due to

¹⁶⁵ Fahy, "Women and Italian Cinquecento Literary Academies", p. 440.

¹⁶⁶ F. Pona, *La Galeria delle donne celebri* (Rome, 1635).

¹⁶⁷ Miato, *L'Accademia degli Incogniti*, pp. 113-120, 184; Panizza, "Introduction", in Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*; Weaver, "Introduction", in Buoninsegni, Tarabotti, *Satira e Antisatira*; "Aprosio, Angelico", in *Dizionario*, vol. 3, pp. 650-3, 651; De Bellis, "Attacking Sumptuary Laws", pp. 237-9; see also below pp. 248-53.

Tarabotti's intervention that this oration was never included in the published collection of Loredan's lectures.¹⁶⁸

Although Academies were interested in the debate about women, their members were not always favourable towards the female sex. Furthermore, not all Academies adopted the same line of action towards women. When, for example, the *Intronati* admitted women as members in 1612, Traiano Boccalini leveled strong criticism at this development, when the news reached Parnassus.¹⁶⁹ It was only at the end of the seventeenth and during the eighteenth centuries that women more actively entered Academies. The Academy of *Arcadia*, founded in 1690, in Rome, launched this development.¹⁷⁰ However, already in the sixteenth century some women succeeded in entering certain Academies as members or being unofficially associated with their intellectual setting, and at times even affecting it.

¹⁶⁸ Miato, *L'Accademia degli Incogniti*, p. 113.

¹⁶⁹ Yates, "The Italian Academics", p. 26.

¹⁷⁰ Graziosi, "Arcadia Femminile".

CHAPTER FIVE

IDENTITIES OF FEMALE SPEAKERS AND MODELS OF FEMALE DECORUM IN ITALIAN LITERARY DIALOGUES

THE TRADITIONAL SILENT FEMALE FIGURE

The traditional norms of gender roles expected women to speak as little as possible in private life, especially in front of men, and remain silent in public life. Sixteenth and early seventeenth-century conduct literature continued to hold this attitude. The discourse on female verbal expression was closely interwoven with the broader corpus of ideas, epitomized in the belief that women are by nature inferior to men. Due to their physical inferiority, women should defer to men, not take part in public affairs and be faithfully devoted to their family duties under the strict supervision of their fathers or husbands, without taking initiative or expressing their own views. Female silence was also a sign of chastity, the crest of female virtues, and a symbol of public moral order. Whether unmarried young girls, wives or widows, women had to speak as little as possible.

In his emblematic treatise on marriage, Francesco Barbaro advised that "women should not speak unless they have to protect their honesty and wives should bear in mind not to associate or speak with strangers".¹ In his portrayal of the ideal virgin, Lodovico Dolce considers that "silence is the fairest female virtue". However, girls should not be completely silent before men since such behaviour may indicate vanity; they should speak, but always modestly. To protect their honour, girls should speak chastely not only before strangers but also before their own brothers, since "there are many examples of brothers who corrupted their sisters in such a way [ie taking advance of the familiarity between them]".² In *Dello stato maritale*, Giuseppe Passi recommends wives to speak as little as possible, and especially before their

¹ "le donne non debbono parlare se non quando per honesta non possono tacere, che le moglie deono riguardare di non conversar, ne parlar con persone estranee": Barbaro, *Prudentissimi et gravi documenti*, (tavola delle cose più notabili).

² "si possono addur molt'esempi di coloro, che per tal via le sorelle violarono...bellissima laude delle donne è il silentio": Dolce, *Dialogo della Institution*, pp. 32R-32V.

husbands, and follow and obey them in any case.³ Similarly, depicting the ideal widow, Giulio Cesare Cabei advises widows, and especially the young ones, to be always humble, avoid laughing or rambling, and under no circumstances talk about "dishonest matters, which can raise intemperate desires, as the pernicious discussions about vulgar love do".⁴ Speaking in church or on the street, "a common defect of women", does not fit "female honesty" [*donesca honesta*], and even more that of the widow.⁵ The widow is permitted to speak only at her home and only with other virtuous women. No public expression is acceptable. Cabei's admonitions reflect a broader anxiety about widows who, being under no male supervision, could endanger the moral social order with their independent and potentially loose living.

Women's refusal to conform to these rules was considered a potential threat to men's well-being. In the second book of *La civil conversazione*, both Guglielmo Guazzo, the supposed enemy of the female sex, and Annibale Magnovallo, who has a more positive attitude towards women, share the opinion that women should speak as little as possible. It is women's boundless ambition that makes them garrulous:

So, it is so gentle as it seems to you when a woman can remain silent by speaking and speak by remaining silent, and she creates another harmony with her silence, departing from that ambition, common to many women, to want to break the words of the others in their mouth...⁶

Conversation with women could be dangerous and corrupting. According to Guazzo's speakers, it is better for a man to speak with wicked men rather than with honest women:

It is more sinful to speak with women of good reputation rather than with evil men, since by speaking with usurers, thieves, adulterous, slanderous or other wicked men, one does not run so much risk of being captivated by their dishonesty as he

³ Passi, *Dello stato maritale*, p. 175.

⁴ "fuggirà dunque la nostra vedova il parlar di cose men che honeste, lequali havessero punto di forza di destare l'importuna libidine, come sono i perniciosi ragionamenti dell'amor volgare..." Cabei, *Ornamenti della gentil donna*, p. 49.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁶ "Insomma è tanto soave che vi pare che parlando taccia, sì come all'incontro tacendo parla, e fa col silenzio un'altra armonia, posciachè rimossa quell'ambizione, che a molte donne è commune, di voler rompere ad ognuno le parole in bocca..." Guazzo, *La civil conversazione*, p. 171.

does by speaking with women, even the honest ones, because in this case he will be corrupted by lascivious and intemperate desires.⁷

In *Donneschi difetti*, Passi devotes a whole chapter to proving that women are "backbiters, gossips, slanderers, naggers, liars and sarcastic" and they cannot keep secrets. Deferring to the authority of Aristotle and Church fathers, Paul and John Chrysostom, Passi considers silence the major gift of women.⁸ A similar stereotypical image of the quarrelsome and insolent woman features in Giacopo Gorretta Boero's misogynist poem:

Vain, unstable, moody, and light-minded / always she screams and she flares up easily / quarrels; she says now a thing now another / And she commands, menaces and insults everyone / malicious, wicked, cruel, rapacious and fierce / arrogant, avaricious, gullible and liar / full of ambition and really dull.⁹

In Dionigi Atanagi's biography of Irene di Spilimbergo, the pattern of women's incapacity to engage in serious discussions emerges again. His biographee is presented as a notable exception to the rule:

She discussed vividly but with such a modesty that [her arguments] made the best impression to the learned noblemen with whom she most liked to discuss. She observed with attention their laudable customs and arguments... such a noble intellect rarely is found in women's soul; because from an early age she had the natural gift to want to excel in honour and glory and be different from the other women... She liked to converse with noblewomen known for their dignity, and thanks to her outstanding virtue she shrugged off vile womanly arguments.¹⁰

⁷ "il quale pecca più tosto conversando con donne di buona fama, che con uomini scelerati, conciosiaché conversando con usurari, con ladri, con adulteri, con maldicenti e con altri uomini di mala vita, non sarà così facile a lasciarsi tentare delle loro sceleraggini, come conversando con donne, benché oneste, si sentirà commovere da lascivo e disordinato appetite": Ibid., p. 163.

⁸ "Delle donne linguaccinte, ciarlere, maldicenti, mormoratrici, mentitrici, bigiarde e mordaci": Passi, *I donneschi difetti*.

⁹ "Vana, inconstante, e mobile, e leggiera, / Garrisce sempre, e ogn'hor desta, & accende / Risse: indi parla con due lingue altera, / E comanda, e minancia, e tutti offende, / Maligna, empia, crudel, rapace, e fiera, / Superba, avara, credula, e bugiarda, / Piena d'ambitione, al ver ben tarda": G. Gorretta Boero, *I diavoli delle donne* (Genova, 1573), p. 8.

¹⁰ "...ragionava vivacemente: ma però con modestia tale, che sempre lasciava il miglior intendimento loro a gentiluomini letterati: co quali per lo più si compiaceva di ragionare. Osservava intentamente le parti laudevoli, che scopriva ne costumi, e ragionamenti loro...si nobil pensiero di rado cada nel animo delle donne: conciosia cosa che ella infino da suoi più teneri anni per inclination di natura si

The model of the modest woman who does not express her opinion in public was so deep-rooted in tradition that contemporary women writers were often expected to justify their participation in the intellectual life. Although showing modesty was a typical pattern featuring in the dedications and proems of contemporary writers, this tendency was stronger in women writers. In her dedication of *Rime* to Eleonora di Toledo, Duchess of Florence, Tullia d'Aragona describes her motives as such: "I composed them [the *Rime*] to avoid idleness and not insult those who have encouraged me, rather than on the conviction that I should win fame or praise".¹¹ Indeed, idleness was considered a typical defect of women, which led to lascivious thoughts and immoral behaviour. Similarly in her proem to Lodovico Dolce, Laura Terracina apologizes for her arrogant virile speaking and for not having used a more womanly way of expression.¹² Veronica Franco also expressed hesitation at dedicating her letters to Cardinal Luigi d'Este on the grounds that he had received dedications by many known learned men, whereas she was "just a woman, inexpert in disciplines and lacking ingenuity and oratorical skill".¹³

OFFICIAL SETTINGS: COURTS, PALACES AND GARDENS

From the early sixteenth century, the emerging literature on women and gender relations was accompanied by a trend towards the incorporation of female speakers in literary dialogues, especially those discussing love or women's excellence. The first dialogues to incorporate female speakers were set in courtly environments; and

scoperse desiderosa, nell'imprese d'honore, e di gloria, di uscir della strada comune delle altre... Amava di conservar con Gentildonne stimate per nobiltà, o per qualche segnalata virtù sdegnando i ragionamenti bassi, & da donnicciuole": *Rime di diversi nobilissimi*, p. 7V.

¹¹ "composti da me piu tosto per fuggir l'otio molte volte, o per non parere scortese a quelli, che i loro mi haveano indirizzati, che per credenza di doverne acquistar fama o pregio alcuno appresso le genti": D'Aragona, *Rime*.

¹² "Ecco il discorso pur, Dolce gentile / In fretta da me visto, e non d'altrui / E se la lingua mia fu sì virile / perdon vi chieggi; e s'arrogante fui, / Ch'io non sapea se'il verso femminile / era sì degno apparir nanzì a uvi, / Pur hò compito al fin, col mio sudore / A le vostre promesse, & al mio honore": Terracina, *Discorso*, p. 3V.

¹³ "...m'ha dato tanto d'ardire, che nel concorso di molt'huomini famosi di dottrina, che del continuo indirizzano à lei opere maravigliose di scientia, & di elegantissimi studii, & anco delle proprie lodi Vostre, delle quali riman tanto honorato il giuditio di chi tenta di lodarvi, quanto mancano le forze di potervi lodare, non hò dubitato, donna inesperta delle discipline, & povera d'inventionone, e di lingua, di dedicarvi il presente volume di lettere giovenili...": V. Franco, *Lettere familiari a diversi* (n.p., n.d.).

Pietro Bembo's *Gli Asolani*, written in 1505, was one of the earliest. Bembo's dialogue takes place in Caterina Cornaro's Court in Asolo, where Bembo had served. Some learned men from Venice and some Court Ladies deliberate on love. We are given only their first names. What interests Bembo is not to praise specific contemporary figures or families, with the exception of Caterina Cornaro, but to depict a typical courtly scene. Strictly speaking, Bembo's female characters are listeners rather than speakers since they just encourage male speakers to develop further their views on the positive and negative effects of love. Bembo does not regard women as incapable of reasoning. Their verbal restraint is rather the natural consequence of female modesty. As Gismondo, one of the speakers, clarifies:

It is no wonder if you are silent, my sweet young women; for I believe that since love can never in any wise have served you ill, you would exert yourselves rather to praise him than to blame, were it not that a becoming modesty, always commendable in a lady, had restrained you (though it is always possible to hold the most virtuous discourse on love).¹⁴

Women's presence is mostly a source of inspiration for male speakers. They yearn for their encouragement and praise, often entering into rivalry between them, an aspect rooted in the chivalry cultural tradition. Indicative are male speakers' attempts to undermine their verbal enemies and make their speech cogent in a paternalistic way:

O worthy ladies, he [Perotinno, the adversary speaker] has surely poured so many falsehoods together and so well organized them with every appearance of the truth that he would undoubtedly, as he first threatened, flood me out, if I did not speak before such careful listeners as you, who are able to untie the knottiest questions and to judge them when untied, as you will shortly have an opportunity in this case. And in order to begin without delay, I shall consider the matter, provided you give me your attention. Nor should it be unpleasant for you ladies to do so since what I have to say today is more deserving of attention than what Perottino said yesterday...¹⁵

¹⁴ Bembo, *Gli Asolani*, pp. 16-17.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 74-5.

Furthermore, men's and women's learning emanates from different sources of knowledge, which is a typical pattern also featuring in subsequent dialogues. Men's knowledge originates in their personal experience, whereas women derive their learning from what they have heard or read and often misunderstood. One of the speakers, Lisa, clarifies that what she is going to say is what she has read and asks further clarifications from Perottino so that she and her female companions be enlightened:

But now answer me, Perottino... Therefore, please tell me how this may be. And in doing so you will perhaps please Madame Berenice and Sabinetta no less than me; for they too must have entertained this doubt earlier in the discussion, as I did, though I never found so good an opportunity as now to ask about it.¹⁶

On the other hand, male speakers stress over and over again that their source of knowledge is their personal experience: "And now if you were to ask me how I know all this without having read about it, I'd say that I know it all by proof and speak of what experience taught..."¹⁷

Although women's participation in Bembo's dialogue is limited to encouraging men and stimulating the conversation, the incorporation of female speakers was a significant novelty. It seems that Bembo wavered between the traditional pressures of female social decorum and his choice to incorporate women in the dialogue. At the beginning of the third book, the writer expresses his anxiety about contemporaries' potential criticism against his novelty:

Yet though I believe many will blame me for asking women to take part in these inquiries, since it is more suitable for them to be occupied with womanish affairs than to rummage in such matters, I shall not accept the criticism. For unless it is denied that women as well as men have minds, I do not know why they any more than we should be refused the right to seek knowledge... If women do not occupy all their free time with those duties which are said to be proper to them, but devote their whole leisure to literary studies and these pursuits, it makes little difference

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 29.

what some men say about it, for sooner or later the world will praise the women for it.¹⁸

The example set by Bembo was further elaborated in Baldesar Castiglione's seminal work on courtly manners, *Il Cortegiano*. Castiglione not only incorporated female speakers in *Il Cortegiano* but also offered the theoretical basis of female courtly behaviour. In his depiction of the ideal Court Lady, he draws a sharp distinction between male and female social decorum and suggests a detailed pattern of female behaviour:

a woman should in no way resemble a man as regards her ways, manners, words, gestures and bearing... so it is well for a woman to have a certain soft and delicate tenderness, with an air of feminine sweetness in her every movement, which, in her going and staying and whatsoever she does, always makes her appear a woman, without any resemblance to a man... to be well mannered, clever and prudent; to be neither proud, envious or evil-tongued, nor vain, contentious or clumsy... the lady who is at Court should properly have, before all else, a certain pleasing affability whereby she will know how to entertain graciously every kind of man with charming and honest conversation... with such a virtuous manner that she makes herself thought no less chaste, prudent and benign than she is pleasing, witty and discreet... she should possess a knowledge of many subjects... She ought to be on her guard lest she arouse distaste by praising herself indiscreetly or being too tedious... She should not be inept in pretending to know what she does not know, but should seek modestly to win credit for knowing what she does... and her conversation will be fluent, and extremely reserved, decent and charming. Thus she will be not only loved but also revered by all and perhaps worthy to stand comparison with our courtier as regards qualities both of mind and body.¹⁹

Castiglione's women fit exactly this ideal model. The dialogue takes place in four successive evenings during March 1507 in the Palace of Urbino. Among twenty-nine men of known families there are also present some women, but only three of them speak; Duchess Elisabetta Gonzaga, her niece Margherita Gonzaga and Emilia Pia. Their conversation is reserved, graceful and kind. Mostly they just help the

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 148.

¹⁹ Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, pp. 211-214.

progress of the conversation, commenting, praising and encouraging their male interlocutors. At the beginning of the first book Castiglione describes this process as following: "...the group was arranged alternately one man and one woman, as long as there were women, for invariably they were outnumbered by the men. Then the company was governed according to the wishes of the Duchess, who usually left this task to signora Emilia".²⁰

Women play a central role in the conduct of the conversation, simultaneously remaining out of the limelight. Their presence is necessary as a source of inspiration for male speakers. As one of them, Cesare Gonzaga, points out:

... there is no Court, however great, that can possess adornment or splendour or gaiety without the presence of women, and no courtier, no matter how graceful, pleasing or bold, who can ever perform gallant deeds of chivalry unless inspired by the loving and delightful company of women, so any discussion of the courtier must be imperfect unless ladies take part in it and contribute their share of the grace by which courtiership is adorned and perfected.²¹

As in Bembo's dialogue, here also the interrelation between male and female speakers resembles that of the tutor towards his ignorant pupil. Castiglione's speaker, Unico Aretino, plainly states this paternalistic attitude:

It is certainly right to teach ladies how to love, because I've rarely encountered one who does know how to do so... So to help them avoid these gross errors perhaps it would have been as well to teach them first how to choose a man worthy of their love and only then how to love him. But this isn't necessary in the case of men, who know the answer only too well for themselves. I can vouch for this myself, for I was never taught to love... and I had no need at all of any instruction or teacher.²²

Bembo's and Castiglione's dialogues set the example for subsequent dialogues. Placed in a Court, palace or garden, these dialogues incorporate Court Ladies or gentlewomen, who conform to a specific model of behaviour, epitomized in temperance, modesty and taciturnity.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 45.

²¹ Ibid., p. 210.

²² Ibid., p. 264.

Lodovico Domenichi's dialogue on female superiority (1549) follows exactly this pattern. It is placed in Mutio Sforza's palace in Milan, during the marriage of Mutio Sforza and Faustina Sforza, in 1546. All speakers are contemporary known figures drawn either from the intellectual or the political world. Despite the author's initial declaration that the gentlewomen present will participate in the conversation, the majority of them remain silent.²³ Only two of them, Violante Bentivoglia and Faustina Sforza, speak but only to encourage those male speakers who defend the female sex. Already from the beginning, Bentivoglia apologizes for her audacity to speak first among so many remarkable and learned men. Although she is the hostess, she feels compelled to justify her behaviour on the grounds of female ignorance:

Sirs, it may be too audacious of me to speak first among so many gifted and learned men; I would not have dared such a thing if I had not been impelled by some serious reasons. Firstly, seeing you remaining silent, I thought it would be better to find the courage to break this unpleasant silence, which fits neither your profession, since you are eloquent men, nor the occasion [the marriage]... Another equally significant reason that gives me courage to speak is that I am at my home... The last reason, which I regard as the most important and so it is, ...is that I am a woman and many things are conceded to women, which are not allowed to men, not even madmen. And so if I take advantage of my privileges before so many wise men... excuse me, because my words aimed at nothing but launching our discussion, and accept this on the grounds of female ignorance, which justifies any error.²⁴

²³ "Et queste donne anchora credo, che siano meco d'un medesimo parere; lequali benché habbiano lasciato la Sposa, & l'altra piu lieta brigata attendere alle danze, non sono però venute qui per starsi chete, quasi che piangessero alcun parente morto; ma per pigliarsi anch'elle qualche honesto piacere, & come si conviene alla solenità d'allegriissime nozze", Domenichi, *La nobiltà*, pp. 50V-51R.

²⁴ "Io sarò forse, Signori tenuta troppo ardita havendo dato principio a parlare, dove tanti huomini sono valorosi & scientiati: laqual cosa non harei havuto io ardire di fare, quando a ciò non m'havessero mosso alcune forti ragioni. Prima veggendo io starvi cheti, giudicai, che fosse bene farvi animo a romper così maninconico silentio: ilquale ne alla profesion vostra che huomini eloquenti sete, ne alla occasione... Un'altra & non meno potente ragione mi ha fatto animo a dire: & questa è, che io pure in casa mia sono... L'ultima, & quella ch'a me pare, come nel vero è, di maggiore importanza...è l'essere io donna: perche non pure alle Donne molte cose si concedono, ch'agli huomini permesse non sono; ma di piu esse hanno ancho i pazzi. Et però se io usato i privilegi miei dinanzi a tanti giustissimi huomini...mi scusi se le mie parole altro non hanno voluto concludere che dar principio al ragionamento nostro; concedendo questo alla ignoranza femminile, laquale scusa ogni errore": Ibid., pp. 4R-4V.

A similar pattern emerges in Telifilo Filogenio's dialogue on female superiority (1561). The dialogue takes place in Villa d'Agnano between the author and six Court Ladies, who are in the service of Isabetta della Rovere, Marquise of Massa, and dedicatee of the dialogue as well. Only their first names are given: Lionora, Clarice, Livia, Girolama, Isabellina and Cassandra. Female speakers raise questions on love, female beauty and excellence whereas the author/speaker develops a detailed neo-platonic analysis. Interestingly it is women who reproduce the dominant gender order, impelling Filogenio to develop his "feminist" arguments. When, for instance, Girolama challenges the potential participation of women in war, Filogenio points out the relativity of the customs and the leading role of common practices in the formulation of gender roles:

I answer you, women who have grown up in a delicate way (as it is the custom nowadays) cannot stand bloodshed, as it would have been the case for men if they had grown up in the same delicacy; if women had grown up not with needles but with swords, not with distaffs but with spears... Women would have been as courageous as men.²⁵

Cristofano Bronzini's dialogue on the superiority of the female sex (1622) is similarly structured. The dialogue takes place in Medici Court in Rome between some gentlewomen from Rome, Mantua and Florence, "known for their beauty and nobility" and some *Cavaglieri*, experts "in arms and letters". They include a Prince of Tuscany, about whom we are not given more information, a member of the Tolomei family, whose first name is not revealed, and Onorio, who is identified with the author. Female speakers also cannot be identified, since only their first names are given: Margerita, Vittoria and Leonora. Again, such as in Castiglione and Domenichi's dialogues, male speakers are divided between "defenders" (Onorio) and "enemies" (Tolomei) of women whereas female speakers encourage Onorio in his defence.²⁶

²⁵ "...vi rispondo, che alle Donne allevate delicatamente (come hoggi di si usa) non basterebbe l'animo d'insanguinarsi nel sangue humano, come anche è non basterebbe l'animo, à gli huomini, se fossero allevate nelle delicatezze delle Donne, se le Donne non si allevassino infra gli aghi da cucire, ma infra le spade da ferire, non si nutriscono infra le rocche da filare, ma infra le lance da giostare...le Donne riuscirebbero animose come gli huomini...": Filogenio, *Ragionamento della Perfezione*, p. 112; see also above p. 144.

²⁶ Bronzini, *Della dignità*.

Rarely do female speakers attack directly the enemies of their sex in dialogues set in official environments. Paradoxically, it is the male speakers who enlighten women on their superiority and disapprove the dominant gender order. An exception to the rule is Bernardo Trotto's dialogue on marriage, which takes place during the marriage of Hippolita Scaravella and Giovanni Castelliero in Turin.²⁷ In Trotto's dialogue, Hippolita, a forceful female speaker, attacks marriage, pointing out its negative consequences for women. A pre-arrangement between the author and the dedicatee, Hippolita Scaravella, who is identified with the speaker Hippolita, must have led Trotto to this decision. Hippolita's dynamism stands out in comparison to another female speaker, Barbara, also a contemporary figure identified with the daughter of Capitano Caludio Annebaldo (*luogotenente* of Francis I) and wife of Presidente Girolamo Purpurato from Piedmont. Barbara reproduces the stereotypical views on gender roles within marriage, though without formulating her own views: "I have many times heard it said and so I believe that the death of her husband is the worst punishment a woman can suffer".²⁸ Barbara's role is explicitly underestimated. Hippolita characterizes her as "a gentle and obedient girl, a naïve woman".²⁹ On the contrary, Hippolita stands in perfect equality with her male interlocutors; Antonio Bello who argues for male celibacy, Aleramo Beccuti who supports marriage for men and Asternio who defends marriage for women, transferring what he had heard from an old woman called Empiria (Experience). As the woman's name indicates, she is an allegorical figure who personifies custom and established practices, epitomized in wives' complete subjection to their husbands.

With the exception of Bernardo Trotto's dialogue, in most dialogues which take place in official settings among contemporary learned men or political figures, the role of women is of secondary importance. In some dialogues, women remain completely silent, although the author indicates their presence. In Guido Casoni's dialogue, set in Sertorio Pancetta's Garden, women are supposed to listen to the conversation but they remain a silent audience, or better an "ornament": "this place was adorned with the prestigious ornament of many beautiful gentlewomen, who had gathered there moved by desire to listen to the harmony of various sweet instruments

²⁷ See also above pp. 145-6.

²⁸ "Et ho sempre udito dire e così credo, che la morte del marito sia la maggiore di tutte le pene, che possa mai patire una donna", Trotto, *Dialoghi del matrimonio*, p. 3.

