

LITERARY CULTURE AND WOMEN WRITERS IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY VENICE

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At the turn of the seventeenth century, the young Venetian writer Lucrezia Marinella (1573-1651) published a soon-to-be-famous treatise on the nobility and excellence of women. With the long list of examples so typical of the *querelle des femmes* tradition into which her text entered, Marinella drew attention to a hundred women who over the millennia had gained fame for their intellectual achievements, which only those «poco pratici dell'istorie» could ignore.¹ She declared that women must continue to gain fame for their philosophic, literary and scientific pursuits and for their other virtuous actions «non solo

¹ She praised intellectual women in a chapter entitled *Delle donne scienziate e di molte arti orlate* (L. Marinella, *La nobiltà e l'eccellenza delle donne co' difetti e mancamenti degli uomini*, Venezia, G.B. Ciotti, 1601, pp. 37-43). Period citations in Italian are modernized according to the criteria in A. Tarabotti, *Lettere familiari e di complimento*, a c. di M. Ray - L. Westwater, Torino, Rosenberg & Sellier, 2005.

nella propria città, ma in diverse e varie province».² Marinella herself achieved renown for this very treatise, which was put to press three times and widely read,³ and for eleven other works which she published over her fifty-year career.⁴ But the half century of prominence altered Marinella's perspective, until at the end of her career she discouraged women from a public intellectual life altogether. In her last major work, *Essortazioni alle donne e agli altri se a loro saranno a*

² L. Marinella, *La nobiltà*, cit., p. 130.

³ Marinella published an initial version of the treatise in 1600 (Venezia, Giovan Battista Ciotti) and an expanded version (as cited above) in 1601 that was republished in 1621 (Venezia, Giovan Battista Combi).

⁴ On Marinella, see *inter alia* A. Chemello, *La donna, il modello, l'immaginario: Moderata Fonte e Lucrezia Marinella*, in a c. di M. Zancan, *Nel cerchio della luna: Figure di donna in alcuni testi del XVI secolo*, Venezia, Marsilio, 1983, pp. 95-179; F. Lavocat, *Introduzione*, in L. Marinella, *Arcadia felice*, a c. di F. Lavocat, Firenze, Olschki, 1998, pp. VII-LX; L. Panizza, *Introduction*, in L. Marinella, *The Nobility and Excellence of Women, and the Defects and Vices of Men*, a c. di A. Dunhill, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1999, pp. 1-34; L. Westwater, "Le false obiezioni de' nostri calunniatori": Lucrezia Marinella Responds to the Misogynist Tradition, "Bruniana & Campanelliana", XII.1 (2006), S. Haskins, *Vexatious Litigant, or the Case of Lucrezia Marinella? New Documents Concerning Her Life: (Part One)*, "Nouvelles de la République des Lettres", I (2006), pp. 81-128; S. Haskins, *Vexatious Litigant, or the Case of Lucrezia Marinella? New Documents Concerning Her Life (Part Two)*, "Nouvelles de la République des Lettres", I-II (2007), pp. 203-230; P. M. Price - C. Ristaino, *Lucrezia Marinella and the "Querelle des Femmes" in Seventeenth-Century Italy*, Madison NJ, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2008; and V. Cox, *Women's Writing in Italy 1400-1650*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008, *passim*.

grado, she wrote:

Sono alcune nel sesso femminile che [...] desiderano per via di dottrina e di scienza che apparisca il nome loro tra le genti di gloria degno e di laude, sperando di ciò riportare non poco onore [...] [M]a però io le essorterò a fuggir questo straziamento d'intelletto e attendere alla propria virtù per fuggir disgusti, travagli, e afflizioni di animo.⁵

Marinella detailed the «afflizioni», from sisters and mothers who would criticize scholarly women for abandoning traditional activities to literary men, irked by women's entry into their domain, who would judge women's writing as fine «for a woman» or, if skillful, too good to be a woman's. These criticisms from male intellectuals particularly rankled Marinella, since she argued that it was men's refusal to accept women as intellectual companions that doomed women's writing to failure.⁶

But such had hardly been the fate of Marinella's own writing, which was greeted with abundant praise throughout her long career. Her admirers ranged from such turn-of-the-century enthusiasts as Luciano

⁵ Venezia, Valvasense, 1645, pp. 23-24.

⁶ «Questa è la cagione che le opere donnesche non hanno né gloria né buon volto, anchorché di perfezione forse avanzino o almeno pari alle loro sieno, perché gli uomini non vogliono avere una donna compagna nel saper....» (*ibid.*, p. 40).

Scarano⁷ and Girolamo Mercurio,⁸ to Cristoforo Bronzino in the 1620s,⁹ to Angelico Aprosio in the 1640s¹⁰ - among many others.¹¹ There is, on the other hand, scant record of criticism: we learn only indirectly that she was accused of plagiarizing her *Vita di Maria Vergine Imperatrice dell'universo* (first published in 1602) when Giovanni Battista Ciotti, who printed many of her works, defended her against it.¹² Bronzino, in praising Marinella, also alluded to assaults on her reputation but did not provide details and perhaps referred again to the charges about her *Vita di Maria*.¹³ The attacks against Marinella were

⁷ *Scenophylax dialogus, in quo tragaedijs, & comaedijs antiquus carminum vsus restituitur, recentiorum quorundam iniuria interceptus*, Venetiis, Apud Ioan. Baptistam Ciottum Senensem, 1601, p. 17.

