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The Enclosed Renaissance:
Intellectual and Spiritual Learning in Early Modern Venetian Convents

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ABSTRACT

The Enclosed Renaissance:
Intellectual and Spiritual Learning in Early Modern Venetian Convents

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Convent education was financially accessible to many girls whose families could not afford a private tutor and nuns were the largest group of educated, culturally-active women in pre-modern Europe. Convent education mirrored the general contours of humanist education by associating learning with morality, serving the purposes of the Venetian republic, and providing an education relevant to the class and social positions of the students. But convent education also differed in fundamental ways from other sources of education because it allowed lifelong intellectual exploration within a community of women. Convents valued reading and writing as ways to develop the intellect and the spirit simultaneously, while also sometimes allowing creative expression through theater. As a result, women could pursue intellectual enrichment throughout their lives and some used the opportunity to advance feminist arguments. Former convent students, both nuns and married women, used their knowledge to educate other women, argue for the spiritual and intellectual equality of women, and correspond with prominent thinkers of the time.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACPV	Archivio della Curia Patriarcale di Venezia
ASV	Archivio di Stato di Venezia
BMC	Biblioteca Museo Correr, Venezia
BNM	Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venezia

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I. Introduction

In *The Worth of Women,* Moderata Fonte (1555-1592) presents a striking picture of liberty as one of six figures in a fountain. Liberty holds a sun, which, as the widowed character Leonora explains, "stands free and alone, giving light to itself and sharing its light with the whole universe."[1] The fountain was designed by Leonora's aunt, who never married. Thus Leonora explains that the figure of liberty symbolizes that "my aunt, living free and alone as she did… shared the treasures of her mind with every person of refinement with whom she came into contact – something she might not have been able to do under the rule and command of a husband."[2] This is an interesting perspective in a society where marriage or life as a nun were typically the only options for a woman. But Venice often proved to be an exceptional place in terms of women's educational accomplishments: far more than in other Italian cities, examples abound of women who gave inaugural speeches, lived independently from their husbands, or wrote in defense of their sex.

Convent education was financially accessible to many girls whose families could not afford a private tutor, and nuns were the largest group of educated women in pre-modern Europe. Convent education mirrored the general contours of humanist education by associating learning

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[1] "La terza è la Libertà e l'impresa è il Sole, il quale libero e solo illustrando se stesso comparte la sua luce a tutto l'universo…"Moderata Fonte, *Il Merito Delle Donne: Ove Chiaramante Si Scuopre Quanto Siano Elle Degne e Più Perfette De Lil Uomini*, ed. Adriana Chemello (Venezia: Editrice Eidos, 1988), 22; The English translation is from Moderata Fonte, *The Worth of Women: Wherin Is Clearly Revealed Their Nobility and Their Superiority to Men*, ed. and trans. Virginia Cox, The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 55.

[2] "…dinotando che ella libera e sola divenne Chiara per molte degne ed onorate qualità e ha compartito anco i tesori della sua virtú ad ogni gentile spirito, che ne ha avuto conoscenza; il che sotto la signoria ed imperio del marito, forse non averiapotuto fare." Fonte, *Il Merito Delle Donne*, 22; The English translation is from Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 55.

with morality, serving the purposes of the Venetian republic, and providing an education relevant to the class and social positions of the students. But convent education also differed in fundamental ways from other sources of education because it allowed lifelong intellectual exploration within a community of women. Convents valued reading and writing as ways to develop the intellect and the spirit simultaneously, while also sometimes allowing creative expression through theater. As a result, women could pursue intellectual enrichment throughout their lives, and some used the opportunity to advance feminist arguments. Former convent students, both nuns and married women, used their knowledge to educate other women, argue for the spiritual and intellectual equality of women, and correspond with prominent thinkers of the time**.**

Studies of women's education in Venice have been hampered by several factors. Early forays into women's history ignored the importance of women's education entirely, rarely studying educated women and then only to recognize the unusual nature of their accomplishments. Recent studies have assigned more importance to educated women but have still disparaged the education received both at home and in convents by dividing men's and women's education into the categories of "public" and "private." These divisions ignore the fact that all education aimed to increase virtue and prepare young people for their future careers, whether in government, business, or as homemakers. While interest in convents has increased over the past twenty years and scholars have recognized that they offered creative opportunities to young women, many scholars see convent education as irrelevant to large cultural developments because nuns were under strict enclosure. I demonstrate that convents offered young women an education comparable to that received by many young men and that convent-educated women used their knowledge to advance themselves and the status of all women.

By investigating the education of women in Venetian convents, I provide a new perspective on the long-debated question of whether women were true participants in the Renaissance. Closely related to this question are similarly long-running historiographical debates over whether divisions between "public" and "private" are useful in pedagogical history and whether educated women were able to challenge gender norms. I argue that dividing education into the realms of public and private is unhelpful and serves to reproduce the mindset of contemporaries who devalued the activities of women. I also support the contentions of recent scholars who argue that early modern women did change society and extend this argument about lay women to women who resided in convents.

Joan Kelly-Gadol famously asserted that the economic, political, and cultural advances of Renaissance Italy had actually undermined the power of women by creating a new division between public and private life that removed women from public concerns and created the modern relation of the sexes.[3] Discussions of this argument, which have continued over the past forty years, have often centered on the availability of education to early modern women. Kelly-Gadol's argument was generally supported in subsequent works by Christine Klapisch-Zuber and Margaret King.[4] J.R. Brink and Patricia Labalme, although they focused on the accomplishments of select women who received a full, formal education, assigned those same women little

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[3] Joan Kelly-Gadol, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?," in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed. Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1977), 161.

[4] Christine Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*, n.d. implicitly backed the article's assessment through an astute application of statistical information that drew heavily on the 1427 catasto and descriptions from ricordanze. Later works, such as Margaret L. King, *Women of the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) are more nuanced in some respects but nevertheless present the life of a woman in the Renaissance as having severely limited opportunities for personal or intellectual fulfillment.

importance.[5] Their books present a powerful accolade of female achievement and experience but do not see these women as moving or changing their world.

Other scholars have challenged Kelly-Gadol's thesis more directly, but their ability to do so has been limited by the claim that women received a moralistic education preparing them for the private world, in contrast with men whose training prepared them for a public career. Phyllis Stock identified narrow improvements in the early modern period. But she generally concluded that primary education for young women of the time was inferior because it was primarily moral, aimed at shaping the character of future wives and mothers rather than developing the female mind for its own sake.[6] Barbara Whitehead argued that it is ahistorical to assume that the same education should be appropriate for men and women. Instead, scholars should recognize that women's education often meant the formal *training* necessary for a woman to be educated.[7] Christopher Carlsmith's excellent overview of education in the Bergamo used Whitehead's fluid definition of education to explain the limits placed on female students, whose education

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[5] J.R. Brink's work studied the "sleeping giants" that had previously been ignored when the field of history was dominated by men. Her essential argument was that an international tradition of female scholarship existed in the late medieval and early modern periods and that it should be recognized despite its failure to significantly improve the situation of actual women at the time. But her explanation of the scholarship's scope rested on the unusual nature of female education. Because they were conscious of being "exceptions," learned women made it a priority to form connections with educated women in other places. Brink carefully specified that a web of connections did not qualify these scholars as feminists because they did not attempt to improve the status of women in general. J.R. Brink, *Female Scholars: A Tradition of Learned Women Before 1800* (Montreal: Eden Press Women's Publications, 1980); Patricia A. Labalme, ed., *Beyond Their Sex: Learned Women of the European Past* (New York: New York University Press, 1980) contained a collection of essays that took a similar approach. Labalme's introduction told the tale of frustrated women who were seen as unchase or even intellectual transvestites due to their learning.

[6] Phyllis Stock, *Better Than Rubies: A History of Women's Education* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1978), 80.

[7] Barbara Whitehead, "Introduction," in *Women's Education in Early Modern Europe: A History, 1500-1800*, ed. Barbara Whitehead (Routledge, 1999), xii.

emphasized moral and social training at the expense of intellectual development, limiting them to the study of vernacular texts, catechism, and practical domestic training at home or in a convent. Girls at the Schools of Christian Doctrine, for example, received a "'spiritual' education... appropriate for the private domain of the house," while their male counterparts "were trained in the public arts of grammar and rhetoric."[8]

But recent feminist scholarship has explicated important problems inherent in adopting the categories "public" and "private" without analyzing their underlying assumptions.[9] By reproducing these categories, scholars reproduce the mindset of contemporaries and devalue the activities of women by privileging the political, intellectual, and social activities of men. They also ignore an important avenue of inquiry by failing to question how these categories developed and explain their wider significance. When women's education is automatically placed in the misleading "private" category, scholars consequently assume that educated women could not change their society.

Sarah Ross' work effectively challenged previously dominant interpretations of the interactions between education and gender. Ross reexamined the lives of women such as Isotta Nogarola (1418-1466) and Cassandra Fedele (1465-1558) to illustrate that highly-educated females could gain public renown and garner the respect of celebrated male scholars.[10] Ross argued that in the fifteenth century, Italian and English humanists began to understand female

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[8] Christopher Carlsmith, *A Renaissance Education: Schooling in Bergamo and the Venetian Republic, 1500-1650* (Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 14 and 147.

[9] See Joan Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Joan Scott, "Experience," in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. Judith Butler and Joan Scott, 1992, 22–40.

[10] Sarah Gwyneth Ross, *The Birth of Feminism: Woman as Intellect in Renaissance Italy and England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 2009), 12 and 41.

virtue as "a composite of erudition and Christian morality," which Ross referred to as "learned virtue."[11] These ideas eventually prompted many humanists to argue that women, like men, should be educated in order to help them become more virtuous.[12] Ross further demonstrated that educated women were important because they challenged gender norms and forced society to rethink female capability. But Ross sharply differentiated learned laywomen from educated nuns on the basis that because nuns lived outside the reproductive economy, they could not force society to reconsider gender categories.

Ross' approach to nuns and other women in convents ties into another large historiographical debate about the Council of Trent (1545-1563) and how its new requirements shaped convent life. The council produced a list of provisions aimed to remedy perceived laxity in convent discipline in many locations. Reinforcing monastic enclosure was one among many concerns that included the renunciation of private property, the proper election of superiors, and the need for nuns to regularly confess and receive the Eucharist.[13] But scholars see the reinforcement of enclosure or *clausura* as the provision with the most potential to change the daily lives of religious women for the worse. Indeed, these requirements from the 25th session of the Council of Trent have spurred a significant amount of debate in historical scholarship on the lives and experiences of nuns in the early modern period.

Among scholars who focus specifically on Venice, there are two main approaches to understanding how the Tridentine requirement of enclosure shaped convent life. On one hand, many scholars claim that despite some lapses in the enforcement of these rules, Tridentine

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[11] Ross, 4.
[12] Ross, 4.
[13] Christine Scippa Bhasin, "Nuns on Stage in Counter-Reformation Venice (1570-1750)" (Northwestern University, 2012), 30–31.

regulations effectively isolated the many women and girls who inhabited convents, both willingly and unwillingly.[14] Anne Jacobson Schutte, for example, takes the following approach:

> Monastic rules regulated minutely every moment of nuns' days and nights. Male churchmen and lay legislators, usually in collaboration with female superiors, sought to exercise complete control not only over what brides of Christ could do but also what they could say, write, and even think. Above all, the guardians endeavored to ensure that inmates of convents were sealed off from contact with people, books, and ideas in the secular world beyond the walls.[15]

This terrifying, prison-like description is supported by some writers, such as Arcangela Tarabotti, as well as some of the rulings from the Council of Trent. For example:

> No nun shall after her profession be permitted to go out of the monastery, even for a brief period under any pretext whatever, except for a lawful reason to be approved by the bishop; any indults and privileges whatsoever notwithstanding. Neither shall anyone, of whatever birth or condition, sex or age, be permitted, under penalty of excommunication to be incurred *ipso facto*, to enter the enclosure of a monastery without the written permission of the bishop or the superior.[16]

Despite the seeming finality of these words, it is important to recognize that convent regulations were attempts to control convent life that were not always successful. Other scholars have found evidence that paints quite a different picture of convent life. Bhasin, for example, describes convents as bustling locales, performing plays and hosting parties:

> A row of gondolas are sidled up to San Girolamo's canal entrance… Laughing and chatting, gentlemen escort ladies through the torch-lit open gate of the cloister's rear entrance, leading directly into the large, indoor space of the public parlor. The room is

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[14] Examples include Elissa Weaver, ed., *Arcangela Tarabotti: A Literary Nun in Baroque Venice* (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 2006); Jutta Gisela Sperling, *Conventsand the Body Politic in Late Renaissance Venice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Meredith K. Ray and Lynn Lara Westwater, "Introduction," in *Letters Familiar and Formal*, The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: The Toronto Series 20 (Toronto: Iter Inc. and Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2012), 1–40.

[15] Anne Jacobson Schutte, "The Permeable Cloister?," in *Arcangela Tarabotti: A Literary Nun in Baroque Venice*, ed. Elissa Weaver, "Susan and Donald Mazzoni" Seminar (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 2006), 22–23.

[16] H.J. Schroeder, trans., *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* (Rockford, Illinois: TAN Books and Publishers, Inc., 1978), Chapter V, Session XXV.

> already abuzz with conversation… the sister in charge of finances, accompanied by the sister whose job it is to overhear parlor conversations, stands at the far door greeting guests and accepting care packages… Sister Giulia Camilla Casteglione, who made a name for herself performing the title role in a popular tragedy at a private residence last year, will be playing the scheming male servant in tonight's comedy at the convent.[17]

In this recreation of a night at a convent, Bhasin describes what may have transpired when convents performed plays for the Venetian public. Bhasin's description is supported by the narratives of contemporaries as well as play bills and other evidence.[18]

It is difficult to find the truth among these conflicting reports, but the answer lies in understanding the specifics of forced monachization and Venetian symbolism. Unlike other parts of Italy where Church officials inspected convents to insure their adherence to Tridentine guidelines, the Venetian government maintained primary control over enforcing convent rules in the Republic. The importance of the dowry system and the need to maintain social order caused the Venetian government to sustain the appearance of effective cloister, but the government maintained control over convent inspections and could choose when it was beneficial to allow certain gaps in regulation.

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[17] Bhasin, "Nuns on Stage," 13.

[18] Elissa Weaver and Kate Lowe have also suggested that enclosure could act as a catalyst for intellectual and creative activity. Weaver described the popularity of theater in early modern Tuscan convents to argue that communities of nuns frequently defined themselves in opposition to the "masculine" outside world. She argued that such communities had internal dynamics that contributed to "the development and permanence of its cultural forms and created within the convent a class of literate women, long before this was possible outside the walls." Elissa Weaver, *Convent Theatre in Early Modern Italy: Spiritual Fun and Learning for Women* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 3; Lowe suggested that convents required female agency to function successfully and that perhaps "decision-making in one sphere led to decision-making in other spheres." Because they were cut off from regular male contact, convents may have "unintentionally aided self-expression." K. J. P. Lowe, *Nuns' Chronicles and Convent Culture in Renaissance and Counter-Reformation Italy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 2.

Convents in Venice were an integral part of a financial system in which the placement of a daughter into a convent helped keep money in the family, often for a young woman's brothers. Marriage dowries were extremely expensive, so families that could not afford them often placed one or more daughters into a convent.[19] Forced vocations created problems in addition to the obvious suffering of individual women: women forced to join a convent were more likely to break the rules and cause disorder.[20] Clausura laws and the tight surveillance of unruly nuns were intended to promote convent life as a safe and honorable alternative to marriage.[21]

Clausura was also necessary due to an increase in the symbolic importance of convents in the sixteenth century as the theory of Venetian perfection and stability, known among scholars today as the "myth of Venice," was elaborated. The foundation stories of the convents claimed that they had sacred origins and convents housed holy relics associated with the foundation myths of Venice itself.[22] These symbolic connections between convents and the Republic's foundations created a connection between the sacredness of these enclosures and the legitimacy and sovereignty of the government.[23] As a result, the appearance of successful clausura was extremely important in Venetian culture.

But the symbolic importance of convents in Venetian culture also made the enforcement of clausura more complicated than in other cities. The connection between sacred convents and

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[19] Sperling, *Convents and the Body Politic*, 11.
[20] Sperling, 13–14.
[21] Coerced monachization continued and even increased in the post-Tridentine period despite the Council of Trent's 1563 requirement that novices be interviewed twice to ensure that they were taking the habit of their own free will. Sperling, 4, 13–14; Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees*, Chapter XVII, Session XXV.
[22] Gabriella Zarri, "Venetian Convents and Civic Ritual," in *Arcangela Tarabotti: A Literary Nun in Baroque Venice* (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 2006), 41–42.
[23] Sperling, *Convents and the Body Politic*, 235.

legitimate government meant that allowing foreigners to inspect and potentially critique monasteries (and the behavior of the nobility's daughters inside them) would symbolically mar the ruling class and the government itself.[24] Both before and after the Council of Trent the inspection of convents and enforcement of rules needed to be carried out by the Venetian government rather than Church officials from outside the Venetian Republic.

The pre-Tridentine attitude in Venice towards convents was dictated by each patriarch, leading to inconsistent enforcement of rules even before the Church required that all nuns be enclosed. The patriarch was formally appointed by the Holy See, but the Venetian Senate elected the actual individual, who was typically from a noble Venetian family and had previously held at least one important government position. As a result, the patriarch was typically more loyal to the Venetian government than to Rome.[25] Antonio Contarini attempted to enforce enclosure on the nuns in Venice, and in 1521 the Venetian government supported his reform efforts by establishing the *Provveditori Sopra Monasteri*, a branch of the government initially designed to exercise monastic oversight, but that in later years took on the role of supporting the patriarch's disciplinary programs.[26] A 1521 bull by Leo X gave full power to the Council of Ten and the *Provveditori Sopra Monasteri* to enforce reforms on Venetian convents.[27] But Patriarchs in control after Contarini did not consistently continue his strict program of reform and much evidence indicates that nuns continued to regularly ignore a variety of rules.

In the years following Trent, the Venetian government remained uninterested in ceding control of convent inspections to outsiders and continued to primarily subject convents to

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[24] Sperling, 217.
[25] Bhasin, "Nuns on Stage," 32–33.
[26] Zarri, "Venetian Convents and Civic Ritual," 45; Bhasin, "Nuns on Stage," 33.
[27] Sperling, *Convents and the Body Politic*, 215.

inspections by individuals whose interests were more closely tied to the Republic of Venice than to Rome. The Church never attempted to regain control by officially revoking Leo X's 1521 bull.[28] The first apostolic visitors were allowed in 1580-1, but the Republic only permitted them to inspect secular clergy and male regulars, not nunneries, *ospedali,* or *scuole.* Under the patriarchy of Lorenzo Priuli (1590-1600), pastoral visitations occurred in conformity with Tridentine decrees but still by Venetians.[29] Convents were ultimately subject to primarily Venetian surveillance rather than any surveillance by the Church.[30]

Some Venetians expressed concerns about the behavior of local nuns. For example, the early sixteenth-century chronicler Alvise Priuli thought that the Venetian defeat at Agnadello was the results of sinful Venetian nuns.[31] But contemporaries held serious reservations about the possibility of asserting greater control over convents in order to force nuns and other residents to obey the rules. One concern was that Venetian families might not be able to force girls to join convents if life there was overly unpleasant. In 1580 the nuncio Bolognetti worried that the rigidity of Tridentine reforms would cause Venetian girls to refuse to enter convents, a situation which he wrote "would bring ruin upon many families as a result of the excessive dowries the nobility are accustomed to give to their daughters who marry."[32] Another, related concern emerged from the guilt associated with forcing so many young women into convents. Patriarch

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[28] Sperling, 215; Bhasin, "Nuns on Stage," 31.
[29] Bhasin, "Nuns on Stage," 32–33.
[30] According to Bhasin, this made them "as much, if not more so, institutions of the Venetians state as organizations founded on the religious principles of their particular orders and subject to the Holy See in Rome." Bhasin, 34.
[31] Zarri, "Venetian Convents and Civic Ritual," 43–45.
[32] Zarri, 43–45.