²⁹ "tenera fanciulla, semplicetta donna, figliuola ubidente": Ibid., p. 1.

that divinely removed boring thoughts from men's minds".³⁰ Furthermore, noblewomen's presence satisfied authors' need to praise contemporary women, in the hope of enjoying their favour or their families'. It also offered greater prestige to their writings. In his dialogue, placed in the Court of Don Alfonso da Este, Duke of Ferrara, in Palazzo Belriguardo, Annibale Romei gives a detailed account of the attendees.³¹ However, and despite what the title indicates, Romei's women hardly speak. Their role is just to ask questions, play music and sing, as with Laura Peverara, wife of Annibal Turcho, who appears at the end of the first dialogue to play her harp, cheering up the company.³²

Most dialogues set in official environments were inspired by the actual courtly life. It has already been shown that the debate about female superiority often had its origins in courtly environments and the dedicatees of these writings were powerful women. The audience for courtly orations and conversations included also women, noblewomen or Court Ladies, who had to conform to a specific model of good manners, which demanded temperance, modesty and taciturnity. In 1585, the Alessandrian patrician Annibal Guasco advised his daughter Lavinia, who was going to serve as lady-in-waiting to the duchess Caterina of Spain, wife of the Duke of Savoy, Carlo Emanuele, to read Giovanni della Casa's *Galateo* and Baldesar Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*, "truly a most noble work and absolutely essential to anyone who has to live at court".³³ Later on in his handbook, Guasco advises Lavinia to "control her tongue" and "restrain her speech, listening much and speaking little" and warns her that "there are some things with which we do people neither honor nor injury, and yet they have the power to earn us both love and hatred, according to how

³⁰ "...in quella parte adorne con petioso ornamento di molte, e bellissime gentildonne, che quivi erano concorse, tratte dal desiderio d'udir armonia, ch'uscendo da varii, e dolceissimi instrumenti quasi che divinamente toccati alleggiocrivano in tutto de pensieri noiosi la mente di quelli Signori": G. Casoni, *Della magia d'amore* (Venice, 1596), (first published in 1591), p. 2V; Sertorio Pancetta was a nobleman from Serravalle (Treviso) and a member of the Maggior Consiglio. His garden must have been somewhere in the Veneto. Casoni was a noble from Serravalle as well.

³¹ "la Serenissima Duchessa accompagnata da nobilissimi Cavaglieri, & gratiosissime Dame, tra le quali era la illustrissima Signora Contessa di Sala, le illustriss. e beliss. Sorelle. La Signora D. Marfisa & D. Bradamante. La Signora Leonora Tieni Contessa di Scandiano. La S. Isabella Bentivoglio Marchesa di Galtieri. La Signora Camila Costabile. La Signora Lucretia Calcagnina. La Signora Vittoria Tassona. La Signora Camila Canale. La Signora Silvia Villa. La Signora Camila Bevilaqua. La Sign. Lucretia Malchiavella. La Signora Camila Mosti. La Signora Ana Strozza. La Signora Tarquinia Molza. La Signora Leonora Sacrata, & altre Signore, e matrone di conto": A. Romei, *Discorsi divisi in sette giornate, nelle quale tra Dame e Cavaglieri ragionando...della Bellezza...del'Amor humano...dell'Honore...del Duello...* (Venice, 1619), p. 5.

³² Ibid., p. 42.

³³ A. Guasco, *Discourse to Lady Lavinia his Daughter*, ed. and trans. P. Osborn (Chicago & London, 2003), p. 85.

we do them. These things are our habits, demeanor, and manners, and consequently you will have to devote much thought to them".³⁴ Furthermore, according to her father, Lavinia was also well trained musically, and expected to use her musical talents to bolster her court position.

Most aforementioned writers had participated in the literary and intellectual activities of a Court and had personal experience of the courtly cultural life. Pietro Bembo participated in Caterina Cornaro's Court in Asolo, in the Veneto, and also at Ferrara, where his father served as Venetian co-ruler in 1497, and at Urbino, between the years of 1506 and 1512. Baldesar Castiglione was himself a courtier, from 1504 in the service of Guidobaldo of Montefeltro, Duke of Urbino and later, from 1508, in the service of the new Duke, Francesco Maria della Rovere. Cristofano Bronzini had served at the Court of Carlo de' Medici in Florence. Annibale Romei had served at Ferrara Court of the Estensi and had dedicated his *Dialogo sull'anima humana* (1565) to Leonora d'Este.

UNOFFICIAL SETTINGS: COURTESANS' SALONS

Quite different is the shaping of female identity in dialogues set in unofficial environments, however, such as contemporary literary salons. In these cases female speakers are often courtesans who had a close relationship with the author.

Indicative is Sperone Speroni's dialogue on love (first published in 1542), where the famous courtesan Tullia d'Aragona displays considerable erudition in her conversation with some well known contemporary intellectuals, who frequented Venice in that period, her supposed lover, Bernardo Tasso, who is going to leave her to serve his Prince, Antonello Sanseverino, in Salerno, and Nicola Grazia. The dialogue takes place at Tullia's home, in Venice. The starting point of the debate is lovers' jealousy whereas the focal point is to what extent love is subject to human reason. However, throughout the conversation gender issues are treated as well.

Although Tullia often attributes her learning to what she has heard or read, she does not hesitate to disagree with her male interlocutors, disordering the gender value system and discrediting male authority. Tullia's view on love is similar to that

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 86, 101.

of Raffaella in Alessandro Piccolomini's dialogue on women, written three years before (see below). As Raffaella, Tullia depicts an active role in love affairs on the part of women, rendering them subjects rather than objects of love. What interests her more is her love for Tasso and not Tasso's love for her. Like Raffaella, Tullia claims that her love for Tasso will deliver her from despair in old age.³⁵ In this way, Tullia reverses the dominant neo-platonic schema which laid emphasis on the beneficial effects of love on men and considered women just the means for men's fulfillment.

Interestingly male speakers anxiously restore gender roles. Tasso clarifies: "My lady, it is not your duty to love, but to be loved".³⁶ Grazia backs Tasso, associating the whole matter with women's superiority/inferiority: "I know many women who love with passion, but even those are loved in such a way that it could be better call them beloved [*amate*] rather than lovers [*amanti*]. I do not know yet whether this indicates the perfection or imperfection of their sex".³⁷ Male speakers go even further relating gender roles in love affairs with the intellectual abilities and physiological characteristics traditionally attributed to each sex. So, Tasso ascribes the role of *amata* to women by virtue of their grace and beauty whereas the role of *amante* to men thanks to their intellectual power:

God has provided that beauty and grace, principal characteristics of someone who is loved and desired by another, are greater in women than in men, and, on the contrary, the lover is endowed with the strength of the soul and the ability to suffer the torments of love, characteristics of men...³⁸

Similarly, Grazia considers women unable to love on their own, due to their biological composition: "...for this reason it is proper to call them (women) *amate* and ourselves *amanti*. Because women's love cannot function on its own due to the

³⁵ "E questa piccola gloria consolerà in guisa il mio danno che, s'io non vivèrò lieta, almeno io non morirò disperata": Speroni, *Dialogo d'Amore*, p. 140.

³⁶ "Signora mia, egli non è vostro officio l'amare, ma l'essere amata": Ibid., p. 140.

³⁷ "Io conosco dimolte donne, le quali amino grandemente; ma quelle istesse sono amate in maniera che più tosto amate che amanti si dovrebbero nominare: la qual cosa io non so ancora s'ella è segno della perfezione o dell'imperfezione del sesso loro": Ibid., p. 141.

³⁸ "...avendo Iddio provveduto che la bellezza e la grazia, condizione principale di chi è amato e desiderato d'altrui, fosse di gran lunga maggiore nelle femine che ne' maschi non è e all'incontro, dotando l'amante di forte animo e atto a sopportare le fatiche d'amore; quali siamo noi uomini...", Ibid., p. 142.

coldness of the female soul".³⁹ Finally, according to Tasso, women should love so that they please their lovers and not for their own satisfaction. Women's emotion is completely subject to men's will: "The woman loves (joy and delight of the universe) not for her pleasure but so that she pleases and serves her lover, his courtesy, his sweetness and his liberality...this is good, this is the beginning and the end of her life and her love for us".⁴⁰

Cornelio Frangipane's dialogue on love, written in 1545 but published posthumously in 1588, has many similarities to Speroni's dialogue. It takes place in Venice, at the home of a learned woman called Tullia, between her and her lover, a Siennese man called Geri, who had passed some time in Venice for business. Frangipane most probably had in mind Tullia d'Aragona. Contemporary correspondence indicates that Frangipane, a Friulian nobleman and ambassador in Venice, was associated with Domenico Venier's circle, to which Tullia d'Aragona also belonged.⁴¹ The author himself indicates that he had met Tullia when he went as ambassador to Doge Francesco Donà.⁴² Frangipane presents Tullia as a cultivated woman, with knowledge of Italian and Latin, whose home many learned men frequented:

I found myself last month in Venice, sent by the *Parlamento* as ambassador to the Doge, and I went to entertain at the home of a very gentle woman; there, gentle and learned young men frequented and they spent their time with kind arguments; because she is a very attractive woman, eloquent and equally expert in vernacular and Latin literature, which is not, perhaps, required for a woman.⁴³

³⁹ "...per il che meritamente quelle amate e noi amanti nominaremo. Ma ciò è perchè tutto quell ch'Amore, stando nel cuore della donna, per la freddura della sua anima non può in lei dirittamente operare...", Ibid., p. 143.

⁴⁰ "Ama adunque la donna (gioia e diletto dell'universo) non per diletto che a lei ne succeda, ma acciò che diletando e giovando l'amante, la cortesia, la dolcesa e la liberalità sua... Questo è il bene, questo è il premio, questo è il fine della vita sua e dell'amor suo verso di noi"; Ibid., pp. 149-150.

⁴¹ Frangipane was in correspondence with Domenico Venier. One of his letters is included in "Testimonianze onorevoli di Vari Illustri autori intorno alla Persona, ed agli scritti di M. Domenico Veniero", in *Rime di Domenico Veniero* (Bergamo, 1751).

⁴² Frangipane had also written an oration on the election of Donà: C. Frangipane, *Oratione...nella creazione del Serenissimo Principe Donato* (Venice, 1545).

⁴³ "Ritrovandomi il mese passato in Venetia ambasciatore al Serenissimo Principe mandato dal Parlamento, & andando alcuna volta per via di diporto in casa di una gentilissima Signora; ove alcuni giovani & costumati, & dotti spesse volte riducer si sogliono, & con piacevoli ragionamenti trappassar la incresciosa parte del giorno; perciocchè ella è Donna vezzosa, & ben parlante, & nelle cose volgari, & nelle latine parimente dotta più, che a Donna peravventura non si richiede"; C. Frangipane, *Dialogo d'Amore* (Venice, 1588), p. 9.

The starting point of the conversation is the impending separation of the two lovers. Geri, who is going to leave, claims that he will suffer more than Tullia, whereas Tullia maintains that her grief will be unbearable. Structured around contrasting arguments, the dialogue is presented as litigation before some "wise judges" who will reach a verdict after hearing both sides. Once again, the female speaker expresses her hesitation to speak. However, she points out the social dimensions of her scruples, attributing women's absence from the intellectual life to contemporary customs:

Gentle sirs, since I was born a woman, and nowadays that women are little interested in learning, understanding or discussing worthy and nice things, it would be sensible of me to quit this undertaking. How could a fragile and weak woman, competing with a courageous and strong man, not be defeated easily? But I take comfort at the idea that, defending the right thing and having the weapons of love and truth on my side, there is some hope that I will beat my sweet enemy.⁴⁴

In the course of the dialogue, gender issues are also discussed. Tullia accuses men of infidelity and false promises whereas Geri charges women with instability and tendency to betray when they stay alone. Speakers are presented equal in eloquence and learning. Both use typical historical and mythological examples and cite Italian and Latin poets to sustain their views. At the end they draw level with each other. The judges' decision renders female speech equal to the male one.

Giuseppe Betussi's dialogues on love follow a similar path. Both dialogues are set at the home of Francesca Baffa, a courtesan and personal friend of the author. In *Dialogo Amorofo* (1543), Baffa converses with the best known intellectual Francesco Sansovino, whereas Giovan Battista Pigna is a secondary figure. Although it is Baffa who raises questions and Sansovino who develops the contemporary love theories, Baffa participates actively in the debate, developing at times her own views and earning the admiration of her interlocutor. When she typically apologizes for her

⁴⁴ "Quantunque, Nobilissimi giovani, io Donna nata sia, & in questi tempi; ne quali le Donne poca cura si danno di sapere, & d'intendere le cose alte, & belle, & attorno à queste con altrui ragionare; il perche senno farei io al presente di ritirarmi da questa impresa; che volendo io Donna fragile, & inferma contender con homo valoroso, & forte, leggermente potrei rimaner vinta; pur mi consola, che difendendo io la parte migliore, Amor & la verità per me l'armi piglieranno, & in maniera combatteranno, che io prendo speranza dover esser vincitrice contro al mio dolce nemico": Ibid., p. 15.

inexperience, due to her sex, Sansovino acknowledges her as "a very eloquent woman who can compete and reply not only to him but to any sharp and formidable intellect".⁴⁵

In *Il Raverta* (1544) Baffa's role has been upgraded. Already from the beginning of the dialogue Baffa is praised by her interlocutors for her erudition: "If more Venetian women were like you, they would be as famous as the Lacedemonian women, who were known for their great erudition".⁴⁶ She is also presented as an expert in love literature, having read the works of Leone Hebreo, Alessandro Piccolomini and Sperone Speroni. However, despite her wide learning, Baffa needs the help of her male interlocutors, Lodovico Domenichi and Ottaviano Raverta, to further understand what she has read or heard: "Despite the books I have read and what I have heard, I can always learn something from you that I have not found in books...I had often doubts and questions which remained unsolved".⁴⁷ Nevertheless, by contrast with the female speakers of the courtly environments, who ask questions from ignorance, Baffa has already good grounding in contemporary cultural trends. Especially when the dialogue shifts away from love philosophy to gender issues, Baffa forcefully develops her own arguments. On a typical question of contemporary love debates, whether men or women love more fervently, Baffa rejects Domenichi's stereotypical argument that men, thanks to their perfection, love with greater passion.⁴⁸ Baffa's objection is based on the contemporary debate on male/female superiority and the medical discourse of the period: "My view is opposite to yours; having softer and more tender complexion, women love more ardently...".⁴⁹ Similarly on the question whether men or women love more constantly, based on the authority of Virgil, Augustine and Petrarch, Domenichi argues that men are superior, whereas Baffa rejects his arguments, drawing again from medical discourse and

⁴⁵ "son Donna, in cio di poco giuditio et di manco esperienza potreste dare ad intendere cio che vi piacesse, & se bene io vi rispondesti all'opposito le mie ragioni sariano facilmente ributtate", "...benche vi conosco Donna sufficientissima a confondere & rispondere non a me, ma ad ogni acutissimo, & dottissimo spirito": Betussi, *Dialogo Amorofo*, p. 27R.

⁴⁶ "Et come gia furono descritte le donne di Lacedemonia per dottrina egregie: cosi si potrebbero celebrare le Vinitiane per famosissime, se molte ce ne fossero simili a voi.": Betussi, *Il Raverta*, p. 12.

⁴⁷ "che quanti libri io potessi & leggere & udire conciosia che da voi sempre io posso imparare alcuna cosa: ilche d'ogni tempo ne i libri non m'incontra...molte volte mi restano de i dubbi, & de gli argomenti, ch'io soglio fare irresoluti", *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁴⁸ "perche l'huomo è piu perfetto della donna: e però quando diventa amante ama con piu fervore": *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁴⁹ "A me pare il contrario, essendo la donna piu dolce, & delicata complessione, che l'huomo non è. Però ama piu ardentemente, et piu facilviente s'infiama": *Ibid.*, p. 101.

citing examples of women found in contemporary dialogues and treatises on female superiority, such as Lucrezia, Porzia, Alceste and Penelope:

Based on natural law I will be able to reject what you said. And I will say that men's hotter complexion is responsible for their fickleness and instability. But I do not want to enter into details about issues relating to form and matter. I could also prove with reason and examples women's greater constancy. Because women are very constant in love and I will give many examples of women who preferred death rather than losing their lovers...⁵⁰

Gradually *Il Raverta* shifts away from love philosophy to gender issues with arguments derived from the contemporary dialogue on gender issues. In this verbal conflict, Baffa is presented equal to her male adversary in eloquence and erudition.

Dialogues set in unofficial environments had a different social basis from those taking place in official settings. Speroni's, Frangipane's and Betussi's dialogues were inspired by the Venetian socio-cultural environment of the 1540s. Their female speakers, Tullia d'Aragona and Francesca Baffa, participated actively in the Venetian intellectual scene, they maintained their own literary salons and associated with *litterati*, then in Venice or nearby Padua, such as Sperone Speroni, Giuseppe Betussi, Lodovico Domenichi, Antonfrancesco Doni, Bernardo Tasso and Domenico Venier among others. Authors' personal relationships with these women and their participation in informal meetings which took place at their homes had inspired their works. Furthermore, all of them -- Speroni, Betussi and Frangipane -- had studied at the University of Padua and Speroni and Betussi were members of the Paduan Academy of the *Inflammati*. The strong Aristotelian tradition of the university and the academy must have led these authors to shift from the neo-platonic model of dialogues set in courtly environments. Replacing Court Ladies with Courtesans these writers, who were not related to courtly environments, popularised love theory and brought it outside the narrow courtly setting. There is an evident correspondence between Court Ladies and Courtesans. As Adriana Chemello has noticed, just as the Court Lady was regarded in the light of neo-Platonic tradition as

⁵⁰ "...potrò negarvi quanto dite con ragion naturale. E dirò ch'essendo l'huomo piu caldo, da quella qualità convien pigliar leggerezza & instabilità. Ma non voglio, che s'entri in simili forme, ne materie: anzi, che s'habbia da provare con ragioni & essempli la maggior costanza: perche in amore si sono vedute donne costantissime; le quali piu tosto hanno eletto morire, che mancare al suo amante: & darovene molti essempli", Ibid, p. 102.

the crest of idealization and conceptualization of love, the courtesan, retaining the gifts of courtesy, refinement, beauty, ingenuity, and cultivation, together with her looser morals, became the real subject of this ideal.⁵¹ Both figures had to be cultivated, refined and capable to take part in discussions of love. According to Castiglione, the Court Lady should know to talk about love, but always with moderation and restraint. However, by contrast with Court Ladies or noblewomen, who had to be chaste and not to give in their suitors' requests, courtesans were not entrapped in the strict moral scheme of chaste and reserved woman.

In the same tradition belongs the *Dialogo della bella creanza* (1539) of Alessandro Piccolomini, a professor at Padua University and also a member of the *Infiammati*. The dialogue takes place at the home of a noble Siennese woman, Margarita. However, the scene has nothing in common with the aforementioned dialogues set in official environments. Only Margarita and a poor aged woman, Raffaella, are present. After ensuring that nobody can hear them and that Margarita's husband is on a business trip, Raffaella, the main speaker, delivers a long skilful speech to persuade Margarita to enjoy a life of indulgence and find a lover. According to Raffaella, God absolves minor sins, such as conjugal infidelity, but not the despair, which over the years seizes those who have abstained from every pleasure. Furthermore, Raffaella permits women to deceive their husbands on the grounds that others have decided on their marriage against their will. Initially, Margarita raises some objections but quickly she is convinced and asks for further clarifications. Through Raffaella, Piccolomini denounces contemporary social practices. Furthermore, he acknowledges the importance of love to women's lives, whereas love theory traditionally considered women just the object of the male desire, an idea rejected by Speroni's Tullia as well. In the proem addressing women readers [*quelle donne che leggeranno*], Piccolomini denounces the contemporary practices and the different attitudes towards women's and men's conjugal infidelity: "Men have made laws irrationally and tyrannically, considering the same thing [infidelity] great shame for women and great praise for them".⁵² Piccolomini's social criticism goes even further when he suggests a superficial conformation to social

⁵¹ A. Chemello, "Donna di Palazzo, moglie, cortigiana: ruoli e funzioni sociali della donna in alcuni trattati del cinquecento", in *La Corte e il Cortegiano*, ed. Ossola, p. 127.

⁵² "gli huomini fuor d'ogni ragione e tiranicamente hanno ordinato leggi, volendo che una medesima cosa a le Donne sia vituperosissima, et à loro sia honore e grandezza": Piccolomini, *Dialogo della bella creanza*, p. 3V.

conventions. Women have to keep their lovers secret and pretend that they are chaste: "it does not matter what you do or not, but whether others believe you or not".⁵³

Similar to and most probably influenced by Piccolomini's dialogue was the *Specchio d'Amore*, written by Bartolomeo Gottifredi, a friend of Antonfrancesco Doni, Lodovico Domenichi, Giuseppe Betussi and Francesca Baffa, and also a member of the *Ortolani*.⁵⁴ In this dialogue, the elder Coppina instructs the fourteen-year-old Maddalena in "the art of love". Maddalena belongs to a noble family and Coppina is one of the servants of the household. The debate takes place in Maddalena's parents' absence, and both women worry about their imminent arrival. The debate mostly involves practical tips on love affairs, such as which is the ideal lover, how Maddalena will enchant him and advice on love letter-writing. However, like Piccolomini, Gottifredi also levels his criticism at contemporary social practices: "Necessity is a different thing from pleasure. People get married by necessity, which is imposed by the law and custom; but they love for pleasure".⁵⁵

In early modern comedies, the advice of an aged woman of low social position to a young maiden or wife often performed the function of exonerating the heroine from responsibility for love and dishonest tricks which are employed on her behalf. From her base social position, this figure "is privileged in the same way as the fool and the madman in being free from the dictates of social convention".⁵⁶ The pattern of the old woman who corrupts a young modest woman was also common in popular literature. Paolo Britti's *Dialogo fatto tra una Ruffiana et una putta donzella* has a similar scenario. However, there, the young woman resists the temptation to the end.⁵⁷

However, although Piccolomini's dialogue shares common characteristics with contemporary comedies, it is more than a comedy. *Dialogo della bella creanza* would be better to be placed in a tradition of Renaissance dialogues that derived from the Ancient Greek serio-comic [*spoudogeloios*] dialogue. In these dialogues the

⁵³ "nel fare, o non fare, che questo importa puoco, ma nel credersi, o non credersi", *Ibid.*, p. 25R.

⁵⁴ See above p. 157.

⁵⁵ "Altra cosa è la necessità, altra il diletto. Per necessità si marita, sendo così astrette dalle leggi e dall'uso; e per diletto s'ama": B. Gottifredi, *Specchio d'Amore, dialogo nel quale alle giovani s'insegna innamorarsi*, in *Trattati d'Amore*, ed. Zonta, (first published in 1547), p. 291.

⁵⁶ Maclean, *Woman Triumphant*, p. 195.

⁵⁷ P. Britti, *Dialogo fatto tra una Ruffiana et una putta donzella* (Trevigi, 1659).

serious and the comic are in relative equilibrium.⁵⁸ What provides Raffaella with the courage of her convictions is neither official education nor what she has heard or read but experience [*per la pratica che io ho de le cose*].⁵⁹ At the same time being an anonymous, unlearned low-class woman, Raffaella was the ideal character to express provocative ideas, so that Piccolomini avoided potential criticism. In this sense, Piccolomini's dialogue can be seen as an attack on social conventions and especially courtly culture and its affected manners.

Although Piccolomini reconsidered *Dialogo della bella creanza* in *De la Institutione*, some ideas remained the same. Indicative is Piccolomini's insistence on men and women's equality in love affairs. Stressing women's active role as subjects of love, he unburdens gender roles from the dominant linguistic boundaries:

In this book...each time I treated *amante* and *amato*, I always put the noun *amato* in feminine gender, writing *amata* and not *amato*. However, in the real love union both man and woman should be *amante* and *amato*. I did this firstly because it is me who writes and I am sure for myself that I am in love, whereas I am not sure whether my lady loves me... Furthermore, I always believed that both men and women should both love and be loved to be happy.⁶⁰

Pietro Aretino's rejection of social conventions and courtly culture in the *Ragionamenti* must have been a source of inspiration for Piccolomini and a literary base for Speroni and Betussi.⁶¹ Both Piccolomini and Speroni were on good terms with Aretino. A letter from Aretino to Piccolomini is included in Aretino's *Talanta* and Aretino mentions Speroni in the *Carte Parlanti*.⁶² Aretino had read Sperone Speroni's *Dialogo d'Amore* before its publication. In 1541, Speroni wrote to Aretino

⁵⁸ Burke, "The Renaissance dialogue", p. 8.

⁵⁹ Piccolomini, *Dialogo della bella creanza*, p. 26R.

⁶⁰ "in questo Libro...ogni volta, che mi è accaduto parlar de l'amante e de l'amato, sempre l'amato hò posto in persona di donna, dicendo *amata* e non *amato*: essendo nondimeno, che ne la vera union d'amore, così la donna come l'homo, debba essere amante e amato. Il che non senza ragion hò fatto. prima per che essendo io quel, che scrivo; e sapend'io certo, che io amo; mà non ben secuto se la mia donna ama me... Oltra questo, io hò hauta sempre opinione che quantunque così l'homo come la donna, se voglian'esser felici bisogna che amino e sien'amati...": Piccolomini, *De la Institutione*, p. 215V.

⁶¹ According to Peter Burke, *La Bella Creanza* was not only "an attempt to imitate Aretino but also to defuse him, to make him safe for female readers, displacing attention from sex to clothes and make-up": Burke, "The Renaissance Dialogue", p. 12.