⁸ *La commare o riccogliatrice*, Venezia, Apresso G.B. Ciotti, 1601.

⁹ *Della dignità e nobiltà delle donne...Settimana Prima, e giornata quarta [quinta, e sesta]*, Firenze, stamp. Zanobi Pignoni, 1625, p. 113.

¹⁰ A. Aprosio, *La maschera scoperta*, a c. di E. Biga, Ventimiglia, Civica Biblioteca Aprosiana, 1989, p. 161. See below, n. 60.

¹¹ See for example Panizza, *Introduction*, cit.; S. Kolsky, *Moderata Fonte, Lucrezia Marinella, Giuseppe Passi: An Early Seventeenth-Century Feminist Controversy*, "Modern Language Review", XCVI.4 (2001), pp. 975-977; L. Westwater, *The Disquieting Voice: Women's Writing and Anti-Feminism in Seventeenth-Century Venice*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 2003, pp. 100-107; and Haskins, *Vexatious Litigant (Part One)*, cit., pp. 102-104.

¹² He mentions these negative charges in a letter to readers at the beginning of her *Arcadia felice*, where he says the *Vita* «è statta conosciuta, come certamente è, vero parto del suo ingegno, da persona publica a confusione de' maligni» (Marinella, *Arcadia felice*, cit., pp. 2-3).

¹³ He writes that he esteems her «per le sue rare virtù e virtuose qualità... più in un solo dito che non faccio né farò mai alcuni

therefore covert and infrequent enough to leave no direct trace and seem from all evidence not to have dominated her career.¹⁴ But personal experience alone could not have created the writer's deep distress over the position of the female intellectual, and it is doubtless inaccurate to read the *Essortazioni* only as Marinella's regretful reflection on her own public intellectual life, a reading that is also undermined by Marinella's pursuit through this very text and one that would follow of a public literary presence.¹⁵ It is illuminating instead to read Marinella's negative assessment of the position of the female intellectual in the *Essortazioni* as a broader reflection on the cultural atmosphere for female writers in mid-century Venice.¹⁶

Over Marinella's remarkable half-century-long career, she shared the Venetian literary stage with two other female writers, Jewish poet and *salonnière* Sara

viziosi poeti maldicenti in tutto il corpo e tutto il resto della lor persona» (*Della dignità e nobiltà delle donne...Settimana prima, e giornata prima [seconda e terza...]*, Firenze, Stamperia Zanobi Pignoni, 1624, p. 82).

¹⁴ An exception to this would be the criticism from Dutch writer Anna Maria van Schurman (1607-1678), who in a 1638 letter praised the *Nobiltà* but criticized Marinella's effrontery (see Panizza, *Introduction*, cit., p. 31). This censure, however, is not among the sorts the Marinella describes in the *Essortazioni* and she may in fact not have known of it.

¹⁵ Her last published work is *Olocausto d'amore della vergine Santa Giustina in ottava rima*, Venezia, Presso Matteo Leni, 1648.

¹⁶ On the fraught situation for female intellectuals throughout Italy in the seventeenth-century Italy, see Cox, *Women's Writing*, cit., pp. 166-227.

Copio Sullam (1591?-1641) and feminist nun and polemicist Arcangela Tarabotti (1604-1652). As Marinella issued her negative assessment of female intellectual activity, it is not far fetched to imagine that she might have been influenced by the example of these writers. Marinella almost certainly knew of Copio Sullam, who in the 1620s was the only other female Venetian writer publishing in the city.¹⁷ Tied to several acclaimed writers and known for her exceptionality as a highly lettered Jewish woman, Copio Sullam increased her prominence with an astoundingly controversial work on the immortality of the soul that she published in 1621.¹⁸ And Marinella

¹⁷ On Copio Sullam, see for example H. Adelman, *The Literacy of Jewish Women in Early Modern Italy*, in a c. di B. J. Whitehead, *Women's Education in Early Modern Europe. A History, 1500-1800*, New York, Garland, 1999, pp. 133-158; C. Boccato, *Sara Copio Sullam, la poetessa del ghetto di Venezia: episodi della sua vita in un manoscritto del secolo XVII*, "Italia", VI.1-2 (1987), pp. 104-218; C. da Fonseca-Wollheim, *Acque di Parnaso, acque di battesimo: fede e fama nell'opera di Sara Copio Sullam*, in a c. di C. Honess e V. Jones, *Donne delle minoranze: le ebreo e le protestanti d'Italia*, , Turin, Claudiana, 1999, pp. 159-170; da Fonseca-Wollheim, *Faith and fame in the life and works of the Venetian Jewish poet Sara Copio Sallum (1592?-1641)*, Ph.D. dissertation, Cambridge University, 2000; U. Fortis, *La 'bella ebrea': Sara Copio Sullam, poetessa nel ghetto di Venezia del '600.*, Turin, Silvio Zamorani editore, 2002; and Cox, *Women's Writing*, cit., pp. 216-219.