Giovanni Tiepolo (1619-1630) wrote in a 1629 letter to the doge and Senate that he felt obligated to enforce rules more loosely because so many nuns were unwilling convent residents.[33]

The dowry system was a cornerstone of Venetian society. Combined with the need to maintain social order, it created a fundamental demand for convents that could feign isolation and internal order. But if convent regulations were enforced too strictly, the entire system could collapse. In addition, the Venetian government supported monastic self-sufficiency and the ability to provide entertainment in the city. Because the Venetian government maintained control over the inspection of convents and enforcement of rules, authorities could strategically enforce the rules enough to present convents as well-ordered components of a peaceful city, while turning a blind eye towards activities that fulfilled other purposes, such as allowing convents to support themselves and provide public entertainment.

The state of clausura in Venice was important to convent education because it shaped the type of education nuns could receive and indicates the influence they could have on the outside world. I have found that convent students maintained strong connections with their families, particularly through frequent visits outside the convent, and convents regularly hired outside instructors, especially for music. Furthermore, women who had been educated in convents circulated ideas rooted in their convent education for many years, regardless of whether they continued to live in a convent.

My investigation of convent education intervenes in several areas of existing scholarship. The fact that women who could not afford a private tutor were presented with expanded educational opportunities in the form of convent education indicates that women did have a

[33] Bhasin, "Nuns on Stage," 32.

Renaissance. Dividing education into the realms of public and private is unhelpful and serves to reproduce the mindset of contemporaries who devalued the activities of women. While some scholars have recognized the ability of early modern women to change their society, I extend this argument to women who resided in convents. By intervening in the historiographical debates on the educational opportunities available to women in Renaissance Venice, I also provide a new explanation for the unusual gender norms of the Republic of Venice. Venetian women were unusually independent and many of the most highly educated women of the time were from Venice. Venetians participated in the early modern world's unprecedented debate about education, the role of women, and how we know things. Convent education, although not the sole explanation, shaped the atmosphere that allowed for this unusual level of female independence.

My use of the term "education" includes both formal schooling and informal instruction. It is not restricted to young people because convents provided intellectual and creative opportunities to all residents, including educande, novices, nuns, and other visitors. I imitate Sarah Ross in using the term "feminism" to describe the arguments of early modern women, although they are in many ways dissimilar to feminism in the twenty-first century. As Ross points out, different manifestations of feminism share the common goal of improving the condition of women.[34]

[34] "However tentative and provisional the demands of early modern intellectuals for a redefinition of 'womanhood' and normative female endeavor may appear, segregating Renaissance feminists from our wider discussion of modern political feminism does indeed constitute a dangerous form of 'amnesia': it deprives feminism of its history." Ross, *The Birth of Feminism*, 3.

My dissertation uses archival research conducted in Venice and the writings of women educated in convents. My archival research includes the records of Venetian convents in the Archivio di Stato, as well as records regarding convents written by Venetian patriarchs, held at the Archivio di Stato, Archivio della Curia Patriarcale di Venezia, and the Biblioteca Museo Correr. The documents have been informative on many counts, particularly regarding the administrative aspects of convent education and the variety of other visitors who were allowed behind convent walls. But perhaps more revealing are the writings of three prominent women, who each represent one aspect of how convent education shaped feminist discourse: Arcangela Tarabotti, unwillingly confined to a lifetime behind convent walls; Maria Alberghetti, an enthusiastic *dimessa* who observed a type of half-cloister which allowed her more obvious interaction with outsiders;[35] and Moderata Fonte, a Renaissance feminist who is usually disassociated with convents, but received a significant amount of her schooling within convent walls. Instead of organizing my chapters chronologically, I have chosen to order them thematically so that I may begin with the traditional convents that were supposedly most restrictive, followed by the unusual case of "third-order" convents, whose residents were allowed to roam the city performing charitable works, and completing my argument with a discussion of women who were educated in convents but left permanently and married.

Chapter two primarily utilizes archival records to describe the prevalence and nature of convent education in Venice. Many Venetian families sent their daughters to be educated in a convent, where they were known as *educande.* Education in a convent was not just for future nuns: while many of these girls became nuns, a significant number eventually left the convent to

[35] Alberghetti's works are spread throughout various libraries and archives. I primarily consulted those held by the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana.

marry. Convent records, patriarchal orders, and the writings of women educated in convents show which activities were considered important in convents and what lifestyle the students were being trained to embrace. Venetian convents valued reading and writing as a way to develop the intellect and the spirit simultaneously and sometimes allowed creative expression through theater. Students in convents likely received vernacular literacy training comparable with that accessed by lower and middle-class boys. Simultaneously, convent students prepared for their future social roles either inside or outside the convent: they formed connections with one another, with nuns, and with other convent boarders while keeping in touch with their family members through letters and visits. Convent education contributed to the education of nuns as well as married women by providing social and vocational training as well as a basic education in virtue, reading, and creative expression.

In chapter three I turn to Arcangela Tarabotti, who was educated in the convent and forced by her father to become a nun. Tarabotti advanced arguments that could be considered feminist, and although she was relentlessly critical of forced vocations, Tarabotti's own convent experience contributed to her ability to write and circulate feminist arguments. She recognized the potential for positive experiences in convent life itself and she supported the opportunities convents provided for solitude, arguing that it could help both intellectual and spiritual development. Although at some points she appears to criticize the education she received in the convent, this is often rooted in false modesty or the desire to undercut many men's criticisms of women. Her overarching goal was for women to have more control over their own lives and she blamed the lack of this control on the Venetian government. Tarabotti's writings ultimately demonstrate that the unusual opportunities for intellectual enrichment in convents could produce female scholars who advanced novel feminist and political arguments.

While scholarship has recently focused on the activities of cloistered nuns in Italy, there is comparatively very little information available on tertiary nuns, who theoretically should not have existed after the Council of Trent. But in several cities, including part of the Venetian Republic, such as Padua and the island of Murano, these women continued to live and work, following a very different set of rules compared to officially cloistered nuns. In chapter four, I explain that Dimesse submitted to fewer formal restrictions as they publicly served the poor but still resided in a community of other women. Like nuns in enclosed convents, the Dimesse trained their novices using a pedagogy that reflected fundamental aspects of the humanist and Counter-Reformation approaches to education. Maria Alberghetti used her literary knowledge to encourage particular aspects of this pedagogical approach, such as imitation of the saints, essentially training a group of women who would become the teachers of lower-class boys and girls in Venice.

Chapter five discusses the life and works of Moderata Fonte, who was educated in a convent but later married. Because she was born to parents who were Venetian citizens but not nobles, Fonte demonstrates the opportunities offered by convent education to a "middle class" Venetian woman. Her works contain idealizations of female communities and complaints about the problematic influence of men upon the ability of women to learn, discuss, and pursue their interests that likely stem from her time as an educanda within a community of all women. It is true that Fonte did not use her position to advocate for convent education exactly as it occurred during her time and it is likely that she recognized some of the same problems highlighted by Tarabotti. Yet Fonte did gesture towards the positive potential of a community of unmarried women learning in an atmosphere in which the presence of men was rare and generally under their control – an atmosphere completely unavailable to most women educated at home. Like

Tarabotti, Fonte used her education to write works that advanced women's equality and recognized that convents could potentially contribute to her goal.

Arcangela Tarabotti, Maria Alberghetti, and Moderata Fonte allow glimpses of the way that convent education could shape the lives of women who pursued, whether by choice or necessity, three distinct vocations. By studying in a convent, they could access training similar to that received by many Venetian boys without incurring the expenses of a private tutor. At the same time, their education offered something different from a typical humanist education because they resided in a community of educated women who continued to learn and engage in creative activity. Former convent students, such as Tarabotti, Alberghetti, and Fonte, used their knowledge to educate other women, argue for the spiritual and intellectual equality the sexes, and correspond with prominent thinkers of the time**.**

II. The World as Her Province or the Cell as Her World?: Early Modern Pedagogy and the Convents

> Let her despise no branch of learning, hold all the world as her province, and, in a word, burn marvelously with a desire for knowledge and understanding. -Leonardo Bruni[36]

Introduction

The humanist approach to education that prevailed in the early modern period included the foundational belief that the appropriate education would cultivate virtue in students, understood to encompass duty to both God and state, while also preparing them for their future trade. Many scholars have assumed that these characteristics applied primarily to the education of young men, while the education of women was either non-existent or focused entirely on religious virtue with no interest in intellectual development. Other scholars have overlooked the availability of education for women entirely, particularly assuming that there were no options for any but the very wealthiest girls. I argue that Venetian convent education was an effective option for a broader group of Venetian girls who could not afford private tutors. Although it differed from the typical male education in important ways, Venetian convents provided a quasi-public education to middle and upper-class girls that included social and vocational training and education in virtue, language arts, and creativity.

As discussed above, most scholars who have studied the education of women in the early modern period have argued that women's education was focused on social and moral training instead of intellectual study, while men were trained in the intellectual abilities they would need in the public world.[37] Sarah Ross's discussion of educated early modern women pointed out that

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[36] Leonardo Bruni, "The Study of Literature," in *Humanist Educational Treatises*, trans. Craig W. Kallendorf, The I Tatti Renaissance Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 53.

[37] Two prominent examples are Stock, *Better Than Rubies*; King, *Women of the Renaissance*.

this approach creates a false dichotomy between intellect and virtue that did not exist in the early modern world for either women or men. Rather, early modern education was understood as an enterprise that inherently created virtue. Although opinion was divided, there was significant support for the idea that education would help create virtuous women just as it helped create virtuous men. But Ross' findings are still limited because her study focused on the upper-class women who obtained an education that rivalled that of upper-class men. Our understanding of how early modern society approached female education is incomplete without studying how a broader range of women were educated, including those in convents.

Education in a convent was not just for future nuns: while many of these girls became nuns, a significant number eventually left the convent to marry. It is impossible to find evidence of the exact curriculum used in convents, but convent records, patriarchal orders, and the writings of women educated in convents show which activities were considered important and what lifestyle the students were being trained to embrace. Students in convents likely received vernacular literacy training comparable with that accessed by lower and middle-class boys. Simultaneously, convent students prepared for their future social roles either inside or outside the convent: they formed connections with one another, with nuns, and with other convent boarders while keeping in touch with their family members through letters and visits. Convent education contributed to the education of nuns as well as married women by providing social and vocational training as well as a basic education in virtue, reading, and creative expression.

Humanism and Venetian Priorities

Leading pedagogues throughout Europe designed the ideal education for future leaders and rulers based on the principles of Renaissance humanism. This education combined intellectual

and spiritual development while encouraging practical training for a future career, often in a government position. Humanism combined with Venetian priorities and occasionally with the Catholic reformation's educational initiatives to mold the focus of Venetian pedagogues on virtue and practicality. The pedagogy of schools in Venice was driven by the ideal that the proper education would prepare students for a specific career while training them to fulfill their religious and patriotic duties.

In the 1980s and 1990s, historians of education heavily debated the reality of a humanist revolution in education at the beginning of the early modern period. The conventional narrative claimed that the education provided to upper-class boys in Latin schools and Church schools during the Renaissance differed dramatically from the education provided to the same group during the Middle Ages. Although schools in the Middle Ages also educated young men in Latin, they organized lessons around grammar and logic rather than classical rhetoric and culture. Renaissance humanists found the approach of medieval pedagogues completely inadequate, arguing that they created letter-writing technicians instead of individuals possessing wisdom as well as technique.[38] Instead of exact examples of letters in Latin, Renaissance textbooks emphasized concepts and values to teach students to unite form and content in their writing.[39] The best known champions of this interpretation are Eugenio Garin and Paul Grendler.

More recent scholars have presented serious challenges to this conventional narrative. Perhaps most famously, Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine argued that instead of encouraging moral development, creativity, and intellectual freedom, humanist education replaced medieval

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[38] Paul F. Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Literacy and Learning, 1300-1600*, Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 121.

[39] Grendler, 233.

logic with habit and memorization, creating docile civil servants. Robert Black argued, based on studies of textbooks, that the teaching of grammar did not change significantly between 1200 and 1500 and that early modern education was still more concerned with philology than virtue. His other works highlight the variability in education in different locations across Italy. Influenced by all of the above authors, Christopher Carlsmith's work supports the conclusions of Paul Grendler while agreeing with Black that it is essential to recognize local variation.

My approach is similar to Carlsmith's in many ways: I contend that although some scholars have found examples of schools where the ideals of humanist education were mythical, it remains true that these were the educational ideals to which leading pedagogues aspired and that in many cities, including Venice, these ideals were carried out, albeit not perfectly. But I also agree that humanism should not be understood as the sole defining factor of early modern schooling. Instead, we should view it as one of several factors that shaped pedagogy during the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries. Renaissance humanism combined with the Catholic reformation's educational initiatives and actions of communal governments to shape early modern education's focus on virtue and practicality.

One of the fundamental concerns of humanist educators was the connection between moral development and intellectual training. Leading pedagogues of the fifteenth century, such as Pier Paul Vergerio (1370-1444), Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini (1405-1464), and Battista Guarino (1434-1513), discussed the connection between virtue and intellect at length in their educational treatises. Vergerio advocated the study of literature as protection against sloth and a distraction from worry.[40] Guarino congratulated Maffeo Gambara for concluding that true

[40] Pier Paul Vergerio, "The Character and Studies Befitting a Free-Born Youth," in *Humanist Educational Treatises*, trans. Craig W. Kallendorf, The I Tatti Renaissance Library

nobility comes from virtue and, as a result, devoting himself to the humanities.[41] Piccolomini praised King Ladislaus of Hungary, Bohemia, and Austria in similar terms, writing "you do not approve of immoral companions; you listen with the closest attention to tales of virtue, and day by day you strive to become better through the instruction of your teacher."[42] In these examples, the pedagogues emphasized that an educated man should strive to become both virtuous and learned.

Rather than simply arguing that study could assist in the development of virtue, the advice of these pedagogues was often based on the underlying principle that intellectual training and spiritual development were inseparable. Vergerio wrote that "for just as not every voice makes a melodious sound, but only one that harmonizes well, so also not all movements of the soul, but only those which accord with reason, contribute to a harmonious life."[43] In other words, the soul is being taught as well as the mind in an intellectually rigorous education. Guarino similarly told Gambara that "no possession is more honorable or stable than learning, for beauty and strength, even when not diminished by any disease, are surely laid low in the end by old age, and money more often provides an excuse for sloth than a means for attaining virtue."[44] Rather than implying a one-way causal relationship between intellect and virtue, these pedagogues assumed that they were intertwined and must be pursued together for any hope of success.

(Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 23.

[41] Battista Guarino, "A Program of Teaching and Learning," in *Humanist Educational Treatises*, trans. Craig W. Kallendorf, The I Tatti Renaissance Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 133.

[42] Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini, "The Education of Boys," in *Humanist Educational Treatises*, trans. Craig W. Kallendorf, The I Tatti Renaissance Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 67.

[43] Vergerio, "Character and Studies," 26.

[44] Guarino, "Program," 134.

But virtue in the sense it was used throughout the early modern period was not limited to good deeds; it involved knowing one's station in life and fulfilling one's individual purpose, often to benefit your society. Piccolomini wrote to King Ladislaus "you could have been born a commoner or a peasant, but the inscrutable judgment of God has placed you upon a lofty throne."[45] Although it may sound like typical royal flattery, Piccolomini used this statement to discuss a ruler's religious responsibilities, including the importance of developing virtue, conducting oneself humbly, and recognizing the authority of religion.[46] At the same time, however, he was adamant that education would be both possible and beneficial to boys in any social class:

> Few, however, are found who by nature are unteachable. For Quintilian says that as birds are born to fly, horses to run, and beasts to be ferocious, so mental activity and cleverness are peculiar to man, while stupid and intractable persons are no less unnatural than deformed and remarkable bodies in monsters… there is not one who cannot achieve something through effort.[47]

The humanist perspective saw education as both necessary and natural, as something to be adapted to the needs of each person. Each person was assigned a different role by God, and therefore needed a different type of education; but some type of education was useful for everybody.

Concern for the development of virtue extended to ensuring that boys learned basic prayers and religious practices. In his treatise for King Ladislaus, Piccolomini immediately established this aspect of a basic education:

> We trust that you were instructed as befits a Christian, that you know the Lord's Prayer, the Ave Maria, the Gospel of John, the Creed, also several collects, the names of the

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[45] Piccolomini, "The Education of Boys," 85.
[46] Piccolomini, 85.
[47] Piccolomini, 68.

> mortal sins, the Gifts of the Holy Ghost, the Ten Commandments, the Works of Mercy, and finally the way of saving the soul and leading it to heaven.[48]

He also encouraged care in the selection of readings for young men. Piccolomini argued "we do not, indeed, lay it down as a principle that all poets should be read and that boys should study them obsessively. There *are* many erotic and vicious things in them, so the mind must not be absorbed in everything they say, just as one should not hear lectures on all the theologians and philosophers."[49] Among the poets and other writers that a boy read, Piccolomini advised exercising caution, so that one would only receive "whatever in accordance with the truth… avoiding the thorns as you gather the roses."[50]

Early modern pedagogy showed a great concern with selecting the proper teacher who would inculcate the ideal morals. Piccolomini's advice on the characteristics of good teachers, including the requirement that they be "faultless and their morals irreproachable" also emphasized the fundamental influence they were expected to have on their students.[51] It was common at this time to compare the role of a teacher to that of a farmer or gardener:

> Just as farmers place fences around their young trees, so it is the duty of your instructors to encircle you with teachings in keeping with a praiseworthy life and with admonitions from which the shoots of the most correct morals will germinate, for to receive a proper education is the source and root of virtue.[52]

In this example Piccolomini makes a point about how intellect serves as a source of virtue, but he also demonstrates the tremendous role of a teacher in the life of a student. By comparing the student to a plant and the teacher to a farmer, he presents an almost entirely dependent

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[48] Piccolomini, 83.
[49] Piccolomini, 110.
[50] Piccolomini, 111.
[51] Piccolomini, 70.
[52] Piccolomini, 70.

relationship. The farmer has the sole responsibility of protecting the plant from adverse forces and ensuring its access to natural resources such as sunlight and water. Similarly, the instructor, in Piccolomini's mind, has the sole responsibility of surrounding the student with good teachers and examples as constantly as possible.

The emphasis on an effective and moral teacher went hand-in-hand with the high early modern evaluation of boarding schools. Vergerio argued that living in another person's home made youth better behaved, most likely assuming that the youth would be imitating the behavior of the type of ideal person described above.[53] According to Grendler, "the boarding school became in [sic] integral part of the maturation process for the sons of the wealthy and powerful in Western civilization. In this setting the privileged learned Latin and Greek, how to share authority with their peers, and how to command the rest of society."[54] Boarding schools served more than one purpose, including practical training for future leaders and spiritual development.