⁶² Cairns, *Pietro Aretino*, pp. 201, 215.

from Padua to thank him. He explicitly criticizes those who looked for protection at Courts:

My dear sir, if my *Dialogo dell'amore* rendered me worthy of your praise, then I would dare compare it not only to the Pantheon but also to the whole heaven, because your divine intellect celebrates nothing unless it is divine. Actually, when I decided to fabricate it, I did not know what architecture to refer to, as I see many doing every day, who fill their little houses with medals, statues, and ancient texts, to move the Princes, and with great skill they seek to gain their favour and visit them.⁶³

Instead of eulogizing potential patrons, Speroni expressed his gratitude to a contemporary circle of *literati*, including Tullia d'Aragona: "I am humbly indebted to Grazia, Tasso, Molza, Valerio, Molino, Capello, Brocardo and Tullia, and also to you and the divine Titian who willingly helped me..."⁶⁴ Titian associated with the known circle of *literati* in Venice, including Pietro Aretino, Sperone Speroni and Lodovico Dolce, among others. Aretino praised Titian's paintings in his letters and wrote sonnets about Titian's portraits.⁶⁵ Both Aretino and Titian enjoyed the company of courtesans, with Angela Zaffetta the best known among them. Titian's *Venuses* and *Ladies in their toilets* have been seen as depictions of courtesans, and courtesans most probably posed as models for these paintings.⁶⁶ Both the dialogues including courtesans as speakers and Titian's erotic paintings were part of the same culture which flourished in the 1530s and 1540s in Venice. In Speroni's dialogue, Tullia praises Aretino and Titian, pointing out the similarities between their works:

⁶³ "Signor mio honorando, se il mio Dialogo dell'amore mi ha fatto degno di quelle laudi che voi degnate di darmi, già non solamente al Pantheon, ma al Cielo Empiro ho ardimento d'assomigliarlo percioche il vostro divino intelletto, niuna cosa se non divina non ha in costume di celebrare. Io veramente quando io proposi di fabricarlo, poco sapendo d'architettura a quello ricorso, che io vedo fare ogni dì a molti, li quali empiendo le loro casette di medaglio, di statue, & di teste antiche, col mezzo loro moveno i Principi, & gran Maestria a Visitarli, & desiderare la loro amistà": *Lettere scritte al signor Pietro Aretino* (Venice, 1551), p. 202.

⁶⁴ "son certo d'esser stato villanamente cortese al Gratia, al Tasso, al Molza, al Valerio, al Molino, al Capello, al Brocardo, alla Tullia, & verso di voi, e del divin Titiano prosuntuoso in servirvi: *Ibid.*, pp. 203-204.

⁶⁵ Lodovico Dolce dedicated to Titian his paraphrases of Juvenal's sixth satire and the translation of Catullus's *Epithalamium on the Marriage of Pelus and Thetis*. He also referred to his painting techniques in *Dialogo della pittura, intitolato l'Aretino*: L. Freedman, *Titian's Portraits through Aretino's Lens* (University Park, Pa, 1995), pp. 9-33.

⁶⁶ C. Santore, "The Tools of Venus", *Renaissance Studies*, 11: 3 (1997); R. Goffen, "Introduction", in *Titian's "Venus of Urbino"*, ed. Goffen (Cambridge, 1997).

Aretino depicts things in words as well as Titian does in colours; and I have seen that some of his sonnets have been inspired by Titian's paintings and it is not easy to understand whether the sonnets have been engendered by the paintings or the paintings by the sonnets. Surely both together, since both sonnets and paintings are perfect; the former are the voice of the latter and the latter are the flesh of the former.⁶⁷

Aretino's provocative speakers, Nanna, Antonia and Pippa, differ from Speroni's and Betussi's gentle courtesans. The latter rather resemble the image Aretino constructed for Angela Zaffetta, dissociating her from courtesans who attempt to seduce with feigned tricks, such as Nanna and Pippa.⁶⁸ However, it seems that in both cases courtesans functioned as a counterbalance to the female speakers of the courtly environments; the latter representing the neo-platonic ideal, which flourished in Courts and the affected courtly manners, whereas the former a sensualistic view of love, and the culture of the writers who were not associated with Courts, and whose meetings often took place in these women's salons. Their dialogues were both a popularization and a rejection of Court culture. Anti-court sentiments also feature elsewhere in their works. In *Il Raverta* Lodovico Domenichi reads in a letter written by Antonfrancesco Doni: "Who did advise you, dear brother, to leave Piacenza to go to the Court, and finally to Rome, where virtue is not appreciated, good habits are persecuted and virtuous lifestyle is hated".⁶⁹ Similarly in *Dialogo Amorofo*, referring to Domenichi and Bartolomeo Gottifredi, Francesco

⁶⁷ "Lo Aretino non ritragge le cose men bene in parole che Tiziano in colori; e ho veduto de'suoi sonetti fatti da lui d'alcuni ritratti di Tiziano, e non è facile il giudicare se li sonetti son nati dalli ritratti o li ritratti da loro; certo ambidui insieme, cioè il sonetto e il ritratto, sono cosa perfetta: questo dà voce al ritratto, quello all'incontro di carne e d'ossa veste il sonetto": Speroni, *Dialogo d'Amore*, p. 139.

⁶⁸ In his letter to Angela Zaffetta, written in December 1537, Aretino writes: "Voi non essercitate l'astuzia, anima de l'arte cortigiana, col mezzo dei tradimenti, ma con sì fatta destrezza che chi spende giura d'avanzare... I vostri corrucci s'adirano a tempo, né vi curate d'esser chiamata maestra di lusinghe, né di tenere in lungo, avendo in odio quelle che studiano i punti de la Nanna e de la Pippa... La bugia, l'invidia e la maladicenza, quinto elemento de le cortigiane, non vi tengono in continuo moto l'animo e la lingua. Voi acarezzate le virtù e onorate i virtuosi: cosa fuor del costume e de la natura di coloro che compiaccono ai prezzi de l'altrui volontà"; P. Aretino, *Lettere*, ed. F. Erspamer, 2 vols (Parma, 1995), vol. 1, pp. 609-11.

⁶⁹ "Chi vi consiglia, fratello honorando, a lasciar Piacenza, per andare in corte, & poi a Roma, dove la virtù non è stimata; i buoni costumi sono cacciati; & il ben vivere è odiato...": Betussi, *Il Raverta*, p. 76.

Sansovino says ironically: "I am amazed at seeing them wasting their life in Piacenza and not going to a Court to become known".⁷⁰

Interestingly when Sperone Speroni changed literary setting and topic and placed the *Dialogo della dignità delle donne* (first published in 1542) in Beatrice Pia degli Obizzi's villa, outside Padua, he gave a different role to his female speaker. Beatrice is presented as a respectable and reserved woman, resembling the noblewomen of the courtly dialogues rather than Tullia d'Aragona or Francesca Baffa. Beatrice does not defend the female sex. On the contrary, she reproduces the stereotypical rhetoric. By contrast with some of her male interlocutors, who maintain female superiority, Beatrice insists that women, and especially wives, are by nature men's servants: "It is natural for the wife to serve her husband. This condition is neither harmful nor shameful. Without this servitude woman is not woman and her life could be better called a living death".⁷¹ Women's subjection to men makes them happy since "the servitude of those who are born to serve is a light and very sweet yoke".⁷² Beatrice concludes that women are by nature imperfect, and consequently they serve men by their own will:

Surely the woman is imperfect, and especially in comparison with the man; but since this is decreed by Nature, which is moved by God, and consequently it cannot be wrong, we should consider this imperfection appropriate to her... So, the woman is servant since she is born to be servant, but this servitude does not lay heavy on her...she lacks by nature this part of the soul, which men have, and makes them [you] able to govern.⁷³

Beatrice's attitude might puzzle the reader. In most dialogues, women speakers either encourage male speakers who defend the female sex or develop their own favourable arguments towards women. Taking into account that Speroni must

⁷⁰ "Mi maraviglio, che si perdino in una Piacenza, & che non vadino in qualche corte a farsi conoscere": Betussi, *Dialogo Amorofo*, p. 20R.

⁷¹ "...alla moglie è naturale, non dannosa nè vergognosa condizione il servire al marito: senza laqual servitù, non è donna la donna, e la sua vita viva morte dee nominarsi": Speroni, *Dialogo della dignità*, p. 46; for Beatrice Pia's circle see above pp. 158-9.

⁷² "così all'incontro la servitù di colui, cui servo fece la sua natura, è giogo lieve, e soave molto": Ibid., p. 44.

⁷³ "Certo cosa imperfetta à la donna, massimamente se lei all'huomo paragoniamo; ma perciòche tale è fata dalla Natura, laqual mossa dà Dio, non suole errar nelle sue opere, creder debbiamo, che cotale imperfettione le si convenga... Serva adunque la donna, poi che à servire creata, ma non l'aggravi tal servitù...mancando per sua natura, di quella parte dell'anima, onde è dato à voi huomini che voi debbiat signoreggiarne": Ibid., p. 47.

have personally known Beatrice Pia, one can argue that it was her wish to be presented as a faithful and humble wife. In *Libro di M. Gio. Boccaccio delle Donne Illustri* Giuseppe Betussi had constructed a similar image for her. Speroni's representation of Beatrice also attracted the attention of some early modern writers, such as Lucrezia Marinella and Cristofano Bronzini. Although Marinella ranked Speroni, due to his treatment of speaker Beatrice, among women's enemies, Bronzini gave a different version of Speroni's choice. Onorio, the supporter of the female sex in Bronzini's dialogue, claims that Speroni's choice was a clever literary device to show that women themselves often share the dominant misogynist views: "See what a nice invention; he put in the mouth of one of his speakers the opinion of Signora Obiza for demonstrating that women themselves develop opinions against their sex".⁷⁴

FEMALE SPEAKERS IN CONDUCT DIALOGUES

Conduct literature mainly consisted of treatises rather than dialogues. The authors' aim was to give their own advice rather than providing diverse views on the topic. So, even when they preferred the dialogue form, they composed closed and didactic dialogues. By contrast with open dialogues, in which opposing arguments are developed, in didactic dialogues the main speaker impose on readers one indisputable point of view, whereas the other speakers just listen and then make helpful comments, or ask simple questions.⁷⁵ Most dialogues on domestic economy did not include female speakers. In Torquato Tasso's *Il padre di famiglia*, the wife and mother of the house leaves the scene silent after dinner, when her husband and their guest begin discussing domestic management; the host is the author himself who hears the father of the family arguing over the successful governing of the household. Similarly, in Paolo Caggio's *Iconomica* and Stefano Guazzo's third book of *La civil conversazione* no woman is present; in the former, the elder Apollonio

⁷⁴ "Udite bella invenzione; fece in quel suo Dialogo raccontare à uno di que' suoi Interlocutori, l'opinione della Signora OBIZA, per dimostrare, che le Donne istess, si fanno la sentenza contro se stesse": Bronzini, *Della dignità*, Giornata seconda, p. 13; for Lucrezia Marinella's criticism, see below pp. 246-7.

⁷⁵ For the various kinds of dialogue and their development in early modern Italy, see: Cox, *The Renaissance Dialogue*, pp. 1-8, 99-113.

enlightens the young unmarried Monofilo on marriage and domestic life, whereas, in the latter, the writer's brother, Guglielmo Guazzo, and the philosopher and physician Annibale Magnovallo discuss the proper relationships within the family. An exception to the rule is Giacomo Lanteri's *Della Economica* (1560), in which the female speaker, Deianira, instructs the other female speakers in the proper management of the household. Both Lanteri's dialogue and Lodovico Dolce's *Dialogo della Institution* (1545), which, although not exclusively devoted to domestic life, includes a discussion on the proper behaviour of the wife, belong to the genre of the didactic dialogue and incorporate female speakers. These two dialogues can show how gender relations are constructed in conduct dialogues.

In Dolce's *Dialogo della Institution*, the male speaker Flaminio paternalistically instructs the female speaker, Dorothea, on the nature of a modest life. The dialogue's structure indicates the author's attempt to identify the female speaker with the female reader. Already the dedication of Gabriel Giolito to Violante da S. Giorgio demonstrates that the dialogue addresses a female reading public.⁷⁶ Furthermore, as is clarified at the beginning of the dialogue, Flaminio has written a book on proper female behaviour and Dorothea will help him to develop his arguments. According to Flaminio, his work "depicts the perfect virgin, the perfect wife, and the perfect widow, so that every woman can easily reach perfection at each stage of her life by reading this book".⁷⁷ With this literary device, Flaminio is identified with the real author and Dorothea with the female reader, who will find an answer to her questions through Dorothea's questions. Both Dolce's dialogue and Flaminio's supposed book are handbooks, which in a simple manner instruct women in how to conduct themselves.

Flaminio suggests a strictly austere and ascetic model of life. Women have to be absolutely controlled by their parents, and especially their fathers, while unmarried, take no initiative in their marriage, be entirely subject to their husbands during marriage, and live with the continuous remembrance of their deceased husbands during widowhood, abstaining from every kind of pleasure. Dorothea asks for further clarifications and agrees to everything, without raising any objection. When Flaminio recommends that women should be absolutely subject to their

⁷⁶ See above pp. 117-8.

⁷⁷ "formando una perfetta vergine, una perfetta maritata, e una perfetta vedova, di maniera, che ciascuna Donna, che osserva i ricordi di questo libro, puo con molta facilità innalzarsi alla perfettione di questi tre stati": Dolce, *Dialogo della Institution*, p. 6V.

husbands, Dorothea not only agrees but also rules out any possibility of a different view: "I think no wife could ever deny that this is her duty".⁷⁸ Her words enclose the female reader in the dominant gender scheme, allowing no margin of discredit. Dorothea's role is also morphologically marginal. Dolce transformed Vives' treatise, *De institutione feminae Christianae*, into dialogue, but the rationale behind the dialogue remained that of a dogmatic treatise, in which only one view is suggested. When, almost eighty years later, the same work was published again under a different title and by a different publisher, Dorothea has been eliminated and only Flaminio's words have remained in the form of treatise.⁷⁹

Giacomo Lanteri's *Della Economica* is divided into two parts. The first part treats husbands' role in household management, and it is conducted between male speakers, whereas the second one, which deals with wives' duties, takes place exclusively between female speakers. Lanteri depicts the domestic management of a noble house and all speakers are of noble origins. The second dialogue is set in Milan, during the Carnival, between three women of contemporary known families, Isabella Borromea, Deianira Comnena and Laura Gonzaga.⁸⁰ Praising these women and their families, "from which innumerable men and countless women of great value have come", is a basic aim of the writer.⁸¹

The main speaker is Deianira Comnena who enlightens her companions on the duties and responsibilities of the prudent wife. However, Lanteri does not permit his speaker to express her own views. When Isabella and Laura exhort her to talk about the role of the *madre della casa*, Deianira answers that these matters fall within the competence of learned men [*dotti*]. When she is finally persuaded to give a lecture on the subject, she just transfers what she has heard by her mother and husband, repeating their words as the pupil repeats his lesson: "So, my duty will be nothing

⁷⁸ "Io non credo, che alcuna moglie negasse questo esser suo debito": Ibid., p. 44R.

⁷⁹ *De gli ammaestramenti pregiatissimi che appartengono alla Educatione, & honorevole, e virtuosa vita Virginale, Maritale, e Vedovile Libri Tre; Ne' quali con leggiadra, e dolce maniera concatenati si veggono sentenze scelte, documenti singolari, ricordi prudentissimi, avvisi saggi, regole utilissime, & precetti lodevoli* (Venice, 1622).

⁸⁰ All women are related to Trivultio family, a leading military-political family in Milan. Deianira Comnena was the daughter of Constantin Comneno, Principe di Macedonia e Contaloniere di Santa Chiesa and Francesca Paleologa, daughter of Marchese di Monferrato. Her husband was Conte Giorgio Trivultio. Laura Gonzaga was the wife of Conte Gioangiaco Trivulti, brother of Conte Giorgio Trivultio. Isabella Borromea was married to a member of the Trivulti family as well.

⁸¹ "Dalle quali famiglie sono usciti huomini innumerabili, & Donne parimente infinite di grandissimo valore": Lanteri, *Della Economica*, p. 117.

but talking about these matters as pupils do at the beginning of the week, repeating in one day what they have heard from their tutor for many days".⁸²

Deianira's conventional speech reproduces the dominant scheme of domestic gender roles. The ideal wife should be chaste and diligent, always under her husband's strict supervision. Whatever she might do, unbeknown to her husband or against his will [*senza saputa e senza la volontà del suo consorte*], can imperil her honesty.⁸³ So, she should obey her husband's words "like inviolable laws".⁸⁴ Transferring her mother's and husband's words, Deianira satisfies at least two targets. On the one hand, conforming to the dominant ideal, Lanteri supplies his noble young married woman with modesty, prudence and obedience. On the other hand, her opinion carries greater weight since it derives from an older, more experienced woman and from a learned man. Praising Deianira, Isabella compares her to a learned man: "You pleased us so much that we do not know whether a learned and wise man could have talked so skillfully and methodically".⁸⁵

Although at first sight Dorothea's and Deianira's roles are different – the former learns whereas the latter teaches – neither develops her own views. Lanteri's Deianira speaks authoritatively, as main speakers use to do in didactic dialogues, but the author hastens to clarify that she just repeats what she has learnt from others, more experienced in the topic. In a final analysis, both Dorothea and Deianira are only learners. Female identity formation in Dolce's and Lanteri's dialogues differs significantly from that in the dialogues set in courtly environments or courtesans' homes. It is characteristic that Dolce criticizes courtly culture for its licentious morals and considers it inappropriate for women, who have to be devoted only to their family duties:

O arrogant vanity, o harmful delicacy of the nobles of our century... What do they [women] do? Do they spend all their time among the multitude of Court Ladies and Courtiers? What are their conversations? Always quips and witticisms? Or they just argue about trifles? Do these conversations ever come to an end? And what do they

⁸² "La onde la mia fatica di dirleri non altrimenti sarà, che quella che fa fare il maestro alli scolari, quando à capo della settimana, fa loro recitare in un sol giorno ciò che da lui hanno in molti giorni udito": Ibid., p. 129.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 135.

⁸⁴ "come leggi inviolabili haverai ad ubidire": Ibid., p. 146.

⁸⁵ "voi così bene ci contentaste, che non sappiamo, se più acconciamente, ne più ordinatamente ci avesse esposte quelle cose qual si voglia savio huomo e prudente": Ibid., p. 151.

do afterwards? They contemplate, one could argue. The female thoughts are so prompt, unstable, light and wandering, and they do not know when to stop.⁸⁶

By rejecting courtly culture and the *ragionamenti* between men and women – in all probability he implies love *ragionamenti* – Dolce condemns love arguments and mixed conversations. The only appropriate role for women is that of wife and mother. Neither the charming, modest and reserved noblewoman or the Court Lady, who attends love conversations, nor the courtesan, who participates more actively in love and gender debates has a place in Dolce's dialogue.

FEMALE READERS AND WRITERS FACING THEIR REPRESENTATIONS: TULLIA D'ARAGONA AND MODERATA FONTE

Before proceeding to make some suggestions on what impact these dialogues may have had on female readers, and how women writers met their male predecessors' challenges, it would be useful to mention Luigi Dardano's dialogue on female superiority (1554), since it presents a significant difference in comparison with the aforementioned dialogues: speakers are mythological or allegorical characters rather than documentary/contemporary figures.⁸⁷ The literary scene is a fictional court where an allegorical figure, Giustitia, and three judges – Traiano Imperatore, Carondo Prencipe and Selenco Dominator di Locrensi – will judge the role of men and women in the course of history. The conflict between the sexes is represented in a verbal combat between Hortensia, a known woman of Ancient Rome, and Fulvio Stello.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ "O ventosa vanità, o delicatezza dannosa delle Nobili del nostro secolo... percioche che faranno elle [le donne]? Consumerano sempre le hore tra la moltitudine delle Damigelle e de' Cortegiani? Quali ragionamenti saranno i loro? Parlerano sempre di motti e d'argutie? o pure novellerano? Non havrano questi ragionamenti mai fine? à che daranno poi opera? Penseranno mi rispondera alcuno. I pensieri femminili sono per lo piu veloci, instabili, leggieri, erranti, e non sanno dove fermarsi": Dolce, *Dialogo della Institution*, pp. 13R, 14R.

⁸⁷ Luigi Dardano's work was dedicated by his nephew, Hippolito Dardano, to the Doge Francesco Venier. In his dedication he underlines the services Luigi had offered to the Venetian Republic as "Cancelliero dell'Illustrissimo Senato Vinitiano". Apart from the controversy between Hortensia and Fulvio Stello, Dardano's work also includes a defence of the female sex in verses, and a small treatise on conception, astral influences on birth and the proper upbringing of children. I have not spotted any other Dardano's book.

⁸⁸ Dardano must have derived his heroine from the most popular *De Claris Mulieribus* where Boccaccio writes about Hortensia, daughter of Quintus Hortensius: "During the time of the triumvirs,

By contrast with the great majority of contemporary dialogues, the female speaker plays here the leading role. Her speech is more forceful and the author dedicates more space to her than to her male adversary. In the fourth book, Hortensia's superiority becomes unchallengeable. Fulvio remains completely silent whereas Hortensia draws from mythology and history to slander men's actions and praise women's achievements. In the fifth book, Hortensia continues praising female deeds and simultaneously mocks Fulvio's silence. In the sixth book, Hortensia uninterrupted comes to the conclusion that women have excelled in military arts, politics, religion, prophecy, inventions, arts and sciences "as Dardano's verses and prose manifest in a skillful, detailed and complete way".⁸⁹ When Fulvio attempts to counterattack by citing women from the Bible or mythology who were traditionally seen as negative figures, such as Eve, Bathsheba, Delilah, and Iole, the author offers these women the opportunity to defend themselves. They appear before the court, protest their innocence and give a different version of the events, a rereading of history. Delilah, for instance, reshapes her traditional image as the archetype of the voluptuous and treacherous woman. Having a love affair with the Philistines' Hebrew enemy, Samson, beguiling him into revealing that the secret of his strength was his long hair and finally having his hair cut as he slept, Delilah had been the stereotypical synonym of female fatal allurements.⁹⁰ Instead of this negative image, Dardano's speaker shapes for herself the identity of a weak but heroic woman, who could do nothing but conform to the Philistine rules and authorities and entrap Samson against her will:

the needs of the state appeared to require women to shoulder an almost intolerably heavy burden of taxation. No man could be found who would dare to lend the ladies his advocacy against a measure so unjust; only Hortensia was bold and courageous enough to bring the female cause before the triumvirs. She pleaded so effectively and with such tireless eloquence that, to the great admiration of the audience, she seemed to have changed her sex and was Hortensius come back to life": Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, p. 172.

⁸⁹ "la scienza, la sapienza et la eloquela, la fortezza del corpo e dell'animo mirabile, la militia si equestre, come pedestre, e con diversi in strumenti, arme, e modi d'Atterar li suoi nimici, e adversarii, dato lo studio grandemente all'arte Oratoria, Musica, Filosofia, e Poesia, in tutte le sette arti liberali. Studiando grandemente far legge, statuti, e ordini al politico viver necessarii, son anchor state prime a trovare il modo della cultura, seminare il grano, far produrre alla terra lino, filarlo, e tessere, di scolpire, e dipingere non furon mediocri fra gli eccellenti date anchora alla religione e santo vivere...di spirito di profetia...di dominar cittadi...e regni, e quelli conquistar in pace, e in guerra possedere e mirabilmente diffender maestre eccellentissime, come particolarmente, e abbondamente, per li versi, e prosa del Dardano, amplamente, e copiosamente si manifesta": Dardano, *La bella e dotta difesa*, pp. 124V-125R.

⁹⁰ Giuseppe Passi cites Delilah's example to demonstrate the risk men run when they reveal their secrets to women: Passi, *I donneschi difetti*, p. 339.

I was never free from the pressure of the city's superiors to whom I had to conform for the sake of my honour... I had to obey them and finally sleep with him [Samson] against my morals and will...because I knew that everyone's debt is not only liberate his country but also fight for it, without taking into account one's personal benefits.⁹¹

Through his female speakers, Dardano challenges the dominant view of the past and demonstrates male writers' historical bias. That Hortensia and the other female speakers are fictional/mythological figures permits the author to present them as forceful defenders of the female sex, without coming into conflict with the contemporary ideal of the modest and reserved woman.

From the above analysis, one can argue that female speakers' representation depended on the literary scene, the sort of woman/women who participated in the dialogue, the topic of the conversation and the broader socio-cultural orientation of each author. In official settings, women, usually noblewomen or Court Ladies, play a secondary role, encouraging male speakers. Whether we are given their full names or not, they are always taciturn and modest. When the author gives the name of the speaker, identifying explicitly her with a contemporary figure, he has one more reason to present her in such a way, since otherwise her modesty could be put into question. In dialogues that present themselves as documentary accounts of conversations between contemporary figures, authors are subjected to more restraints, since their representation should conform to contemporary ethos and circumstances.⁹² On the other hand, courtesans, thanks to their particular position, gave authors the opportunity to express more freely a hypothetical female view, keeping at the same time the ideal of the respectable noblewoman or modest wife and mother intact. Giuseppe Betussi's and Sperone Speroni's courtesans have wider margins of expression. Similarly, Alessandro Piccolomini's Raffaella or Bartolomeo Gottifredi's Coppina, due to their low social status, are permitted to deliver a corruptive speech. Even more forceful is Dardano's fictional speaker, Hortensia,

⁹¹ "ne mai per le conditioni mie non fui libera da stimoli de principali della città, a i quali per conservar l'honor mio...mi su necessario prestarli obbedienza, e finalmente di giacermi seco contra ogni mio costume, e contento d'animo...perche non m'era ascoso quant'e debito di ciascuno non solamente liberar la patria, ma pugar per quella, antiponendo al proprio comodo, e bene", Dardano, *La bella e dotta difesa*, pp. 67R-67V.