¹⁸ The work, entitled *Manifesto di Sarra Copia Sulam ebrea, nel quale è da lei riprovata e detestata l'opinione negante l'immortalità dell'anima falsamente attribuita dal signor Baldassare Bonifaccio*, was printed at least three times that year, twice by Giovanni Alberti and once by Antonio Pinelli (see Westwater, *Disquieting Voice*, cit., p. 212). Pinelli also printed the text against which Copio Sullam replied,

was in direct contact with Tarabotti, who, after Copio Sullam had disappeared from the literary scene, took up place alongside Marinella.¹⁹ The literary cases of Copio Sullam and Tarabotti were quite distinct: Copio Sullam was prominent a full two decades before Tarabotti and encountered constant opposition for her Jewish identity, which, even as she attempted to bridge religious divides through a literary community forged almost exclusively with Christian men, became the defining aspect of her literary career.²⁰ Tarabotti, a forced nun who gained fame for several controversial works in the waning years of Marinella's career, was instead best known for her gender polemics.²¹ But

Bonifacio's *Dell'immortalità dell'anima* (Venezia, 1621) - which attacked her for her religious beliefs - and his *Risposta al Manifesto* (Venezia, 1621).

¹⁹ Marinella contributed two sonnets to Tarabotti's *Paradiso monacale*. In one, Marinella wrote: «Arcangela, il tuo nome illustre intorno / Veggio volar pien d'immortali onori / E dove sorge e dove cade il giorno» (A. Tarabotti, *Paradiso Monacale*, Venezia, Guglielmo Oddoni, 1663 (but 1643), p. †5v.); in the other, she writes of Tarabotti's «dotta penna» (*ibid.*, p. a6v).

²⁰ Copio Sullam launched her public literary career by initiating a correspondence with Genoese poet Ansaldo Cebà (1565-1623) in 1618, a correspondence that soon transformed into a religious debate. At her literary salon she hosted several Christian men, including Bonifacio, Numidio Paluzzi and Alessandro Berardelli. In Paluzzi's *Rime*, which Berardelli published after Paluzzi's death, Berardelli insults Copio Sullam as a woman and a Jew, calling her, for example, a «perfida ebrea» (N. Paluzzi, *Rime*, Venezia, dal Ciotti, 1626, p. 120).

²¹ Tarabotti's published works include *Paradiso Monacale*, cit.; *L'Antisatira*, Venezia, F. Valvasense, 1644; *Lettere familiari e di complimento*, Venezia, Guerigli, 1650; *Le lagrime d'Arcangela Tarabotti*

Copio Sullam and Tarabotti both had careers dominated by high-profile conflicts with male literary associates. Members of Copio Sullam's literary circle published three attacks on their associate over a span of five years, accusing her of heresy, plagiarism and thievery, and a fourth slanderous treatise reportedly

per la morte dell'Illustriss. signora Regina Donati, Venezia, Guerigli, 1650, published along with the *Lettere*; and *Che le donne siano della specie degli uomini. Difesa delle donne.*, Norimbergh, Par Iuvann Cherchenbergher, 1651. She also circulated as manuscripts her *Tirannia paterna*, posthumously published as *La semplicità ingannata*, Leiden, G. Sambix (but Elsevier), 1654; and her *Inferno monacale*, published for the first time only in 1990 (a c. di F. Medioli, Torino, Rosenberg & Sellier) and likely other works that are attributed to her but have been lost, including three seemingly devotional works (*Le contemplazioni dell'anima amante*, *La via lastricata per andare al cielo*, and *La luce monacale*) and a work entitled *Purgatorio delle malmaritate*. Critical interest in Tarabotti has intensified in recent years, and modern volumes of her works, with their introductions and critical apparatus, are the best starting point for study: see *Inferno monacale*, cit.; *Che le donne siano della specie degli uomini. Women are No Less Rational Than Men.*, a c. di L. Panizza, London, Institute of Romance Studies, University of London, 1994; *Antisatira*, in F. Buoninsegni, A. Tarabotti, *Satira e Antisatira*, a c. di E. Weaver, Rome, Salerno, 1998; *Women are of the Human Species*, trans. T. Kenney, in "Women are not Human": *An Anonymous Treatise and Responses*, a c. di T. Kenney, New York, Crossroad, 1998; *Paternal Tyranny*, a c. di L. Panizza, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2004; *Lettere familiari*, cit.; and *La semplicità ingannata*, a c. di S. Bortot, Padua, Il Poligrafo, 2007. A fundamental study is E. Zanette, *Suor Arcangela, Monaca del Seicento veneziano.*, Rome-Venice, Istituto per la Collaborazione Culturale, 1960. See also the recent collection of essays dedicated to the nun, a c. di E. Weaver, *Arcangela Tarabotti: A Literary Nun in Baroque Venice.*, Ravenna, Longo, 2006.

circulated.²² And among other conflicts that dogged Tarabotti, in the years immediately preceding Marinella's publication of the *Essortazioni* several of Tarabotti's associates charged the nun with plagiarism and wrote works against her.²³ It is almost impossible to imagine that Marinella did not know of these notorious controversies—peopled by prominent intellectuals, some of whom she knew, and played out on the city's presses. These scandals, for Marinella and perhaps for a knowledgeable contemporary audience, bolstered the contention of the difficulties that lay in wait for female writers, difficulties seemingly intrinsic to contemporary literary society.