Although scholars long perpetuated the myth that early modern society categorically feared learned women, Sarah Ross demonstrated that this argument results from a narrow focus on the texts that critique women's education, such as Leon Battista Alberti's *On the Family* and Francesco Barbaro's *On Wifely Duties*. Examining the literature on female humanists more generally reveals that many men throughout Europe, including pedagogues, held positive views of educated women.[55] Italian examples include Giuseppe Betussi's 1596 edition of Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris,* originally published in 1362. Betussi added forty-nine biographies of women that emphasized the connection between learning and virtue, in contrast to Boccaccio's

[53] Vergerio, "Character and Studies," 14.
[54] Grendler, *Schooling*, 132.
[55] Ross, *The Birth of Feminism*, 95.

original connection of female accomplishment with promiscuity.[56] Biographies by Tomaso Garzoni, Pietro Paolo di Ribera, and Francesco Agostino della Chiesa also praised intellectual women and associated them with virtue rather than immorality.[57] Most interestingly, *Fior di virtù,* read by many lower-class boys in school, also defended women, alleging that they were not an occasion to sin. On the contrary, it argued that men committed far more evils than women, that women were more reticent, and that women must constantly defend themselves from men. Ultimately, the seventh chapter of the book argued that there was no foundation for the argument that women were at fault for presenting sexual temptation.[58]

Despite certain limitations on education in practice, pedagogues who supported humanist training for women held goals for the education of women that matched those of fellow pedagogues for the educated man. For example, Leonardo Bruni (c.1370-1444) advocated for both wisdom and linguistic development, advocating that students study the ancients in order to learn wisdom, clear thinking, and how to think and write persuasively.[59] He also advocated a focus on divinity and moral philosophy, arguing that "other subjects will be related to them in proportion as they contribute to them or their embellishment."[60] In contrast to the idea that women were only allowed to be educated in spiritual matters, Bruni encouraged women to read both religious and secular authors.[61]

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[56] Ross, 96–98.
[57] Ross, 102–6.
[58] Grendler, *Schooling*, 279.
[59] Craig W. Kallendorf, "Introduction," in *Humanist Educational Treatises*, The I Tatti Renaissance Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), xi.
[60] Bruni, "Literature," 53–54.
[61] Bruni, 53.

Humanism and the educational ideals derived from it took a special form in Venice, where leaders were concerned with preserving the state's unusual stability.[62] In order to avoid the instability of other communes, leaders such as theologan Paolo Sarpi championed the independence of Venetian thought from outside sources of influence, believing the Republic's success was a result of her freedom from foreign interference.[63] Thus, in the aftermath of the Protestant Reformation, as Rome attempted to address political particularism and centralize ecclesiastical administration, Venice was determined to resist papal control in political, cultural, and even ecclesiastical affairs.[64] Sarpi claimed that religious authority should be placed under state control to eliminate the possibility that religious motivations could conflict with the work of the government. For the state to have its proper level of influence, it must not be threatened by outside sources of law and order. If religious leadership from Rome contradicted the Venetian government, it would contribute to instability.

Education played a crucial role in Sarpi's theories because it helped determine the moral code followed by a society and what authority that society will listen to:

> It cannot be expressed in writing how important the principles conceived by the young are to governments, both of families and of cities. Everyone knows by experience that every man acts according to the principles he believes; and he believes those things that have been instilled into his mind by educators, which, once they have taken root, it is impossible to detach. Hence nothing is more likely to change the governance of a family or a city than education contrary to it.[65]

It is crucial to note that Sarpi did not simply assert the *importance* of education to a government's success; rather, he pointed out that *nothing else* has more potential to change it:

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[62] Margaret L. King, *Venetian Humanism in an Age of Patrician Dominance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 187–88.
[63] King, 423.
[64] King, 293–94.
[65] Quoted and translated in Bouwsma, *Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty*, 524.

education must reflect the specific religious or political necessities of a particular society. Thus, for Sarpi and other Venetians, the ideal education drew from ancient example to encourage piety that would lead to devotion to the Venetian republic.[66]

Venetian humanists, like other pedagogues, typically focused on the training of the ruling class. Francesco Negri advised young aristocrats to study the liberal arts to prepare themselves to rule the republic as effectively as possible. Matteo Collazio emphasized ethics and speech as crucial tools for future leaders.[67] Francesco Barbaro wrote to his son

> Be sure that you adorn your name with the glory of virtue and the good arts rather than dull it through depravity. Cultivate the promise which your mind held forth from our earliest youth, and [cultivate] above all else piety, from which derives not only immortal glory but also the greatest pleasure and utility. If [your teacher] Lorenzo Cesano is there, work hard to cultivate your mind with his knowledge and virtue, lest you allow those seeds of virtue given you by God and nature to perish – while if you permit them to mature, you will recognize yourself as born for the honor of your country and for the glory and amplification of our family.[68]

The focus was not on personal satisfaction, but the good of the state. Humanist pedagogues believed that each person should be educated to fulfill the role assigned to them by God; in Venice, the emphasis was on the way a person's role would benefit the government. According to Margaret King, "Humanist education, though new in content and method, becomes here the agent of inherited power, the vehicle by which patrician culture can reproduce itself."[69] But not everyone needed to be trained to rule the state; education at many levels could contribute to a more peaceful society. The education of non-elites could be useful to the extent that it taught the correct values to cultivate loyal lower-class citizens.

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[66] King, *Venetian Humanism*, 37–38.
[67] King, 23–24.
[68] Quoted and translated in King, 25.
[69] King, 25.

The pedagogical principles embraced by the Catholic Reformation had common ground with many aspects of humanism, but in practice often clashed with the political bent of Venetian humanism. Antonio Possevino's *Coltura de gl'ingegni* enumerates many of the well-known aspects of Jesuit education, with the principle aim of gaining knowledge through repetition and good habits. According to Possevino, the purpose of education was to help each pupil became a son of God through the acquisition of truth, knowledge, and religion.[70] Three problems could prevent an individual from accomplishing this task: sin, failure to recognize his strengths, and deprivation of necessary cultivation.[71] Consequently, Possevino explained the importance of avoiding these pitfalls by cultivating virtue, examining a student's strengths, and teaching skillfully.

Possevino argued that cultivating a student's virtue would prevent the pupil from falling into sin, increase his ability to learn, and perhaps even lead to divine inspiration. He asserted that religious individuals had greater patience and more tranquil spirits because they had "flattened and eradicated turbid passions."[72] He compared the development of a sinful mind to the growth of a tree with vermin in its roots.[73] A good education would promote virtues and therefore eradicate such vermin from the mind. Possevino's second requirement for a successful education, that teachers examine the strengths of each student and recognize the variation of individual minds, was also closely connected to the ultimate goal of Christian salvation. Differences among

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[70] Antonio Possevino, *Coltura de Gl'Ingegni* (Vicenza: Giorgio Greco, 1598), Chapter 7.
[71] Possevino, Chapter 8.
[72] "Aggiungonsi il tempo, & l'attentione dell'animo: le quali due cose essendo molto necessarie allo studio della Sapienza, sono rare ne i scolari, & abodano ne i Religiosi: I quali anco hāno la quiete, & la tranquillità dell'animo, le quali seguono dopè l'haver spianate, & quasi diradicate tutte le torbide passioni." Possevino, Chapter 42.
[73] Possevino, Chapter 9.

individuals existed, in part, because God grants everyone different gifts and abilities. Teachers must therefore identify each student's gifts to help him achieve God's purpose.[74] Assessing the mind of a student and pointing him in the right direction was still not sufficient, however, because without proper cultivation, students lose their talents. Possevino wrote that sometimes minds which at first seem lively "become later stupid and like logs" due to an utter lack of proper instruction.[75] Improper cultivation was even worse, because bad habits or sophistic reasoning would cause knowledge to be lost or prevent it from being learned.[76]

Proper cultivation requires a proper teacher, and Possevino's concern with selecting adequate teachers reflected the broader humanist goal of promoting virtue through education. One should select instructors on the basis of both knowledge and morality, otherwise students will fall prey to the same mistakes as their instructors. A good teacher is like a farmer or gardener who removes weeds and plants only good seeds. If the teacher does not take care of the land properly by working, weeding, and purging it, a multitude of incorrect thoughts and heresies will sprout. Eventually, the mind will become like a series of knots "found finally so intricate, that human help is not enough to undo them."[77]

Many humanists would have applauded the way Jesuit education linked the development of virtue and intellect, but in Venice many disagreed with its international scope. Sarpi argued

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[74] Possevino, Chapter 15.

[75] "Altri poi, i quali parevano piu vivaci, divengano poscia stupidi, & come tronchi." Possevino, Chapter 10.

[76] Possevino, Chapter 10.

[77] "...il terreno quanto è più buono, se esso nó si lavora, ne si farchia, ne si purga, tanto piu germoglia di trsite herbe, & la perspicace natura dell'huomo, la quale non può cessare dall'operare, quando... tanto intricata, che l'aiuto humano non basta per liberarla." Possevino, Chapter 10.

that all education should be under state control and had little respect for more universal educational structures, such as the schools and colleges established by the Society of Jesus:

> Education is not an absolute thing which has grades of perfection, of which the Jesuit Fathers have attained the highest, but education is relative to government. Therefore youth is educated in such a way that what is good and useful for one government is harmful for another, and education receives variety according to the variety of governments. What is useful for a military state, which is maintained and increased with violence, is pernicious to a peaceful one, which is conserved through the observance of laws.[78]

By Sarpi's logic, Jesuit education was intrinsically ineffective because it reflected universal goals rather than the needs of any local government. Even worse, it would turn young minds toward a religious code that the Venetian government did not control.

Humanist pedagogues throughout Italy extolled the intertwining of intellectual and spiritual learning. This often included an emphasis on knowing one's calling and serving the government in an appropriate capacity. In Venice, there was a special emphasis on the latter principles because Venetian leaders believed allegiance to the Venetian state and resisting outside influences were crucial to the government's stability.

Venetian Schools

Many schools in Venice, particularly those for upper-class students, aspired to achieve the ideals of leading pedagogues. Venetian schools attempted to provide vocational training for specific careers while encouraging young citizens to serve the Venetian Republic. Few women received schooling that corresponded with modern concepts of education, but many received the

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[78] Quoted and translated in William Bouwsma, *Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty: Renaissance Values in the Age of the Counter Reformation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 524–25; See also Edward Muir, *The Culture Wars of the Late Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 34–35.

intellectual and moral education considered appropriate for their occupations. Although it often took a different form, women's education was motivated by the same ideas that motivated men's education. Although fewer opportunities were available to Venetian girls, their existence does not support the idea that Venetians associated the education of women with promiscuity. But the lack of equality in education indicates that many types of schooling were considered unnecessary for young girls and women. In particular, comparing the educational options available to young men and women in Venice reveals a lack of traditional options for those who were too poor to be taught privately but not poor enough for charitable educational initiatives.

In Venice and most other Italian communes, upper-class boys and young men attended either a Latin school or a Church school. As their label suggests, Latin schools taught Latin grammar and literature to students who wanted to advance to university studies and then to careers in civil service, the Church, or other areas requiring Latin proficiency. Teachers, who were usually clergymen, typically used a combination of grammar manuals, elementary readers, and classic works.[79] A few teachers added additional subjects such as Greek, logic, philosophy, *abbaco* (mathematics), and/or vernacular reading.[80] After grammar drills, students began reading the *Disticha Catonis,* a medieval text that escaped humanist censure due to its classical language and content.[81] It provided practice reading Latin with maxims of prudence and virtue, such as "try not with words the talker to outdo; / on all speech is bestowed: good sense on few" and "conceal your shameful deeds lest others make things worse by open criticism."[82] Despite its

[79] Grendler, *Schooling*, 47–48, 55.
[80] Grendler, 48–50.
[81] Grendler, 198.
[82] Quoted and translated in Grendler, 198–99.

medieval origins, this text fulfilled the humanist ideals of teaching classical Latin while simultaneously providing useful advice for boys preparing for roles in the government.[83]

The second type of school available to upper-class boys was a Church school, established for boys who wished to become clergymen.[84] These offered essentially the same education as the Latin schools, but students also served as assistants to parish priests in a sort of apprenticeship. In Venice, these responsibilities were substantial enough that Patriarch Vendramin ordered pastors not to give the boys so many duties that they would miss class.[85] The similarity in education between Latin schools and Church schools is unsurprising, given the similarity in the requirements of the jobs they were training for. Just like princes and republics, popes and bishops wanted men who could draft an elegant letter or oration in classical Latin.[86]

Venetian schools for upper-class boys were funded both by private entities and the government, but the majority of schools in Venice were independent (private) schools. Communal (public) schools were always Latin schools intended primarily for the children of the elite who would eventually occupy legislative and executive offices or chancery posts. Venice made various attempts to expand the availability of communal schooling, but funding issues limited the success of these projects.[87] In 1587, only 188 students attended communal schools, 4% of the approximately 4,625 pre-university students in Venice.[88] The Venetian government was motivated to ensure that its future leaders were properly trained in order to ensure the Republic's survival, but officials also cited moral development and self-fulfillment as reasons to

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[83] Grendler, 199.
[84] Grendler, 57.
[85] Grendler, 58–59.
[86] Grendler, 61.
[87] Grendler, 65–67.
[88] Grendler, 48–49.

establish more communal schools.[89] Based on this information, Grendler argued that "Venetian state involvement in education shows that the patriciate viewed schools primarily as a training ground for civil servants and secondarily as a place to teach good morals and wisdom to future leaders."[90] In contrast, I maintain that career preparation was part of virtuous training because it was thought to prepare an individual to fulfill God's purpose for their life and help fulfill the needs of the state.

Some upper-class women received exceptional educations and became influential in humanist discourse. Sarah Ross' work has shown that household academies provided a type of "subversive" success, preparing women such as Isotta Nogarola and Christine de Pizan to produce writings that were the roots of modern day feminism. Cassandra Fedele (1465-1558), gave a public oration at the University of Padua upon the graduation of her cousin, Bertuccio Lamberti, illustrating that highly-educated females could gain public renown and garner the respect of celebrated male scholars. Ross argued that instead of being entirely quashed by patriarchy, educated women could use the rhetoric of patriarchy to their advantage. Unlike learned courtesans, women such as Nogarola used literal and discursive familial associations to shield themselves from accusations of promiscuity. Through familial rhetoric that placed their tutors and correspondents in the position of an intellectual father-patron, they enjoyed publicity legitimized by a type of putative male supervision. Because of their ability to gain positive publicity these female writers forced society to rethink female capability.

A handful of young women who did not have the resources or talents of Isotta Nogarola were still educated at home or able to attend schools with their male peers. A 1587 survey

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[89] Grendler, 48–49, 65.
[90] Grendler, 70.

conducted in Venice revealed approximately thirty females enrolled in formal study compared to 4,595 boys.[91] Many of these girls studied individually at home with private tutors, but a group of ten gathered together in one home to work with a single teacher. Two girls were reading the breviary, indicating that they had studied more advanced Latin. A few attended the independent vernacular school established by a woman named Marieta that accepted both boys and girls with a total of about 8 students.[92] Venetian communes on the mainland also offered a few formal schooling opportunities for girls. In seventeenth-century Alzano Maggiore, which was under Venice's control, a widow with two female tertiaries ran a small girls' school and a woman known as Sister Chiara Maria, who may have been a tertiary, gave lessons to girls in reading, writing, and sewing.[93]

Humanists and government officials were primarily concerned with shaping the education of future leaders, but their ideals also influenced the education of lower-class citizens. Lower-class boys typically attended vernacular schools, which focused on reading and writing Italian in addition to some business-oriented mathematics.[94] They sometimes also taught basic Latin grammar, but not always. Unlike those in Latin schools, vernacular schoolmasters were typically not clergy because the job did not require their extensive training in Latin.[95] Also unlike Latin schools, vernacular schools were not revolutionized by the humanist movements. Instead of eliminating medieval textbooks as the Latin teachers did, vernacular instructors were happy to use a combination of medieval and Renaissance texts. Pedagogical theorists and communal

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[91] Grendler, 43.
[92] Grendler, 96.
[93] Carlsmith, *A Renaissance Education*, 279.
[94] Grendler, *Schooling*, 409.
[95] Grendler, 51, 55.

governments typically did not directly address the type of curriculum that should exist in a vernacular school, so the curriculum developed from the ground up. Due to a lack of vernacular works written specifically for educational purposes, teachers used the books they already owned and those which the children could bring from home.[96]

The education of lower-class boys typically began with a primer in reading Italian and was immediately followed by a medieval text called *Fior di virtù (Flower of Virtue*).[97] It was the equivalent of the *Disticha Catonis* used in Latin schools. Both works aimed to teach moral principles along with literary training. But the *Disticha Catonis* contained classical, rather than medieval, morality and included the detailed social advice needed by those entering the upper echelons of society.[98] After *Fior di virtù,* vernacular teachers introduced a wide variety of works, including saints' lives, meditational religious works, and chivalric romances.[99] Schools for both the upper and lower classes had the goal of teaching personal virtue and social values using classical and Christian sources, with a greater emphasis on classical examples, especially in Latin and Church schools.[100] The education of lower class boys shared the upper-class interest in virtue although it accomplished the task in a different way.[101]

In the late Renaissance, the Church began to exert more influence on pre-university education, largely to contribute to Counter-Reformation goals. The most famous example of this is the educational system of the Jesuits, but Venice's relationship with the Society of Jesus was complex, and Jesuit schools did not flourish in Venice. In contrast, the Clerics Regular of

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[96] Grendler, 275–76.
[97] Grendler, 278.
[98] Grendler, 279–80.
[99] Grendler, 282, 286, 287, 289.
[100] Grendler, 409–10.
[101] Grendler, 279.

Somascha, also known as the Somaschi or the Somaschan fathers, thrived in Venice in the 16th century when Girolamo Miani began caring for orphans he found through the Republic. The order continued to operate orphanages but eventually also put resources toward educating the young and elite.[102] For children with no other educational resources, the Schools of Christian Doctrine offered basic training in reading, writing, and Church teachings on holy days throughout the year. Although there were differences in the education provided by communal and independent schools on the one hand and schools founded by religious order on the other hand, both approached education as an endeavor that would benefit the student's mind and spirit, particularly on the pre-university level. Religious orders served as another educational option but did not revolutionize the fundamental approach to pedagogy in the early modern period.[103]

Young women benefitted equally from some of the Counter-Reformation educational initiatives. Although the Jesuits primarily educated boys, the Somaschans and the Schools of Christian Doctrine provided the same education to boys and girls. In 1532, the Somaschans established orphanages in Bergamo, at that time part of the Republic of Venice. In these orphanages, boys and girls were instructed in reading, writing, and arithmetic.[104] Although male and female orphans were in separate buildings, they received the same schooling, which separated reading and writing from religious instruction (an unusual choice). Deputies of the orphanages provided dowries to young women when they were ready to leave.[105] Schools of Christian Doctrine also welcomed girls and offered them the same spiritual education they provided to boys. In fact, by 1610 there were more female teachers and students enrolled,

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[102] Grendler, 391–92.
[103] Grendler, 363.
[104] Carlsmith, *A Renaissance Education*, 197.
[105] Carlsmith, 198–99.

possibly because boys had more alternatives.[106] In Venice, women from *La Compagnia delle Dimesse*, which I will discuss in chapter four, taught in the schools of Christian Doctrine.

Humanism was not the only influential force shaping Venetian pre-university education. It combined with the Catholic reformation's educational initiatives and Venetian priorities to mold the focus of most schools on virtue and practicality. The pedagogy of schools in Venice was driven by the ideal that the proper education would prepare students for a specific career and simultaneously encourage them to act in the Republic's best interest. Just as boys did not ignore spiritual education or understand it as something only appropriate for the "private" realm, girls did not entirely avoid non-religious sources of information. Girls participated in many of the same educational opportunities as boys, but in lower numbers. The types of schooling available to girls in Venice and its territories does not suggest that there were strong feelings tying general education of women to promiscuity. Instead it suggests that certain types of schooling were not considered necessary for women, and therefore their education was not worth the exact same resources afforded to their male peers. The largest gap in the education of women in Venice would appear to be a lack of schools for middle-class girls, but this was a deficiency that many Venetian convents were prepared to fill.