⁹² Cox, "Seen but not heard", pp. 387-8.

who, lacking direct correspondence with contemporary reality, has complete freedom to pull her male interlocutor's arguments to pieces, without challenging the dominant gender order. On the opposite side stand Dolce's and Lanteri's Dorothea and Deianira respectively, passive and obedient under men's close guidance.

However, female speakers' representation is not only a reflection of the contemporary social reality and practices, but also a model of decorum the writer suggests, either strengthening the dominant gender structure or challenging it. So, apart from the broader literary and social orientations of each author, according to his position in the socio-cultural milieu of early modern Italy, it would be interesting to detect what impact these dialogues may have had on female readers. The incorporation of women speakers in literary dialogues can be seen as a process towards the participation of women in the intellectual life. However, at the same time a closer consideration indicates that authors wavered between their innovative choices and the conformation to the deep-rooted notions of female social decorum. It is not feasible to formulate certain views on how each reader may have responded to the literary representations of her sex, since reading is a dynamic interaction between text and reader, and each reader's subjectivity creates his/her own relationship with the text. However, one can detect the potential outlets these dialogues offered to the female reading public.⁹³

In his treatise on dialogue, *Apologia dei dialoghi*, Sperone Speroni writes about the speaker-reader relationship:

The speakers are introduced not to teach authoritatively, but rather to contend with one another. These speakers are rather like a tinder-box, since, in the course of their dispute, one of them will use his or her arguments to batter away at the opinion of the other, just as the iron strikes against the flint, or the flint against the iron. And as this happens, and they argue away, even though the truth does not leap out fully-formed and plain to seen, nonetheless, it is inevitable that a few sparks of truth will appear, especially since truth is sparkling by nature. And these sparks, even if they are few and small at first, if they fall on to good kindling (ie. readers with well-disposed minds and intellects not tainted with malice) will quickly fan into a clear and steady flame.⁹⁴

⁹³ On how female readers may have responded to their literary representations, although for a different period of time, see: Krueger, *Women Readers*.

⁹⁴ Cox, *The Renaissance Dialogue*, p. 177, n. 16.

According to Speroni, readers are offered a variety of views and it depends on their judgment to discover the truth. This may have happened in open dialogues, in which the author did not express in a clear manner his own opinion and speakers were presented in an equal status. However, female readers' potential attitude towards the text seems to be more perplexing, since different modes of identification operated for male and female readers. The sharp division between the sexes and their social roles, and the contemporary formation of gender identities through antithetical pairs of characteristics and qualities, rather impelled women readers to be inevitably identified with female speakers. So, female readers were entrapped in a scheme of gender roles that worked against them, and the dialogue itself gave no possibility of escape. Even in open dialogues, where two or more male speakers develop different arguments, women speakers, contrary to their male interlocutors, operate in a closed system, without participating directly in the conflict. In dialogues set in official environments, women do not wade in the conversation on equal terms, but they remain hemmed in a peripheral sub-dialogue, included in the main dialogue, which is always conducted between male speakers. So, female speakers do nothing but "choose" which speaker they will support and "suggest" female readers do the same. In closed didactic dialogues, such as that of Lodovico Dolce, female speakers' role is even more marginal. Dorothea just listens to Flaminio's instructions. Dorothea's passive role is identified with that of the female reader who cannot express her potential dissent.

On the other hand, dialogues presenting women as skillful and forceful speakers also entrapped women readers in a risky scheme. By contrast with dialogues which, by idealizing passive female speakers (a gentlewoman, Court Lady or a middle class decent woman), begot in women readers the desire for emulation, the questionable modesty of courtesans, or Raffaella and Coppina, could make women readers waver between their identification with the female speaker and the risk of patterning themselves upon her. This two-sided polarization made women readers identify themselves either with the passive, modest and reserved female speaker, or with the dynamic courtesans of Speroni and Betussi, the prostitutes of Arcitino or the "immoral" speakers of Piccolomini and Gottifredi. The models of behaviour most authors suggested placed the historical woman reader in a dilemma: the price for her freedom of speech was the imperilment of her virtue.

The examination of Tullia d'Aragona's and Moderata Fonte's dialogues can show how some contemporary women attempted to solve this dilemma by challenging the above schema and suggesting to female readers a different decorum of female behaviour. Tullia d'Aragona's *Dialogo della infinità di amore* belongs to the tradition of love literature that flourished in the 1540s. Written five years after Speroni's dialogue it had many similarities with Speroni, Betussi and Frangipane's dialogues. It is placed in the home of a courtesan, Tullia herself, with discussion between a courtesan, herself again, and a well known contemporary intellectual, Benedetto Varchi, a friend of Tullia. A secondary figure is Lattantio Benucci, a doctor and a frequent guest of Tullia in Florence, who exchanged sonnets with her.⁹⁵ A letter of Girolamo Mutio Iustinopolitano to Tullia has been included at the beginning of the dialogue as proem. Mutio praises Tullia's intellect, declares his love for her and claims that he decided to publish her dialogue unbeknown to her: "...having judged that the time has come to remove it from its burial in the darkness. In your typically courteous manner, you made me a recipient of your dialogue, as though it were something you wished to share with me and not because it might be something for publication".⁹⁶ Additionally, Mutio clarifies that in her original copy, Tullia had out of modesty put as female speaker a woman called Sabina, and that it was Mutio's decision to change the name Sabina to Tullia. At the same time, Mutio takes the occasion to remind readers of Tullia's acquaintances with contemporary known *literati*, including himself, Benedetto Varchi and Sperone Speroni:

Since the dialogue contains many details extolling your praises and virtues, you deemed it unsuitable to refer to yourself by your real name, so out of modesty you chose to pass yourself off as Sabina. I, however, considered it wrong that a dialogue should have one fictitious name amongst two real ones... I adopted the plan of leaving those names just as they were and restoring "Tullia" in place of "Sabina". I would have done this for no other reason, indeed, than because of your choosing to have the no less learned than eloquent Varchi make such honorable mention of me as a person belonging to you, and I know that I have never belonged to any Sabina. I know perfectly well that I have only ever belonged, and still belong, to Signora

⁹⁵ D'Aragona, *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*, p. 52, n. 1.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

Tullia. I am sure that what I am saying here would be repeated by the excellent Signor Sperone, if he heard himself referred to as yours in the same way.⁹⁷

As an acknowledged man of letters, Mutio introduces readers to Tullia's work and bears full responsibility for its publication. It seems that the main aim of his letter was to lend prestige to a dialogue that had been written by a woman and a courtesan too.

Although female speakers' participation in dialogues on love was a common literary *topos*, Tullia d'Aragona's work is the only early modern Italian love dialogue written by a woman. Interestingly it was written by a courtesan, the sort of woman that authors used to place in their dialogues. Although influenced by the literary tradition, Tullia's dialogue differs in some critical points concerning the representation of the female speaker and gender identities. The dialogue is structured around Tullia's and Varchi's contrasting arguments on love; Varchi claims that love is infinite whereas Tullia believes that love always comes to an end.

Already from the beginning, Tullia acknowledges Varchi's superior learning. However, at the same time she ironically underlines her interlocutor's gender bias:

Yet I rather wonder whether you may not end up feeling a little uncomfortable and perhaps regretting the fact that you came over, particularly because it was my turn to speak, and for the reasons that you will shortly hear: not only am I a woman – and you have some complex philosophical reasons for considering women less meritorious and intrinsically less perfect than men – but what is more, I do not possess either sufficient learning or verbal ornaments, as you are well aware.⁹⁸

Varchi denies Tullia's charge. He acknowledges women's spiritual qualities, and especially those of Tullia, and Tullia's important circle of acquaintances with contemporary intellectuals is once more highlighted:

Would I then be so ignorant, so mean and ungrateful that I could ignore or pass by without praising that beauty, virtue, and refinement of yours, which is bound to be honored, admired, and adored by anyone who has either seen it for himself or heard it from others? ...Sperone, in his prose, and Muzio, both in his ornate prose and in

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 52.

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 55-56.

different poetic meters, have written so much, and in such style, about you, that their texts "will last as long as the universe is in motion".⁹⁹

Praised by a lettered man, the female speaker wins prestige already from the beginning.

Although Tullia lacks Varchi's formal qualifications, in the course of the conversation she gradually appears equally able to cope successfully with philosophical terms and meanings. Even if the pattern of the erudite male speaker has not been eliminated, the female speaker shows repeatedly her expertise in philosophy, linguistics and logic, developing her own arguments. Moreover, Tullia regards Varchi's complex philosophical reasoning as mere sophism:

I'm afraid I might be embroiled in God knows what. There's one thing I can't get over, and that's the way these logicians fog up the other person's mind at their first opportunity. They start pronouncing affirmatives and negatives; they want you to say "yes" and "no" at their prompting; they hardly lay off until their side of the argument gets the upper hand, whether rightly or wrongly. Things come to such a head that I usually compare them with the Gypsies when they carry on with their tricks... Ha! You shan't catch me out like that. I don't mean the proper brand of logic, but the bogus sophistry which is all the modern vogue.¹⁰⁰

Some passages later the same pattern emerges. When Varchi asks Tullia what is the difference between a noun and a verb, she answers that "it is something that Varchi has to ask a schoolmaster, because she has no particular competence in grammar". Nevertheless, immediately after she gives the right answer, making her interlocutor acknowledge her erudition: "Now I can tell that you are learned in every way and pretend to know nothing just to force me to do the talking".¹⁰¹ Downgrading Varchi's formal university learning and showing equal erudition and eloquence, Tullia refashions step-by-step the common pattern of the inferior female speaker.

Finally, the author becomes explicit in her criticism of male speakers' superiority when her female speaker openly criticizes Varchi for always pursuing the leading role in the conversation and attempting to impose his ideas on her:

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 56.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 59-60.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 61.

...However, if Socrates was so wise and virtuous, why don't you make a practice of imitating him? For as you know, he discussed everything with his friend Diotima and learned all manner of wonderful things from her, especially concerning the mysteries of love...he adopted a learning stance, whereas you're imparting lessons.¹⁰²

Furthermore, although it is implied that some other men are present, they remain silent during the whole conversation. The usual literary motif is reversed. A silent male audience has replaced the traditional silent female audience. By her dialogue Tullia d'Aragona also aspired to refashion her identity in relation to Speroni's dialogue. Towards the end of the dialogue Lattanzio Benucci makes direct reference to Speroni's work and rejects Tullia's image as a jealous woman: "while she had loved Tasso, and still loves him, both for his qualities and in return for having been loved by him in such an unusual and overwhelming way, she had never felt jealousy for him".¹⁰³

Published in 1600, Moderata Fonte's *Merito delle Donne* recasts in a more dynamic way the previous dialogues' conventions. Fonte's dialogue is conducted between seven Venetian women of different marital status: Adriana, an elderly widow, Virginia, Adriana's daughter of marriageable age, Leonora, a young widow, Lucretia, an older married woman, Cornelia, a young married woman, Corinna, a young unmarried girl and Helena, a newly-wed young woman. The dialogue takes place in Leonora's house overlooking the Grand Canal. The focal point of the debate is women's superiority and marriage. Leonora, Corinna and Cornelia criticize gender order mechanisms, condemn men's behaviour, accuse the legal system and gender norms, which place women in a secondary social position, and attack marriage, condemning the economic exploitation, maltreatment, lack of freedom and home seclusion women suffer from their husbands and other male relatives. On the other hand, Helena, Virginia and Lucretia are presented as moderate and compromising with the dominant norms and practices. Andriana, the eldest one, is elected as their "queen" and directs the process of the conversation. The first group of speakers,

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 66.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 109.

especially Corinna, play the leading role in the dialogue, and the author explicitly identifies herself with them.

Already from the beginning, in an idealization of her heroines' witty meetings, Fonte rejects mixed conversations:

These women would often steal time together for a quiet conversation; and on these occasions, safe from any fear of being spied on by men or constrained by their presence, they would speak freely on whatever subject they pleased – sometimes, their womanly labors; sometimes, their seemly diversions. Sometimes one of them, who was fond of music, taking up her lute or tempering her sweet voice with the notes of a well-tuned harpsichord, would provide a charming entertainment for herself and her companions; or another, whose tastes inclined to poetry, would recite some novel and elegant composition to entertain that judicious and well-informed audience in a fresh and pleasing manner.¹⁰⁴

Some passages later, Cornelia expresses a similar anxiety about men's criticism or disapproval: "Praise God that we are free to do just as we please, even tell jokes like that to make each other laugh, with no one here to criticize us or puts us down". And Lucretia adds: "If a man could hear us now, joking together like this, how he would scoff! There'd be no end to it".¹⁰⁵ The same pattern emerges again in a more specific context: "Just think, if men could have heard what we've been saying about them, how many much worse things they'd say about us in return... They'd probably write some contemptuous book about women as a reply".¹⁰⁶ Not only the image of the male speaker/defender of the female sex has been eliminated but also men are presented as a threat to the development of the conversation.

In the second part of the dialogue, Corinna almost uninterrupted displays considerable erudition in a variety of fields, such as physics, biology, geography, geology, chemistry, medicine, literature and law. Her companions encourage her by asking questions and further clarifications. In the art of oratory, Corinna develops both a theoretical framework for a skillful public speech and composes an oration addressing men on behalf of all women.¹⁰⁷ Corinna's expertise in all these fields of

¹⁰⁴ Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, p. 45.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 47.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 116.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 188-93.

knowledge refashions the traditional image of the male expert with university education, both in literature and real life, and claims an equal position for women in education and public speech. Lucretia wishes women knew about medicine so they could look after themselves without being dependent on men.¹⁰⁸ Towards the end of the dialogue, Corinna concludes: "we have just as much right to speak about these subjects as they [men] have, and if we were educated properly as girls (as I've already pointed out), we'd outstrip men's performance in any science or art you care to name".¹⁰⁹

Fonte's speakers are learned, skillful and forceful. However, instead of courtesans, fictional female characters or immoral aged women, they are "noble and spirited women, all from the best-known and most respected families of the city, who, despite their great differences in age and marital status, were so united by breeding and taste that a tender bond of friendship had formed between them".¹¹⁰ Although Fonte's speakers are modest and chaste, they arrange their own separate meetings, where they speak freely and develop through their alliance and friendship a social profile beyond the narrow family bonds. In this way, Fonte disengages female virtue from the ideal of the taciturn and isolated woman and suggests a new female identity that could at least potentially lead female readers to a further critical analysis beyond the text.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 181.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 238.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 44-5.

CHAPTER SIX

"DEFENDERS" AND "ENEMIES" OF WOMEN: SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CATEGORIES OR EMPTY RHETORIC?

"DEFENDERS" VERSUS "ENEMIES": THE CONSTRUCTION OF A POSITIVE MALE IDENTITY

A common pattern of early modern Italian treatises or dialogues dealing with the excellence of the female sex is the repeated structure of the arguments around a dichotomy between women's defenders and enemies. Whether in the proem or main text, the author, or, in the cases of dialogues, one of the speakers, presents himself as a devout defender of the female sex. Usually some space is also devoted to the strong disapproval of women's enemies. Despite the insistent repetition of this schema, specific information is rarely given about women's defenders or enemies and the references to them mostly remain in an ambiguous and vague context. Authors' insistence on referring to women's defenders and enemies, most often without identifying them, raises the question of what was the aim of this literary representation. Detecting how the defender and enemy of the female sex are represented in the texts in question, one can make some further suggestions about the ideology, motives and pursuits of these writers. Besides, a closer examination of the contemporary use of these terms – defender and enemy of the female sex – can throw light on whether writers suggested an improvement in the economic, social and political conditions of women, they expressed developments in the gender perceptions of early modern Italian society, or their writings were part of a rhetorical performance. A combination of all these is possible as well.

What primarily figures in most writings is the representation of women's defenders as a small but enlightened group of men, whose noble sentiments and ideals mark them out from the rest of people. Authors' moral and intellectual uplift is achieved by an insistent comparison between themselves and "the others", namely women's enemies. In his dedicatory letter to the Brescian nobleman Giovan Battista Gavardo, Girolamo Ruscelli claims that the female sex is loved and honoured "by the

most virtuous and perfect men".¹ This small but "heroic and pioneering group" is opposed to the common view, which is ill disposed towards women. At times, women's defenders are even supposed to be vulnerable to attack due to their endeavour to defend women and reveal the truth they only know. Devoted to their duty, authors often ask for the protection of a powerful person, usually a woman, from the "ill-natured" women's enemies. In his dedication to Eleonora de' Medici of Toledo, Duchess of Florence, Domenico Bruni argues that her prestige will make even women's enemies read his work:

Thanks to your most illustrious and excellent name it will be praised and honoured by everyone for that alone, which the feeble author's base style does not deserve; and although to many who find themselves hardly friends of women, it would appear difficult, and hard to read it or listen to it, it is very certain that under the shade of your name everyone will read it or hear about it with great satisfaction.²

In a similar way, addressing Margarita Estense Gonzaga, Duchess of Ferrara, Tommaso Garzoni underlines the risk his work runs of being attacked for its brave defence of women: "I know that many people will dislike my undertaking to praise so explicitly your sex and maybe I will be mocked by their evil tongues with insolent words, because they will think that I directly oppose the authority of many wise men, who have sharply persecuted them [women] in their writings".³

A similar pattern emerges in Ortensio Lando's dedication to Sigismondo Rovello "ambasciatore del potentissimo re d'Inghilterra":

Having collected many letters, gathered from various places and written by wise women, in a little volume... I thought that it would be necessary to dedicate it to a protector of great authority and great wisdom; so that the evil tongues, enemies of

¹ "elle [donne] sono amate, riverite, & servite solamente da i piu veri, e piu perfetti huomini": Ruscelli, *Lettura*, p. 6.

² "...per lo obietto del suo illustriss., & eccellentiss. nome, che per quello solo da tutti sarà più carezzata & honorata, che non el rozzo stile del debole suo autore meritarebbe: & che se bene a molti che poco amici delle donne si ritruovano, sarebbe parso difficile, & faticoso il leggerla o ascoltarla; mirendo certissimo che sotto l'ombra di quel la sarà da ciascheduno con grandissima satisfatione, & letta, & ascoltata...": Bruni, *Difese delle donne*, pp. 2V-3R.

³ "Io sò, ch'a molti spiacerà l'impressa ch'io piglio, di lodar sì apertamente il vostro sesso, e forse dalle mordaci lingue, con temerari motti, sarò beffato, parendo loro, ch'io m'opponga dirittamente al giuditiostinato di molti huomini saputi, che v'hanno co'scritti loro acerbamente perseguitato": Garzoni, *Le vite delle donne illustri*, p. 161.

the honour of the female sex, would fear to bite and lacerate women...and they would learn by now to respect and honour this so noble sex... So I dedicate these [letters] to you and consequently now it will be your turn to undertake the defence against the Calumniators (if somebody appears)...⁴

In their attempt to construct a positive identity for themselves, authors often present women's defenders and enemies as two opposing factions. Indicatively Girolamo Ruscelli underlines the distinction between *i nostri* and *essi*: "Wishing to praise women our folks [*i nostri*] always blame men... they [*essi*] say that our folks deceive the world by a great fraud".⁵ This intellectual conflict between women's defenders and enemies is depicted either as fight or as litigation, through which the truth will shine. Domenico Bruni presents himself as "cordial advocate" [*cordiale avvocato*] of women.⁶ Girolamo Mutio, the women's defender in Lodovico Domenichi's dialogue, warns his adversary and enemy of women, Pier Francesco Visconte, that he and his companion, Francesco Grasso, will enter this battle of arguments well-armed:

I do not want to intervene in this battle as enemy of women... Of course, I am not going to stay, as one might say, with my hands tied in this undertaking...and although Signor Francesco is a very worthy and successful champion by his own, I will not consider giving him an injury, if opposing you with the same weapons of truth which I have already in my hands, I will make your situation even worse...⁷

Authors/defenders of the female sex consider their contribution vital for people learning the truth, which women's enemies have distorted. Lodovico Domenichi informs readers that he brought to light his collection of poems written by

⁴ "Havendo in un picciol volume ridotto molte lettere, da vari luoghi raccolte et da savie donne scritte...hò fra me stesso pensato esser quasi di necessità il dargli alcun protettore di molta autorità & di molto giudicio ornato; & questo accioche le maligne lingue nemiche de gli honori femminili, sbigottite si rimassero di mordere et di lacerar le Donne...imparassero hormai à riverire et honorare questo nobilissimo sesso...à voi adunque le dedico, & à voi per conseguente toccherà la difensione contra la nequitia de Caluminiatori (se alcuno ne apparirà)...": Lando, *Lettere*, pp. 2R-2V.

⁵ "I nostri nel volere essaltar le Donne si son posti sempre a biasmare gli huomini...essi dicono che i nostri per ingannare il mondo usano una gran fraude...": Ruscelli, *Lettura*, p. 15V.

⁶ Bruni, *Difese delle donne*, p. 6V.

⁷ "Io per me non voglio intravenire in questa battaglia come nimico delle femine; ... Già non sono io per starmi come si suol dire, in questa impresa con le mani a cintola; anzi benche il Signor Francesco sia da se pur troppo valoroso & sofficiente campione, non però crederò fargli ingiuria, se opponendomi a voi con le medesime armi del vero, che già gli veggio in mano, farò la vostra conditione assai peggiore...": Domenichi, *La nobilità*, pp. 6V-7R.

women with the help of some friends of his, "devoted to female honour as well", to "prove in every possible way the excellence of the female intellect to those who are doubtful about it".⁸ Similarly, defending women against "their slanderers" [*gli accusatori del sesso loro*], as the title indicates, Luigi Dardano points out the beneficial contribution of his work to the readers' protection from these "wicked people", namely women's enemies:

Both my verses and my prose intend to demonstrate with pretty clear arguments that even if women's virtues do not surpass that of men, at least they are not inferior. I consider this effort not only pleasant but also useful for readers; because nowadays the world is full of wicked men who, due to their bizarre and immoderate desires, would like not only to stain the name of the courageous women... They deserve not only repression but also harsh and severe punishment.⁹

Women's enemies are also supposed to have distorted the historical truth to underestimate women's great contribution to civilization. So, they have deliberately omitted to mention women's achievements in arts and letters and their heroic deeds. This historical bias, expressed in women's absence from the historical foreground, is attributed to the fact that history has always been written by men. Wishing to praise only their own sex, and "being envious of women's achievements", male historians have withheld the truth.¹⁰ Taking as an example Giovanni Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris*, biographies of famous women were regarded by their authors as a common endeavour to retrieve women's reputation. This rereading of history aimed at the spiritual regeneration of the female sex and signified an imaginary historical

⁸ "Così con l'aiuto d'alcuni amorevoli miei, & grandemente affezionati al valor donnesco, raccolti da più parti assai ragionevole quantità di rime composte da Donne. Lequali rime sono poi state infino ad hora appresso di Me f quel grado tenute, che le più care, & pretiose cose si soglion tenere... Et benché infino all'hora, ch'io cominciai a raccorle, io fossi fermo di volere in ogni modo publicarle al mondo col mezzo delle stampe, per charir coloro, i quali stanno in dubbio della grandezza dell'Ingegno femminile": Domenichi, *Rime Diverse*, p. 3.

⁹ "La onde di tal materia intendo di scrivere sì in verso; come in prosa, l'ufficio d'iguali sarà di approvar con ragioni evidentissime, che se le virtù delle donne non debbono essere anteposte a quelle de gli huomini, almeno non sono punto inferiori. Ilche io giudico cosa non solo dilettevole, ma utile a i lettori, essendo hoggidi il mondo ripieno di huomini scelerati: iguali, mercè de i loro strani & disordinati appetiti, vorrebbero non solo oscurare il nome delle valorose Donne... A iguali è di mestiero non solo di ripresione, ma di aspro & severo castigo": Dardano, *La bella e dotta difesa*, pp. 3R-3V.

¹⁰ "Questo, è nato similmente per la pigrizia, o invidia de gli scrittori, i quali per esser stati huomini, o non hanno voluto durar fatica, in raccontare gli egregii fatti loro, o hanno havuto invidia alla lor gloria": Thomagni, *Dell'eccellentia de l'huomo*, p. 116R.

continuity of female excellence. In *Vite delle donne illustri*, dedicated to Margarita Estense Gonzaga, Duchess of Ferrara, Tommaso Garzoni makes known "to the world and reveals to the centuries to come" the honourable deeds of women, which "so many importunate tongues" have concealed because of their hatred and madness.¹¹ Luigi Dardano's dialogue also challenges the male structured historical discourse through his forceful female speakers, who give a different version of the historical facts.¹² Similarly, in the early seventeenth century, Francesco Agostino della Chiesa claimed that his biography of lettered women demonstrated erudite women's achievements, which some modern authors had withheld,

[...] due to their disdain, hate and envy rather than to some sound reason; and with their mouth full of venom they attempt with atrocious words to bite and lacerate like rabid dogs poor women, by demolishing their reputation and dignity and maliciously ascribing to them many defects, which most times are found in men rather than in women.¹³

Psychological reasons, such as envy, hatred, idiocy, pursuit of fame or star-crossed love, are often considered the motives behind enemies' attacks. Already in 1525, in a chapter entitled "About the reasons that have moved many to slander women", Galeazzo Flavio Capra notes that many men writers defame women due to their suffering of an unhappy love.¹⁴ Similarly, Domenico Bruni points out that many authors slander women because women have scorned them without satisfying their desires.¹⁵ Along the same lines, Thomaso Pellegrini alleges that women's enemies

¹¹ "...parmi, Serenissima Signora, cosa convenevole a' meriti di tante altre sotto ingegno silentio passate, almeno con qualche gentil discorso commune à tutte, far note al mondo, e palesar a' venturi secoli l'honorate conditioni del sesso femminile, da tante importune lingue dispettose, con eguale odio, e follia, iniquamente e scioccamente vituperato": Garzoni, *Le vite delle donne illustri*, p. 161.