At the center of this society in mid-seventeenth-century Venice stood the Accademia degli Incogniti. The Academy, which Gino Benzoni calls «la più nutrita e significativa dell'Italia barocca»²⁴ - was a central intellectual and political force in Venice from its formation in the mid 1620s²⁵ until its dissolution

²² The works are Bonifacio, *Dell'immortalità dell'anima*, cit.; Bonifacio, *Risposta al Manifesto*, cit., and Paluzzi, *Rime*, cit. A defamatory work entitled *Satire Sarreidi* was reported to have circulated.

²³ See p. 19-20 below.

²⁴ G. Benzoni, *Gli affanni della cultura. Intellettuali e potere nell'Italia della Controriforma e barocca*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1978, p. 69.

²⁵ Scholars have traditionally dated the academy's founding to 1630, but on the basis of extensive textual evidence, Nina Cannizzaro suggests a founding date between 1623 and 1626 for the group that would become the Incogniti (N. Cannizzaro, *Studies on Guido Casoni (1561-1642) and Venetian Academies*, Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 2001, p. 309).

around 1660.²⁶ The Academy boasted nearly three hundred members,²⁷ and any writer in the city at the time had to contend with the Academy as an institution and with its prominent members. Women could not join its ranks,²⁸ but Marinella, Copio Sullam and Tarabotti all had, naturally enough, important ties to the Academy, though in the case of Copio Sullam

²⁶ On the academy, see for example G. Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini: la teoria dell'impostura delle religioni nel Seicento italiano*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1983 (1950); Zanette, *Suor Arcangela*, cit.; P. Ulvioni, *Stampa e censura a Venezia nel Seicento*, "Archivio veneto", CIV.139 (1975), pp. 45-93; A. Mancini, *La narrativa libertina degli Incogniti. Tipologia e forme*, "Forum Italicum", XVI.3 (1982), pp. 203-229; E. Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice: The Creation of a Genre*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1991; M. Miato, *L'Accademia degli Incogniti di Giovan Francesco Loredano: Venezia, 1630-1661*, Florence, Olschki, 1998, with some errors, especially as regards Tarabotti.; N. Cannizzaro, *Guido Casoni, padre degli Incogniti, I luoghi dell'immaginario barocco : atti del convegno di Siena, 21-23 ottobre 1999*, a c. di L. Strappini, Naples, Liguori, 2001, pp. 545-560; Cannizzaro, *Studies on Guido Casoni*, cit.; N. Cannizzaro, *The Nile, Nothingness & Knowledge. The Incogniti Impresa*, in a c. di L. Jones and L. Matthew, *Coming About. A Festschrift for John Shearman*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Art Museums, 2001, pp. 325-332; W. Heller, *Emblems of Eloquence: Opera and Women's Voices in Seventeenth-Century Venice*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2003; and E. Muir, *The Culture Wars of the Late Renaissance: Skeptics, Libertines, and Opera*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2007.

²⁷ Cannizzaro, *Studies on Guido Casoni*, cit., p. 2.

²⁸ E. Rosand, *Barbara Strozzi, virtuosissima cantatrice: The Composer's Voice*, "Journal of the American Musicological Society", XXXI.3 (1978), p. 247.

and Marinella, these have been largely ignored.²⁹ The Academy's interest in women, as objects of discourse but also as writing subjects, favored to some degree the women's success, since their relationships with Academy members provided the women intellectual prestige and helped them to publish. Accompanying members' interest, however, was hostility to women that manifested itself in a vast range of the Academy's writing and in the members' relations with women writers. In fact all of the attacks that I described above against Copio Sullam and Tarabotti were by men who would be or were Academy members, and it was in an intellectual climate long controlled by the Academy that Marinella voiced the deep pessimism about women's writing in her *Essortazioni*.

Behind such negative reactions lurked a misogyny probably connected to the strict Aristotelian teachings of Paduan philosopher Cesare Cremonini (1550-1631), a guiding spirit of the Academy³⁰ whose heterodox teachings held enormous sway in seventeenth-century Venice³¹ and who advanced views of women's

²⁹ But see E. Biga, *Una polemica antifemminista del '600: La maschera scoperta di Angelico Aprosio*, Ventimiglia, Civica Biblioteca Aprosiana, 1989; da Fonseca-Wollheim, *Faith and fame*, cit.; Westwater, *Disquieting Voice*, cit., pp. 105-106, 195-197; Cox, *Women's Writing*, cit., p. 223.