Social and Vocational Training

Many Venetian families sent their daughters to be educated in a convent before they were old enough to become novices. These students, known as *educande*, would eventually either become nuns or leave the convent to marry, in accordance with their families' wishes. Convent

[106] Carlsmith, 152–53.

education was more available than any of the other schooling options for young women in Venice, with convents that would take boarders of a variety of ages from middle and high-income families, regardless of their interest in marrying or becoming a nun. Official rules stated that men could only enter the convent in extreme circumstances and that educande should observe cloister as strictly as the nuns until they left the convent permanently. But records actually indicate a great level of flexibility regarding these rules in efforts to provide both vocational training and social interaction for convent students. Convents often hired men from outside the convent as teachers. Students formed strong friendships with other women in the convent but were still allowed to maintain bonds with their families and return home when their parents needed them. Just as boarding schools for young men provided social and vocational training for future government officials, convent education trained both *educande* and young nuns for their potential future lives in the convent – a life that eschews the division of public vs. private and instead required a much more complex combination of skills.

Most families in Venice could not afford a private tutor for their daughters. Even among the patrician class, only a select few received this kind of individualized education. Attending school with boys was an unusual circumstance and it is not entirely clear how certain girls were able to obtain permission to do so, although they may have been relatives of the instructor. Convent education was an option that larger groups of families could afford. It did not offer the same elite training provided by a tutor, but the education was at least comparable to the vernacular training received by boys in vernacular schools.

The cost of convent education varied.[107] A letter from 1672 regarding a donation made by an educanda states that students in San Sepolcro usually paid only 25 ducats per year.[108] Payment records at San Sepolcro from the preceding decades give a similar price.[109] At Santa Marta in 1594 an education cost 40 ducats per year. At Santi Marco e Andrea in 1624 the required sum was 60 ducats, equal to the yearly payments of a professed nun.[110] Although often considered the prisons of patrician women, Venetian convents were becoming less dominated by the patrician class over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Sperling estimates that between 1591 and 1598, approximately 73% of nuns on the main island of Venice were patricians. For 1656-1670, this estimate drops to approximately 64%. But, as Sperling points out, these estimates are based on lists of nuns with identifiable surnames. Convents which predominantly housed noblewomen were more likely to list surnames, so she recognizes that her estimates may overstate the percentage of patrician nuns.[111] The decrease in percentage may at least be partially due to the establishment of new convents in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries that were less ideal for patrician girls entering the convent. Many of the newer convents were too

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[107] It is difficult to find detailed information about average income at the different levels of Venetian society, but a couple of comparisons are possible. A master builder could earn up to 133 ducats per year, if we assume 250 working days, while a laborer could earn 82. A master weaver earned 14 to 16 soldi daily for each cloth in operation. One ducat was worth approximately 124 soldi. Rapp's work also described the average yearly rents in the Corte San Rocco, which ranged from 14.7 to 19.8 ducats per year. The apartments varied widely in size, from two to twenty-rooms, meaning that some apartments cost far below the average. Richard Tilden Rapp, *Industry and Economic Decline in Seventeenth-Century Venice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 127 and 133-135; See also Brian Pullan, *Rich and Poor in Renaissance Venice: The Social Institutions of a Catholic State, to 1620* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 180.

[108] ASV, 18 November 1672, San Sepolcro (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 1, Reg. 1, 104.

[109] ASV, Note delle Figlie Educande (1659-1668), San Sepolcro (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 37.

[110] ASV, Copie di Letter Per Conto del Monasterio di San Marco, et Sant'Andrea di Murano, SS. Marco e Andrea di Murano (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 4, No. 30.

[111] Sperling, *Convents and the Body Politic*, 27.

poorly endowed or too strictly observant to support the lifestyles that many patrician women kept up even after taking vows of poverty.[112]

It is difficult to know precisely how many young women were educated in convents. According to Laven, in 1581, there were 2,508 women living in convents with a city population of 135,000. In 1642 there were 2,905 nuns on the Island of Venice itself and of this number, 315 were girls.[113] All of these estimates are based purely on the main island of Venice, excluding the smaller islands such as Murano, Burano, and Torcello. The estimate of 315 is many times the number of girls who were educated by tutors or at schools with boys. Given the flexibility in the amount of time a student spent in the convent and the age at which a girl was sent there, the number of girls who were educated there at some point during their youth was probably much higher.

Girls who entered a convent as a student were officially required to be between the ages of seven and twenty-five, but there were many exceptions.[114] The records of Spirito Santo contain several handwritten licenses giving permission for younger girls to enter the convent as boarders. Cecilia Gradenigo was allowed to enter in 1692 although she was only six years old and in 1684 Marinetta Michiel entered although she was not yet seven.[115] Most girls who entered a convent in some capacity in their mid-teens or later became nuns, but occasionally an older girl would enter for educational purposes. The educanda license for Giulia Malipiero on March 9,

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[112] Sperling, 28–29.

[113] Mary Laven, *Virgins of Venice: Broken Vows and Cloistered Lives in the Renaissance Convent* (Viking Penguin, 2002), 210n.

[114] The records I have found indicate that most girls were on the lower end of this age range, between the ages of seven and twelve.

[115] ASV, Giovanni Badoaro, March 8, 1692, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 8; ASV, Leonardo Marini, Licenza Della N Dongella Marinetta Michiel, June 22, 1684, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 8.

1705, grants her permission to continue "to be educated, although she is over 25 years of age."[116] Her payment record to Spirito Santo actually began in March 1702. The first three payments were made by Stefano Malipiero but in the name of Giulia's father, Tomaso Malipiero. The next four payments simply say they are from Giulia herself. A separate page of records that appear to refer to the same person begin in August 1722, when Giulia would have been at least 37. This time the payments were made by her brother, Gerolemo Malipiero and continue until February 23, 1729, with no explanation of whether Giulia left or finally became a nun.[117]

Many of the girls who entered the convent for education became nuns, an unsurprising fact given the sheer number of young women who were forced into convents one way or another. But a significant number left to marry or left no record of their fate after their convent education. Angela Tiepolo, daughter of Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo and Isabetta, became an educanda in May 1681, when she was eight years old.[118] She requested to leave and visit her sick mother on February 6, 1691.[119] The request was likely granted because records include another request for her to re-enter the convent on the 12th of the same month.[120] In 1693, she requested to leave permanently because she was planning to get married: "to leave the convent and never return

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[116] "...figlia del NHS Tomase Malipiero, la quale desidera continuere la sua d'mana in detto Monasterio per esser educata, non offente sia maggiore d'anni 25 d'tua età... con queste Condizioni però." ASV, Giovanni Antonio Zampelli, March 9, 1705, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 8.

[117] ASV, *Libro Delle Figlie, Che Sono a Spese, et Educatione Nel Nosto Monastero Del Spirito Santo, 1688-1729*, San Sepolcro (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 37.

[118] ASV, *Libro Delle Figlie, Che Sono a Spese, et Educatione Nel Nosto Monastero Del Spirito Santo, 1688-1729*, San Sepolcro (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 37; ASV, *Libro Delle Figlie, Che Sono a Spese, et Educatione Nel Nosto Monastero Del Spirito Santo, 1654-1689*, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 28; ASV, Aloysius Sagredo, Licentia pro Educanda, May 6, 1681, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 8.

[119] ASV, Maria Vittoria Lustinan, February 6, 1691, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 8.

[120] ASV, Maria Vittoria Lustinan, February 12, 1691, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 8.

because her wedding contract for her to get married has been drawn up."[121] Antonia Fontana entered Spirito Santo in June 1695 and left in December 1696 for the same reason, with the specific mention that her fiancé was Antonio Gritti.[122] During my archival research I recorded information for about approximately 475 educande. I was able to confirm that roughly 60 of these young women became nuns; sometimes this was specified at the end of the payment record but far more often I discovered it by examining the documentation of newly professed nuns from the same convent. Unlike educande who became nuns, the payment record is the only opportunity to find information about educande who got married. Only two payment records specifically indicated that a girl was leaving the convent to get married, but this information would only appear in the payment records if a girl left the convent because the wedding was imminent. It is likely that a large number of the other educande eventually married.

Most archival documents related to educande do not contain information regarding how the nuns in a particular convent chose which girls to admit as educande. Two documents, however, suggest that the nuns at least sometimes voted on whether to admit each student. A book from Santi Biagio e Cataldo della Giudecca contains the voting records of the nuns for both students and servants using the following description: "It was proposed in the chapter to accept for education Miss Angela Palazin. Being put to a vote there were in the box 47 white balls, 7 green balls, and 57 total nuns voting."[123] While Angela was immediately accepted, Maria Isabeta

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[121] "...figlia a spese che possi uscir di Monasterio per non piu entrare essendo stipulato il contratto di nozze per farsi sposa." ASV, Maria Vittoria Lustinan, August 12, 1693, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 8.

[122] ASV, *Libro Delle Figlie, Che Sono a Spese, et Educatione Nel Nosto Monastero Del Spirito Santo, 1688-1729,* San Sepolcro (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 37; ASV, Laura Capello, December 25, 1696, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 8.

[123] "Fu proposta in Capitolo di acetarla ad educazione la Signora Angela Palazin et essendo rimasta alla Balozazione havedo auto nel Bosolo bianco balle… no. 47 Et nel verde balle….

Faver was rejected upon the first vote on June 8, 1698, but accepted during a repeat vote five days later. Spirito Santo received a license from Aloysius Sagredo in 1687 allowing them to "gather the chapter of nuns in the usual place at the sound of the bell tower and there propose a secret vote" to accept nine-year-old Lugretia Statio, daughter of Carlo and Orsetta, as a new educanda. If the motion passed with two-thirds of the vote "or more in conformance with the convention of the convent" than the girl would be accepted, provided she was within the acceptable age range between seven and twenty-five. The license continued that "she may be introduced in the cloister, assigning her to the mistress of those girls, etc. But with the conditions that she is in the usual place separate from the nuns and that she dresses modestly without ornaments of any kind. And she should observe the laws of the cloister…"[124]

Convents were theoretically expected to follow strict rules about male visitors and some of these rules were extreme. In response to reports that the nuns of San Zaccharia had been talking to men in the convent parlor, rather than through the grate as the rules required, Antonio Contarini ordered the abbess to sequester the disobedient nuns in their rooms. He also commanded that in the future all convent residents "abstain from speaking to any man… according to the form of our other mandates, not in the parlor, nor at the door, nor even in the

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No. 7 Essendo Monache da balla…. No 57." ASV, *Libro Delle Balotacioni Delle Educande et Converse*, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 28.

[124] "Concediamo licenza alla V.M. Superiora del Monasterio della Monache di ___ di poter convocare il Capitolo delle Monache nel luoco solito, à suono di Campanella, & ivi proporre a voti secreti _____ ad educatione : e passata che sia con li doi terzi, overo metà conforme l'uso del Monasterio, il che si doverà notare distintamente in libro à ciò deputato; essendo questa maggiore delli sette anni, e minore delli vinticinque, come consta dal suo Battesimo da noi veduto: possa introdurla nella Clausura, consegnandola alla Maestra di queste figliuole, &c. con questo però, che se ne stia nel luoco solito seperato dalle Monache, e che modestamente vesti senza ornamenti d'alcuna sorte. Et osservi le leggi della Clausura confirme le Monache istesse; E servati anco gli ordini, &c." ASV, Aloysius Sagredo, Licenza, August 4, 1687, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 8.

church save at the grate."[125] In April 1511, a group of pipers and singers were commanded to stop visiting the monasteries, where their performances caused "great offense to divine majesty, shame to the monastery, scandal to good people" as well as the "highest displeasure" of patriarch Antonio Contarini.[126] Despite this strict approach, the archive is full of examples of nuns who persisted in breaking the rules of cloister even more flagrantly. Undated documents regarding the convent of Spirito Santo describe an abbess who faced trouble for a variety of broken rules. She allegedly spent an unnecessary amount of time with a Pre Iacomo, with a certain doctor, and with a Greek man. She stayed with Iacomo at his villa, and he stayed with her in her cell. The doctor also stayed in her cell morning and night "without her being sick."[127] She had known the Greek man for a long time "and he was seen more times in the convent and in the cell of the abbess."[128]

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[125] "Item vi comandemo che sotto la dicta pena de excomunication debiati al tutto abstenirve de parlar ad alguno homo, sia chi esser si voglia in quocumq: gradu, et statu, segondo la forma de li altro Mandati nri, ni in parlatorio, ni su le porte, ni etiam in giexia salvo che a le grade, certificandovi che se vui contrafareti al pnte mandato nro Interdiremo la giexia vra cum nota del Monasterio vostro." BMC, Antonio Contarini, "Contro Le Monache Di S. Zacharia." May 14, 1511, 24r, MS Cicogna 2583, Intorno Chiese e Clero Veneto.

[126] "Per el tenor de le presente significhemo a Vui Castaldo et Compagni, ac etiam tuti fratelli de la Scholar di piphari et Sonatori como el ni e sta referito p(er) fide digne relation che per viu e facto de zorni, et di nocte matinade, et soni de diverse sorte a monasterii de monache de questa Cita de Venetia cum grande offension de la Divina majesta, vergogna de Moansterii, scandalo de le persone de ben, et sum(m)a displicentia nra: pertanto comandemo a tutti vui predicti sonadori de cadaun Instromento che sotto pena de excomunicazione..." BMC, Antonio Contarini, "Contro l'Arte de Pipari e Sonatori" April 24, 1511, MS Cicogna 2583, Intorno Chiese e Clero Veneto.

[127] "Come a principio che la intro nel Spirito Santo ha viso desonestamente con pre Jacomono, con un certo Medego, et qual é morte, con el Griego, el qual é sta condando, e con altri. Item che la dita é stada piu fiade stravestida fuora del Monastier a la Villa a caxa de pre Jacomo, et altri Luoghi. Item che Pre Jacomo é stado nel Monastier de di, e de notte, e in Cella con la ditta. Item che el Medego é stado piú fiade in cella con la dita da la matina à la sera, senzando lei esser amalada, et ogni di in coloquio nei Parlatori con la dita." BMC, Gradenigo 179, *Monache II*, 257v.

[128] "Item che el Griego y longo tempo há avuto Aretta familiarità con Lei, et é stà visto piú volte per el Monastier, e ne la Cella de la Badessa." *Monache II*, 257v.

Even legitimate doctor's visits were only permitted in specific circumstances. The Provveditori Sopra Monasteri could provide licenses for individual visits, such as the one provided for a doctor to visit Santa Maria Maggiore on April 20, 1646.[129] Documents from the Palazzo Patriarchale include a license for three monasteries to introduce Giovanni Franco Marchi as their ordinary doctor "having first served extraordinarily for the space of about seven years… with the necessary modesty." But there were still several regulations. The doctor could only come when there was an urgent need, must be always accompanied by two of the older nuns, and could not come before the morning prayers or after evening prayers unless there was a true emergency. Perhaps most dramatically, his visits must be preceded by the ringing of the church bells so that all the nuns could retire before he entered.[130]

Such broad suspicion of males appears to reinforce the idea that convents were shutting women away from the world unless the life of a sick nun were at stake, but this was not the reality. Venetian convents often hired outside instructors to teach additional subjects to the educande and sometimes also to the nuns themselves. In this way the presence of educande motivated nuns to form more outside connections in order to provide instruction to their students, often taking advantage of these opportunities alongside them. Outside instructors could obtain permission to visit the convent to teach both nuns and educande from

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[129] ASV, *Licentie dal 1643 sino 1651 dell'Ex Magistrato Sopra Monasteri,* Provveditori Sopra Monasteri, Atti, Pezzo: 312.

[130] "Che vi sii il bisogno, e la necessità urgente Che prima resti introdotto, sii dato il suono alla Campanella acciò le Monache stiino retirate Che sii accompagnato sempre da doi deputate delle più Vecchie Che non sii introdotto prima dell'Ave Maria della mattina, e doppo quella della sera, mentre non vi fosse urgentissima necessità Che non possi trattenersi in Clausura, se non il tempo, che sarà necessario p(er) le visite dell'inferme che deva incaminarsi p(er) la stradda più breve alla visità et uscire p(er) la stessa, et osservati tutti gl'ordini già fatti da nostri Precessori sotto le pene in qllo fulminate, e vaglia la presente p(er) mesi sei..." Giovanni Badoaro, Licenza, January 27, 1689, Morosini-Grimani 566, No. 151.

the Provveditori Sopra Monasteri and in many cases the permission was granted. Lorenzo Rossi, a writer, was allowed to go to Santa Anna to teach two young ladies for two months and permission was granted to Marco Tonador to "teach Sister Emilia Lion and other girls in the Monastery of Spirito Santo for 15 days."[131] Hiring music teachers was particularly popular. In 1644 and 1645, Isepo de Michiel was allowed to teach some young girls to sing. In December 1645, the Provveditori Sopra Monasteri gave Franco (Francesco) Cavalli permission to teach a convent resident to play the organ. Cavalli's example is particularly interesting because he was a famous composer and the 1640s were an important time of growth in his career.[132] Cavalli's final will suggests that this was not the only time he received permission to teach. To his pupils Francesca Grimani and Betta Mocenigo, nuns from San Lorenzo, he left spinets and some pictures.[133] He also left most of his possessions and real estate to the convent of San Lorenzo.[134]

Of course, not all convents obtained the necessary permissions before utilizing the kind of instruction provided by Cavalli and other individuals. The records of the Provveditori Sopra Monasteri are also full of examples of men who entered convents without permission. In 1610, organist Zuane Isoto was caught teaching "certain Reverend Mothers" to "play and sing…

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[131] "A Marco Caorolini Tonador per insegnar alla Suor Emilia Lion et altre figlie a spese nel Monst del Spirito Santo per giorni quindeci." ASV, *Licentie dal 1643 sino 1651 dell'Ex Magistrato Sopra Monasteri,* Provveditori Sopra Monasteri, Atti, Pezzo: 312.

[132] Over the course of the 1640s Cavalli's annual stipend from San Marco increased from 140 to 190 ducats. Jane Glover, *Cavalli* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978), 19.

[133] Glover, 32 and 151.

[134] "Having no families or relatives of his own, Cavalli then bequeathed the majority of his possessions and real estate to the Monastery of S. Lorenzo… He appointed as his executors three of his friends… For four years these three men should share the profits yielded by two of his estates… After four years, these estates were then to be transferred to the patrician Cavalli family in recognition of the great favours and generosity he had always received from them. If the male line of the Cavalli family should not be continued, then the property was to be returned to S. Lorenzo as originally directed." Glover, 31.

without a license of any sort." [135] Less than a month later, Zuane Pichi, another organist, was caught teaching the mothers of Spirito Santo "to sing and play the organ and the viola, three on the viola, one on the violin and two on the organ."[136] The emphasis in these cases is placed on the absence of a license, which presumably would have made such activities licit and unproblematic. It is very likely that many outside teachers hired illicitly were never caught.

Despite differences in organization and scope, Venetian convents served many of the same social purposes for young women across social classes that boarding schools served for upper-class young men.[137] Like young men at boarding school, *educande* used their time in the convent to make long-term connections among themselves and with the nuns. Former *educande* often returned to visit on their wedding day, while betrothed *educande* often continued living in the convent, supposedly creating chaos by dressing as married women and allowing their future husbands to "visit them at the grated window."[138] Sometimes friendships formed in the convents inspired much larger breaches of convent rules: Sister Raphaela Balbi ran away from San

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[135] "In Illustrissimi signori Sopra li monestarii sechreta mente si fa saper ale vostre Signore Ilustrissime che aote 20 in Circha era Sarato Solo in giezia mS Zuane isoto organista dei frari t muzicho che in segnava asonar et achantar aquele Reverende madre et afrequentato molto tempo Avanti Senza lisentia di sorte alchuna." ASV, Provveditori Sopra Monasteri, Atti, Pezzo: 264.