¹² Dardano, *La bella e dotta difesa*; see above pp. 201-3.

¹³ "Che i moderni scrittori mossi da invidia, ò altra passione non si sono degnati farne mentione ne' loro scritti... Ma vedendo ogni giorno che alcuni poco prudentemente instigati più da sdegno, odio, & invidia, che da qualche fondata ragione, con bocca piena di veleno si affaticano con le atroci loro parole di mordere, e lacerare à guisa di rabbiosi cani le povere donne, conculcando, & abbattendo la dignità, & riputatione di quelle, attribuendo li malignamente molti difetti, più communi à gl'huomini, ch'alle donne": Della Chiesa, *Theatro delle donne letterati*, p. 2.

¹⁴ Capra, *Della eccellenza*.

¹⁵ "Perche essendo quelli in loro disgratia, ne sapendo come altrimenti prevalersene, si pongano a dirne male, parendo loro per questo a se stessi in effetto, & alli altri in apparenza haver' pienamente sodisfatto: non considerando che non questo loro maligno scrivere manifestano a ciascuno la loro poca gratia con esse. Ilche non può se non procedere ò da poco ingegno loro, o vero da qualche apparente vizio in quelli dalle sagacissime donne conosciuto": Bruni, *Difese delle donne*, pp. 3V-4R.

are motivated by envy of women's superiority: "They do it due to nothing but their envy, because they know that women are superior to them".¹⁶

In a rhetorical display, authors/defenders utter threats against women's enemies, warning them about their ominous future. Women's enemies will be punished, since they offend not only women but also those men who respect and love them and even God, who wishes mutual love and support between the sexes.¹⁷ Associating contemporary women's enemies with Stesichorus and Orpheus, traditionally regarded by the writers/defenders as women's enemies, Cesare Barbabianca (pseud. "Academico Solingo") creates an imaginary line of succession of women's enemies:

O Liar be careful not to suffer what happened to Stesichorus poet whom Jove deprived of his sight after having slandered the beautiful Helen, daughter of Leda, in his verses; ...Be careful, wretched, that the same misadventure does not happen to you that happened to Orpheus, when he was killed by women after having slandered them. Admit, admit the error in your own self...¹⁸

According to the writers/defenders, one basic aim of their works is to awaken women to their splendour and provide them with the necessary arguments so that they themselves could cope with their enemies' challenges. In the proem of the *Dialogo della bella creanza*, Alessandro Piccolomini informs women readers that he will supply them with "many arguments and countless examples" to silence "those ill-natured" men who, among many lies, argue that the female soul is not capable of profound concepts and witty judgments. It is clearly implied here that women

¹⁶ "ilche per altro essi non fanno, se non per la invidia che loro portano, conoscendole à se superiori": Pellegrini, *Discorso*, p. 20V.

¹⁷ "Donna, de le lor forze istimo poco / Et torneranno in lor tutti tormenti / Ragunate io vi prego in questo loco: / Udite quel, ch'Amor m'infiama a dirvi / Per liberarvi da l'eterno foco... / Voi Dio offendete, e fate al mondo guerra... / Ei di viver procaccia per salvare / L'anima sua dal foco de dannati, / Voi correte a le pene alte & amare": Dardano, *La bella e dotta difesa*, pp. 7V-8R.

¹⁸ "Guarda, ò Mentitore, che non accada quell'istesso, che intervine à Stesicoro Poeta, ilquale havendo ne i suoi versi biasimato la bella Helena figlia di Leda, fu da Giove accietato della vista de gli occhi... Guarda misero, che non incorri in quel medesimo infortunio, che nel biasimar le Donne occorre ad Orseo, quando meritamente fu da loro ucciso. Riconosci, riconosci in te stesso l'errore...": C. Barbabianca, *L'Assonto Amoro in difesa delle Donne dell' Academico Solingo* (Trevigi, 1593), p. 22; the name "Cesare Barbabianca" does not appear in the book but the catalogue of *Biblioteca Marciana* attributes the work to this author. Stesichorus was a lyric poet who lived in the first half of the sixth century. The story that he was struck blind for slandering Helen of Troy in one of his poems is told by Plato (*Phaedrus* 243 A). According to one version of the myth, after the death of Eurydice, Orpheus swore off the love of women and had only men lovers. Thracian women attacked him because he took their husbands away from them with his songs.

paradoxically need a male protector to prove the superiority of their sex. Interestingly, Piccolomini hastens to clarify that his main speaker, the elderly and humble born Raffaella, is just a *dramatis persona*, since if she was a real figure it would be impossible for her to have formulated such ideas (apparently because of her low social status and sex) and that it is he himself who speaks behind her.¹⁹

The pattern of the male protector of women was a commonplace of the literature in question. Most dialogues on women's excellence were structured around the verbal conflict between the defenders and enemies of the female sex. Women attending the conversation just intervene to encourage their protector and express their gratitude to him. This pattern is already found in the Third Book of Baldesar Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*. The female speaker, Emilia Pia, asks Magnifico Giuliano to clarify his views in simpler words for women to understand and to continue his reasoning in favour of women, so that the speakers/enemies fall silent:

In heaven's name, leave all this business of matter and form and male and female for once, and speak in a way that you can be understood. We heard and understood quite well all the evil said about us by signor Ottaviano and signor Gaspare, but now we can't at all understand your way of defending us. So it seems to me that what you are saying is beside the point and merely leaves in every-one's mind the bad impression of us given by these enemies of ours.²⁰

Similarly, Margherita Gonzaga, encourages Magnifico Giuliano, to develop further his arguments for the same reason:

I think you are describing these noble deeds of women too briefly; for although these enemies of ours have indeed heard and read about them, they pretend not to

¹⁹ "E se per sorte Donne mie vi accadera mai di leggerlo a la presentia di alcuni di questi maligni, iquali fra l'altre bugie che dican di voi donne sogliano affermare che ne l'animo de le Donne non si posson crear mai gran concetti e sententie Profunde & di giudicio, ma solamente discorsi frivoli e snervati, e per questo parendoli questo Dialogo pieno di utilissimi consigli...vorra dire che sia impossibile che sia nato da una Donna chiamata Madonna Raffaella, come io lo prosupponga, à questi tali anchor che non meritin riposta, non dimeno voglio esser tanto cortese di offerirvi che voi respondiate à loro da parte mio, ch'io à ogni lor volonta gli vo provar con moltissime ragioni & essempli infiniti, che s'ingannano di longo, e che le donne posson discorrere e giudicare, consigliare, e proveder i qual si voglia caso d'importanza, cosi ben come gli huomini": Piccolomini, *Dialogo della bella creanza*, pp. 2V-3R.

²⁰ Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, p. 221.

know them and would like them to be forgotten. But if you will allow us women to hear them, at least we shall take pride in them.²¹

In Lodovico Domenichi's dialogue, when one speaker begins to argue for women's superiority, the female speaker, Violante Bentivoglia, thanks God exclaiming that finally a man defended the female sex.²²

Apparently, the identity of women's defender lent splendour and prestige, and was regarded as a sign of sensibility, noble ideals and civilized manners. At every chance, writers reminded readers or dedicatees that they had also supported the female sex in the past, presenting themselves as firm defenders of women. In the *Dialogo della bella creanza*, Alessandro Piccolomini assures women readers that he had always been their faithful defender and he used to support them in oral discussions as well:

How affectionate I was always towards you and aware of your beauty and virtue, noble women...you can take very clear information about this from those who, deprived of the light of the intellect and with no reason, have yielded to such vileness and filth to speak ill of you women...the best witnesses of my affection are those whom I have whipped and vigorously admonished with arguments and anger, having often been found in the same place with them;²³

In a letter to Lucretia Gonzaga da Cazuolo, included in Ortensio Lando's *Panegirici*, Girolamo Ruscelli underlines that he had supported women in the past by making their dignity known to the world.²⁴ Similarly, in his collection of poems written by women, Lodovico Domenichi declares that he had also defended female

²¹ Ibid., p. 228.

²² "Sia ringraziato Iddio, che pure ho ritrovato uno huomo, che piglia la contesa per noi": Domenichi, *La nobiltà*, p. 69R.

²³ "Quanto io sia stato sempre nobilissime donne, vostro affectionato, e conscitor de le bellezze e virtu vostre...quelli piu che altri ve ne potrebbon dar chiarissima informatione, iguali accetati dal lume del intelletto fuor d'ogni ragione si son lassan invollere in cosi vil sango e brutta macchia quant'è il parlar in biasimo di voi Donne...vi potrebbero esser bonissimo testimonio de l'animo mio come quelli che si son trovati piu volte in luoghi dove io con ragione e con collera gli ho ripresi & ammoniti gagliardamente...": Piccolomini, *Dialogo della bella creanza*, p. 2R.

²⁴ "Al che s'aggiunge, che havendo io fatto gia con verissime & non piu udite ragioni capace il mondo della nobiltà vera & perfettion delle Donne, debbo piu d'ogn'altro sentir contentezza, che con gli effetti, et con l'esperienza vera V.S. le confermi, & che approvato scrittore ne faccia historia": Lando, *Due Panegirici*, pp. 56-7.

excellence in the past, apparently implying *La nobiltà delle donne*, published ten years earlier.²⁵

Not only did authors present themselves as women's defenders but also fellow *litterati* often constructed this image for them in the proems of their books. Ortensio Lando's *Lettere di molte valorose donne* includes poetical compositions by Lodovico Dolce, Girolamo Parabosco, Pietro Arcino, Francesco Sansovino and Nicolo delli Alberti da Bormo, who, addressing either women readers or the author himself, praise Lando for having honoured women and made women's keen intellect known. Women of course should owe a debt of gratitude to Lando.²⁶ Similarly, Bartolomeo Burchelati, author and physician from Treviso, presents to women readers their "defender, the Solingo", Cesare Barbabianca.²⁷

Authors' dedications also demonstrate intellectuals' and high-ranking persons' profound interest in being regarded as affectionate defenders of the female sex. Lodovico Domenichi delineates Giovanni Vincentio Belprato, Conte d'Aversa, as a "gentle cavalier" highly esteemed by women.²⁸ In his panegyric to Marchioness of Padulla and Lucretia Gonzaga of Cazuolo, Ortensio Lando underlines Bernardo Michas' love for women, pointing out that Michas "is delighted more than any other nobleman to hear arguments favouring illustrious women".²⁹ Similarly, Vincenzo Busdragho, the publisher of Lodovico Domenichi's collection of poems, dedicates

²⁵ "Sono già molti anni passati ch'essendo io con l'animo, & con l'opere tutto volto a celebrare quanto per Me si poteua allhora, la nobiltà, & eccellentia delle Donne; laqual cosa io ridussi poi in un giusto volume; si come il pensier mi guidava, mi posi in un medesimo tempo raunare cio che mi pareva potere procurar loro gloria, e honore": Domenichi, *Rime Diverse*, p. 3.

²⁶ Addressing "studiose et chiare donne", Lodovico Dolce writes: "Di beltà, di valor, d'ingegno, & d'arte / Non tanto & così vivo obbligo havete: / Quanto al buon Lando; ch'ogni rara parte / di voi consacra (onde chiare vivete) / Nel vago stil de le sue dotte carte". Similarly, Girolamo Parabosco: "Ecco chi vi torrà donne gentili / Quel biasmo, che vi dan le false lingue / Del vulgo sciocco, che mai non destingue / ma ugualmente vi fa imperfette & vili... / Onde il mondo vedrà, ch'attorto ogn' hora / Vi biasma questo stuo, d'insania pieno / Impotente a mirar vostro splendore. / Et vedrà chiar, donne felici ancora, / Ch' Apollo a voi non è cortese meno / De duoni suoi, che sia Venere, e Amore": Lando, *Lettere*.

²⁷ "Donne, che honor bramate, / Anzi chi il vostro honor spieghi, & illustri / Per viver secoi, non che gli anni, e i lustri: / Gradite il Difensor vostro il SOLINGO: / Di cui la libertate / Tanto ha per sua, quanto che voi l'amate": Barbabianca, *L'Assonto Amorofo*, p. 8.

²⁸ "...havendo eletto sì valoroso, & gentil cavaliere, quanto servisse mai Donne, & quanto per alcun tempo sia stato amato, & honorato da Donne, alquale io dedicassi l'istoria della dignità, & grandezza di tutte le antiche, & moderne Donne": Domenichi, *La nobiltà*, pp. 3-5.

²⁹ "Perche sono certo Signor Bernardo, che al paragone di qualunque altro gentilhuomo vi diletate di udir ragionare del valore delle Donne illustri": Lando, *Due Panegirici*, p. 3.

the work to Gerardo Spada, a nobleman from Lucca, who "had always been an affectionate and indomitable defender of women's excellence".³⁰

Occasionally, even writers who calumniated women attempted to justify their attitude on the pattern I-slander-women-for-their-own-good. The introductory dialogue, preceding Giacobbo Boero Goretta's poetical composition, is characteristic. Although the whole poem treats women's evil nature, this dialogue between the author and Scipione Maniliano aims at demonstrating that the author is a friend [*amico*] of women. To Maniliano's question, how it is possible for the author, on the one hand, to declare himself women's friend, and on the other hand, to write such a slanderous work against them, Goretta answers that he does not chastise all women but only the evil ones, who do not deserve the name "women" [*donne*]. As he clarifies, with his work the virtuous women will shine and the evil ones will "bless him a thousand times a day" for having helped them become better and save themselves.³¹

JUST A RHETORICAL GAME?

By shaping the image of women's defenders and enemies, authors constructed a positive male identity for themselves. However, interestingly, texts themselves often imply that this schema and the whole debate about women were nothing but intellectual trickery. In Sperone Speroni's dialogue on women's dignity, one of the speakers, Michele Barozzi, explicitly states that the purpose of the dispute over men/women's superiority is not the search for truth but pastime and rhetorical exercise. Describing a debate about women he had attended, he claims that the arguments of the speaker/defender of the female sex were pleasant to the audience, although they might not have corresponded to truth:

³⁰ "per esser voi sempre stato sollecito & invitto difensore de l'eccellenza de le donne...": Domenichi, *Rime Diverse*, p. 7.

³¹ "Parvi c'habbiato fatto bene, ad imponer tal carico alle Donne, delle quali già mi diceste esser si amico?", "Anzi il ben mio: percioche non vitupero le buone, nè le giuste, delle quali sapete che sono martire, ma le triste e le inique...si che non solo merito d'esserne lodato dalle buone...ma ancora dalle perverse, e scelerate, le quali, vedendosi scoperti i suoi errori, e le sue iniquitadi si emendaranno, e fatte giuste e buone, mille volte il giorno mi benediranno, che sii stato causa della loro salute": Goretta, *I diavoli delle donne*, pp. 3-4.

He said things, which might not be true, but they were appealing thanks to their novelty. Now, we do not dispute over which of the aforementioned conclusions may be true or false; but, it being presupposed that the attendees, each one in his mode, either to please the others or to prove his ingenuity, presented his arguments as true, we will assess them.³²

Similarly, in Girolamo Parabosco's *I Diporti*, one of the speakers, Conte Alessandro Lambertino, downgrades the whole debate to a rhetorical game: "I do as you all do. You compose in women's praise to practise your mind by converting skillfully a vile and negligible topic into a noble one, so that you demonstrate your mental abilities".³³ Eighty years after the publication of Sperone Speroni's dialogue, Cristofano Bronzini used exactly the same words to demonstrate the rhetorical dimension of the debate. Tolomei, the speaker/enemy of the female sex, argues that wishing to go against the trend, he will disagree with those who "say things which might not be true but they are appealing thanks to their novelty" [*per avventura non vere (ma per la lor novità care molto ad udire)*]. Furthermore, he clarifies that he does not want to quarrel but just to entertain himself.³⁴

Another interesting example is Giovanni Thomagni's dialogue, published in Venice, in 1565. The peculiarity of this work consists in that, although in its form and structure of arguments it resembles the dialogues defending women, its aim was to prove men's superiority. The correspondence between the author and Alessandro Piccolomini, preceding the main text, again implies the rhetorical dimension of the debate. Both Thomagni and Piccolomini share the opinion that instead of the basic idea of a text, namely whether it is on men's or women's side, the subtle and well-

³² "disse cose per avventura non vere, ma per la lor novità care molto ad udire. Hora non contendiamo qual vera fosse, ò qual falsa de le già dette conclusioni; ma presupposto che i circostanti, ciascheduno à suo modo, chi per diletto d'altrui, chi per far prova del suo intelletto, qual veramente per vero dire parasse, vegnamo al' fatto del referire": Speroni, *Dialogo della dignità*, p. 38.

³³ "In quanto poi al dar loro [donne] lode, io faccio come fate voi tutti, componete in lode loro per meglio esercitare il vostro ingegno; il quale tanto maggiore mostrate, quanto più illustrate e fate nobile soggetto per sè stesso vile e tenebroso": Parabosco, *I Diporti*, p. 13.

³⁴ "Precorrete pure quanto voi volete, perche vi confesso hora, e confermo alla scoperta, ch'io veramente voglio essere uno di quelli, che nel contrario mi adoprerò sempre: E se bene mi avveggo dell'error mio, e che saria meglio forse, che deposta l'ostinazione, non à contendere, ma à dilettere io attendessi, tuttavia per non essere insieme con voi altri, che dite cose per avventura non vere (ma per la novità, care molto ad udire) voglio con l'autorità di più di mille (che prima n'hanno ragionato) mantencervi la Donna esser fatta dalla Natura al servizio dell'Huomo, e non esser vero, che l'Huomo naturalmente soggiaccia alla Signoria della Donna, come voi dite": Bronzini, *Della dignità*, Giornata Seconda, p. 13.

documented treatment carries greater weight. Interestingly, Piccolomini, once affectionate defender of the female sex, writes now to Thomagni, praising his work:

So, concerning the debate about men's or women's superiority in excellence, I am neither from those, who consider the matter solved in favour of women with no doubt, nor from the others, who consider so self-evident the man's superiority that they think there is no need of well-documented treatment and sharp intellect to prove and defend it; but your [intellect], as your book demonstrates, is (according to me) subtle and penetrating.³⁵

The presentation of the debate about women as a witty rhetorical controversy comes up in Thomagni's main text as well. Already from the beginning of the dialogue, a speaker clarifies that the aim of their meeting is to demolish with oratorical skill the statements of a certain writer/defender of the female sex, whose name is not given.³⁶ Later on, the author, who is identified with one of the speakers, argues that the writers/defenders of the female sex rather than wishing to reveal the truth, formulate their arguments either on account of their love for a certain woman or to display their rhetorical skill and keen intellect:

Actually, concerning his undertaking, this noble and erudite author along with other similar, who have written in favour of women, are worthy of great praise, since these orators who knew how to adjust themselves to the attitudes of the listeners were always greatly esteemed... To sum up, nothing but Love led him astray, so that he exalted women and degraded men in his book; and also maybe to demonstrate the vivacity of his intellect, which is always best manifested in defending something wrong, as he does, rather than truth itself.³⁷

³⁵ "percioche, se bene in questo contrasto d'Eccellenza tra l'huomo, & la donna, io non son di quegli, che tengin in modo risoluta la causa in favor delle donne, che non habbia controversia alcuna; nondimeno io non sono ancor di quegli altri, che ponghino la cosa tanto manifesta per l'huomo, che non habbia bisogno di sottil'ingegno, & di acuto intelletto per la sua prova, & per la sua defensione, si come si vede in questi vostri libri, essere (per quanto giudico io) sottilissimo, & acutissimo il vostro": Thomagni, *Dell'eccellentia de l'huomo*, pp. 5V-6R.

³⁶ "voglio che hora pigliamo a ragionare sopra quelle ultime parole, che dicemmo hiersera per via di dubio, cioe, se si poteva provare con ragioni efficaci, che l'huomo fosse piu nobile della donna; essendo stato qualch'uno che nell'havere scritto in lode delle donne, in cio han tenuto la parte loro, & con assai ragioni mostrato, la donna esser piu nobile dell'huomo": Ibid., pp. 10R-V.

³⁷ "Ancor che in vero in cosi fatta impresa quell nobile, & dotto autore, con gli altri appreso, che in favore delle donne hanno scritto, sono degni di gran lode, essendo sempre sommamente stati esaltati quegli oratori, che hanno saputo accommodarsi a gli animi de gli ascoltanti...& con questo in somma e da concludere, che Amore, & non altro l'habbia fatto deviare dal dritto sentiero, nell'aggrandire, come

Through Thomagni's dialogue, writers who had supported women are often praised. It seems that Thomagni's purpose was neither to be hostile to those writers nor to prove women's inferiority. Thomagni rather chose this literary trickery – the defence of the male sex – to develop in the most skilful way his arguments on a topic which had been so popular. Writing in a period when many works on female superiority had already come to light, Thomagni attempted to attract readers' attention by supporting the reverse, namely men's superiority. However, at the same time, he declared his sympathy with women's defenders, so that his work did not go against the current. Piccolomini's approving letter at the beginning of the dialogue satisfied the same need. Instead of the misogynist ardour found in works such as Giuseppe Passi's *I donneschi difetti* (see below), Thomagni's open dialogue permitted the elaboration of two contrasting but equivalent theses, both in favour of men and women; Thomagni, as a speaker, defends male superiority, whereas another forceful speaker, Cervone, argues in support of women.

In other works, the defence of the female sex was considered mere adulation. In Girolamo Borro's *Ragionamento*, the female speaker, Livia, says that someone told her that those who assure women of their superiority, are motivated by their wish to ingratiate themselves with them, especially when they are growing older.³⁸ Similarly, Girolamo Camerata, after having criticized those who speak ill about women, disapproves also of those who exalt women motivated by their love sentiments or wishing to adulate them.³⁹

Taking into account the negative image authors construct for women's enemies, one might wonder about writers' practice of choosing identifiable contemporary figures as women's enemies in their dialogues. In Baldesar Castiglione's third book of *Il Cortegano*, the main speakers condemning women are Gaspare Pallavicino and Ottaviano Fregoso; in Sperone Speroni's *Dialogo della dignità delle Donne* Michele Barozzi; in Lodovico Domenichi's *La nobiltà delle donne* Pierfrancesco Visconte and Cavalier Cicogna; in Girolamo Parabosco's *I Diporti* Conte Alessandro Lambertino; and in Cristofano Bronzini's *Della dignità e*

in quel suo libro fa, la donna, l'huomo abbassando; e forse ancora per mostrar la vivacità del suo ingegno, qual sempre apparisce più nel difendere il falso, come lui difende, che la verità stessa": Ibid., p. 12V.

³⁸ Borro, *Ragionamento della perfezione*, p. 100; see also above, p. 144.

³⁹ "...ma lasciandosi poi allettare ò da amorosi affetti, ò da adulatione han voluto dire, che sono gli huomini imperfettissimi": Camerata, *Trattato dell'honor vero*, pp. 2R-V.

nobiltà delle donne as *avversario delle Donne* is presented one Tolomei, a Cavalier Ferrarese whose first name is not given since "he would not like his first name to be revealed".⁴⁰

This apparent paradox can be interpreted within the contemporary context of literary expression. In early modern Italian dialogue, speakers often function "as guarantors to the authority of the author's arguments". However, this does not mean that their arguments were taken at face value, in other words that readers took their arguments for faithful transcriptions of the beliefs of the respective historical persons.⁴¹ On the other hand, the rhetorical dimension of the debate permitted authors to present these contemporary figures as women's enemies, without touching their prestige. Girolamo Parabosco's *I Diporti* is indicative of the rationale behind the "casting of roles". In one of the dialogues, treating whether men or women love more constantly – a typical question of love literature, associated with the debate about male/female superiority – Girolamo Molino prearranges who will be women's defender and who their enemy. Molino's choice is not completely arbitrary. However, it demonstrates the rhetorical aspect of the debate:

Concerning this question, I recommend Conte Alessandro for the protection of men, not because I have some doubt (about the answer) but in order to see what arguments he will develop; what arguments, I mean, he will develop to prove that women are by nature deprived of every excellence, such as he himself vigorously claimed. It will be recommended that the reasoning favouring women [will be argued] by the *magnifico* Luigi Mocenigo, and I hope that, through his authority, today, I will become pleasant to women, who attend, by finding such a prestigious *cavaliere* for their defence against so forceful an enemy of theirs.⁴²

⁴⁰ "in questo Dialogo si ponesse il suo Cognome, ma non volle però vi si specificasse il proprio Nome": Bronzini, *Della dignità* (in the introductory chapter entitled "Le persone introdotte a ragionare nel dialogo di queste ventiquattro giornate").

⁴¹ Cox, *The Renaissance Dialogue*, pp. 12-3.

⁴² "Nè questa quistione propongo già perché io sia punto di ciò dubbioso, ma si bene per vedere quai ragioni alleggerà il Conte Alessandro, al quale la protezione dell'uomo raccomando; quai ragioni, dico, dirà per far conoscere che le donne in tutto sieno naturalmente prive d'ogni maorevolezza, siccome di sua propria bocca ha gagliardissimamente detto che sono. La ragione delle donne sarà raccomandata al magnifico m. Luigi Mocenigo, per mezzo del cui valore spero farmi grato oggi alle donne, che intenderanno ch'io avrò in loro difesa trovato così valoroso cavaliere contra così presente e fiero nemico loro."; Parabosco, *I Diporti*, p. 227.