³⁰ Giorgio Spini argues that key Incogniti members «hanno un medesimo sostrato culturale...: l'insegnamento di Cesare Cremonini dalla sua cattedra accademica in Padova» (*Ricerca*, cit., p. 155; see also pp. 155-62).

³¹ «[L]a filosofia naturalistica del Cremonini costituì praticamente la filosofia ufficiale della classe dirigente della Serenissima per un

inferiority that were even more negative than those of other neoaristotelian philosophers.³² Such views in fact appear in much of the Incogniti writing on women's nature and roles, from the roundly negative assessment of women issued by Giovan Francesco Loredano (1606-1661), founder of the Academy and its central animator,³³ to diatribes against women in the works of Academy member Ferrante Pallavicino (1615-1644),³⁴ to the depiction of the danger of the female sex and of the dirty, corrupting female body in *L'Alcibiade fanciullo a scola*, attributed to Incogniti

lungo giro di anni» (Spini, *Ricerca*, cit., pp. 156-157). Spini also underlines the close connection between Cremonini's thought and Incogniti literary production (*Ricerca*, cit., p. 157).

³² See Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman: A Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980, p. 32, 36.

³³ In a discourse entitled *In biasimo delle donne*, Loredano builds on Aristotle's description of woman as an imperfect man and concludes by calling her «un male così grande che non si può descrivere» (*Bizzarrie accademiche*, Cremona, Dal Belpieri, 1640, II, p. 168). Though Loredano excuses his argument as a mere academic exercise, he later reasserts it in a letter to Tarabotti, saying that he mistakenly attributed many errors to women when «si sa che la donna è tutta un solo difetto» (*Lettere*, Venezia, Guerigli, 1660, p. 243).

³⁴ In his *Retorica delle puttane*, for instance, Pallavicino intertwines his attack against the Jesuits with that against women. He uses prostitutes' speech to ridicule religious rhetoric, and he equates all women with prostitutes. In his *Corriero svaligiato*, he complains that men have to pay prostitutes, and asks «a qual fine è fatta la donna, se non per servire a' nostri piaceri e sottoporcisi...?» (F. Pallavicino, *Il corriero svaligiato*, a c. di A. Marchi, Parma, Università di Parma, 1984, p. 113).

member Antonio Rocco (1586-1653).³⁵ Such views found acceptance at the heart of the Incogniti, as Loredano's close friendship with Pallavicino³⁶ and his efforts to propagate and publish the *Alcibiade* demonstrate.³⁷ Pallavicino and Rocco were both among the most important members of the Academy.³⁸ Even more revealing were the Academy's efforts - led by Loredano - to vernacularize and disseminate a treatise that denied that women had souls.³⁹ Published in Italian in 1647 with the title *Che le donne non siano della specie degli huomini*,⁴⁰ the treatise -

³⁵ See A. Neri, *Il vero autore dell'Alcibiade fanciullo a scola*, "Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana", XII (1888), pp. 221-222. See also Spini, *Ricerca*, cit., pp. 164-168.

³⁶ See *ibid.*, p. 177; Muir, *Culture Wars*, p. 69.

³⁷ See Neri, *Vero autore*, pp. 221-222, and L. Coci, *Nota introduttiva*, in A. Rocco, *L'Alcibiade fanciullo a scola*, a c. di L. Coci, Roma, Salerno, 1988, p. 33.

³⁸ Spini calls Rocco «un po' la testa forte in fatto di filosofia di tutta l'accademia loredaniana» (Spini, *Ricerca*, p. 161) and describes at length the significance to the Incogniti of Pallavicino, during his life and after his death (*ibid.*, pp. 177-259).

³⁹ The treatise purports to demonstrate the fallaciousness of Anabaptists' arguments by showing how faulty scriptural interpretation can lead to an outrageous conclusion - that of women's inhumanity. Most scholars have read the treatise not as a misogynist document but instead merely as an attack on the religious sect's flawed reasoning. Contemporaries, however, tended to read it as an attack on women, whose humanity - even if by analogy - was thrust into question (see Westwater, *The Disquieting Voice*, cit., p. 326).

⁴⁰ *Che le donne non siano della specie degli huomini, discorso piacevole tradotto da Orazio Plata romano*, Lyons, Ventura, 1647 (but the work was printed in Venice by Francesco Valvasense). Tarabotti would

which had possibly been translated by Loredano,⁴¹ who certainly had a hand in its publication and distribution⁴² - was the culmination of the Academy's dehumanizing attacks on women.

But was the misogyny voiced by Academy members was more rhetorical than real? Wendy Heller notes that «it is often difficult to determine whether this apparent misogyny was an integral part of Incogniti thought, an intellectual game, or a little of both.»⁴³ Certainly one cannot take for granted that views that members advanced on any topic represented their sincere beliefs, especially since, as Ellen Rosand points out, «the Incogniti defended, on principle, the validity of multiple points of view, multiple interpretations.»⁴⁴ It is therefore not surprising to find - alongside the attacks - defenses of women by Incogniti.⁴⁵ These exchanges, often

later respond with her *Che le donne siano della specie degli uomini*, her last published work. See n. 20.