[136] "...andava ad insegnar alle madre al spirito Santo li dm che cosi qlle andavi ad insegnar a cantar et a sonar di organ et di viola a tre di viola ad una di violin et a doi di organo ma una di esse numera anun Monaca li dm p(er) quanto tempo laver continuado di andarvi R cimonciai avanti una sagra che fu questo settembre solui il ven passati..." ASV, Provveditori Sopra Monasteri, Atti, Pezzo: 264.

[137] I disagree with Grendler's characterization of convent education: "First, an undetermined number of lay girls lived and studied as long-term boarders in Venetian female monasteries… The female monasteries were not boarding schools in either a Renaissance or a modern sense, because educating secular girls was not a convent's chief concern, and because each admitted only a handful of girls. Nevertheless, the female monasteries provided limited vernacular schooling to some wealthy Venetian girls." Grendler, *Schooling*, 44.

[138] Laven, *Virgins of Venice*, 121.

Bernardo di Murano in 1558 to be with her friend Laura, another young lady she had become close to while they were *educande* together. Various other friends from her time as an *educanda* assisted the nun in her escape.[139] A nun's education did not require complete isolation from society but rather brought more social interactions into the convent itself, shaping the experiences of professed nuns. Life as a student in the convent introduced many young women to lifelong friends with whom they could potentially share interests they developed during their education. It allowed them to connect with a community of other women.

Besides educande or novices, there were other women who sought to enter these all-female communities and could benefit from the atmosphere. In addition to nuns and students, convents housed a variety of other individuals for short-term stays, including servants, elderly women, and even married women who needed a temporary home. In 1685 a woman named Elena Dolfin, wife of Zaccaria Grimani was received by the nuns at Spirito Santo. She paid for herself and her servant Lucretia Carrava so they could stay for the next six months. She renewed this agreement multiple times, staying at least until 1690. Her daughters, Cornelia and Lucietta Grimani, also stayed at the monastery for approximately half the time their mother resided there, eventually leaving to marry. In 1690, Elena Dolfin requested to leave temporarily with her servant to "settle affairs with her husband."[140] It is not clear from the documents why Elena Dolfin was living in the convent instead of with her husband. However, it appears that she was able to utilize it as a home when she needed it and leave when she wished to attend to outside

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[139] Sperling, *Convents and the Body Politic*, 148 and 161.

[140] "che… possi uscir di Monasterio, con Lucretia Cavarra sua serva essendo di movata insin hora per aggiustar l'intervessi suoi con il Marito, et hora, che à stabilite le cose sue desidera far partenza di Monasterio, è perciò l'impolora la permissione…" Laura Capello, September 20, 1690, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 8.

affairs. In 1682, Leonardo Marini granted the abbess of Spirito Santo permission to accept another woman, Elena Padavina, wife of Dionisio de Rossi, in the convent for three years "in secular dress, although she is married."[141] He specified that he had reached this decision in light of a June 22 letter regarding Elena and because he had information about her good qualities.[142] The abbess was given permission on October 16, 1685 for Elena to remain in the convent "even though she is married for another five years and to wear secular clothing."[143] Margarita Mazzoleni entered Spirito Santo on June 24, 1688 and stayed for at least a year, with her fees paid by her husband, who was a doctor.[144]

It is not made entirely clear how the situation of these women differed from that of women like Giulia Malipiero, who was given permission to live in the convent as a student although she was over the age of twenty-five. The main differentiating factors appears to be that Elena Dolfin, Elena Padavina, and Margarita Mazzoleni were each married and were not assigned to a teacher during their stay. Perhaps it was assumed that married women were no

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[141] "In virtù d'lettere… de li 22 giugno… per parte della Signora Elena padavina, moglie… a per le informasioni che habbiamo della sue buone qualità, e conditioni concediamo licenza alla Ven. Madre Abbadessa del monastero delle monache dello Spirito Santo di questa Città, che possa ricevere la Sudetta Elena nel detto monastero, per starvi il caso di tre anni in habito di secolare, sebene è maritata…" Leonardo Marini, Licenza, June 23, 1682, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 8.

[142] Leonardo Marini, Licenza, June 23, 1682, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 8.

[143] "…per parte della Signora Elena Padavina... ch'al presente s'attrova nel Venerado Monasterio del Spirito Santo .... Concediamo Licenza alla Venerando Abbadessa del Monasterio… per altri anni cinque in habito da secolare, sebene è maritata…" ASV, Leonardo Marini, Licenza, October 16, 1685, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 8.

[144] ASV, *Libro Delle Figlie, Che Sono a Spese, et Educatione Nel Nosto Monastero Del Spirito Santo, 1688-1729*, San Sepolcro (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 37; ASV, *Libro Delle Figlie, Che Sono a Spese, et Educatione Nel Nosto Monastero Del Spirito Santo, 1654-1689*, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 28.

longer in need of a formal education if the purpose of the education was preparation for life as a nun or wife.

San Sepolcro may have made similar arrangements. Their records include a book of "seculars who are in our monestary," but it is not clear if this includes educande or only non-student boarders. Paulina Canal lived at San Sepolcro from July 1633 until September 1635, when she left the convent to become a nun at Santa Maria Maggiore. Lugrecia da Mosto stayed at San Sepolcro from February 1635 until January 1638 when records say she left with her husband.[145]

If convents were primarily focused on shutting away their students and teaching them to be good nuns, one would expect educande to remain inside the convent at all costs. Indeed, Venetian regulations theoretically required educande to observe cloister in the same manner as the nuns. Lorenzo Priuli discussed this in a letter to the abbesses of monasteries that accepted young women "for a healthy education in the Lord." He said that before entering for their education, the girls should be warned about the rules they would be expected to follow:

> The girls who are to enter the convent should first be warned that the enter the obligation to observe cloister like the nuns. They must not go to the grate without permission from a superior and must have the company of a nun; they are required to dress completely without silk or golden ornaments or jewelry, neither at the neck nor on the arm, or display riches... and in sum live with every modesty.[146]

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[145] ASV, *Libro Delle Secolari Sono Nel Nostro Monasterio Del Santissimo Sepolcro e Sono Discritto Se Contro Lordine Sono Venute Nel Monasterio,* San Sepolcro (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 37.

[146] "Saranno avvertite le figliuole, che saranno per entrar in Monasterio prima che entrino dell'obligo, che haveranno cioè d'osservare la clausura come le Monache, non andar alle Grade senza licentia della superiora, et con compagnia de monaca d'esse deputata vestir positivamente cio è senza seda nè ornamenti d'oro, nè di gioie, nè al collo, nè alla brazza, nè portino rizzi, nè si biondeggino, et portino di suoi bavari serrati d'avanti talmente che non si veggiano spettarate, et in somma vivino con ogni modestia." BMC, Lorenzo Priuli, "Ordini Per Le Figliuole a Spese," November 2, 1592, 125r, MS Cicogna 2583, Intorno Chiese e Clero Veneto.

Priuli's letter also highlights the permission required from the patriarch for the comings and goings of students in a convent:

> First, that the monasteries that usually receive girls to be educated may not receive them without our license in writing, and after having entered if they leave one time, they may not be received again, either in that monastery or another monastery, if not for the reason of becoming a nun, and with our license in writing. It will be very lawful in the house if a serious malady occurs to have recourse to us with judgement of the doctor and the superior of the monastery of the sickness that the girl has who wishes to leave. Once we understand the necessity, we will give her the license to leave to heal, and in this case she will be able then to return with our license in writing.

The entry of each new student required a license from the patriarch and many examples of these licenses remain in the records of Spirito Santo; some are handwritten while others are printed forms with blanks filled in by hand for the date, the student's name, and the convent named. If a student wished to leave the convent, it required another license, usually submitted by the abbess of the convent to the patriarch for his approval. The records of the convent of Spirito Santo contain an unusual amount of documentation of this process.

Many of the records do not specify whether the request was accepted or rejected, but sometimes this may be gleaned from other documents. In addition, the frequency of requests suggests that there was a reasonable likelihood of acceptance. Andriana, Emilia, and Elena Moro, daughters of Zuanne Moro, entered Spirito Santo in August 1703.[147] The Moro family continued funding the education of all three girls at the convent through July 1706. Emilia and Elena each made a request to leave "to resolve her vocation," in December 1705 and May 1706,

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[147] Andriana was either 9 or 12 when she entered the convent. Records conflict regarding her baptism. It is initially listed as March 30, 1694 in S. Paolo, but later licenses list June 6, 1691. Emilia was 11. ASV, *Libro Delle Figlie, Che Sono a Spese, et Educatione Nel Nosto Monastero Del Spirito Santo, 1688-1729*, San Sepolcro (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 37; ASV, Pietro Barbarigo, April 30, 1710, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 8; ASV, Pietro Barbarigo, August 27, 1708, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 8.

respectively.[148] It is not clear whether this was a break from convent life to determine a true vocation or simply to make preparations, but both sisters reentered the convent to pursue religious life. In January 1706, both Elena and Emilia asked to reenter the monastery after having left previously for an unclear reason and in April 1707, they submitted a joint request "that they may take the nun's habit and exit and enter the monastery for the usual three times before the ceremony, the day of which they may be accompanied by four or more servants…"[149] On January 23, 1707, Andriana also requested to leave the convent "to resolve her vocation."[150] One of her later requests, from August 21, asks that she be allowed "to exit and reenter three or four times as usual and as needed; and should be accompanied on the said occasions as well as on the day of the ceremony, but four of our servants or by more elderly sisters. She requests also a license that the two novices Sister Maria Elena, and Sister Giovanna Maria, the Moro sisters, may make their profession."[151]

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[148] "...per risolver la sua Vocazione," ASV, Laura Capella, May 2, 1706, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 8; ASV, Maria Teresa Venier, December 22, 1705, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 8.

[149] "...che possino prender l'Abito Monacale ed uscir et enrar in Monasterio per le solilte tre prove innanzi la fonzione, il giorno della quale, come pure nelle dette prove possino essere acompagnare da quattro o più sorelle converse scondo sarà il bisogno, di quelle pero più attempre solite ad uscir per l'urgenze della nostra Chiesa…. anco… che possino celebrar Messa nel predetto giorno della Fonzione, nella nostra chiesa Sacerdoti, si Secolari, come Regolari…" ASV, Laura Capello, April 29, 1707, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 8; ASV, Laura Capello, January 24, 1706, ASV: Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 8.

[150] "...per resolver la sua Vocatione." ASV, Maria Teresa Venier, January 23, 1707, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 8.

[151] "Andriana Moro Accettata Monaca nel nostro Mon; che possi prender l'Abito Monacale; uscire et rientrare per le tre o quattro Prove giusto il solito, e il bisogno; e possi esser a compagnata tanto nelle dette prove quanto nel giorno della Fontione, da quattro delle nostre Sorelle Converse della più attempate; e condere pure Licenza, che le doi Novizze Suor Maria Elena, e suor Giovanna Maria Sorelle Moror, possino far Professione, e nel giorno delle predatta Fonzione possino celebrare essa nella nostra Chiesa Sacerdoti si Regolari, come Secolari…" ASV, Maria Teresa Venier, August 21, 1708, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 8.

Pasqua and Teresa Anichini entered the convent in 1692, when Pasqua was 10 years old.[152] Pasqua remained a student for about five years and then pursued the religious life. She requested in October 1698 to leave the convent for "the usual recreation before taking the nun's habit."[153] She made another request in December 1698, after she was accepted to become a nun, to leave the convent and "remain outside for a month." The request specified that she had been granted a similar request before "but because of the absence of her cousin returned instead of finishing the usual two months conceded by the patriarchal command."[154] At the same time, the abbess asked that Pasqua be allowed to exit and re-enter two or three times before taking the habit.[155] Students also requested to leave for medical reasons. Cecilia Tattare asked permission to leave the monastery in February 1702 "for a change of air, and to be looked after and cured of her sickness by her parents."[156] Cecilia has no payment records after December 1702, so it appears that she did not return.[157]

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[152] ASV, *Libro Delle Figlie, Che Sono a Spese, et Educatione Nel Nosto Monastero Del Spirito Santo, 1688-1729*, San Sepolcro (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 37.

[153] "...la solita ricreatione innanzi di vestir l'Abito Monacale" ASV, Angelica Baffo, October 8, 1698, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 8.

[154] "per star fuori il corso d'' un mese… Innanzi di vestir l'Abito Monacale, essendo stat un'altra volta, come deve ricordarsi [illegible] Roma per la Licenza concessali, ma per la mancanza d'una sua congionta fecca dentro ritorno innanzi di terminar li mesi doi soliti concedersi giusto egl'ordeni Patriarchali; supplicandola concedermi anco in questo stesso foglio la permissione di poter de nobo si pagliarla terminata la predetta ricreatione, come pure, che possi uscire, e rientrare per le due o tre preve, che occurre perche prender l'Abita, che a suo tempopoi, si mandera a prender la Licenza per vestir l'Abito Monacale medesimo, che di gia si havrà il Mandato dal Magistrato Eccmo sopra Monasterii a nostro piacere, essendosi hormai fatta la presentatione della donne giusto le Darti." ASV, Angelina Baffo, December 30, 1698, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 8.

[155] ASV, Angelina Baffo, December 30, 1698, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 8.

[156] "...che possi uscir di Mon per mutar aria, et esser governata, e curata dalle sue Infermità, appresso la sua genitrice." ASV, Laura Capello, February 5, 1702, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 8.

[157] ASV, *Libro Delle Figlie, Che Sono a Spese, et Educatione Nel Nosto Monastero Del Spirito Santo, 1688-1729*, San Sepolcro (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 37.

Priuli's letter gives the impression that only very specific circumstances should merit a license to leave the monastery, such as preparation to become a nun or extreme sickness. In practice, girls did request to leave for these reasons but also for many others, some of which were surprisingly vague. Eight-year-old Elena Venier became an educanda in 1702, when her aunt was the abbess of Spirito Santo.[158] She remained a student for eight years before it was decided that she should become a nun. She requested a license to leave the monastery in May 1709 because she wanted "to see her father, Sebastian Venier, about certain matters."[159] She made further requests to exit and re-enter the convent on January 23, 1710 and September 23, 1710. The second time was simply to spend time with her parents.[160] Anna Maria Soderini became an educanda at Spirito Santo in January 1704 at the age of eleven or twelve and initially remained until April 1710. After a short break in payments (usually made every 3 to 6 months), her records resume in April 1711 and continue until December 1712, when Anna Maria would have been twenty years old.[161] She made a request to leave the convent in May 1709 to see her parents.[162] She also made a joint request with her aunt, Sister Maria Serafina, in February 1706 to "go eat lunch at the grate three days."[163] Giustina Vittieri entered the convent in August 1701

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[158] Elena was the daughter of Sebastian Venier. She was baptized in S.S. Apostoli on February 3, 1694. ASV, *Libro Delle Figlie, Che Sono a Spese, et Educatione Nel Nosto Monastero Del Spirito Santo, 1688-1729*, San Sepolcro (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 37.

[159] "...che si ritrova a spese nel nostro Mon, che poui uscire del medesimo, volendola l'Eccellentissimo Signor Sefasoian Venier suo Padre, per certi suoi interessi…" ASV, Teresa Venier, May 1, 1709, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 8.

[160] ASV, Teresa Venier, September 23, 1710, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 8.

[161] Anna Maria was the daughter of Pietro Soderini. She was baptized in S. Angelo on 20 July 1692. ASV, *Libro Delle Figlie, Che Sono a Spese, et Educatione Nel Nosto Monastero Del Spirito Santo, 1688-1729*, San Sepolcro (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 37.

[162] ASV, Teresa Venier, May 17, 1709, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 8.

[163] "...che possino andar a pransar alle Grate giorni tre..." ASV, Laura Capella, February 26, 1706, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 8.

when she was almost eleven. [164] She requested to leave in August 1706 "her parents wanting her."[165] She may have left and not returned, or her further payments records could be lost. Laura and Cecilia Giacomazzi made a similar request in July 1705, after a year and a half in the convent.[166] Laura's payment records disappear after January 1704, so she may have left the convent permanently. In May 1708, Cecilia requested to leave again because her parents wanted her.[167]

Flaminia, Bianca, and Maria Malipiero, daughters of Angelo Malipiero and Elena Padavino entered Spirito Santo in July 1706.[168] All three sisters made a request in February 1708 "to exit the convent because their parents want them for a few days because of certain matters."[169] Bianca and Maria together requested to leave on May 6, 1709 because their parents wanted them and Flaminia made a separate request twenty days later "for some honest

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[164] Giustina was the daughter of Marin Vittieri and Marieta. She was baptized on August 18, 1690 in San Cantian. A.SV, *Libro Delle Figlie, Che Sono a Spese, et Educatione Nel Nosto Monastero Del Spirito Santo, 1688-1729*, San Sepolcro (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 37.

[165] "…che puoi uscire, volendola li suoi Genitori." ASV, Laura Capella, August 2, 1706, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 8.

[166] ASV, Maria Teresa Venier, July 6, 1705, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 8; Laura and Cecilia were the daughters of Giovanni Francesco Giacomazzi and Cattarina Gingali. Laura was born on April 7, 1681 and baptized nine days later. Cecilia's records claim that she was born on the 20 August 1684, but date her baptism to March 6, 1684. ASV, *Libro Delle Figlie, Che Sono a Spese, et Educatione Nel Nosto Monastero Del Spirito Santo, 1688-1729*, San Sepolcro (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 37.

[167] ASV, Maria Teresa Venier, May 13, 1708, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 8.

[168] All three girls were baptized at home because of imminent danger then later at S. Geminiano. Flaminia was born on November 23, 1691 and had her baptism ceremony on March 5, 1692. Bianca's payment record lists May 7, 1694 as her baptism date but her license to become a novice says August 6, 1696. According to her payment records, Maria Angela was born on August 8, 1695 and baptized in the church on the 23rd, but multiple licenses list August 8 as her baptism date. ASV, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 8.

[169] "...conceder Licenza… che possino uscir di Monasterio volendole li loro Genitori, per alquanti giorni per certi interessi…" ASV, Maria Teresa Venier, February 5, 1708, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 8.

amusement before she takes the habit."[170] All three sisters entered the religious life. Bianca, now known as Regina, requested and was granted a license in April 1712 to "leave the cloister… every morning for eight days, and every evening re-enter, because her most excellent parents want to give her every day some honest amusement not having had any since she became a nun."[171]

Cecilia Gradenigo, one of the students who entered under the age of 7, requested permission to travel with her parents. She entered the convent as a student in 1692.[172] In May 1693 she requested to leave because her parents wanted to take her to Padua "to visit the saint."[173] The request was likely granted because she made another request in June 1693 to re-enter the convent.[174] In June 1694 she and her sister Andriana asked to leave, "because their most excellent mother desires to have them to take them to Badoria to the saint."[175] Lucretia Bragadin, daughter of Nicolo Bragadin, became an educanda in September 1690, when she was 23. Her cousin, Isabetta Querini, is specified as her teacher or mistress. She asked for permission to leave

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[170] "Flaminia Malipiero, Accettate per Monaca nel nostro Mon; che possi uscir di Monasterio, per prendersi qualche onesta Ricreatione, innanzi di vestir l'Abito…" ASV, Maria Teresa Venier, May 26, 1709, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 8.

[171] "...l'egresso di Clausura… Accettat per Monaca nel nostro Mon. ogni mattina per lo spatio di giorni otto, e darli ogni giorno sera l'ingresso, cosi desiderando li Eccellentissimi suoi Genitori per darli ogni giorno qualche onesta ricreatione non havendone più havuto doppo l'essersi Accettata…" ASV, Maria Gioconila Delfino, April 10, 1712, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 8.

[172] Her parents were Pietro Gradenigo and Paulina. ASV, *Libro Delle Figlie, Che Sono a Spese, et Educatione Nel Nosto Monastero Del Spirito Santo, 1688-1729*, San Sepolcro (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 37.

[173] "per visitare il Santo" ASV, Maria Vittoria Lustinan, May 23, 1693, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 8.