However, although casting the role of women's enemy to contemporary figures does not seem to have been generally in contradiction to contemporary literary norms, these "enemies" often attempt to justify their attitudes and disclaim any identification with women's enemies. In the Third Book of Baldesar Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*, Gaspare Pallavicino rejects Emilia Pia's accusation of being women's enemy: "Do not call us that, for your real enemy is the Magnifico [women's defender] who, by praising women falsely, suggests they cannot be praised honestly".⁴³ Moreover, it is often implied that women's enemies help the conduct of the debate for women's benefit. This aspect is also underlined by Gaspare Pallavicino: "On the contrary, the women have every reason to thank me; because if I had not contradicted the Magnifico and Cesare, we would not have heard all that they had to say in their praise".⁴⁴ Similarly, in Lodovico Domenichi's dialogue, Pierfrancesco Visconte dismisses the accusation of being women's enemy, emphasizing his contribution in advancing the debate for women's benefit:

And, although in reality I am not their enemy, as you may have concluded from my words, so that we hear Signor Francesco arguing about things if not true at least novel and unprecedented, I will not be concerned about being reputed something I am not... So, women may be forever indebted both to him and me; to him for the praises, which he will offer them beyond truth, and to me because I will be the cause of it. And I also hope that he will not win so easily this battle; so when he finally wins the victory, the sharper the conflict will be the greater will be his honour.⁴⁵

Hercole Marescotti goes even further. In his dedicatory letter to Ottavio Ringherio, he claims that his source of inspiration was a debate which had taken place at Ringherio's home. However, in this debate, Marescotti's strategy was to attack women:

⁴³ Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, pp. 221-222.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

⁴⁵ "Et io, benché in fatti non sia nimico loro, come forse havete argomentato dale parole mie, nondimeno per udire ragionare il Signor Francesco se non di cose vere almeno di nuove & non piu udite, non curerò di farmi riputar quell ch'io non sono...onde le Donne a lui & a me perpetuamente restino obligate; a lui per le lodi, le quali dara loro sopra il vero, a me che di cio sarò stato cagione. Et spero anchora che questa bataglia non gli debba riuscire così facile: onde havendo finalmente a conseguirne la vittoria, n'havrà tanto piu honore, quanto havrà trovato il contrasto maggiore": Domenichi, *La nobiltà*, p. 6V.

...I attacked women. And I did this of course not because this was my opinion, as at the end of the conversation I revealed to them, but to provide myself with these subtle disputations, and so to be able to develop afterwards my arguments in greater detail; and to obtain more material, so that if I found sometime the occasion, I could say more things praising this most divine sex. And fortunately, I easily found the occasion.⁴⁶

To a certain extent the debate about women was part of a rhetorical game. However, the rhetorical dimension of the debate should be seen in relation to the broader cultural expression of the period. Rhetoric enjoyed a significant position in the Renaissance culture. It was taught in the universities and its nature and relation to truth was discussed in many treatises. Two main contrary views dominated; some writers praised it as a means of maintaining peace and order, whereas others saw it as the art of lying and condemned it as dangerous and hypocritical.⁴⁷ In 1546, Sperone Speroni, who held the chair in logic at Padua during the 1520s, wrote the *Dialogo della Rettorica*, which treated exactly these matters. Since he was one of the writers who in his works on women made explicit references to the rhetorical aspect of the debate, it would be interesting to see what he writes about rhetoric. Speroni is an apologist for rhetoric, considering it as a sign of the superior human nature. The aim of rhetoric is to "persuade the audience by delighting, instructing and moving them", or otherwise, "to persuade our listeners, achieving the desired victory not by force, nor as something rightfully ours by merit, but as a grace bestowed on us by our listeners because of the delight that a well-composed and delivered oration gives birth in their minds".⁴⁸ However, according to Speroni what the orator teaches is not falsehood but rather "something merely similar to the truth", or "an image of the truth".⁴⁹

The same game between truth and falsehood reappeared in *Apologia dei Dialoghi* (1574), which Speroni wrote to defend his previous *Dialoghi*, which were

⁴⁶ "...l'aveva io presa contro le Donne. E questo non già, perche tale fusse il parer mio, come nel fine di quel ragionamento mi gli scopersi poi: ma per procacciarmi dalle sottilissime obietzioni da questo, e da quello fatte alle mie proposte, piu campo largo; e per acquistarmi tuttavia maggior materia, acciò potessi una volta più cose dire, quando l'occasione mi si presentasse, in lode di questo divinissimo sesso. Il che facilmente, per mia buona fortuna, mi venne fatto;": Marescotti, *Dell' eccellenza*.

⁴⁷ *Renaissance Debates on Rhetoric*, ed. and trans. W. A. Rebhorn (Ithaca & London, 2000), pp. 1-13.

⁴⁸ S. Speroni, *Dialogue on Rhetoric*, in *Ibid.*, pp. 113-4.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 115, 118.

now condemned by the Roman Inquisition for certain passages regarded as offensive to the public morality and the principles of the Catholic Reformation. In *Apologia*, Sperone Speroni claimed that a dialogue could not be condemned, since it presents by definition not only the right views but also the erroneous ones, and maintained that a dialogue "speaks in vain, while it wanders from game to game without getting closer to truth; but to wander in such a way is neither wicked nor dishonest".⁵⁰ Actually, the dialogue was the ideal literary genre to provide diverse views which the writer could simultaneously deny holding. It is worth noticing here that Speroni was a student of Pietro Pomponazzi who had denied the immortality of the soul, invoking the Averroists' doctrine of the "double truth" (that something might be true philosophically but not true theologically and *vice-versa*).⁵¹ Also, Pietro Aretino, in his first volume of letters, published in 1538, had used an argument similar to those featuring in the debate about women to defend his *Sonetti Lussuriosi*. He wrote to a surgeon of Brescia, Battista Zatti: "And since ancient and modern poets and sculptors, in order to exercise their minds in a pleasant manner, sometimes composed and carved lascivious objects ...".⁵² This game between truth, many truths, falsehood and rhetorical device was not exclusively connected with the debate about women but was an integral part of early modern thought.⁵³ Apparently, literature on women reflected and was influenced by all these concepts and ideas concerning rhetoric and dissimulation.

THE SOCIO-CULTURAL PROFILE OF "DEFENDERS" AND "ENEMIES"

Authors' self-definition as members of a pioneering and distinguished group counted more than their disapproval of women's enemies, which mostly functioned as the negative opposite. So, usually, no specific information is given about these enemies, and rarely do authors identify them with specific individuals (contemporary figures as speakers in dialogues are not actually identified with women's "historical"

⁵⁰ Snyder, *Writing the Scene of Speaking*, p. 103.

⁵¹ M. Pine, "Pomponazzi and the Problem of 'Double Truth'", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 29 (1968).

⁵² *I Modi*, ed. & trans. Lawner, pp. 8-9; Talvacchia, *Taking Positions*, pp. 85-6.

⁵³ For dissimulation generally in early modern Europe, see: P. Zagorin, *Ways of Lying. Dissimulation, Persecution, and Conformity in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Mass. & London, 1990).

enemies, but they rather represent them as literary personae). Most references remain in a psychological analysis of the adversarial faction, ascribing to it an immoral, vindictive, egocentric and weak character. However, a closer examination of the texts can give some indications of the socio-cultural identity of the supposed enemies and, most important, of the writers' motives behind their representations.

The Classical and Christian traditions had formulated a seminal misogynist rhetoric, which became the cornerstone of the intellectual, legal, religious, social and medical theories and perceptions in the next centuries. However, the Fathers of Church are seldom charged openly in the works, although the Christian misogynist implications found in the Old and New Testament are often demolished. Rather than refuting the doctrines of the Scriptures, the writers/defenders usually suggest different interpretations of them to support women's superiority. Classical tradition is more often the target of criticism. According to Lodovico Domenichi, "having been the most untrustworthy and vainglorious people", Greek authors, due to ambition, vanity and self-love, claimed that men are superior to women and that women are predestined only to bear children.⁵⁴ He continues that in his days many people hold "this harmful view", and perhaps mostly those, who "are considered to be most worthy", and concludes that he, who "was born to be always women's servant", does not share the opinion of the world [*vulgo*].⁵⁵ Later on, the speaker Francesco rejects Aristotle's and Thomas Aquinas' views on women's inferiority, declaring that instead of bowing to their authorities, he will build his arguments on reason.⁵⁶ Quoting women's great enemies, Francesco derives support from various historical times and mythology:

One could forgive Saint Thomas because he came in such frenzy and became their [women's] main enemy to win paradise... Having said so many bad things about them, fra Gieronimo Savonarola was burned in public, as he deserved it. And

⁵⁴ "...gli scrittori Greci; iquali essendo sopra tutte l'altre nationi del mondo instabili, & vantatori, ... Et così continuando in questa loro falsa opinione, essendosi in quegli affatto la verità perduta, per essere eglino naturalmente dall'ambitione & vanagloria accecati; mossi ancho dallo sfrenato amore di loro stessi, cominciarono indegnamente a preporre il maschio alla femina; ...pensando che la Donna solamente per far figliuoli si debba mantenere": Domenichi, *La nobiltà*, p. 1R.

⁵⁵ "Et per che questa dannosa opinione hoggi ancho in molti regna, & per aventura molto piu in quegli, che molto piu degli altri sono reputati valere; io, che nacqui, & sono, & farò sempre servo delle Donne, & dalle quali & l'essere, & cio ch'è di buono in me riconosco, per non imitare in questo il rimanente del vulgo;": Ibid., p. 2.

⁵⁶ "Anchora che Aristotele prima, e San Thomaso poi, così habbian creduto, io pero non mi lascio governare per autorita, ma per ragioni": Ibid., p. 43R.

among the ancients, Orpheus was pelted with stones by them [women]; Hippolitus was wretchedly lacerated. Demosthenes was punished justly for having spoken ill of them. Having vituperated Helen's beauty, the Stesichorus poet lost his sight... To sum up, all those who have slandered them, such as Giovanni Boccaccio and the similar, should go unheard...⁵⁷

Similarly, Cristofano Bronzini ranks among women's enemies ancient historians and Boccaccio, evidently due to *Il Corbaccio*:

Now, if we take into account the Ancient Histories (and also in every period many [authors] scarcely praise women since they love only themselves and their works). On the contrary, very often they make comments against them [women]; but let's not entitle all those books of Whips, Rattles, Scourges, Grievs, Furies and Devils and unfold volumes of Corbacci and Laberinti [the second title of Corbaccio] (in which rashly intriguing they would like to entrap you [women])...⁵⁸

Refuting the cultural norms of the past, writers imply that their works offer innovative interpretations. In 1525, in one of the earliest treatises on female excellence, *Della eccellenza e dignità delle donne*, Galeazzo Capra refers directly to the novelty of the subject, stressing that he wrote his work in the vernacular so that everybody would be able to read it, at least for its novelty.⁵⁹ The rivalry with the Classical Antiquity was an integral part of Renaissance thought. Already from the fifteenth century humanists "were bound to look at the fruits of their labors as results achieved in imitation of ancient attitudes and forms, but executed in a different

⁵⁷ "San Thomaso è da scusarsi, perche venne in tal frenesia, per haver deliberato d'esser loro capital nimico per havere il paradiso... Et fra Gieronimo Savonarola, per haverne detto tanto male, fu come ci meritava pubblicamente abbruciato. Et de gli antichi Orpheo da loro fu lapidato: Hippolito miseramente lacerato: Demosthene pati del suo dirne male la debita penitenza. Stesicoro poeta per haver vituperato la bellezza d'Helena, perdè la vista de gli occhi;... Et in somma tutti coloro, che le biasimano, come Giovanni Boccaccio, & simili, non debbono essere ascoltati...": Ibid., p. 46V.

⁵⁸ "Se si consideran poi le Istorie Antiche (ancor che molti d'ogni tempo siano stati scarissimi nello scrivere le lodi delle Donne, amando eglino solamente se stessi, e loro opere). E per lo contrario larghissimi in far menzione di qualche biasimo loro; lasciandosi trascorrere à intitolare libri, di Sferze, di Sonagli, di Flagelli, di Doglie, di Furie, e di Diavoli; & à distender volumi di Corbacci, e di Laberinti (dove essi ciecamente intrigati, vi vorrebbero involuppare)": Bronzini, *Della dignità*, Giornata Prima, p. 100.

⁵⁹ "...ho voluto questo mio picciolo libretto in prosa volgare scrivere, acciò meglio da ognuno fusse inteso e se non per altro, almen per la novità de la materia...": Capra, *Della eccellenza*, p. 63.

material and for fresh needs – in the service of new political loyalties and new national literatures".⁶⁰

However, contemporaries were not excluded from authors' condemnation. Indeed, defenders' arguments often had a solid sociological basis, far from rhetorical display. As it has already been shown, denunciations of the contemporary social practices and norms prescribing gender order featured often in the debate about women. Within this context, women's enemies were identified with the legislators, who had made laws against women, the husbands and male relatives, who maltreated or exploited women, and, generally, whoever supported and enforced the contemporary customs and patriarchal norms. Girolamo Mutio, women's defender in Lodovico Domenichi's dialogue, accuses men of having deprived women of every social, political, military and intellectual role, excluding them from "the squares, senate, councils and schools".⁶¹ He further denounces the "tyrannical" imposition of men's power over women against the divine justice and nature, underlining that male domination derives from the legislation, custom, women's exclusion from education and political participation, and their confinement in home or convent.⁶² Similarly, Cervone, women's defender in Giovanni Thomagni's dialogue, points out the decisive role of legislation, custom and the biased interpretation of the Scriptures in women's oppression:

In a malicious way your new legislators violated God's command for the sake of their laws...so, with these laws women, as if defeated by men in war, were forced to submit themselves to the winners; this is decreed neither by nature, nor some necessity, nor reason but by custom, namely their upbringing, fortune and a specific tyrannical condition; and there are also some people who derive authority from the

⁶⁰ H. Baron, "The *Querelle* of the Ancients and the Moderns as a Problem for Renaissance Scholarship", in *Renaissance Essays*, ed. P. O. Kristeller, P. P. Wiener (New York, 1992), (first published in 1968), p. 109.

⁶¹ "E tanto e si crude le odio s'ha concitato contra questa lodevole generatione, che voi indegnamente habbiato ordinato, che le donne in tutti i modi s'habbiano a cacciare dalla piazza, dal senato, da i luoghi de consigli, dalle scuole, e finalmente da tutte le raguananze? tanto volete lor male, c'havete giudicato l'opera loro non essere buona ne sufficiente ne in casa, ne alla guerra, ne co panni lunghi, ne con l'arme in mano?": Domenichi, *La nobilità*, p. 81V.

⁶² "Ma contra la divina giustizia, e contra gli ordini della natura, rimanendo superiore la insolenza e tirannia degli uomini; la autorita e liberta delle Donne e loro dalle ingiuste leggi usupata, dall'uso impedita, e dall'educatione del tutto ammorzata: percioche tosto che la femina e nata da i primi anni e sepolta nell'ocio della casa; ...Poche sono quelle aventure, a cui sia concesso il potere dare opera agli studi e alle lettere. Quando ella e giunta poi all'eta del matrimonio, e consegnata nella servitu e nella gelosia dal marito; o quel che e assai peggio rinchiusa nella perpetua prigione d'un monistario di monache. Tutti gli uffici publici le sono per le leggi vietati.": *Ibid.*, p. 117V.

holy religion against women and based on holy scriptures they prove women's subjection...⁶³

Furthermore, at times writers identify women's enemies with certain contemporary social categories. The misogynist rhetoric is often attributed both to the written and oral speech, which either permeates all social strata or is limited to the "ignorant mob". According to Domenico Bruni, women's enemies are found in all social ranks and fields of knowledge, "both among vulgar and ordinary men, and among erudite writers, philosophers, astronomers, poets, lawyers and canonists, and whoever thinks or writes against this worthy sex".⁶⁴ Similarly, Tommaso Garzoni locates women's enemies in both upper and lower classes, "in the ignorant mob and the wiseacres" [*il volgo inetto, e i savii pazzi*].⁶⁵

From a different point of view, Cristofano Bronzini classifies women's defenders and enemies in accordance with social standing. As Bronzini alleges, the social elite – emperors, kings, princes, knights [*Cavaglieri*] and courtiers – honour and love women, whereas the lower-class men, the "mud" [*fango*], as he calls them, humiliate women, offending, ridiculing and scorning them. In the houses and Courts of the princes and *ottimati* women have always been held in high esteem, whereas in humble houses they confront only quarrels, murmurs and offences. According to Bronzini, the cause for women's maltreatment is ignorance and ill-breeding.⁶⁶ Later

⁶³ "L'è stata la malignità de' vostri nuovi legislatori, i quali hanno annullato il precetto di Dio per i loro comandamenti...con questi leggi adunque le donne quasi in guerra vinte da gli huomini, son sforzate di sottomettersi a vincitori, non che ciò lo faccia ne natura, ne alcuna necessità, ne ragione, ma la consuetudine, l'esser così allevate, la fortuna, & una certa occasione tirannica, & sono ancora alcuni che dalla religione santa si sono pigliati autorità contro le donne, & dalle sacre lettere provan la loro subietione...": Thomagni, *Dell'eccellentia de l'huomo*, p. 110V.

⁶⁴ "...tanto per i vulgari, e plebei huomini, quanto per valentissimi scrittori, filosofi, Astronomi, Poeti, Legisti, e Canonisti dottori, e da ogni altra persona che di quel degno sesso malsentissi ò scrivessi...": Bruni, *Difese delle donne*, p. 14R.

⁶⁵ Garzoni, *Le vite delle donne illustri*, p. 162.

⁶⁶ "Gl'Imperatori, e Regi danno loro la man dritta, i Sommi Principi la strada, i Grandi gli cedano, i Cavaglieri le servono, & honorano; e tutti gli altri soggetti di qualità, non si trovano giamai così lieti, e contenti, come allora, che posson rendere qualche straordinario honore alle pregiatissime Donne: Solamente la gente vile, gli Huomini di poco conto, il fango si può dire, dell'humana spezie è, che ambisce ignorantemente innalzarsi sopra le Donne, e contro le Donne; burlarsene, ingiuriarle, offenderle, e disprezzarle: e sì come nelle case, e Corti de' Principi, e di Ottimati, voi le vedete sempre honorate, accarezzate, servite, & honorate, così al contrario nelle picciole, e vili, non vi sentite se non grida, lamenti, mormorazioni, e querele; la onde bisogna inferire, che nessun'altra cosa è cagione di tante Spine nel Matrimonio, (come à suo luogo diremo) né cosa alcuna genera tanto il disprezzo delle Donne, come l'ignoranza, & il cattivo nutrimento...": Bronzini, *Della dignità*, Giornata Prima, pp. 6-7.

on, Bronzini refers again to "mob" [*vulgo istesso*] as the "perpetual enemy" [*perpetuo Avversario*] of women.⁶⁷

Several authors regarded *volgo* as women's great enemy without, however, being always clear whether they meant the common view or popular culture and practices. In Sperone Speroni's dialogue, *volgo* was also presented as the eternal enemy of women [*vulgo stesso vostro eterno nemico*]. However, referring to both written and spoken word, the speaker most probably implies the common view rather than the lower classes of society: "writing and speaking in public, ignorant people claim that the woman is an irrational creature, a little better than the beasts".⁶⁸ Some passages later, another speaker implies once more the common view, by using this time the term *mondo*: "the world believes that being male is a kind of perfection whereas being female is a defect".⁶⁹

That every man of noble intellect should love and serve women was a fundamental ideal of the courtly culture, in which woman held a particular position within the framework of the neo-platonic idealization of female beauty and love, and the civilized manners. Actually, the first writings on female superiority were born within courtly environments and dialogues on love or female superiority were very often placed in Court settings. The *par excellence* book of courtly manners, Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*, makes such a connection explicit: "Therefore since this opinion is so widespread, I think it only proper also to punish harshly those who defame women with their lies; and I consider that every noble knight is bound when it is necessary to take up arms in defence of the truth, and especially when he hears a woman falsely accused of being unchaste".⁷⁰

However, some aspects of the courtly culture gradually passed the narrow limits of Courts, influenced *litterati* who were not directly related to courtly culture and permeated literary salons and Academies. The great popularity of *Il Cortegiano* played a significant role in this popularization, which was further succeeded by works written in the Venetian environment of the 1540s. Despite the different socio-cultural orientation of each author, the idea that every man of noble intellect should love women, and whoever does not is of a lower quality, dominates in most writings.

⁶⁷ Ibid., Giornata Seconda, pp. 18-19.

⁶⁸ "...ilquale occulto misterio, non intendendo il volgo ignorante, scrive e parla pubblicamente la donna esser nata irrational creatura, poco miglior delle bestie": Speroni, *Dialogo della dignità*, p. 40.

⁶⁹ "crede il mondo che l'esser maschio voglia dire perfettione, e difetto la femina": Ibid., p. 42.

⁷⁰ Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, p. 242.

Galeazzo Capra clarifies that his work intends to silence not only women's enemies but also "those who vituperate love" [*il rispondere a coloro che Amore vituperano*].⁷¹ Love for women plays a spiritually enlightening and morally uplifting role. In Sperone Speroni's *Dialogo in lode delle donne*, Girello, a former enemy of women, becomes a devout defender of them, after having fallen in love with a Paduan married noblewoman. In the proem of *La nobiltà delle donne*, Lodovico Domenichi considers that by defending women against the "cowardice and ignorance" of those who slander and insult them, his work will please "countless cavalieri and gentle men, most affectionate servants of Love and Women".⁷²

Although from the mid-sixteenth century love literature and literature on female superiority gradually waned, the ideal of the noble man, who honours and serves women continues to feature, especially in the works of authors related to courtly environments. Bronzini's aristocratic view that women's defenders are found only among "emperors, kings, princes, knights and courtiers" is not irrelevant to his association with the Florentine Court of Medici where, in 1615, he became master of ceremonies (*maestro de ceremonie*) to the Cardinal Carlo de' Medici.⁷³ More specifically, Bronzini's identification of women's defenders with the high-ranking persons and the representatives of high culture reflects a more strictly defined notion of nobility, which gradually developed in the second half of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. During this period new titles of nobility, which came from non-Italian royal powers of the Holy Roman Empire, France and Spain or from the Popes within Italy, were adopted in many Italian cities to designate certain people as part of the new elite. The Medici Ducal court, to which Bronzini belonged, had begun to set new standards of nobility already from the middle sixteenth century, and the Tuscan urban elite gradually adopted a more courtier-like image. In various parts of Italy, the creation of knightly Orders incorporated the new elite and enhanced the prestige of local rulers, such as the Knightly Order of Santo Stefano, created by Duke Cosimo I of Tuscany in 1562.⁷⁴

The image Bronzini constructed for women's defenders lent prestige to a certain social elite, to which he also belonged, to "men themselves, ourselves and our

⁷¹ Capra, *Della eccellenza*, p. 62.

⁷² "Che se bene io son certissimo d'haver fatto cosa grata a infiniti cavalieri, & huomini gentili, affettionatissimi servi d'Amore, & delle Donne; prendendo la difesa del sesso Feminile contra la viltà & ignoranza di coloro, che le biasimano & offendono a torto": Domenichi, *La nobiltà*, p. 3.

⁷³ "Bronzini", in *Dizionario*.

⁷⁴ Black, *Early Modern Italy*, pp. 132-48.

honour which is attacked by the opinion that Women (whom we love, desire and serve above everything else in the World) are men's servants and not their *signore*".⁷⁵ In the same context can be placed Pietro Paolo Porro, a Cavalier of Santi Maurizio and Lazzaro. In his dedication to Carlo Emanuele di Savoia, Principe di Piemonte, to whom he subscribes as *humilissimo vassallo*, Porro presents the dedicatee as "dear Prince and supreme *cavaliere*", whose proper duty is to defend women's honour.⁷⁶ In 1593, Cesare Barbabianca made a similar connection between women's defenders and chivalric culture. Since "it is the custom of each prestigious *Cavaliere* to defend innocent women on every occasion, either with his sword or spear", Barbabianca dedicated his work to the "Heroic Cavaliere", Horatio Ruino of Capodistria, to protect it from "the audacious and unjust who lacerate women".⁷⁷

Representing the Venetian socio-cultural environment of the 1540s, writers such as Lodovico Domenichi and Sperone Speroni adopted a quite different attitude. Although they regarded the defence of women as a sign of nobility, nobility was perceived in a broader context, related more to noble sentiments and virtue rather than a certain officially institutionalised elite. Although Domenichi places his dialogue in a courtly environment, he locates women's enemies in every social rank, and especially among those who "are considered to be most worthy". Since Domenichi along with the publisher, Gabriel Giolito, expected the *Nobiltà delle donne* to be responsive to the demands of a broader reading public, it is natural that he did not adopt a narrow aristocratic approach.

Indicative of the relation between the shaping of the defenders' and enemies' image and authors' social identity is another work, a theatrical performance entitled *Ricorso di villani alle donne*, which was performed during the Siennese Carnival, around 1576. The main characters are peasants, who appear in public to assure the female audience that, although the "learned, wise and intelligent" authors have

⁷⁵ "...E mentre ciò si farà, vedrete, ch'io non difendo le Donne solamente, ma gli Huomini stessi, noi medessimi, e l'honor nostro, quale offende che hà opinione, che le Donne (sopra tutte le cose del Mondo, da noi amate, desiderate, e servite) siano Serve degli Huomini, e non Signore...": Bronzini, *Della dignità*, Giornata Seconda, p. 16.

⁷⁶ "ma riverir le Donne, più volte mi sono imaginato di volerlo donare a Vostra Altezza (come a Principe amorevole, et a supreme cavaliere, ch'egli è, de'quali è proprio il diffendere l'honore d'esse": Porro, *L'Eris d'Amore*.