⁴¹ See Zanette, *Suor Arcangela*, cit., pp. 402-405; Spini maintains that the treatise came from Incogniti circles and says that the publication occurred with Loredano's approval (Spini, *Ricerca*, cit. p. 221). Mario Infelise says Loredano's involvement with the book is certain (*Libri e politica nella Venezia di Arcangela Tarabotti*, "Annali di Storia Moderna e Contemporanea", VIII, 2002, p. 43).

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 41-43.

⁴³ Heller discusses the issue at length (*Emblems*, cit., pp. 48-81; citation at p. 57). For varying views, see also for example Cannizzaro, *Guido Casoni*, cit., p. 5; Muir, *Culture Wars*, cit. p. 102; Cox, *Women's Writing*, cit., p. 183, 194.

⁴⁴ Rosand, *Opera*, cit., p. 38.

⁴⁵ Pietro Paolo Bissari (1595-1663), one of Tarabotti's correspondents, for instance defended women's aptitude for

academic exercises, confirm the Academy's tendency to explore both sides of an issue, but the overwhelming majority of Incogniti writings on women were uncomplimentary and the defenses of women seem rather feeble in face of the virulent attacks. In discussing the academy's negative writings about women, Rosand argues that «the rhetorical stance assumed by the academy as a group toward the female sex did not, however, preclude respectful intellectual relationships with women.»⁴⁶ But the experiences of Copio Sullam and Tarabotti - experiences mirrored in Marinella's bitter contemporary reflections - indicate that many academy members were unable to maintain such respectful relationships.⁴⁷ The more abstract misogyny voiced in the works of academy members, in other words, seems to have found concrete expression in attacks on the character and intellectual honesty of prominent intellectual women, subjected to exactly the kind of «disgusti, travagli, e afflizioni di animo» that Marinella detailed.

Nonetheless these attacks provided the women literary opportunity, since attacks against women in general or against them personally forced the women to write and publish to counter their adversaries.

learning and leadership in an academic discourse included in his *Scorse olimpiche* (Venezia, Presso Francesco Valvasense, 1648, p. 9).

⁴⁶ Rosand, *Barbara Strozzi*, cit., p. 249.

⁴⁷ An academy member was probably also behind the charge in an anonymous 1637 manuscript that singer-composer Barbara Strozzi was unchaste (*ibid.*, pp. 249-252).

Copio Sullam's sole published text, for instance, is her *Manifesto* in which she responded to Bonifacio's charge against her. Two of Tarabotti's published texts, her *Antisatira* and her *Che le donne siano della specie degli uomini*, were responses to attacks on women, and her *Lettere familiari e di complimento* were designed to defend her literary reputation against detractors. Marinella's own career was also fueled by such attacks: her *Nobiltà*, which initiated this intense period in women's publishing in seventeenth-century Venice, was a response to Giuseppe Passi's antifeminist diatribe, *I donneschi difetti*,⁴⁸ and her *Essortazioni* in part responded to attacks on women writers. Born of conflict, these texts are marked by a palpable tension, one component of which is the women's incessant use of direct address against their critics: they make their male adversaries in essence into characters in a dialogue whom the women upbraid and humiliate. We can see this quality, for instance, in Copio Sullam's *Manifesto*, where she berates Bonifacio for what she calls his mistranslation of a Hebrew word, which she tells him reveals «chiaramente che anco le altre cose tutte che avete dette, vi siete assicurato a dirle senza intenderle»⁴⁹; or in Tarabotti's *Che le donne siano*, where she refuses to respond to her anonymous opponent's specious reasoning, telling him «se volessi rispondere a tutte le vostre melensagini filosofiche, sarebbe un cicalare di soverchio».⁵⁰ The women's use of often

⁴⁸ Venezia, Iacobo Antonio Somascho, 1599.

⁴⁹ *Manifesto*, Venezia, Pinelli, 1621, cit., p. C1r.

⁵⁰ Tarabotti, *Che le donne siano*, cit., a c. di Panizza, p. 18.

stunningly aggressive direct address lends a theatrical quality to their texts and creates a rhetorical space in which women at last gain the upperhand against men, who are directly summoned and chastized but left mute - perhaps the most fitting punishment for their crime of words. The women's triumph seems secured by a comparison between their animated texts and the often pedestrian ones to which they respond. But Marinella's pessimistic reflections in the *Essortazioni* suggest that such victory was only possible within the texts and not in the rough-and-tumble literary world, where no amount of rhetorical skill allowed a female writer success.