[174] ASV, Maria Vittoria Lustinan, June 8, 1693, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 8.

[175] "...che possi uscir di Monasterio desderando l'Eccma sue Madre haverle per condurle a Badoria al santo." ASV, Laura Capello, June 17, 1694, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 8.

and see her sister take vows on June 31, 1691: "that she may leave the convent for a day, only so she can be present at the capuchin clothing ceremony of her sister, maiden Giustina Bragadin."[176]

The above examples indicate that there was a significant, formal process for even students to leave the convent for a short time, but going through the process was fruitful for many of the students. In addition, evidence suggests that within the convent walls rules were not always followed so closely. This is clear in the example of hiring instructors without permission as well as the many examples that other scholars have higlighted of women who spent their time in the convent socializing in the parlor rather than attending to their official duties. Like many schools for boys, convent education provided a type of social preparation that would be helpful for girls who remained and became nuns as well as those who ultimately left the convent.

Convent life required the participation of all residents to support the convent practically and financially. Tridentine enclosure provisions came with a related emphasis on monastic self-sufficiency, as authorities hoped convents would be able to provide for most of their own needs.[177] Nuns in Venetian convents engaged in a wide variety of business schemes and other activities to earn money for their order. Nuns often earned money for the convent by leasing property and selling goods, endeavors which also connected the convent to broader Venetian society. Each convent's chapter, or group of nuns who made important decisions about the convent, was responsible for overseeing general convent finances by tracking payments and making investments. Many convents invested in property and therefore owned many "immobile

[176] "...che possi uscir di Monasterio per un giorno, tanto solo che sia presente, alla Fontione del Vestir Capuccina la N Dongella Giustina Bragachin sua Sorella." ASV, Laura Capello, June 31, 1691, Spirito Santo (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 8.

[177] Sharon T. Strocchia, "The Nun Apothecaries of Renaissance Florence: Marketing Medicine in the Convent," *Renaissance Studies* 25, no. 5 (n.d.): 627–47.

assets" such as agricultural land or city buildings that were rented for use as businesses or dwellings. Documents relevant to leasing and caring for these assets constitute the bulk of the convent manuscripts held in the Archivio di Stato. Convents also made loans, both to guilds and to individual citizens.[178]

Some convents made money by producing and selling goods. In 1553 the nuns from the convent of Le Convertite in Giudecca beseeched the Venetian government because their current spinning was not earning enough money for their needs. They were given permission to contract with two guildsmen from the cloth guild to sell their thread.[179] Lace making was a common trade among nuns in Venice, emphasized more in specific convents. Arcangela Tarabotti and her fellow nuns in Sant'Anna produced Venetian lace, known throughout Europe for its delicacy and complexity. Among their clientele was Signora Renata di Claramonte, who collected lace. She connected Tarabotti to her secretary, whom Tarabotti hoped would help publish her works in France. At one point Tarabotti asked for more money for some lacework that was more difficult and required more expensive material than expected:

> …of the women who took on the job, some became ill and some left the convent. I had to look outside and the *maestre* did not wish to respect the price established by your Excellency. At my own expense I had to purchase the rest at twenty lire an ounce from the Venice agent… If your Excellency would like to have the collar you refer to, give the order to the Signors Lumaga or others to count out the money…[180]

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[178] Laven, *Virgins of Venice*, 54.

[179] "L'anderà Parte, che per dichiaratione della concessione fatta altre fialle alle predette Donne sia preso che possino nel Monastero loro essercitar l'Aster del Filatorio con quell'autorità, dar è essercitata di due Maestri di due Boteghe di essa Arte iuxta l'arricando delli Proveditori di Comun antedetti." BMC, *Monache II*, 278v.

[180] Translated in Arcangela Tarabotti, *Letters Familiar and Formal*, ed. and trans. Meredith K. Ray and Lynn Lara Westwater, The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: The Toronto Series 20 (Toronto: Iter Inc. and Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2012), 199.

This example demonstrates that while Tarabotti and her client conversed in friendly terms, serious and sometimes complicated business dealings occurred in the background of the convent's lace business

Nuns in other cities, such as Florence, worked as apothecaries, selling their products to pupils, boarders, and local women who saw the pharmacy as a site of sociability.[181] It is not yet clear if this was also the case in Venice. In 1610 pharmacies were specifically banned in convents, which suggests that some convent pharmacies existed beforehand.[182] In addition, I have found traces of evidence that Venetian convents may have at least sold spices. For example, an undated convent map found in a collection of letters from Santi Marco e Andrea includes a "Bottega da Spicier."[183] If convents ran pharmacies, it would signify a high level of medical literacy among nuns and possibly their students. In all of these examples, the need to raise money to support the convent required significant interaction with the outside world, sometimes overlapping with friendships and intellectual connections, indicating problems with the idea of an entirely private convent world.

Educating young women was also a strategy used by convents to support themselves financially that required nuns to navigate the worlds of finance and law. Each convent kept detailed expense sheets recording required payments for each *educanda* in six-month intervals, tracking any temporary absences from the convent, and often specifying the reason for the student's final departure. A 1592 order by Lorenzo Priuli specified that convents could not accept educande unless they could afford to provide the necessary materials, through charging

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[181] Strocchia, "Nun Apothecaries."
[182] Gino Meneghini, *La Farmacia Attraverso i Secoli e Gli Speziali Di Venezia e Padova* (Padova: Istituto Veneto di Arti Grafiche, 1946).
[183] ASV, SS. Marco e Andrea di Murano (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 4.

them or through other means: “The nuns may not accept girls to educate if they have not enough for said expenses and governing. The monastery can receive some pay to reimburse the inconvenience of raising these daughters. This license comes principally granted to the poor monasteries for their help and charity.”[184] Sister Laura Celega, abbess of Santi Marco e Andrea, was often in the position of tracking down men who had not properly paid for their daughters’ education, sending them letters that walked the fine line between demanding the money owed and trying not to offend a customer. She wrote several letters to Marco Molino over seven months. After apologizing for bothering him, she reminded him his own “blood” was at the convent and needed “many necessary things for her own use, other than the said money which pays for her expenses.”[185] She also pointed out that the monastery had debts and with his payment she could “save myself from the oppression in which I find myself, giving satisfaction to those who should have it from the monastery…”[186] In some cases, daughters who were nuns or students inspired other types of donations to the convent. The will of Marietta Suchietti left

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[184] "Le Monache non possono accettar figliuole a spese, se non haveranno tanto per dette spese, et governo, che il Monasterio ne possa ricever qualche commodo per ricompenso dell’incommodità, che hanno nell’allevare esse figliuole poiche anco questa licentia viene principalmente concessa alli Monasterii poveri per loro aiuto e sovegno." BMC, Priuli, “Ordini Per Le Figliuole a Spese,” 126v.

[185] "...et pur anco in questo si spende qualche ducato all’anno pertanto VS Illma come prudente si compiacci considerare, che anco qui hà il suo sangue, et che hà bisogno di molte cose necessarie per proprio uso, oltre il sudetto danaro, che paga per le sue spese, il quale io in tanto aspetto con ogni celerità tenendone di esso come hò detto gradissimo bisogno..." ASV, Copie Di Letter Per Conto Del Monasterio Di San Marco, et Sant’Andrea Di Murano, SS. Marco e Andrea di Murano (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 4, No. 30.

[186] "...et pare il Sr Iddio sa il bisogno che ne tengo per pagar li debiti che s’attrova il monasterio nostro per tanto la prego, et suppalo con ogni affetto possibile à mandarmi quanto mi deve che sono D 60, che oltre sodisferà il suo obbligo sarà causa, ch’io mi solvarò dall oppressione nella quale m’attrovo, dando sodisfatione a quelli che devono haver dal monast^o da quali vengo del continuo ricercata, et è il dovere..." ASV, Copie Di Letter Per Conto Del Monasterio Di San Marco, et Sant’Andrea Di Murano, SS. Marco e Andrea di Murano (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 4, No. 30.

money to the convent of Santa Maria Maggiore, where two of her daughters were nuns: "The other two thousand ducats I leave to Sister Maria Chiamante and Sister Maria Celestina, my beloved daughters who are nuns in the said monastery of Santa Maria Maggiore, with the obligation of celebrating for me three hundred masses for my soul in that church which would provide a gift of great satisfaction."[187]

By accepting boarders from families that could not afford other options, such as private tutoring, convent education filled a void in women's education in Venice. Despite the strict rules meant to govern both convents and their students, most educande could visit home when necessary and likely interacted regularly with other students, the nuns, and the other women who boarded at convents for various reasons. Convents also interacted regularly with the outside world in attempts to earn money and hire accomplished teachers. They ultimately provided social and vocational training that was particularly appropriate for girls who would become nuns, but also for those who would leave the convent to marry.

Virtue, Rhetoric, and Creativity

Maria Celeste Donato, abbess of the monastery of San Giacomo in Murano, published a book aimed at helping novices prepare for their profession. The language she used to describe the experience of spiritual growth in a convent is similar to that used by Piccolomini to describe the ideal teacher:

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[187] "Gl'altri ducati due mile lascio à Suor Maria Chiamante e Suor Maria Celestina mie amate Figliole Monache nel sudetto Monastero di Santa Maria Maggior con obligo di farmi celebrare trecento messe per l'anima mia in quelle Chiese che saranno di sua Maggior sodisfatione e di dare." ASV, Marietta Suchietti, Testamento Di Marietta Suchietti, December 1, 1705, S. Maria Maggiore (Venezia), Atti, Pezzo: 29.

> …we are obligated to watch over ourselves in order to kill all evil tendencies, and to have an invincible spirit in difficulty, losing no spirit; for we must always cultivate our spirit well in order to eradicate the bad plants that are continually swarming our nature.[188]

Like Piccolomini and many other pedagogues of the time, Donato compared the spirit of a young person to a garden that must be properly cultivated. In this selection, she encouraged the novice to take care to cultivate her own spirit, but at other points Donato paid closer attention to the relationship between novices and the nuns who taught them. Students, novices, and nuns were all expected to make spiritual progress in the convent, whether their stay was temporary or permanent. Their study of virtue was intertwined with regular reading and writing exercises and even theater, an activity that could develop rhetorical skills while providing a creative outlet.

The humanist emphasis on selecting an appropriate teacher is also present in convent schools, where professed nuns could be chosen as *maestra* of the students or of the novices. Like many convents, San Giacomo had a *maestra di novizze* or mistress of novices who oversaw the aspiring nuns. Donato's work exhorted the nuns to learn as much as possible from the mistress. "Attend to the mistress," she wrote "to learn by exercising so that in time you can advance."[189] Donato focuses on the instruction of novices, but evidence suggests that their activities were the next step after the training that was supposed to be provided to educande. Lorenzo Priuli's instructions specified that educande should also be assigned to specific nuns whose job it was to teach them:

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[188] "... ondeo siamo obligate, a vegliare sopra di noi, a fine di far morire tutte le male propensioni, ed'havere un'animo invincibile nelle difficoltà, nulla perdendoci d'aimo; perche sempre habbiamo da coltivare bene il nostro spirito, per ifradicare le pessime piante, che la nostra nature continuamente fa pullulare." Maria Celeste Donato, *Direttorio per Il Novitiato Delle Spose Di Giesu Crocefisso* (Venice: Gian Giacomo Hertz, 1684), 11.

[189] "Attenderà la Maestra, d'insinuare all'esercitanti, che nel, tempo, che può avanzare, procurino essercitarsi in oration giaculatorie verso Deo, e la B. Vergine, e nella visita del Santissimo Sagramento, con osservare…" Donato, 61.

> They are assigned to one or more common mistresses according to the number of girls who need to be taught to read well, both devotional books and principally the book of Christian Doctrine, and let them memorize it. They should be in one or more common rooms separated from the nuns where they sleep, eat, work, and do their exercises, not being able in any way to be in the cells with the nuns.[190]

Priuli's instructions reveal an interesting concern with the exact ammount of intereaction that should theoretically take place between nuns and students. Writings by Venetian patriarchs often include rules about where convent students could sleep and work. Many make it clear that a particular nun or nuns would serve as *maestre* responsible for supervising the students, ensuring that they observed periods of silence and often sleeping in the same room. But the nuns not assigned to look over the students were a different matter. At least one patriarchal visit mentions that the educande should spend their time in a separate room "completing other exercises with one *maestra* or more assigned by the prioress."[191] This was probably not to protect the educande, but to shield the professed nuns from distractions and wordly temptations.

Priuli's comments also demonstrate that reading was considered a basic skill for educande to study and master. Many patriarchal records assume literacy among the nuns by requiring that the patriarch's orders should be read once a week, "not leaving out the reading of the Rule and old Constitution each week, as it is convenient."[192] Donato's work also provides a glimpse into the role played by books and writing within the convent, revealing much about the

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[190] "Sia loro assegnato una ò più maestre communi secondo la quantità delle figliuole, le quali debbano insegnarli a legger buoni, et devoti Libri, et principalmente il Libro della Dottrina Cristiana, e farglielo imparar á mente, et stiano in una stanza ò più communi separate dalla Monache dove dormino, mangino, lavorino, et facciano li loro esercitii, non potendo in alcun modo star nelle Celle con le Monache, non vadino vagando in Monasterio sole, ma si bene possino andare in compagnia, et con la licentia della Reverenda Superiora." BMC, Priuli, "Ordini Per Le Figliuole a Spese," 126v.

[191] APV, *Visite Pastorali a Monasteri Femminili*, Pezzo: 3.

[192] APV, *Visite Pastorali a Monasteri Femminili*, Pezzo: 3.

lifestyle educande were meant to imitate. Her work shows that reading and writing in the vernacular were common, and even quite important, activities in the convent. She does not mention any study of Latin, which was also not studied by lower or middle-class boys. Her book of advice is peppered with references to *Sacra Sposa* (Holy Spouse), recommending that the novices read certain sections or refer to it for prayers. At one point she wrote that they should use it to understand the mass and the spiritual exercises: "The first part of the book called the *Sacra Sposa* treats broadly the practice of hearing the Holy Mass, and of taking spiritual communion, along with all other work that each day can make you a bride of Christ. I advise you to try it yourself along with the second part, which describes the practice of making the spiritual exercises."[193] At another point she told the novices to read about holy communion in the first part of *Sacra Sposa*, and then "if you desire prayers there are many in various books, and you can with those serve your talent."[194]

The fact that Donato recommended the *Sacra Sposa* along with various other unspecified books suggests that the convent had a variety of spiritual works to choose from. She also suggested a wider breadth of reading in her later section of advice on preparing to enter the convent permanently:

> One should at least read attentively, and with affection, the papers listed below, trying to really understand the point proposed. It will benefit you to repeat the same meditations a few times in order to understand them better and with greater spiritual fruit. For spiritual reading, any devotional book will do, such as something by St. Francis di Sales, but especially the introduction to the spiritual life, la Filagia of Father Paul of Bari, Thomas à Kempis, Father Rodriguez, and other similar works. But above all one should read the rule and statutes of the monastery, not scanning quickly but with attention. She who

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[193] "Nella primae parte del libro intitolato la Sacra sposa, si tratta diffusamente la pratica d'ascoltare la S. Messa, e di fare la Communione spirituale con ogni altra opera, che può fare giornalmente una sposa di Christo e vi consiglio, di procurarvelo con la seconda parte, che dà la pratica di fare gli esercitii spirituali." Donato, *Direttorio per Il Novitiato*, 20–21.

[194] Donato, 31–32.

> wishes to draw use from it should consider within herself each step she reads in order to examine as a practice in herself the virtue taught by the book she reads."[195]

This passage is notable for both the breadth and style of reading suggested. Donato's book also includes sections on St. Augustine, St. John the Baptist, and Mary Magdalene, which encourage the idea that spirituality and intellectual gain were typically intertwined in the convent. She also wrote that "the mistress will remember to let you read the rule at some point every day and one chapter of the constitution, and, moreover, some spiritual book so you can learn as much as possible."[196]

Of course the convents were not given entirely free rein. The available books were, at least in theory, carefully monitored:

> And above all is prohibited the reading of vain books, and therefore the Superior should be diligent, that they are not found in the monastery, so that the spirit will not be infected by the poision of taking delight in vain reading. Instead, books are of spiritual sisters, and directed to the love of Jesus Christ their spouse, in which inflaming them increasingly each day, become completely detached from worldly emotions, and if any Sister is charge with having curious and vain books, she is mortified and punished by the Superior with severity for the example of the others.[197]

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[195] "Dovrà almeno leggere attentamente, e con affetto le pratiche scritte di sotto, procurando di penetrare bene il punto che si propone, al che gioverà ripetere alcune volte le stessa meditatione, per poterla capire meglio, e con frutto maggiore dell'anima. Per lettione Spiritule si potrà servire d'alcun libro divoto, come farebbe alcuno di San Francesco di Sales, a massimamente l'introduttione alla vita Spirituale: la Filagia del Padre Paolo da Barri; Tomaso da Kempis: Il Padre Rodriguez, & altri simili: ma sopra tutto sì deve leggere la Regola, e statute del Monasterio non scorrendo in fretta, ma con application, dovendo chi pretende cavarne utile, considerare trà se ogni passo, che legge, per esaminare, come pratica in se quella virtù ch'insegna il libro, che legge." Donato, 61–62.

[196] "La Maestra si ricordi, di farvi leggere ogni giorno qualche punto della Regola, & un Capitolo delle Constitutioni, e di più qualche libro spirituale, con procurare di darvi tutte lo cognitioni possibili." Donato, 23–24.

[197] "E sopra tutto sia proibito il leggere libri vani, e perciò faccia diligenza la Superiora, che non se ne ritrovino in Monastero, affinchè dal veleno, che si prende dal diletto in quella lettura, non restasse infetta l'anima; ma siano i libri delle Suore Spirituali, e diretti all'amore di Gesù Cristo loro Sposo, nel quale infiamandosi vieppiù alla giornata, si stacchino totalmente dalli afffetti mondani, e se alcuna Suora s'ingegnasse di tener libri curiosi, e vani, sia mortificata, e punita dalla Superiora con severità per esempio delle altre." Marc' Antonio Martinengo,

Patriarchs also included the explicit order that convents could not have "printed or handwritten books that were not first seen and approved" or "tracts… that are less than honest and could affect the honor of the convent."[198] Many also specified that convents were required to compile a list of the books held individually or jointly in the convent to make sure they were all approved.[199] This is not just an example of religious authorities trying to control the reading and knowledge of women. Rather, it illustrates that reading of any kind had an impact on the spirit.

The rule of St. Augustine approved by the bishop of Torcello in 1648 for the nuns of Santa Maria della Grazie in Burano mentioned the practice of listening to a reading during meals: "When you go to the dining room, until you rise from the table, you will remain attentive and listen to that which will be read to you according to custom and the order, without any contention or riot, so that you not only taste food but also your ears remain hungry with desire for the word of God."[200] The constitution stipulated that twice a week during Advent and every Friday for the rest of the year, with the exception of solemnities, meals should be accompanied by reading "something about the passion, as also during Advent twice a week" as well as "the

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Regola Dell'Egregio Sommo Dottore Sant'Agostino E Constituzieri, Le Quali Devono Osservar Le Monache Del Monastero Di S. Maria Delle Grazie Di Burano. (Antonio Zatta, 1758), 21–22.

[198] "Prohibemo sotto pena d'escommunica che non si leggano ne tengano nel Monasterio libri stampati, o scritti a mano, che non siano stati prima visit et approbati con sottoscrittione di nostro ordine... che non si raggioni, ò tratti per se, overo con messi, et tettere cosa che sia meno che honesta, et possa pregiudicare all'honor dell Monasterio." APV, *Visite Pastorali a Monasteri Femminili*, Pezzo: 1.