⁷⁷ "E di costume all'honorata professione di Cavaliere prender la difesa, hor con la spada, hor con la lancia, in tutte l'occasioni, delle innocenti Donne... Hora vedendo io, che non una sola Donna, ma tutta la nobiltà, & gentilezza delle Donne è miseramente lacerata da alcuni temerari, & ingiusti; mi è parso degna cosa, che questa mia compositione in difesa loro, non havendo tanta vehemenza quanta si converrebbe, sia la protection d'un Heroico Cavaliere, ch'è V.S. molto Illust. Aiutata, & resa perfetta, supplendo à mancamenti dell'Autore": Barbabianca, *L'Assonto Amorofo*, pp. 3-4.

charged them with speaking ill of women, women's real enemies are the representatives of high culture. Notaries, merchants, *procuratori*, doctors of law, medicine and literature, *potestà*, judges and vicars are accused of hypocrisy, cruelty and greed. Two allegorical figures, *Bugia* and *Verità* help peasants in their undertaking.⁷⁸ This bizarre approach can be better understood within the context of the sixteenth-century Siennese social-cultural environment and theatrical tradition. The author was a certain G. B. Binati, called the Falotico, a member of the theatrical *Congrega* of Rozzi, established in Siena in 1530. The authors and actors of the *Congrega dei Rozzi* traditionally came from the artisan population of the city. The peasant, often presented with a touch of bantering, was a standard figure in Rozzi's comedies, through which the authors expressed their own views.⁷⁹ It seems that following this tradition, Falotico used the figure of the peasant along with the long-established debate about women, and the known schema of defenders' and enemies' conflict to denounce the social and cultural elite of his city.

Authors apparently used the schema of women's defenders and enemies to construct a positive identity for themselves. This identity formation usually remained in vague terms; authors' comparison with "the others", that is women's enemies, lent the former prestige, portraying them as noble and heroic figures. The common identification of the *mondo* or *volgo* with women's enemies implied that authors/defenders belonged to an enlightened minority. Furthermore, the frequent identification of the enemies with men of the past aimed to show that the authors/defenders offered some fresh interpretations of history and society. However, when women's defenders and enemies were identified with certain social categories, the comparison became much more specific, aiming at the approval of a certain social category, to which the author himself belonged, and the parallel disapproval of other contemporary social groups.

⁷⁸ Falotico de' Rozzi, *Ricorso di Villani alle donne contro a calunniatori, i quali di loro alle donne hanno commesso male...et recitata in Siena ne' giorni del Carnevale* (Siena, 1576).

⁷⁹ For the *Congrega dei Rozzi*, see: N. Borsellino, *Rozzi e Intronati. Esperienze e forme di teatro dal "Decameron" al "Candelajo"* (Rome, 1974), pp. 96-102.

GIUSEPPE PASSI'S *I DONNESCHI DIFETTI*

Whereas women's "defenders" had to manifest their new ideas, by constructing a new distinctive identity for themselves, women's "enemies" had not. Family relations, legal system, social and economic transactions and politics prescribed and testified gender power relations. Since women's inferiority was the norm in early modern thought, it had not to be proven. Consequently, whereas the misogynist discourse permeated political thought, philosophy, theology, conduct literature, medical treatises and popular literature, writings devoted exclusively to women's inferiority were sporadic. Most frequently these were short poetical compositions, often written in a sarcastic tone, such as Pietro Aretino's *Capitolo contra le donne*, which warns prospective lovers against trusting women, or the aforementioned *I diavoli delle donne*, in which Giacompo Goretta Boero reproduces the dominant misogynist stereotypes about women's ill nature.⁸⁰

In popular culture we find similar anonymous works of a few pages, such as the five-page *Historia nova*, which treats women's evil nature and their passion for luxury.⁸¹ Cristofano Bronzini refers to another anonymous misogynist work entitled *Nuova Nave di Novemila novecento novantanove malizie delle Donne*, which he characterizes as "a nonbook" [*scartabelletto*], which "one could find only at the author's home".⁸² Thanks to their small size and obscure publication these pamphlets must have been cheap and accessible to a broader reading public. They were related to oral tradition and were often sung in various meetings and feasts, such as in Carnival. In the first half of the seventeenth century, indicative of this tradition were the works (of just a few pages) by the prolific popular author Paolo Briti; published by obscure presses in Venice, Treviso, Vicenza and Verona. He himself probably sold them during his peregrinations as storyteller in the Veneto. He mainly elaborated the genre of *canzonetta* in a comic popular vein derived from *commedia dell'arte*.⁸³ Briti treated gender issues in a daily, prosaic and humoristic way, often mocking love relations, such as in *Ridicoloso Dialogo fatto tra Uomo e Donna*, and

⁸⁰ *La Caccia d'Amore del Berni con la risposta del Molza. Et una giostra da Cavallieri erranti. Con un Capitolo di Pietro Aretino contra le Donne. Et un altro capitolo, con un sonetto amoroso aggiunti nuovamente* (Venice, 1554).

⁸¹ See above pp. 74-5.

⁸² Bronzini, *Della dignità*, Giornata Prima, p. 100.

⁸³ "Briti, Paolo (Il Cieco da Venezia)", in *Dizionario*, vol. 14, pp. 346-47.

usually reproducing misogynist stereotypes, as in *Canzonetta nova, nella quale un giovane racconta tutti i deffetti della sua morosa*.⁸⁴ Some of his works treated the world of prostitution as well.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, it should be noticed here that popular literature often treated women's everyday problems as well. Such works were, for instance, the *Tre canzoni del fortunato*, which narrates the misfortunes of an unhappy wife or the *Villanesche alla Napolitana*, which includes a chapter, supposedly written by a woman, who warns women against men's infidelity and deception and recommends them to avoid poor men.⁸⁶ It seems that it aimed more at being sung rather than read.

However, the misogynist work *par excellence* of the period was Giuseppe Passi's *I Donneschi Difetti*, first published in 1599, with three more editions in 1601, 1605 and 1618. By contrast with the aforementioned writings, citing examples from mythology, history and Christian tradition, and drawing on known Classical and Christian authorities, Passi's work is an analytical treatise, in which the author presents women's evil nature. Each of the thirty-five chapters discusses a female defect. Passi does not limit his condemnation to the vices traditionally attributed to women, such as arrogance, vanity, lasciviousness or inconstancy, but also ascribes to them characteristics, such as drunkenness, cruelty and thievery. Quoting a great number of authorities – mainly in Latin – Passi seeks to prove that women's evil nature is a threat to men's well-being and advises the latter to take great care of their associations with women.

Both the subsequent works of Passi and the comments of contemporaries on him and his work imply that *I Donneschi Difetti* must have met a negative reaction from the intellectual environment of the period, or at least from a number of the contemporary *litterati*. Three years after *I Donneschi Difetti*, in *Dello stato maritale* Passi attempted to reshape the image of his previous treatise. This work was dedicated to Giulio Spreti, Passi's "patron osservantissimo", to whom Passi subscribes as "affettionatissimo servitore". According to Passi, his work was inspired

⁸⁴ P. Briti, *Ridicoloso Dialogo fatto tra Uomo e Donna* (Venice, 1624); idem, *Canzonetta nova, nella quale un giovane racconta tutti i deffetti della sua morosa dipingendola brutta à l'impossibile* (Trevigi, 1659).

⁸⁵ P. Briti, *Dialogo tra una cortigiana et un forestiero, opera ridiculosa, e bella* (Venice, n.d.); idem, *Canzonetta Nova, nella qual s'intende un Giovane caduto in precipitio per amar una Meretrice* (Trevigi, n.d.).

⁸⁶ *Villanesche alla Napolitana et Villotte bellissime, con altre Canzoni da Cantare. Et un Capitolo composto da una Donna, ad essemplio a tutte le altre, scopre l'ingratitude de gl'huomini* (n.p., n.d.); on the *Tre canzoni del fortunato*, see above p. 74.

by a discussion on marriage which had taken place at Spreti's palace in Bologna, in the summer of 1601. The participants in this conversation were apart from the writer and the host, a certain Gio. Maria Maratello and a certain Pietro Grossi. Passi and Spreti advocated marriage whereas Grossi, as Passi writes indicating once more the rhetorical dimension of the debate, supported celibacy but just "for fun".⁸⁷ According to Passi, it was Spreti who entrusted him with writing a treatise on marriage, since he was already "an expert in issues concerning women".⁸⁸

However, in the proem to readers, giving a different version of the events, Passi writes that he decided to write a new work on marriage to rebut these "foolish ones" who had misapprehended his previous work and, regarding it as an attack on marriage, they had leveled at him "strange criticisms".⁸⁹ Furthermore, Passi informed readers that he intended to write a treatise on the other three stages of women's life (*stato Virginale, Vedovile e Monacale*), which did not happen. Despite its moralistic tone, *Dello stato maritale* presents a quite different attitude towards women. The author often develops the typical arguments in support of women to show women's value and gifts, and acknowledges that women are superior to men in some aspects. However, what is more striking is that Passi disparages women's enemies and praises their defenders. In particular, he claims that launching accusations against the female sex is characteristic of the ignorant mob and names certain individuals who had defended women:

They lack the gifts which render women bright and illustrious; and if many examples of women's virtue could be drawn on the histories of the Greek, Latin and Barbarian authors, this would have annoyed them, who have harshly persecuted this sex; and with so importunate and wild tongues, and with similar hatred and fury, they have unjustly and unwisely vituperated it. This was done neither by Plutarch, nor Valerius nor Boccaccio [he apparently means *De mulieribus claris*], nor Domenichi nor by so many modern authors, who have wisely and sincerely exalted

⁸⁷ "Onde il Signor Pietro Grossi con lieta fronte esaltò la vita solitaria: ma per scherzo, & ella all'incontro si diede ad abbassarla, mostrando chiaramente, che molti per starsene rinchiusi in quelle volontarie prigioni, cadettero in frenetiche imaginationi...": Passi, *Dello stato maritale*.

⁸⁸ According to Passi, Spreti said: "lasciarò il carico al Passi; il quale, per esser versato di fresco in queste materie donnesche, aggiungerà con la sua leggiadria i dovuti ornamenti": Ibid.

⁸⁹ "...per sgannare quei sciocchi, i quali poco leggendo i miei Difetti, e manco forse intendendoli, fanno giudicii strani del fatto mio, come, che io voglia in tutto dissuadere all'huomo il maritarsi, il che è falsissimo, se osserveranno i miei detti": Ibid.

the female sex to Heaven and have put an end to the calumnies, which ignorant mob ascribes to it.⁹⁰

Passi's attempt at refashioning his self-image from women's enemy to their defender is also manifested in *La monstruosa fucina delle sordidezze de gl'huomini*, published in 1603. This treatise is a complete reversion of *I Donneschi Difetti*. Using the same structure and style, quoting examples from the past and drawing on Classical and Christian authorities, Passi proves men's evil nature. The work is divided into many chapters, each of which is devoted to a male defect, as Passi had done in *I Donneschi Difetti* four years before to prove women's inferiority. The edition of 1609, dedicated to Vincenzo Gonzaga d'Austria, Duke of Mantua and Monferrato, includes a poem written by Hippolita Benigni Manfredi, "la ferma academica insensata & assidata", wife of Mutio Manfredi. Mutio Manfredi, who had also written a poem praising Passi in the same volume, was a member of the Ravenna Academy of *Informi*, to which Passi also belonged with the name "L'Ardito" (the Bold). In her laudatory poem, Hippolita Benigni aimed at justifying Passi's previous misogynist treatise. The poetess interestingly praises *I Donneschi Difetti* for having slandered evil women and simultaneously glorified the virtuous ones.⁹¹ As a woman Hippolita Benigni was of course the right person for retrieving Passi's reputation.

To a certain point, Passi's shifting attitude in *Dello stato maritale* and *La monstruosa fucina* must have been due to the publication of Lucrezia Marinella's *Nobiltà et l'eccellenza delle donne*. Although Marinella's work was not just an attack against Passi, it directly aimed at overturning his arguments. Already in her proem, she ranks Passi among women's enemies along with Aristotle:

⁹⁰ "Mancano le prerogative, che rendono le donne chiare, & illustri, che se di tutte le virtù loro volessi trarne dale historie de Greci, Latini, e Barbari essempli sarei forse noioso appresso quelli, che acerbamente hanno perseguitato questo sesso; e con tante lingue importune, e dispettose, con egual odio, e follia, iniquamente, e scioccamente vituperato. cosa che non hà fatto ne Plutarco, ne Valerio, ne il Boccaccio, ne il Domenichi, ne tanti altri moderni, i quali non meno dottamente, che veridicamente hanno inalzato il sesso donnescho fino al Cielo, e posto freno alle calunnie, che il volgo inetto attribuisce à lui." Ibid., p. 54.

⁹¹ "Già de le Donne Vili / Fieramente biasmastì i detti, e gl'atti, / E laude e gloria fù de le gentili. / Hor de gl'Huomini rei / Biasmi i pensieri, e i fatti, / E da i perfetti ringratiato sei. / O felice te Passo. Hora il tuo inchiostro / Vero è regolator del secol nostro": G. Passi, *Continuatione della monstruosa fucina delle sordidezze de gl'huomini* (Venice, 1609).

But I truly believe that Aristotle was led by scorn, hate, or envy in many of his books, to vituperate and slander the female sex, just as on many occasions he reproved his master Plato. So too, I believe, was Giuseppe Passi of Ravenna, when he wrote his book entitled *Dei donneschi difetti*, though whether he was moved by envy or scorn or something else, I cannot tell. May God forgive him.⁹²

In the main text, Marinella again characterizes Giuseppe Passi as "our most cruel enemy".⁹³ Furthermore, by citing different examples and drawing on different authorities from those of Passi, Marinella demonstrates women's excellence and men's evil nature. Reversing Passi's arguments, Marinella ascribes to men some of the defects Passi had attributed to women. Interestingly, she accuses men not only of "male" vices, such as brutality, wrath, obstinacy, ingratitude and inconstancy, but also of excessive luxury, a characteristic traditionally regarded as a female defect. The latter criticism is a direct answer to one of Passi's chapters, which condemns women's lavish expenditure on clothes, ornaments and cosmetics.⁹⁴ Marinella claims that, thanks to their beauty, women deserve to adorn themselves and points out that Church Fathers, whose doctrines Passi had used to criticize women's adornment, do not condemn women for "adorning and polishing themselves" but "they merely condemn this when it becomes excessive and bad in other respects".⁹⁵ Furthermore, ridiculing the artifice men use to appear handsome, Marinella inverts the contemporary discourse on women's supposed narcissism and vanity. It should be noticed here, that in his treatise on women's embellishment, Marinella's father, Giovanni Marinello, had also rejected those who considered women's adornment a sign of vanity.⁹⁶

To what extent Passi's "conversion" was due to Marinella's attack is not known. However, if this was the case, one could argue that Marinella was not alone in her undertaking. An echo of the bad impression *I Donneschi Difetti* must have had

⁹² Marinella, *The Nobility*, p. 40.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

⁹⁴ Under the title: "Quanto sia cosa disdicevole à donna il farsi bella: quel che gli avviene per questo suo sbelletamento, con la coltura artificciata de' capelli, e la ridicolosa pazzia di questi suoi concieri di testa": Passi, *I Donneschi Difetti*, p. 272.

⁹⁵ Marinella, *The Nobility*, p. 167.

⁹⁶ "mi pare udire alcuni, liquali riprendano questo mio nuovo aviso, dicendo, che pur troppo vanno cercando le Donne di far se belle: & che non debbono, anzi non stà bene il desiderare più di quello, che loro dalla natura è stato concesso...mi piace di rispondere alcune parole & in favore delle Donne, & di me similmente, in questa guisa incominciando...anzi questo coranto voglio dire, che, benché una donna sia bella; non le si disdica lo accrescere della sua bellezza: conciosia che niuna cosa sia al mondo perfetta": Marinello, *Gli Ornamenti*, pp. 3V, 5R.

on some of the contemporaries is found in Cristofano Bronzini's *Della dignità e nobiltà delle donne*. Written twenty-three years after the first publication of *I Donneschi Difetti* and four years after its last publication, and drawing clearly on Lucrezia Marinella, Bronzini's work refers in detail to Passi's treatise.⁹⁷ Making a pun on Passi's name, and an anachronism, Bronzini writes that the arguments of "Thomagni, Passi and other madmen [*Pazzi*]" have been rejected by writers who have defended the female sex, such as Galeazzo, Domenichi, Romei, Tasso, Martelli, Canoniero, Soranzo "and other noble defenders of women".⁹⁸ Among these writers Bronzini places also Moderata Fonte, who "in her last days wrote, but left uncompleted, the second book of the *Merito delle Donne*, in which she clearly proves that women are worthy and perfect", and Lucrezia Marinella "(our century's glory) with her most beautiful work, under the title *La Nobiltà, & Eccellenza delle Donne*". According to Bronzini, the works of these two women suffice to "silence and humiliate this negligible stuff written by the wretched Passi against the worthy women".⁹⁹

Some passages later, Bronzini charges Passi again, this time with having compromised the reputation of the Ravenna Academy of *Informi*, of which Bronzini seems to have also been a member. According to Bronzini, his "coacademico" offended not only the noble women of Ravenna but also all women, who became ill disposed towards Passi and the entire Academy. Moreover, Bronzini implies that Passi regretted what he had done and tried to redress his error by composing a *Lettura*, in which "with much praise he treated not only the beauty, and gracious manners of women but also their great value, dignity and nobility".¹⁰⁰ To remove

⁹⁷ Among others, he cites the same verses of Lodovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and Moderata Fonte's *Floridoro*, and criticises almost in the same words Sperone Speroni's *Della dignità delle donne*.

⁹⁸ Apparently, he means Domenichi's *La nobiltà*, Tasso's *Discorso della virtù*, Capra's *Della eccellenza*, Romei's *Discorsi*, Martelli's *Stanze in lode delle donne*, in his *Opere*, and Pietro Canoniero's *Della eccellenza delle donne* (Florence, 1606).

⁹⁹ "Bastano dico, e sufficientissime sono, ben fondate sopra la verità, e la ragione, che due valorose Donne, in diversi tempi, honoratamente fecero: (le fatiche de' quali saranno anco grato, e dolce alleviamento a' nostri discorsi). La prima volta, MODESTA Pozzo (Poeticamente chiamatasi Moderata Fonte) col secondo libro del Merito delle Donne; fatto da lei (ma non compito) nell'ultimo de'suoi giorni; ove chiaramente prova, quanto siano le Donne, e Degne, e Perfette; E la seconda volta LUCREZIA Marinella (gloria di questo nostro secolo) con quel bellissimo Discorso, intitolato La Nobiltà, & Eccellenza delle Donne; che sole (senz'altro) servono, e ragionevolmente devono servire per otturar la Bocca, & atterrare qual fivoglia Mole, fatta dall'infelice Passi, à danno e disfavore delle felicissime Donne"; Bronzini, *Della dignità*, Giornata Prima, pp. 30-31.

¹⁰⁰ "Onde poi per emenda di tanto errore... Fù approvato di mandar in luce la Lettura sudetta, ove con molta lode si discorre non solo della Bellezza, e graziose maniere della Donna, ma del gran Valore, Dignità, e Nobiltà di quelle": *Ibid.*, p. 32.

"the justifiable and reasonable anger from the delicate breasts of so many and so beautiful and worthy women" [*il giusto, e ragionevol sdegno ne' delicati petti di tante, e tante belle, & honorate Donne*], and retrieve the Academy's reputation, other *Informi* also composed works favouring women, such as Muzio Manfredi, "a very noble defender of women" [*Nobilissimo Campion loro*], who composed *cento sonetti* and dedicated them to the Duchess of Urbino".¹⁰¹ It was the same Manfredi who had written a laudatory poem for Passi in *La monstrosa fucina*.

Although Cristofano Bronzini's claim that Passi's *I Donneschi Difetti* defamed *Informi* must have been a literary exaggeration, it had a basis in the contemporary cultural reality. As has already been shown, early modern Italian Academies often adopted a pro-woman rhetoric, idealizing their relationships with women. Furthermore, some differences between the 1605 edition of *I Donneschi Difetti* and that of 1618 may also indicate that Passi's work had already raised some dispute among the *Informi*, before Bronzini's criticism. The 1605 edition of *I Donneschi Difetti*, dedicated to Colonello Mario Rasponi, contained several *literati*'s poems praising Passi and his work, including those of the *Informi* Stefano Lotti (*L'Incoronato*), Francesco Camerani (*Il Germogliante*) and a certain *Academico Sdegnato*.¹⁰² Nevertheless, in the edition of 1618, dedicated to Federico Feltrio della Rovere, *Prencipe* of Urbino, these poems have been eliminated, and only one sonnet, written by Alessandro Calderini (*L'Inviato Academico Filopono da Faenza*) prologues Passi's work. Finally, whether Passi regretted having written *I Donneschi Difetti*, due to the literary environment's disapproval, or he just continued to play in an intellectual game, supporting now men now women cannot be substantiated. Be that as it may, *I Donneschi Difetti* had undoubtedly attracted the attention of both contemporary intellectuals, as it seems by Marinella's and Bronzini's criticism, and the reading public, since it was published four times.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 32; Bronzini must mean Muzio Manfredi's *Cento Sonetti in lode di donne di Ravenna* (Ravenna, 1602). Furthermore, Manfredi was asked to address the Academy of *Confusi* in Bologna, for the 1575 Carnival [A Papal Jubilee Year]. His lecture concerned the reciprocal honour of men and women. Women were also expected to attend and so the lecture was in Italian, contrary to the usual practice of the Academy to have lectures in Latin. His lecture was published in the same year in Bologna under the title *Lettione del Signor Muzio Manfredi...si discorre dell'honore reciproco fra gli Huomini, e le Donne*; Fahy, "Women and literary Academies", pp. 445-6, 452, n. 30.

¹⁰² G. Passi, *I Donneschi Difetti* (Venice, 1605).

"DEFENDERS" AND "ENEMIES" IN THE WORKS OF MODERATA FONTE,
LUCREZIA MARINELLA AND ARCANGELA TARABOTTI

Rhetoric was an integral part of the debate about women. Furthermore, authors' discourse was influenced by their self-definition as members of certain socio-cultural groups. However, the debate about women was not just a literary game unrelated to the broader contemporary developments; it reflected a parallel public interest in women's social, family and religious identities and a stricter definition of gender roles throughout the sixteenth century. Besides, as has already shown the role of female patrons, the greater participation of women intellectuals in the contemporary literary scene, the emergence of literary circles which included both men and women, and the emerging female reading public also played decisive parts in the formation of the debate about women. Moderata Fonte's, Lucrezia Marinella's and Arcangela Tarabotti's works belonged to the same literary tradition and were part of the same socio-cultural developments. The examination of the representation of women's defenders and enemies in their works indicates, however, that women writers adopted different approaches and strategies to attack their enemies, challenging the schema of their male predecessors.

Following the example of some of her male predecessors, Moderata Fonte did not limit her condemnation to those who wrote or spoke against women, but she also denounced contemporary social practices and dominant gender order. Although family relations, custom, politics and legal system had often been the targets of criticism in the previous writings, Moderata Fonte paid more attention to the actual conditions of women and made detailed references to their domestic, social and economic problems. Her criticism was more sociological and less rhetorical than that of most male authors. Fonte also made specific references to the cultural construction of gender roles and identities. Through her speaker, Cornelia, she deconstructed the historical discourse and pointed out the gender bias of the male historians.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ "Do you really believe that everything historians tell us about men -- or about women -- is actually true? You ought to consider the fact that these histories have been written by men, who never tell the truth except by accident. And if you consider, in addition, the envy and ill will they bear us women, it is hardly surprising that they rarely have a good word to say for us, and concentrate instead on praising their own sex in general and particular members of it, as a way of praising themselves": Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, pp. 76-7.

Referring to the slanderous writings against women, another speaker, Corinna, reproduces the traditional view about them along the same lines that many authors/defenders had done before her:

Oh, as to that let them go ahead and keep conjuring up these groundless chimeras and fantasies, which aren't worth the paper they're written on and which I'm certainly not going to bother reading. But that kind of pigheadedness just brings shame on them, not honor, and it's not something to be taken seriously, especially since what's behind it all is obviously just the great envy they feel for women (which is also, as I was saying earlier, the explanation for why they can't bring themselves to love us sincerely).¹⁰⁴

However, Fonte's criticism is not limited to those writers, who wrote against women, but it also extends to include the self-proclaimed women's defenders. When Virginia asks Cornelia whether the female sex is loved at least by "those men who have labored so hard and spent so much time writing works in our praise (and there are many, many such men)", Cornelia's answer is definitely negative:

I'd say that they are no different from other men. None of these writers has been driven to write by the intensity of his love: in fact, the majority of them, believe me, have taken on the task of praising us more out of self-interest and concern for their own honor than out of any genuine concern for ours. Because knowing that they have few merits of their own to win them fame and glory, they have used the achievements of our sex instead, clothing their fame in our virtues and perfections... There are many, as well, who praise us in the belief that we are like that crow who let himself be tricked by the hungry fox... In the same way, men think that if they praise a woman enough, she'll be so carried away by vanity and self-love as to allow herself to be tricked into releasing her grip on her own will, so that they can get their hands on it, along with her honor, her soul, and her life.¹⁰⁵

Placing together women's defenders and enemies and relegating the arguments of the former to mere rhetoric or flattery to exploit women, Fonte degrades the whole pro-woman literature flourishing for almost a century.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 116.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 79.