Then must we consider these women's texts, regardless of their merit and posthumous success, ultimately mile-markers on the women's path to defeat? To answer this question, let us consider the case of Tarabotti's *Antisatira* - a work whose content and controversiality likely influenced Marinella. The nun published the *Antisatira* in response to Francesco Buoninsegni's *Contro 'l lusso donnesco satira menippea*, a semiserious tract that took aim at women's vanity. Marinella certainly knew of Tarabotti's text: she was, as noted, in contact with the nun,⁵¹ whose defense of women in the *Antisatira* would undoubtedly have caught the eye of this historic defender of women, especially since Tarabotti's focus on women's domestic lives and their education was the same one Marinella was pursuing in her *Essortazioni*. Marinella

⁵¹ See n. 19.

even used the same publisher for her *Essortazioni* - Francesco Valvasense - as Tarabotti had for her *Antisatira*.⁵² In the *Antisatira*, Tarabotti deftly defends women's right to luxury and takes aim at men's vanity - a defense which is at odds with the septuagennarian Marinella's discouragement in the *Essortazioni* of women's pursuit of beauty.⁵³ But Tarabotti goes beyond the narrow confines of a debate over women's finery and makes a cornerstone of her work her protest against the injustice of denying women an education. Women, Tarabotti wrote, «sono dalle virili tirannie tenute lontane dal potere apprendere a leggere non che dai lumi delle dottrine e belle lettere».⁵⁴ Even when women become educated and write, Tarabotti reflected bitterly, men deny them credit. She writes:

⁵² Marinella's publication of the *Essortazioni* through Valvasense - the principal publisher of the Accademia degli Incogniti in those years, who would two years later publish the vernacularized treatise which denied women had souls (see n. 40) - also suggests her knowledge of the Academy and its activities, including - it can be supposed - the reactions of its members against the *Antisatira* (discussed below). Provocative is Cox's suggestion that Valvasense may have commissioned the *Essortazioni* as response to the *Antisatira* (Cox, *Women's writing*, cit., p. 372, n. 246), but the consonance of the two works on the issue of female intellectual pursuits (see below), as well as the lack of focus in the *Essortazioni* on vanity (only one of eight exhortations is addressed to it; see n. 53), shows that (regardless of Valvasense's role) Marinella did not issue a clear refutation (see also n. 62).

⁵³ See Marinella, *Essortazioni*, cit., pp. 284-300.

⁵⁴ In a c. di Weaver, *Satira e Antisatira*, , cit. p. 73.

Costoro, dico, per parer protomaestri di tutto il mondo litterario, se per sorte vedono da una donna invece dell'ago adoprarsi la penna, con mille invenzioni contro quei scritti attestano come Evangelo che non può essere ch'una femina scriva, se non ricorre a pigliar in prestito dal perfettissimo lume de' loro begl'ingegni un picciolo lumicino.⁵⁵

Marinella echoes these comments when she writes in the *Essortazioni* that men

non vogliono neanco imaginarsi che donna possi contendere di sapere con esso loro, onde se leggeranno qualche componimento [...] venuto da feminil intelletto, mostreranno di non crederlo e diranno 'io non lo stimo scritto di Donna, ma esser potrebbe che amico o amante, per gratificarla, abbia assegnato al suo nome così degna opera.⁵⁶

Tarabotti and Marinella concur in their negative assessment of the prospects for female writers, who they both say will inevitably be robbed of credit for the works they write. In the *Antisatira*, Tarabotti offers as a case in point the charge that she was not sole author of the *Paradiso monacale*.⁵⁷ Not only did Tarabotti's

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁵⁶ Marinella, *Essortazioni*, cit., pp. 30-31.

⁵⁷ Tarabotti writes that «è avvenuto che molti maligni o ignoranti asseriscano che 'l *Paradiso Monacale* non possa esser dettame dell'ingegno mio... o pur, che, essendo, sia anche necessità ch'abbia ricevuto ornamento, fregi, e ricchezze di tratti di filosofia e teologia da spiriti elevati e intelligenti» (*Antisatira*, in *Satira e Antisatira*, cit., p. 74). In her letter collection, Tarabotti

vigorous defense of her intellectual honesty in the *Antisatira* not satisfy her critics, the *Antisatira* itself fueled their fire, since they charged that it was too different in tone from the *Paradiso* to have been written by the same author.⁵⁸ Beyond the charges of plagiarism, the *Antisatira* provoked the ire of some literati in Venice who were offended by the work's aggressive tone. Before Tarabotti's text was even released, the nun's erstwhile friend, the Ventimiglian friar and literary adventurer Apro시오, a member of the Accademia degli Incogniti, was penning a biting response entitled *La maschera scoperta* that ravaged the nun and revealed her as the author of the *Antisatira*, an identity she had left veiled by publishing the work only under her initials. Others joined in the attack against the nun, including another Academy member and former friend, apostate friar Gerolamo Brusoni, who wrote the *Antisatira satirizzata*. While neither the *Maschera* nor the *Antisatira satirizzata* ever came to press, both had been completed and their fame had spread already by the end of 1644, before Marinella published the *Essortazioni*.⁵⁹ Marinella's awareness of

makes clear that these charges came from close associates, including Apro시오 (see *Lettere familiari*, cit., for example letter 17 or letter 44.).

⁵⁸ Tarabotti, *Lettere*, cit., p. 173.