[199] APV, *Visite Pastorali a Monasteri Femminili*, Pezzo: 1.

[200] "Quando voi andate alla mensa infino, che vi levate dalla tavola, quell'ch' a voi sarà letto, secondo la consuetudine, e l'ordine, senza nessuna contenzione, o tumulto, starete attente ad ascoltare, acciò non solo il gusto riceva il cibo, ma anco l'orecchie restino fameliche al desiderare la parola di Dio." Martinengo, *Regola Di St. Augustino*, 4.

Rule of St. Augustine."[201] On Wednesdays and Saturdays they should read the constitution, and on "all the other days should be read some spiritual book, so that the mind is lifted to acquire and perfect the spiritual life."[202] The rule also specified that nuns would be placed in charge of cells, vestments, and books and that they should "serve the other sisters without any grumblings."[203] Other nuns could request books "each day at a certain ordained hour" and should receive them, but "if they are requested outside that hour, they will not receive the books."[204] Furthermore, the rule required that young women know how to read in order to become nuns.[205] This is in contrast to the *converse*, who were servants in the convent, for whom the skill was less crucial: "It is declared in the said chapter, that those who do not know how to read can be servants to the nuns because girls who do not know how to read should not receive the habit."[206] When describing the

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[201] "Tutti li Venerdì dell'anno eccetto nelle Solennità ad imitazione de' primi Padri della Religione, e dell'umiltà del Nostro Signor Gesù Cristo; si mangi in terra sopra le stojette, leggendo a mensa qualche cosa della Passione, come anco nell'Avvento due volte la settimana, feria seconda quarta, e festa, e per tutto l'anno la feria festa; può però la superiora ad arbitrio ordinarla più, e meno, come ne' gran caldi, e freddi, & in alcune solennità... Il Mercordì, e il Sabato deve eleggersi ancora le Constituzioni, il Venerdì la Regola di S. Agostino, quanto pare alla Superiora, e in tutti gl'altri giorni, deve leggersi qualche libro spirituale, acciò la mente stia sollevata per l'acquisto, e perfezione della vita spirituale." Martinengo, 26.

[202] Martinengo, 26.

[203] "Quelle sorelle le quali saranno poste sopra il Cellario, Vestiaria, e libri, senza mormorazione alcuna servino alle altre sorelle, e li libri si possino addimandare ogni giorno ad una certa, e ordinata ora a ciò deputata, ma fuori della detta ora se saranno addimandati, non li siano dati." Martinengo, 7.

[204] Martinengo, 7.

[205] "Non si ricevino fanciulle, per essere Suore velate, che non sappino leggere bene, o almeno con tale disposizione, che nell'anno della probazione, siano per farsi pratiche, nel recitare l'Offizio divino, e se la Superiora permettesse altrimente, incorra nella privazione del suo offizio..." Martinengo, 14.

[206] "Si dichiara nel detto Capitolo, che per quelle, che non sanno leggere s'intendino le sorelle Converse, perché l'altre non si devono ricevere all'abito se non sanno leggere bene, e quando al signore piacerà di levar qualcuna, per tirarla all'altra vita, oltre a quanto si comanda in detto terzo Capitolo, siano tutte obbligate a offerire a Dio per quell'anima tutto il bene..." Martinengo, 25.

daily prayers of these women, the rule included the stipulation that "those who know how to read should also recite the Office of the Blessed Mother, and those who do not know how to read should instead say one time the Crown of the Blessed Virgin."[207]

Chapter seven of the Augustinian rule focused entirely on novices and their instruction, stipulating that the mistress of novices should be "diligent in instructing them in everything that pertains to religous life."[208] Of course this involved good behavior, so when a nun made a mistake, it said, the mistress "corrects her discreetly and with charity."[209] But it also involved reading and memorization:

> It will be the office of the mistress to instruct the novices in the observance of the rule and constitution and to make them read these often and examine well the importance of each chapter, and of those in particular which contain the solemn vows and other things essential to the life of the professed religious, teaching them how they should be humble, modest, and reverent to all, and especially to the superior... otherwise the mistress will teach those novices to read who have the need, and also accustom them to ordering and reciting well and clearly the Divine Office, and to make mental and vocal prayers...[210]

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[207] "E perché anco esse sono entrate nel Monastero per servire a Dio, ed essere sue Spose, perciò con particolare ossequio doveranno ancor esse riconoscerlo conesercizi quotidiani, onde in cambio dell'offizio Divino, per il Matutino diranno venticinque Pater noster, ed altretante (p. 24) Ave Maria... e per ciascheduna ora fette Pater noster, e sette Ave Maria, dovendo aggiungere il Credo al Matutino, e alle Compieta, quelle che sapranno leggere siano tenute a recitare l'Offizio della Madonna, e quelle, che non sapranno leggere, diranno in vece di quello, una volta la Corona della B. Vergine." Martinengo, 23–24.

[208] "Vestita che sarà si consegni subito dalla Madre Superiora alla cura della Maestra delle Novize, la quale sia diligente instruirla in tutto ciò, che'apartiene alla Religione, e quando commetta qualche errore, la correga discrettamente, e con carità, procuri che si proveda alle Novize di tutte le cose necessarie nel miglior modo, che sia possibile." Martinengo, 15.

[209] Martinengo, 15.

[210] "Sarà officio della maestra di istruire le Novize nel osservanza della Regola, e Constitutioni con farle leggere da quelle spesso, ed esaminar benne l'importanza di ciaschuno Capitolo, e di quelli in particolare, ne queli si contengono li Voti solenni, e l'altre cose essenziali dello stato Regolare, insegnandoli come devono esser umili, modeste, e riverenti a tutte, e in specie alla Superiora: Come debba esser il portamento della vita come devono tenere gl'occhi bassi, il modo d'inchinarsi a fare le genuflessioni, egli diano regola aggiustata per ogni loro azzioni, e sopra tutto insitino ad imprimere nelle loro mento l'annegazione del proprio volere, e la sommissione alla volontà de'Superiori, li quali due capi sono il fondamento della mortificazione religiosa, la quale conduce all'acquisto della virtù; Non condurà la Maestra le

Donato also mentioned writing activities. After giving thanks at the end of a meal, she advised novices to go to the chapel to say some prayers and make an examination of conscience. Then, "if you find you have failed in something, make an act of contrition and place in a booklet made for this reason many lines including how many times you have fallen. Confide in your diary again before going to bed and when you wake up in the morning."[211] The rule printed for the Augustinian nuns of Santa Maria della Grazie in Burano also assumed that the nuns would write regularly:

> It is ordered for the greater observance of the vow of poverty, that the cells are poor without any adornment. The walls should be bare and if there is a picture, it is with a plain, black frame... Footstools and chairs of walnut are completely forbidden. All that is allowed is a footstool, two chairs of white wood finished with straw, a simple writing desk to write with their pen and ink, and a tin bucket for holy water.[212]

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sue Novize a dire la colpa in Capitolo, ma le essorterà a questo atto tra di loro, assuefacendole alle penitenze, che da lei saranno loro assegnate, e anco alle penitenze spontanee, quali domanderanno in segno di desidero loro di arrivare alla perfezione. In oltre la Maestra insegnerà leggere quelle Novize, che n'averanno bisogno, a ancora le assurfarà ad ordinar, e recitar bene, e distintamente l'Officio Divino, a far orazione mentale, e vocale, a confessarsi bene, e spesso, a preparasi per la Santa Communione, e nell'ingresso della Religione, l'essortarà a far la Confessione general, quando ve ne sia di bisogno, e le instruirà con diligenza nella Dottrina Cristiana, in maniera che tutte la sappino a mente..." Martinengo, 15.

[211] "Finito il ringratiamento della Tavola v'inviarete alla Chiesa con dire il Te Deum laudamus, &c. Farete l'esame della conscienza, e se trovarete d'essere cascata in qualche cosa, (p.23), farete un'atto di contritione, e tirarete in un libretto fatto a quest'effetto tante linee, quante volte ne fete caduta, per conferirle poi la fera avanti d'andare a letto, e di nuovo farete il proponimento della mattina." Donato, *Direttorio per Il Novitiato*, 22–23.

[212] "Si ordina per maggior osservanza del voto della Povertà, che le celle siano povere senz'adornamento alcuno; le muraglie nude, e se vi è qualche qudro, sia con cornice negre, e schiette, lettiere di niuna forte, ma solo due cavaletti alti una quarta, e messa, con due tavole, che vi stia una sol persona, scabelli, e carieghe di noce siano del tutto proibiti, solo sia concesso un scabello, e due carieghe di legname albeo finite di paglia, & un semplice scrittorio per scrivere con li suoi fornimenti, & un sechietto di latta per l'acque Santa." Martinengo, *Regola Di St. Augustino*, 26.

In addition to clarifying the simple nature of the nun's cells – something that was not carried out in all Venetian convents – this passage indicates that letter writing was a routine activity for nuns.

Moral training in convents was not only associated with the stereotypically "private" religious life but was often presented in conjunction with more public activities, such as theater. Although some scholars discouraged the study of rhetoric among women, convents provided exercises that mirror its recommendations to an astonishing degree. Guarino championed the "art of speaking" as a subject that would enable a student to understand many other things:

> By now, I think, it is perfectly clear that anyone trained in the aforesaid studies is ready to pass on to the discipline of rhetoric. Once he has acquired the art of speaking, not only will he understand the speeches of Cicero, but because of the variety of things he has learned already, he will now also possess a rich vocabulary and a highly wrought artistic style.[213]

One of the easiest ways to practice the "art of speaking" according to Guarino, was to read aloud:

> Reading out loud is of no small benefit to the understanding, since of course what sounds like a voice from outside makes our ears spur the mind sharply to attention. It even helps our digestion somewhat, or so authorities on the secrets of nature and medicine claim.[214]

Other pedagogues emphasized the importance of cultivating a good memory. Piccolomini argued the following:

> A good memory is a sign of intelligence in children, and such a memory has threefold virtues: it perceives effortlessly, it retains faithfully, and it imitates with ease. Something must be committed to memory daily, whether verses or important maxims from illustrious authors. For memory is called the storeroom of knowledge and learning, and in the fables it is called the mother of the Muses because it begets and nourishes.[215]

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[213] Guarino, "Program," 148.
[214] Guarino, 151.
[215] Piccolomini, "The Education of Boys," 91.

Educande and nuns emphasized both values during their frequent informal performances, which were an integral aspect of life in the convent. Although some pedagogues claimed rhetoric was inappropriate for women, convent performances provided Venetian women an opportunity to study it. Educande would sometimes write and memorize poetry that they could later recite for nuns and fellow students.[216]

In addition, there are several eighteenth-century century collections of poems written on the occasion of specific young women becoming nuns. One I found in Venice, written when Signora Marina Licini joined Santo Spirito, includes a short poem by an educanda. In this case, the poem focuses on strictly religious themes, beginning with the following stanza:

> Among these solitary recesses, shelter and nest,
> Of virtue that is ornamented by a pure soul,
> For [you] to be like the Angels, and
> To mock the treacherous world, come away even safer[217]

The existence of this poetry provides further evidence that students were encouraged to display their accomplishments while studying at the convent. It also reinforces the fact that many of the students were literate enough to produce poetry. In addition to these idealized depictions of convent life that may have been chosen for public performances, some nuns may have produced less encouraging poetry, more in line with the depictions of Arcangela Tarabotti. The Biblioteca

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[216] I also found two anonymous poems about the experience of being forced to enter a convent.

[217] "Fra questi ermi recessi, asilo e nido / Di virtù ch'ornamento è d' alma pura, / Per somigliarti agli Angeli, e l'infido / Mondo schernir, vientene pur sicure // Torna intatta Colomba, e schiva il lido / Limaccioso in cui sol trova pastura / Immonda il fozzo corvo, e reca il fido / Segno di pace che tra noi sol dura. // Vieni amabile mia diletta Amica, / Vieni, onde in te ricrei, Sorella, il ciglio, / Dall'erta falda del Libano aprica. / E chi fa, che un tuo lume un tuo consiglio / Ciò ch' or non posso esprimere a fatica… / Basta, in Ciel v' è pietà pel nostro esiglio." BNM, Margherita Albertis, *Gratulatio Coram Serenissimo Principe et Excellentissimo Collegio in Solemni Inauguratione Mariae Dianai Grimanae* (Venice, 1771).

del Museo Correr contains two undated compositions entitled "Lamento di bella Giovane fatta Monacha per forza" and "Sentimento della Monacha Forzata."[218]

Convent performance was not limited to private recitations in front of other nuns and the occasional visitor, or to religious poetry on the occasion of a solemn event; they also prepared more spectacular performances that resembled secular theater. We do not know exactly where the nuns performed. It was common for convents to pay to have temporary stages, known as *palchi,* built in their churches for professional musicians on special occasions, so it is possible that nuns performed on similar stages either in the chapel or, more likely, in the parlor.[219] But, as Bhasin pointed out, even without these stages, the setup of convent parlors may have been ideal:

> the functional delineation between inner and outer parlor would have corresponded quite appropriately to a separation of play space versus audience space. The nuns, performing from behind the iron-barred windows of their inner parlor chat rooms, would have appeared to the spectators in the outer chamber as moving and speaking portraits, framed by the room's architecture.[220]

Although the divisions were originally designed to limit interactions between convent residents and outsiders, Bhasin here points out that they may have assisted effective presentations of theatrical performances. It is ironic that some convents may have followed the rule to stay behind the parlor grate while engaging in these activities.

Convent rules and the admonitions of patriarchs required nuns to wear habits at all times, including during their theatrical productions, but there is scant evidence that this rule was followed. Many records mention nuns dressing not only as secular women, but also as men. In

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[218] BMC, "Lamento Di Bella Giovane Fatta Moncha per Forza," n.d., 375v–377v, Gradenigo 179, Monache II; BMC, "Sentimento Della Monacha Forzata," n.d., 377r–379r, Gradenigo 179, Monache II.

[219] Bhasin, "Nuns on Stage," 59–61.

[220] Bhasin, 69.

many cases the nuns borrowed the necessary clothing and props for their performances from outside the convent.[221] Although women in Venice performed onstage long before women in other parts of Europe, Venetian nuns performed a greater variety of roles than their secular counterparts.[222]

The ability to participate in theater played a crucial role in shaping the regular activities of convents. Bhasin, in fact, uses it to argue that "the life of a Venetian nun was far from truly cloistered and her theatrical and ceremonial offerings were entertainment products on the open Venetian market, making her representative of a new breed of early modern actor."[223] According to Bhasin, spectacular public performances fulfilled a variety of needs for both nuns and for society at large. Performances provided an additional opportunity to families to see their daughters again; although willing to put their daughters into convents, most families were not actually prepared to stop interacting with them altogether.[224] On a broader, and more interesting, level, theatrical performances were allowing the convents to fulfill a theatrical void. Venetian *scuole* did not perform like they did in other cities and Venice had no Jesuit performances.[225] At the same time, entertainment culture in the Venetian Republic was decentralized, allowing Venetians more artistic freedom than performers found in other cities, where a central court controlled theater and other performances.[226] To fill this void, nuns performed throughout the year, but were especially likely to put on plays during religious holidays and on the occasion of religious ceremonies, such as when a young woman entered or advanced within monastic life.

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[221] Bhasin, 62–65.
[222] Bhasin, 174–75.
[223] Bhasin, 4.
[224] Bhasin, 17, 39–40.
[225] Bhasin, 24–25.
[226] Bhasin, 19.

But the audiences were not restricted to religious individuals or even to women. The prologues and dedications of convent plays address an audience of male and female spectators. Many of the plays had been performed elsewhere and therefore had a general appeal.[227] Because a larger swath of the Venetian population attended theater than in other cities, the attendees at Venetian convent performances were experienced theatergoers who had high expectations.[228]

The question remains whether theater can be seen as an educational activity and to what degree it provided opportunities for intellectual development. Bhasin argued that although convent theater may have had a primarily educational purpose in other part of Italy, convent theater in Venice was primarily extracurricular rather than educational. The public nature of Venetian convent performances differed from those in Tuscany, where young students performed in front of a private audience, composed entirely of professed nuns.[229] Tuscan play manuscripts often specified that performers were either educande or novices, but citations against convent theater in Venice did not differentiate among the different types of convent residents, giving the impression that they were all professed nuns.[230] Convents that had theatrical activity and also housed students include Santi Biagio e Cataldo, San Sepolcro, Sant'Andrea, and San Lorenzo.

It is fruitful to compare convent theater with the theatrical activities of Jesuits, widely recognized to be educational. Jesuit theater, in addition to serving as an exercise in rhetoric and eloquence, was based on the idea that outwardly assuming the role of an exemplary character would be spiritually beneficial for the performer. Because convent theater fulfilled many of these

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[227] Bhasin, 74.
[228] Bhasin, 24.
[229] Bhasin, 75.
[230] These citations instructed the mother superior to obtain approval from the patriarch before allowing her nuns to perform a specific play. Bhasin, 73–75.

same goals, Elissa Weaver suggested that even in Tuscany it arose partially as a pedagogical tool for novices and educande. But Bhasin outlined three fundamental reasons that she saw only an "uneasy" comparison between Venetian convent theater and Jesuit theater as a general phenomenon. First, Jesuits primarily performed tragedies, not comedies. Second, Jesuits preferred Latin to the vernacular. Finally, Jesuits were opposed to female performers and often avoided female characters. While these statements are accurate, differences in genre and language do not disprove the strong similarities in purpose underneath the choice to perform. Although there is certainly evidence that the Jesuits were opposed to convent theater and even female performance in general, the Jesuits did not need to approve of convent activities for Venetian nuns to adopt similar educational goals for their theatrical activities. I argue that Venetian convent theater was motivated simultaneously by educational and extracurricular motives and that it did not have to explicitly teach young girls to be an educational enterprise.

The Biblioteca del Museo Correr holds the only known manuscript of a play written by nuns rather than written by an outside playwright and subsequently adopted by or dedicated to a group of nuns. In November 1668, a group of nine nuns in the convent of San Daniele wrote *Teatro dei Cuori* or *Theater of Hearts* in honor of their abbess, Foscarina Diedo, who had passed away. The play demonstrates how nuns could use creative outlets to express their emotions and could use the performance of the play as a spiritual exercise. It also reveals a reverence for both authority and intellect on the part of the nuns.

They used the play predominantly as a means of mourning and celebrating the virtues of Diedo. The play's eights main characters are allegorical figures: Dominance, Virtue, Religion, Obedience, Prudence, Justice, Peace, and Purity. All of them express extreme sadness at the death of their abbess, described as a recent event. Obedience says:

This news is an arrow that has shot me
This is, oh God, that cloud
That renders darkness
In my serene heart[231]

This reaction to the news, echoed by other characters throughout the play, suggests that the composition of this work was partially a result of the desire to publicly express emotion and memorialize a loved one. They also seemed eager to spread the word of their abbess's many virtues and the central role she played in their lives in the convent. Near the end of the play, the chorus describes a sort of emptiness resulting from Diedo's absence. Like many other parts of the play, these lines are directed at Foscarina:

Your welcome presence
Unlocks our lives
    Without you we are ships at sea
Without true north
Clear stars are your lights[232]

These lines indicate that the nuns saw their abbess as a guiding light as well as a close friend. These emotions are not surprising, but it is important to realize that they felt it was appropriate to celebrate these feelings publicly in the form of a play. Most women would not have had the opportunity to memorialize a loved one via staged performance. So, at the very least, this provides evidence of creative opportunities.

Instead of questioning whether this type of memorial is appropriate, the chorus questions whether the play itself is enough to do justice to Diedo's memory:

    There is no pen and no ink
That would be enough to praise you
And the theater of this cloister

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[231] "Questa nuova è un stral che m'ha saettata / Quest è, ò Dio, qulla nube / Che tenebroso rende / Del mio core il sereno." BMC, Chiara Maria et al., *Teatro Dei Cuori*, 1668, n.p.