Lucrezia Marinella was more specific in her criticism. Apart from her condemnation of Passi, she devoted a whole chapter entitled "A Reply to the Flippant and Vain Reasoning adopted by Men in their own Favor" to reply to "the false objections of women's slanderers".¹⁰⁶ She implies two different enemy fronts, that of the lettered men and that of the everyday perceptions and practices, clarifying that she will reply only "to those capable of reasoning and not to the opinions of vulgar and ignorant men who speak obstinately and without any basis or cause".¹⁰⁷ Marinella presents Aristotle among the Classics and Giuseppe Passi among the contemporaries as women's greatest enemies. Their motives were scorn, hate, envy, self-love or suffering an unhappy love. This criticism is predictable since Aristotle's theories had been the ideological cornerstone of later misogynist formulations and Passi had written the best-known substantial misogynist work of early modern Italian literature. Giovanni Boccaccio's *Il Corbaccio*, traditionally considered a *par excellence* misogynist text, and the fifteenth-century Arrigo di Namur's *Malvagità delle donne* are also included in Marinella's criticism. However, she also places among women's enemies writers such as Giovanni della Casa, Jacopo Sannazaro and Angelo Ingegneri. Stereotypical misogynist views featuring in their works had probably led Marinella to accuse them, although they had not written full-length works against women. She also criticizes Ercole Tasso's *Dello ammogliarsi*, which opposed marriage, and by extension, as was the norm in such writings, it also turned against women. Nevertheless, Marinella's criticism of Tasso's work was not a novelty. Already in 1586, Torquato Tasso had written the *Discorso in lode del matrimonio* as an answer to Ercole Tasso.¹⁰⁸

However, Marinella diverges from the previous body of literature in that she rejects Sperone Speroni's *Dialogo della dignità delle donne* and Torquato Tasso's *Discorso della virtù femminile e donnesca*, both of which had been regarded by Marinella's predecessors and the writers themselves as defences of the female sex. According to Marinella, Speroni's dialogue claims "that women are imperfect and impotent, and he endeavors to prove that they are born to serve men and generated by nature for this purpose".¹⁰⁹ What worried Marinella more was Speroni's choice to

¹⁰⁶ Marinella, *The Nobility*, p. 119.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

¹⁰⁸ See above p. 56.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

have a female speaker, Beatrice Pia degli Obizzi, develop arguments against the female sex:

He attempts to show (oh what inventiveness!) that this is the verdict of women themselves. Observe what he has Signora Obiza say to an interlocutor in this dialogue of his: "This happens to her because she is a wife, that is to say servant, to her husband, whose wishes this wife, contrary to her own pleasure, is obliged to obey and to whom she is subject". And then he adds: "Man is to woman as reason is to sentiment". He puts this forward as his own opinion, then narrates Signora Obiza's verdict, which is that: "Woman is not woman unless she serves her husband, for it is woman's natural condition to serve".¹¹⁰

According to Marinella, Speroni's opinion "lacks a true and solid basis" but it is influenced by "the tyrannical insolence of those many men who make not only their wives serve them but also their mothers and sisters, showing greater obedience and fear than that with which humble servants and slaves serve their lords and masters".¹¹¹ Tracing the interrelation between literary representations of women and the everyday social practices, Marinella passes from the writer/enemy to the man/enemy. Nevertheless, Marinella does not mention that in Speroni's dialogue there is also a speaker, Conte di San Bonifatio, who argues for female superiority. As far as the whole detailed analysis of Marinella indicates, one could not attribute this omission to mere negligence or misunderstanding. It seems more possible that Speroni's dialogical analysis, structured around two contrasting views, one for and one against the female sex, did not satisfy Marinella.

Marinella goes on to debunk Tasso's *Discorso*. According to her, based on Aristotle and Tacitus, Tasso claimed that "women are weak and imperfect in comparison to men, similar, in fact, to the left hand" and "that strength does not suit them, nor do they seek fame in making their works known to the world, since their desire is for modesty and retirement".¹¹² What mostly attracted Marinella's attention was Tasso's division of female virtue between "ladylike" [*donnesca*], which "belongs only to queens, princesses and those whom he calls heroic ladies", who "resemble both the right and left hands", and "female virtue", which fit ordinary

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 136.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 138.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 139.

women.¹¹³ Indeed, Tasso's treatise claimed that ordinary women should be characterized by modesty and chastity whereas virtues concerning the intellect, such as justice, clemency, prudence and vigorousness, fit only heroic women who excel in governing.¹¹⁴ To Tasso's opinion Marinella juxtaposes that in her book she has produced "a thousand examples of strong women, and not just of queens" and that thousands more examples would be found "if women practiced and exercised them in public affairs as men do".¹¹⁵ It is the lack of education that prevents women from excelling in studies and not their nature: "speculation is as much of service to women as it is to men. But man does not permit woman to apply herself to such studies, fearing, with reason, that she will surpass him in them".¹¹⁶ However, Marinella's criticism of Tasso's division of female virtue according to rank should also be seen in relation to Marinella's social status. Belonging to the middle class, Marinella was refused any potential social or intellectual role within Tasso's schema.

Lucrezia Marinella was not the only early modern Italian woman who came in open dispute with contemporary male authors (actually with Giuseppe Passi, since Torquato Tasso and Sperone Speroni had already died in 1595 and 1588 respectively). Published posthumously in 1654, Tarabotti's *La tirannia paterna* mainly aimed to denounce women's enforced enclosure. However, she also devoted a chapter to condemn women's enemies. Her first target of criticism is Giuseppe Passi who, according to Tarabotti, "had written about the female sex with such vulgarity and bias that he would be a worthy candidate for King of the Mad gathered together by Tommaso Garzoni in his asylum [*L'Ospedale de' pazzi incurabili* (1586)]".¹¹⁷ However, soon after, she goes on mentioning a contemporary writer, Ferrante Pallavicino, who in his epistolary novel *Il Corriero svaligiato* (1641) had included a letter condemning the female sex.¹¹⁸ It seems that the anticlerical orientation of Pallavicino facilitated Tarabotti's attack. Tarabotti's criticism associates Pallavicino's misogynist sentiments with his anticlerical orientation: "I little wonder if he defaces woman's sacred features; he is guilty of sacrilege against

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 139.

¹¹⁴ On Tasso's *Discorso della virtù femminile e donnesca*, also see above pp. 53-4.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 139-140.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 140-141.

¹¹⁷ Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*, pp. 146-7.

¹¹⁸ For Pallavicino's letter, see: Panizza, "Introduction", in Ibid.

the entire Catholic Church".¹¹⁹ It was a strategy, which, as it will be shown below, was adopted by Tarabotti in another of her works as well.

Tarabotti's second, and major, attack which developed into an open dispute, was against Francesco Buoninsegni, secretary of Leopoldo de' Medici, who in 1638 published *Del lusso donnesco, satira menippea*, a satire against women's lavish expenditure and excessive vanity. It was based on a lecture the author had given in Siena before the Grand Duke Ferdinando II de' Medici, in 1632. Despite the reservations of Giacomo Pighetti, Tarabotti's brother-in-law, and the Augustinian friar Angelico Aprosio, in 1644 she published a response to Buoninsegni entitled *Antisatira*.¹²⁰ In her dedication to Vittoria Medici della Rovere, Gran Duchessa di Toscana, Tarabotti writes that, since most men have as their main object to slander women, she wrote this work to defend the female sex and decided to dedicate it to her, who is "the glory of the female sex".¹²¹ Tarabotti continues that her powerful dedicatee will be able and eager to defend her undertaking not only against Buoninsegni but also against the whole world, whereas a male dedicatee would not have welcomed her endeavour.¹²² The woman Tarabotti chooses to protect her work was not only a powerful contemporary figure but also the wife of Ferdinando II de' Medici, before whom Buoninsegni had lectured against women's luxury in 1632. Tarabotti's clever strategy to choose as patroness a woman equally important with her opponent's protectors, and all the more so from the same ruling family, lent indisputable prestige to her work. In her dedication, Tarabotti touches on her line of attack when she points out that Buoninsegni himself "will consider a great honour to be challenged by someone who enjoys the protection of the woman to whom he was

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 147.

¹²⁰ Weaver, "Introduction", in Buoninsegni, Tarabotti, *Satira e Antisatira*, p. 25.

¹²¹ "perch'egli è abuso e scopo finale della maggior parte degli uomini il vilipendere e oltraggiare in ogni lor discorso e con ogni lor azione le donne, benché da esse riconoscano l'essere e la vita, Vostra Altezza Serenissima, ch'è la gloria del sesso donnesco e ch'accoglie in sé qualità celesti, oltre all'esserne ossequiosamente da me supplicata, non isdegherà, per Sua benignità, mi persuado, diffendere il proprio sesso, né sprezzare la povertà di questo dono, che per glorificare me stessa porto su l'altare di queste carte per vittima al gran Nume del Suo nome": Buoninsegni, Tarabotti, *Satira e Antisatira*, p. 31.

¹²² "...io per nome di tutto il sesso Vi comparisca inanzi con le presenti difese del merito femminile, come a principessa di così vasta potenza e dominio che valerebbe a diffendere la giustizia di questa causa non solo contro il sig. Buoninsegni, ma anche contro il mondo tutto. E, perché m'è noto il livore di molti degli uomini contro le donne, chiaramente da me conosciuto ne' loro scritti, stavomi sospesa s'io dovessi affidar questo parto del mio debile ingegno sotto la protezione di verun di loro...": Ibid., p. 31.

born to be subject and servant".¹²³ Making use of a long tradition, Tarabotti functioned within the female dedicatee/dedicator relationship, to render her attack more effective.

Tarabotti seemingly achieved her purpose since her work had adversarial chain reactions, especially within the Venetian Academy of the *Incogniti*, to which Buoninsegni belonged. On Buoninsegni's side, two other *Incogniti*, Girolamo Brusoni and Angelico Aprosio, wrote soon after two polemics against Tarabotti.¹²⁴ However, as the letters Buoninsegni wrote to Aprosio indicate, Tarabotti and her male adversaries spoke a different language. Buoninsegni and his supporters perceived the whole issue more as an intellectual game. In September 1644, Buoninsegni wrote to Aprosio: "I owe many thanks to that nun [*madre*], who decided to praise me, paying attention to my bagatelles, which I once composed to make our Serenissimo patron to laugh in the Academy..."¹²⁵ Two months later, he wrote with a touch of bantering:

I received the nun's [*monaca*] book and along with other four noble *accademici*, who were there, we read it immediately, breathlessly and with great pleasure; and we were amazed by the bright intellect of this nun [*madre*]. If it happens Your Reverence to speak to her, I would like to give her a most affectionate hand-kissing on my behalf and thank her from the bottom of my heart for the praise she gave me with her most erudite response, and to assure her that not only do I not bear malice against the pins she gave me, but also I like them very much; and if I ever go to Venice, and I hope to go soon, I will express my gratitude to her in person.¹²⁶

Finally, Tarabotti's *Che le donne siano della spezie degli huomini* was published in 1651, under the pseudonym Galcrana Barcitotti. It was a forceful

¹²³ "...e l'istesso sig. Buoninsegni avrà per gloria delle sue fortune l'esser contrastato da chi non è stata audace di comparir in campo senza il patrocinio di quella gran donna, di cui egli tiene a felicissima sorte l'esser nato suddito e servo": Ibid., p. 32.

¹²⁴ See above pp. 171-2.

¹²⁵ "Io rendo infinite grazie a quella madre, che ha voluto onorarli, stimando le mie bagatelle, fatte per far ridere un'ora nell'Accademia il nostro Serenissimo padrone...": Ibid., p. 25.

¹²⁶ "...ricevei il libro della monaca e subito con quattro gentiluomini accademici, che erano presenti quando lo ricevei, lo lessi in un fiato con sommo piacere di tutti, che restammo maravigliati del grande ingegno di cotesta madre alla quale, se Vostra Paternità ha occasione di parlare, desidero che faccia da mia parte un affettuosissimo biaciamani, ringraziandola con tutto l'animo dell'onore che mi ha fatto con la sua eruditissima risposta, assicurandola che non solo non ho avute per male le puntine che ella mi dà, ma da me sono state gradite in estremo, e se mai verrò a Venezia, come spero in breve, a bocca le ne attesterò la mia gratitudine": Ibid., p. 26.

answer to an Italian translation of the *Disputatio nova contra mulieres, qua probatur eas homines non esse*, consisting of fifty-one theses, based on the Scriptures, that women are not human beings. The translation was attributed to a certain Orazio Plata. The original Latin tract had been published anonymously in Frankfurt in 1595, and it had been attributed to the German scholar Valens Acidalius, a Catholic convert. Due to its heretical orientation – mocking Scripture and the clear implications for the mortality of the soul – the work had already been attacked by representatives both of the Catholic and the Protestant Church; by the Lutheran pastor Simon Gedik of Magdeburg and the priest Filippo Maria Bonini, "consultore, teologo et assistente del Sant'Uffizio della Fede". In 1651, the *Disputatio* was placed on the Index.¹²⁷ Publishing her answer in 1651, Tarabotti entered a contemporary lively dispute. Probably due to the tenderness of the subject, Tarabotti preferred to participate in the debate under a pseudonym. As with Pallavicino in *La tirannia paterna*, here Tarabotti chooses a Church's enemy to develop her own arguments. Tarabotti answers each thesis of the writer separately, dividing her treatise into fifty-seven sections. Her counter-attack is also based on the Scriptures. Although Tarabotti's criticism moves in both directions, in her proem to the anonymous author, she rather pays more attention to his misogynist attitude, enriching her attack with charges of heresy. She also implies that she answers not only as a good Christian and an expert in theology, but also as a woman:

You attacked with sophisms the female sex which, due to lack of education, could not reply to your fierce venomousness, and you seek to kill the souls of the ignorant with the venom of your words. Also, you attempt with the black of your inks to stain the spotless Christian Faith and blot the innocence and purity of women. But you are mistaken...¹²⁸

Taking the opportunity of a much-discussed contemporary heretical work, Tarabotti developed a defence of the female sex. In this way, she both defended women and

¹²⁷ For *Disputatio* and the Catholic and Protestant Churches' attack against it, see: Panizza, "Introduction", in Tarabotti, *Che le donne siano*.

¹²⁸ "Voi, con sofistici argomenti, vi sète messo ad assalir quel sesso che per mancanza di studi non può responder alle vostre inventate malvagità, e col veleno de'vostri caratteri procurate d'uccider l'anime de'semplici. Anzi tentate col nero de'vostri inchiostri d'oscurare il candido della Fede Cristiana, e di macchiar l'innocenza e purità delle donne. Ma v'ingannate...": Tarabotti, *Che le donne siano*, p. 6.

declared her faith to the Catholic Church, dissociating herself from potential accusations of anticlerical sentiments.¹²⁹ Interestingly, she concludes by a smart identification of women's enemies with heretics:

Women understand that I defeated and confused you... My arguments in support of them are very clear and they cannot be rejected unless by obstinate wranglers... whoever does not see the prerogatives, virtues and excellence of women is blind. Whoever does not acknowledge them is obstinate. And whoever propagates the opposite would do better to declare himself a heretic and audacious, and unashamed too.¹³⁰

Undertaking the defence of their own sex, which until then was mostly limited to the works of male authors, Fonte, Marinella and Tarabotti diverged in some key points from their predecessors. Marinella's and Fonte's representation of women's enemies moved from those who delivered a misogynist speech to those who did not express a so forceful "feminist" ideology as to satisfy their increased demands, and, at times, to the whole male community. Furthermore, by contrast with their predecessors, both Marinella and Tarabotti launched attacks against certain contemporary authors and the latter intervened forcefully in specific public disputes to defend women's case.

In their strong criticism of contemporary social practices and patriarchal ideology, Fonte, Marinella and Tarabotti were deeply influenced by the long tradition of pro-woman literature. They broadly drew on their predecessors' arguments, sources and examples. The formulation of new gender cultural notions had paved the way for Fonte's, Marinella's and Tarabotti's writings. However, their works signify the maturing of a body of ideas, free from the rhetorical burden of the previous writings. Despite their similarities with the existing literature, their tangible social experience rendered their writings less rhetorical and enriched them with more social references. So, Marinella and especially Fonte and Tarabotti denounced in a more substantial way the sexual discrimination women suffered in their family relations, religious life, economic condition, education opportunities and social representation.

¹²⁹ Also see above pp. 164-5.

¹³⁰ "Stimano le donne ch'io vi abbi vinto e confuso... Le mie ragioni a loro beneficio sono chiarissime, né possono essere contraddette se non dai litigiosi perversi... chi non conosce le prerogative, le grazie, e le preeminenze delle femine è cieco. Chi non le confessa è ostinato. E chi le propala in contrario fa bene a dichiararsi eretico, con l'aggiunta d'audace e sfacciato": Ibid., p. 95.

In the course of the sixteenth century gender roles were put on a firmer basis, conduct religious literature and treatises on marriage and domestic life gradually replaced writings in defence of the female sex, and some explicitly misogynist works, such as Passi's and Plata's translation, appeared. All these might have exhorted these women to write their own defence. Finally, their writings reflected a disappointment about the divergence between the circulation of a pro-woman discourse for almost a century and the fixed power relations and value systems that remained at their very core unchangeable.

CONCLUSION

The debate about women in early modern Italy was part of the broader controversy over women's nature and social position in early modern Europe. In Venice, and the rest of Italy, the debate took various forms, in accordance with the broader socio-cultural environment, the wider cultural currents and individual circumstances. Generally speaking, the debate evolved through three main cultural channels; within courtly environments, through the social and literary networks surrounding the emerging publishing industry, mostly in Venice in the first half of the sixteenth century, and in early modern Italian Academies. Already from the fifteenth century, some Italian Courts (such as those in Ferrara and Mantua) had been places where pro-woman works were written and circulated. In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Courts continued to play a similar role; authors often dedicated their works to powerful women (with women of the Tuscan ruling elite playing the leading role), usually acknowledging the role of a certain patroness in the writing and further protection of the book. Female writers often enjoyed the protection of these women and, in exchange, they constructed an idealized image for their patronesses as their inspirational leaders and exponents of women's emancipation.

The woman question was disseminated along quite different lines in Venice, where a broader and more complicated network determined the terms of the debate. Although the works published in Venice were occasionally dedicated to contemporary political figures, the main dynamic behind their production and circulation derived from the new circumstances of the major expansion of the publishing industry created from the second quarter of the sixteenth century. Authors' and publishers' aspirations and readers' expectations shaped the debate, adjusting it to the new needs. Although the writers closely associated with the printing development, the so-called *poligrafi*, often borrowed their main arguments from key European or well-known Italian works, they enriched their original writings, translations or adaptations with the necessary literary and social comments and references to make them accessible to the new reading public, now including less learned men and women. The close interaction between the writer, or the publisher, and the reader played a determinative role in the new intellectual process. The

establishment of the vernacular and the cheapening of the books certainly contributed to this development. A close interplay between publishers, authors, readers and dedicatees conditioned the debate about women, which gradually became a popular literary topic. The case of the Venetian publisher Gabriel Giolito de Ferrari indicates both the new role women could play as potential readers and book consumers in the formation of the contemporary ideology about them, and reveals an important dimension of the relevant literary production: the commercial profit.

Besides, mixed conversations about women's nature and position and gender relations seemingly took place in the Venetian literary salons. Women, mostly learned courtesans, such as Tullia d'Aragona and Francesca Baffa, often maintained these salons, where important literary figures coming from the whole of Italy participated. Contemporary literary dialogues have portrayed both the courtly and the unofficial environments where relevant debates took place in sixteenth-century Italy. The different representation of female speakers in each scene of speaking indicates the different roles women were expected to play in each intellectual environment, with courtesans being much freer in verbal expression than Court Ladies, noblewomen or prudent wives.

The woman question also held an important place in the rhetoric of some early modern Italian Academies. In their neo-platonic discourse, the "noble and beautiful" women were the stimulating muses who infused male intellectuals with noble sentiments and ideals, like noblewomen were supposed to do as sources of inspiration for the Courtiers. Academies sought to construct a positive image for themselves through an idealization of women, female beauty and love, giving lectures on issues concerning women and gender relations, organizing open activities in which women, usually the noblewomen of the city, also participated, or occasionally accepting some well known female intellectuals as members. The role of the female sex was central but transitory, since women were mainly the means for men's perfection. However, these activities simultaneously offered women some opportunities to participate in the intellectual life of their cities, and sometimes women even attempted to affect the Academies' current ideological trends, as the case of Arcangela Tarabotti indicates in the mid-seventeenth century.

Women's more dynamic entrance into sixteenth-century intellectual life, as literary patronesses, writers, readers and participants in the literary projects of the Courts, literary salons and Academies, profited from the pro-woman literature, and

simultaneously favoured its further development. Male *litterati*'s closer associations with women probably brought them nearer women's anxieties and expectations, and women's intellectual activities proved, or served as proofs, of female mental capacity. Finally, from the end of the sixteenth century, women themselves (Moderata Fonte, Lucrezia Marinella and Arcangela Tarabotti) wrote substantial defences of the female sex, denouncing women's inferior social position, criticizing women's place in domestic life – even rejecting marriage – and attacking women's enforced confinement in convents.

Apart from the particular networks of influence related to the courtly environments, the Venetian printing activity and intellectual life, and the world of the Academies, broader social developments also affected the debate about women. In the second half of the sixteenth century, the gradual shift from love dialogues and literature on female excellence to conduct religious books and treatises on marriage and domestic economy, which – idealizing marriage, female chastity and domesticity – enforced patriarchal values and practices, reflected the dominant intellectual climate after the establishment of the Catholic Reformation. The promotion and standardization of the marriage sacrament by the Catholic Church (1563) and the Index of prohibited books, imposed in 1564, played a significant role in this intellectual turn; the former aroused interest in family relations and domestic life whereas the latter led to an increase in religious literature. Parallel developments in women's life, such as the founding of female institutions, which hosted women at risk or ex prostitutes, the increasing number of women entering convents and convent enclosure, also point toward a growing public focus on female chastity and domesticity, concerning both upper-class women and those of the lower social strata. As the sixteenth century progressed, literature defending women gradually waned, became more conventional and repetitive, with fewer social references, was dealt with by less known writers, shifted to obscure printing houses of smaller towns or was limited in certain Courts. Literature on domestic economy, on the one hand, put gender roles on a firmer basis within the family, denying women the public role that works defending the female sex suggested, at least theoretically, for women, and, on the other hand, repeatedly underlined and sanctioned social hierarchy, reflecting the gradual aristocratization of the Italian upper classes, which took place about the same period.

Although rhetorical device was an integral part of the texts in question, they still questioned the dominant view of female inferiority and challenged the contemporary power relations and value systems. Thanks to their tangible social experience, female writers (especially Moderata Fonte and Arcangela Tarabotti) certainly enriched their analyses with more social references. However, female writers broadly drew on their male predecessors' arguments, sources and examples. Male writers had also seen women not only as biological entities but also as a sociological group, although, as their female counterparts, they rarely distinguished women in view of their social rank. Although they denounced the social factors which placed women in an inferior social position, such as contemporary legal system, family practices, custom, gender biased ideology, women's exclusion from education and public offices and women's home and convent seclusion, their references rather corresponded to the conditions of middle or upper-class women. The references to upper-class women became even more explicit in the literature on domestic economy. Issues concerning lower-class women, such as women's position in work or female refuges, were not generally dealt with in pro-woman literature, whereas prostitution was mainly dealt with in a moralistic tone. This attitude is predictable since the arguments featuring in the debate about women were determined both by the social position of the writers and the potential readers' concerns.

Finally, and despite the rhetorical dimension of the debate, each author's treatment of the topic reflected aspects of his/her broader ideological orientation and social aspirations. The determinants of sex, social position and each author's circle of acquaintances affected the way he/she dealt with the topic. Male authors often changed their attitude, adjusting their works to the requirements of their new environments, as the shifting attitude of some *poligrafi* (such as Nicolò Franco and Giuseppe Betussi) indicates in the 1540s and 1550s. Similarly, the representation of women's "defenders" and "enemies" was shaped in each work in accordance with the social identity each author wished to construct for himself/herself. Male writers generally attempted to construct a positive identity for themselves through their defences of the female sex. Nevertheless, their attitude was not unanimous. Identifying women's enemies with the lower-class men and women's defenders with the social elite, Christofano Bronzini lent prestige to the Florentine social elite, to which he himself belonged. On the other hand, the Sienese popular writer Falotico

de' Rozzi used the debate about women to denounce the social and cultural elite of his city. Female writers used the same literary pattern but, underestimating the beneficial role of women's defenders and overstressing women's enemies' detrimental effect, rendered their criticism sharper, even rejecting the whole male-authored literature defending women. Furthermore, by contrast with their male predecessors, both Lucrezia Marinella and Arcangela Tarabotti launched attacks against certain contemporary authors, Giuseppe Passi and Ferrante Pallavicino and Francesco Buoninsegni respectively, and Tarabotti intervened forcefully in specific public disputes to defend women's cause, as with Valens Acidalius' *Disputatio*. Nevertheless, women's attitudes were also affected by their personal circumstances. Lucrezia Marinella rejected Torquato Tasso's schema which refused middle-class women, including Marinella herself, any potential social or intellectual role. Similarly, identifying women's enemies with heretics, Arcangela Tarabotti both defended the female sex and possibly attempted to dissociate herself from potential accusations of anticlerical sentiments.

Interwoven with wider intellectual trends, the contemporary social and literary networks, each cultural agent's particular circumstances and the broader socio-cultural developments, the debate about women in early modern Italy emerges as a complicated and multidimensional issue which could be explored from various different points of view. The study of the debate can reveal significant aspects of the cultural formation of gender notions in the early modern period and also provide insights into the manifold interplay between the literary representations of women and gender relations and the socio-cultural environment which surrounded them.

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