⁵⁹ The dating for the *Maschera* is in Biga, *Polemica antifemminista*, cit., p. 83; one of Tarabotti's letters suggests that Brusoni's work was finished before Apro시오's [*Lettere familiari*, cit., p. 157], even if Apro시오 started to compose the *Maschera* before the *Antisatira* was even published [see A. Apro시오, *La biblioteca aprosiana, passatempo autunnale, di Cornelio Aspasio Antivigilmi (Angelico Apro시오)*,

the public controversy over the *Antisatira* - already likely since it involved her acquaintance's defense of women - becomes even more certain given the peripheral entry of Marinella's own name into the row, when Aprosio in his *Maschera* praised Marinella in contrast to Tarabotti.⁶⁰ As Marinella prepared the *Essortazioni* for publication, therefore, she not only had Tarabotti's comments in the *Antisatira* as a prompt but also Tarabotti's example. The attacks against Tarabotti could only have influenced Marinella's contention that women, by writing and publishing, invited nothing but trouble.

But Marinella's *Essortazioni* were published as the *Antisatira* controversy was still unfolding, and aspects of its eventual resolution showed that women writers in the period were not powerless against attack. Indeed, Tarabotti emerged from the skirmishes over

Bologna, Manolessi, 1673, p. 169)). The *Antisatira satirizzata* has been lost; on the *Maschera*, see Biga, *Polemica antifemminista*. Aprosio, Brusoni and other close associates would continue to create trouble for the nun in the years that followed Marinella's publication of the *Essortazioni*.

⁶⁰ In the *Maschera*, Aprosio says Marinella, superior to Tarabotti, remains far from the laziness that characterizes most women: «né tale è Lucrezia Marinelli, che ben lo dà ad intendere con tante bellissime produzioni pubblicate al mondo col mezzo delle stampe, alla cui penna è molto più obbligato il sesso donnesco che alla signora T[arabotti]» (*Maschera scoperta*, cit., p. 161; Aprosio did not alter his praise of Marinella between the 1644 manuscript of the *Maschera* and the 1671 one [upon which Biga's modern edition is based]). Such commendation, surrounded by barbs against Tarabotti, clearly did not alter Marinella's negative views on the prospects for the female scholar.

the *Antisatira* with new clout. First, she succeeded in blocking the publication of Aprosio's *Maschera*. That Tarabotti bested Aprosio, a well-established writer with some half dozen published books to his name and an extensive literary network, testified to the strength of her connections and bolstered her reputation. A chastened Aprosio tried to mollify the nun with praise in his 1646 *Scudo di Rinaldo*⁶¹ - a work which also, incidentally, praised the *Essortazioni*.⁶² Tarabotti was not appeased, and in her letter

⁶¹ In the work Aprosio included in its entirety a laudatory composition Tarabotti's brother-in-law Giacomo Pighetti wrote for the nun's *Paradiso monacale* (*Lo scudo di Rinaldo ovvero lo specchio del disinganno*, Venezia, Appresso Gio. Iacomo Hertz, 1646, pp. b3v-b4r). Aprosio poured much of the anti-luxury material from the *Maschera* into the *Scudo* but, to render the book publishable, removed the attacks against Tarabotti (see Zanette, *Suor Arcangela*, cit., p. 268).

⁶² Aprosio cites the *Essortazioni*'s critique of fashion, and particularly contemporary fashion (*Scudo*, cit., pp. b8v-b10r). His excerpt mischaracterizes the *Essortazioni* (see Westwater, *Disquieting Voice*, p. 112, n. 113). Marinella herself later praised the *Scudo*, a move Aprosio portrayed as a betrayal of Tarabotti (see Aprosio, *Biblioteca Aprosiana*, cit., p. 172). Marinella's sonnet, which praises the anti-vanity message of the *Scudo*, does not however speak against Tarabotti, and since the *Scudo* did not attack and in fact praised Tarabotti, it is unlikely that Marinella intended her composition as an open rebuke of the nun. Cox's suggestion of tension in the women's relationship (Cox, *Women's Writing*, cit., p. 372-373, n. 252) deserves mitigation in the face of the similarities between the *Antisatira* and *Essortazioni* and Marinella's strong defense of the female intellectual; worthy of further study are Aprosio's efforts to pit the two writers against one another.

collection, published in 1650, she included Apro시오 among the literary foes whom she pilloried⁶³ - a move which still pained Apro시오 a quarter century later.⁶⁴ The unfolding of the *Antisatira* saga - where there were high costs but also great rewards for Tarabotti - speaks against Marinella's bleak pessimism in the *Essortazioni*, issued before Tarabotti's vindication, and points instead to a more complicated reality. Tarabotti's case does not contradict and indeed reinforces Marinella's contention that women writers would encounter opposition, but it also shows that this opposition could provide opportunity as well as obstacle. The *Essortazioni* themselves, where even Marinella's dismay about women's writing spurs her to publish and allows her renewed prominence in her waning years, can be seen as emblematic of this strange interplay between antagonism and success.

⁶³ See for example Tarabotti, *Lettere*, cit., letter 122, pp. 179-183.

⁶⁴ Apro시오 complained about Tarabotti's depiction of him in her letters in his *Biblioteca Aprosiana*, cit., p. 170.