[232] "La Presenza tua gradita / Reserena nostra vita / Senza te siam Navi in Mare / Senza fida tramontana / Son tuoi lumi Stelle Chiare." et al., n.p.

That itself reseals holy souls
While we are to bow down
The angels come to praise you.[233]

In some ways, therefore, the nuns regard their play as insufficient. It is not possible for mortals to write down all the praiseworthy attributes of Diedo, who is also praised by the angels. At various points, they also refer to their attempts as a "daring enterprise."

But this certainly does not stop the nuns from attempting the impossible. The lines of the play are full of praises for Diedo, particularly her capacity for leadership and her intellect, which reveal something about the atmosphere of the convent. Obedience speaks frequently in praise of Diedo's authority over the nuns. She introduces herself by saying the following:

And God that obedience
I am; and I call myself; from the beloved lip
of Foscarina Diedo
I go begging for the food I adore
Her just commands
Reign in her bosom.[234]

In other words, Diedo's commands are so just, that allegorical Obedience refers to them as "food." Obedience later calls Diedo a "dignified ruler… courteous and fair in dispensing the law."[235] Religion says she "in these cloisters reigns holily."[236] Dominance even asks

And why is it not eternal
Your command
And why do you abandon me?[237]

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[233] "Non v'e penna, e non v'è ichiostro / Che á lodarvi sia bastante / E teato questo Chiostre / Che rachiude alme si sante / Mentre siam per inchinarti / Vengon gl'Angioli à lodarti." et al., n.p.

[234] "E dìo che Ubidienza / Sono; e m'appello; dal'amato labbro / Di Foscarina Diedo / Vó mendicando l'alimento adoro / I suoi giusti commandi / Regnano nel suo seno." et al., n.p.

[235] "A sì degna Regnante / E così giusta, e così santa io fui / Data per seva humile / Al certo non hà `l'Mondo entro la Regge / Donna più de la Diedo / Cortese e giusta in dispensar le Legge." et al., n.p.

[236] "Che in questi Chiostri santamente regna." et al., n.p.

[237] "E perche non e'eterno / Il tuo comando / E perche m'abbandoni?" et al., n.p.

Virtue says, "now that over these souls she reigns / Holy mistress teaches them to love God."[238]As the abbess of San Daniele, Diedo held authority over the convent. Not every convent was filled with nuns who would celebrate their abbess's power, but these women saw Diedo's use of her position as one of the fundamental virtues that should be celebrated in a public form.

Perhaps partially as an explanation for her capacity as a leader, the play also repeatedly praises Diedo's intellect. One of the most straightforward comments comes from Prudence who says, "Of great wisdom and great mind / every heart reveres her."[239] Prudence later elaborates, saying:

> In your shining mind
> Every piece of knowledge is a fixed star
> That you are wise woman
> The ruling is prefixed in Heaven
> There is no other who equals you
> These are the comparison of Heaven.[240]

Again, we see the intertwining of intellectual and spiritual praise. The fact that these sisters found it appropriate to praise Diedo's knowledge provides further evidence that education and knowledge were held in high regard among this group of nuns.

The very existence of a play like *Teatro dei Cuori* tells us several things about the opportunities nuns came across. First, when performed, the play would provide the nuns with a chance to internalize a particular virtue. Second, this is further evidence of the time some nuns could devote to writing, whether for study or for entertainment. Outside the convent only

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[238] "Questi furoi suoi studi, e in questo giorno / Adotrinata, hor ch'á quest'alme regna / Sacra Maestra ad amar Dio gl'insegna." et al., n.p.
[239] "Di gran senno, e grande ingegno / Ogni cor la riverenza." et al., n.p.
[240] "Nela tua fulgida mente / Ogni scienza è stella fissa / Che tu sii Donna sapiente / La sentenza è in Ciel prefissa / Non v'è alcuna che t'uguagli / Questi son del Ciel raguagli." et al., n.p.

wealthy women had time to write and such collaborative efforts are quite rare. Many nuns were not wealthy enough that they would have spent their leisure time writing as married women, particularly on such a creative opportunity to deal with grief. Finally, the play contains a celebration of intellect that demonstrates the degree to which wisdom was a cherished quality within the convent. It demonstrates that regardless of initial motives, the writing and performing of plays provided many opportunities for both spiritual and intellectual development.

As noted earlier, convent education was financially accessible to girls whose family could not afford a private tutor. The archives no longer document the exact curriculum followed by convent students, but they provide glimpses into the activities considered important and the lives that the students were ostensibly preparing for: a world that valued reading and writing as a way to develop the intellect and the spiritual simultaneously, while also sometimes allowed creative expression through theater. Convent records combined with instructions from Venetian patriarchs such as Priuli indicate that convent students received training in vernacular literacy. Like the education received by boys in any class, it was considered inextricably bound to the spiritual training they received simultaneously by regularly reading spiritual books. The piety encouraged in convents in many ways focused on the fundamental tenants of Christianity. But it is also important to remember that the act of being in a convent was itself considered a patriotic sacrifice for the Republic of Venice, as I discussed in my introduction. This likely gave convent spirituality a particularly Venetian flavor.

Conclusion

Venetian education for boys prepared students for a career while training them to be good Christians and citizens. Extremely wealthy women were educated by tutors or formally educated

in small groups, sometimes even alongside boys. Extremely poor girls could receive some schooling from the Schools of Christian Doctrine, but for the most part Venice lacked private or government-sponsored resources for middle-class girls and many upper-class girls. Venetian convents were perfectly positioned to fill this gap as convent education was more available than any other schooling options. As educande, young women were prepared for their future social roles either inside or outside the convent: they formed connections with one another, with nuns, and with other convent boarders while keeping in touch with their family members through letters and visits. They likely received vocational training by participating in the convent attempts to earn money. Reading and writing played an important role in the convent and girls who wanted to become nuns were expected to know how to read. At the same time, the all-female atmosphere of the convent potentially allowed the opportunity for creative expression in theatrical activities, something these young women would not have encountered otherwise. Convents provided a quasi-public education that included an unusual range of creative activities for young Venetian women whose families could not or would not hire a private tutor.

III. Arcangela Tarabotti, The Convent Feminist

Introduction

> Those advised by money will end up stumbling into the abyss. Judas, motivated by greed, resolved to sell Jesus, his master, for thirty pieces of silver – Jesus, who was the treasure of all heavenly treasures. Persuaded by similar considerations, you betray your own daughters and relatives.

These words encapsulate the rage of Arcangela Tarabotti (1604-1652) at the epidemic of forced vocations in Venice. Born in Venice to Stefano Tarabotti and Maria Caduna and baptized Elena Cassandra, Tarabotti inherited a limp from her father. Although he had married and had children, Stefano decided that Arcangela's disability would prevent her from marrying and therefore forced her to become a nun.[241] She entered the convent of Sant'Anna in Castello at the age of eleven, took her first vows at sixteen, and her final vows at nineteen.[242] During her lifetime Arcangela Tarabotti became well-known for her profuse, sharp-tongued writings on the evils of cloistering women who had not discerned a religious vocation. At the same time, she ostensibly benefited from some aspects of the lifestyle she hated: unlike many women of the time she spent her leisure time reading, writing, and circulating her work. In this chapter, I examine her work in order to show that the unusual atmosphere of a Venetian convent helped her produce and circulate feminist arguments and as a result she recognized benefits to convent education in the midst of her critiques.

Convent education allowed intellectual exploration within a community of women who carried out most of their activities in private and could control their interactions with men. In the

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[241] Letizia Panizza, "Volume Editor's Introduction," in *Paternal Tyranny*, The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 2; Ray and Westwater, "Introduction," 3.

[242] Panizza, "Volume Editor's Introduction," 3.

introduction, I demonstrated the history of the Venetian government's control over the enforcement of clausura and showed that they had some important reasons for adhering – or at least appearing to adhere – to most of the Tridentine guidelines. I then demonstrated that Venetian convent education provided many middle and upper-class girls with an education that was similar to boys' vernacular education. Furthermore, the opportunities to first, control their interactions with men and second, occasionally perform for a public audience, were radically different from the experiences women encountered outside of a convent. The life and works of Arcangela Tarabotti demonstrate a third opportunity – to write without the responsibilities of caring for a household – while also allowing us to examine how all three sets of these experiences shaped the life of a woman who entered the convent unwillingly.

Tarabotti advanced arguments that could be considered feminist, and although she was relentlessly critical of forced vocations, her works reveal that she advocated choice and flexibility in the education of women and girls in Venice rather than the removal of convent involvement. Tarabotti's convent experience contributed to her ability to write and circulate feminist arguments and as a result she advocated for certain aspects of convent education. Her overarching goal was for women to have more control over their own lives, including their education and scholarly opportunities, and she blamed the lack of this control on the Venetian government. She recognized the potential for positive experiences in convent life itself and she supported the opportunities convents provided for solitude, arguing that it could help both intellectual and spiritual development. Although at some points she appears to criticize the education she received in the convent, this is often rooted in false modesty or the desire to undercut many men's criticisms of women. Tarabotti's writings ultimately demonstrate that the

unusual opportunities for intellectual enrichment in convents could produce female scholars who advanced novel feminist and political arguments.

Tarabotti's Knowledge and Education

Arcangela Tarabotti was well-educated due to a combination of training as an educanda and time spent reading both religious and secular works as a nun. She was extraordinarily well-read, frequently referencing works by classical and contemporary writers. She sometimes denied her knowledge in letters, and works as a way of participating in the humanist trope of false modesty and ultimately highlighting her abilities.

Tarabotti's letters and published works demonstrate Tarabotti's literary talents and training. She produced several books and was in constant communication with scholars and personal friends via letter. She continually cited both classical and contemporary sources, such as Dante, Petrarch, Ariosto, Tasso, and Guarini.[243] She occasionally advertised this purposefully, as she did in one letter to Girolamo Brusoni:

> I, too, would agree that my eyes were not worthy of admiring the many philosophic and political insights found in your *Orestilla* were it not for the fact that all printed books encounter the misfortune of falling beneath my gaze, which is as dim as a bat's. I have not spared the best books of the greatest thinkers, and the good politician Machiavelli did not disdain to be looked upon and leafed through by me, with permission of course of the *Superiori*.[244]

In this example Tarabotti comes close to pretending to agree with a critique of her work, but quickly turns any potential insult around. While joking about her bad eyesight, she also brags about the vast number of works she has read, specifically mentioning Machiavelli, whose works

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[243] Lynn Lara Westwater, "The Disquieting Voice: Women's Writing and Antifeminism in Seventeenth-Century Venice" (The University of Chicago, 2003), 259–60.
[244] Tarabotti, *Letters*, 251.

were all on the Index of Prohibited Books.[245] But she simultaneously protects her virtue from criticism by mentioning that she had permission to read these works. She also admitted in *Paradiso Monacale* that much of her time supposeduly spent in prayer was actually spent reading secular works. Giovan Francesco Loredano observed that Tarabotti read modern romances as well as renowned authors.[246]

There is even evidence that Tarabotti sometimes secured books for her correspondents. In a letter to an unknown recipient she wrote "I am sorry I do not have more, just as I am ashamed not to be able to procure for you *The Postman Robbed of His Mailbag,* but such people, who usually arrive at night, do not frequent places like ours."[247] The work she refers to was by Ferrante Pallavicino, who was an extremely controversial author supported by the Incogniti, a society of intellectual thinkers known for their libertine ideas. The *novella* used fictional letters to comment on a variety of contemporary issues and included criticisms of the Jesuits, the Inquisition, and the Spanish. Venice arrested Pallavicino on the demand of the apostolic nuncio. He never went to trial but during his remaining years in Venice was persecuted by the nuncio, Francesco Vitelli, and the pope's nephew, Francesco Barberini. He continued writing but published his books secretly; anyone caught selling them was punished.[248] It would be useful to know the identity of Tarabotti's correspondent who requested Pallavicino's book, but in any case this letter reveals that a man thought it expedient to ask Tarabotti for a copy of a prohibited book.

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[245] William J. Landon, *Politics, Patriotism, and Language: Niccolò Machiavelli's "Secular Patria" and the Creation of an Italian National Identity* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 21.
[246] Westwater, "Disquieting Voice," 259–60.
[247] Tarabotti, *Letters*, 207.
[248] Muir, *Culture Wars*, 89–90.

Furthermore, Tarabotti implicitly recognizes that the individuals who sell prohibited works did occasionally stop by the convent – at night! – although their visits were infrequent.

Tarabotti's commentary sometimes seems to present her as ignorant and uneducated, but these attempts ultimately indicate that she was immersed in the humanist literary world, in which false modesty was used as a tool. In *Paternal Tyranny* she seemingly undermined her own arguments by emphasizing that she was uneducated. She wrote

> I blush a little at my own audacity in putting pen to paper, lacking as I do all book learning… I wish I possessed the eloquence of a Cicero or a Demosthenes, not because I seek applause, but so my words strengthened by rhetorical gifts might penetrate men's hearts more sharply and draw forth the fruits I long for with all my being.[249]

Her assertion that she lacks book learning stands in stark contrast to her writing abilities and references to Cicero and Demosthenes within the same section. She carefully claimed that her desire was to improve the world rather than "seek applause" but the ultimate point was to present herself as both learned and virtuous. *Paternal Tyranny* contains several examples of this type of strategic humility, as do her personal letters. She similarly wrote to Aquila Barbara: "You will also pardon… the imperfections of my pen and, even more, of my mind, which uncultured and sterile, can produce nothing but the roughest thorns."[250] Regarding the letter of presentation written by Giovanbattista Loredano for her work *Convent Paradise,* Tarabotti wrote to Giovanni Polani to thank him for inspiring "the flight of Loredano's most glorious quill."[251] But in yet another denial of her obvious purpose she professed that she was actually not thanking him: "I deem myself to be as unworthy as I am desirous to do so. The honors that I receive are too grand

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[249] Arcangela Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*, ed. and trans. Letizia Panizza, The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 41.
[250] Tarabotti, *Letters*, 275.
[251] Tarabotti, 86.

for me to render proper and worthy thanks. Nevertheless, proclaiming my inability, I am in a certain way satisfying the demands of my devotion."[252]

Tarabotti's professions of humility may have intensified when seeking favors and patronage. Tarabotti frequently corresponded with Madame Anna di Gremonville, wife of the French ambassador, whose daughters were boarders at Sant'Anna, but Tarabotti's correspondence did not focus entirely on the girls. She also wrote to Madame Anna in efforts to circulate her works, specifically to have *Paradise* and *Antisatire* added to the library of Cardinal Jules Mazarin:

> The humble compositions of my poor mind come before your Illustrious Excellency only to obey your commands, for they recognize themselves unworthy of appearing before the eyes of the most eminent cardinal Giulio Mazzarino, the splendor of the Roman Church… They have hope that his unbending fairness will not allow the simple offspring of a consecrated virgin to be insulted. It remains for Your Excellency to beg his kind understanding for the imperfections of a *Paradise*, which, if rustic in style, is so because the religious state does not allow for refinement; and not to condemn the *Antisatire* as inappropriate to my state or as a vain…[253]

In this case, Tarabotti was asking Madame Anna to act as a go-between to gain approval for her work from Cardinal Mazzarino. Once again, she uses professions of humility as a tool to remind the recipient of her accomplishments and ask for a favor from a patron.[254]

Tarabotti was not the only nun who used false modesty to advertise her works. Maria Celeste Donato took a similar approach in order to present her work in the most positive light. At

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[252] Tarabotti, 86.

[253] Tarabotti, 206.

[254] Westwater argued that Tarabotti's claim to lack formal education was unreliable because "it served to highlight both her own talent, for which only she was to credit, and the cowardice of her detractors for attacking a woman who had not received the education they had. The nun's comments on her education appear in fact almost exclusively in response to critics' attacks." I agree with her assessment of the unreliability of Tarabotti's descriptions but I believe the claims show up in a wider variety of circumastances rather than simply as responses to criticism. Westwater, "Disquieting Voice," 256.

the beginning of her book for novitiates she emphasized that rather than believing herself to be knowledgeable, she was simply trying to do a good deed: "You, who with tireless zeal and pastoral exhortations goes always suggesting to the spirits the true path of paradise, will permit, that this my book, which I propose to direct the beginners in monastic seclusion, serves she who wishes to practice to conduct herself, or guide herself to the piously desired end."[255] She also wrote that one "who is not exercised in the course of the sciences could not have pretensions to run equally with the men of letters, something that would be foolhardy, and of no prudence."[256] She returned to this commentary near the end of her book:

> I stop here my pen because, badly sustained by the weakness of my talents, having tried to rise to write things that I have never practiced by way of study, I will merit perhaps this reward, to fall in the deep sea of universal censure. If you would be so courteous, you should share my work and excuse my inability… I have written without pretending any other end than the pure glory of my husband, and the usefulness of the spirit consecrated to him. If in me you do not find caprice… I am sure that you will find some piety and good intentions to cooperate with the good of my neighbor.[257]

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[255] "Ella, che con zelo indefesso, e sue pastorali esortationi và sempre insinuando all'anime il vero sentiero del Paradiso, permetterà, che questo mio libretto, qual io propongo per direttorio alle principianti nella clausura Monastica, serva a chi vorrà practicarlo per conduttore, ò guida al fine santamente bramato." Donato, *Direttorio per Il Novitiato*, 4.

[256] "Avverti però, non essere mia intentione d'allettare con sottigliezze di pensieri chi si degnerà leggere questa mia debolezza; perchechi non s'è mai esercitata nell'arringo delle scienze, non può havere pretensiene, di correre ugualmente con letterati, cosa, che sarebbe temeraria, e di niuna prudenza." Donato, 6.

[257] "Fermo quì la mia penna; perrche mal sostenuta dalla debolezza dei miei talenti, havendo tentato sollevarsi a scrivere cose, che mai praticò per via di studio, meritarà forse per so premio, di precipitare nel Pelago dell'universaii censure, Se tù sarai cortese, devi compatirmi, e scusare l'inhabilità del stesso, pigliando in buona parte la buona volontà, che hò di servire al mio prossimo; e mentre io resto augurandoti dal Cielo tutti I very contenti, Tù chiedivvi dal medesimo, che metta in pratica quanto con buon fine hò scritto, senza pretendere altro fine, che la Gloria pura del mio sposo, e l'utile dell'anime a lui consagrante. S'in me non trovi capricci, con I quali possa svegliare gli alti tuoi pensieri, sono sicura, che trovarai qualche pietà, e buona intentione, di cooperare al bene del mio prossimo." Donato, 96.

In one sense this section serves to reinforce the purpose of Donato's work: spiritual training of the novices, to which she refers when she mentions "the pure glory of my husband, and the usefulness of the spirit consecrated to him." But it also serves to protect her from criticism and make her writing abilities more noticeable by throwing them into contrast with her claims of inability.

Secular female writers used similar strategies to draw attention to their accomplishments and secure favors from potential patrons. Moderata Fonte wrote in her dedicatory letter of *Floridoro* to Don Francesco de' Medici "with this letter are the new fruits of my intellect, which by itself is poor and sterile, but it has become in part rich and abundant from the merits, honors, and glories of your Most Serene Highness, and of your Most Serene consort, like a dry meadow which by wafting zephyrs is filled with most charming flowers."[258] It was particularly common for female humanists to speak to patrons as a father figure and present themselves as a dutiful daughter in the search for academic recognition.[259] Laura Cereta typically avoided these tropes but used a similar approach in letters to Cardinal Ascanio Maria Sforza, presenting herself as an inexperienced writer seeking patronage, searching for somebody to champion her work: "I, a supplicant, beg your majesty that you might accept my writings as in every way your 'wards.' For I, to the extent that humble rank allows me, commit myself to your favor – you, my father, my judge, and my lord."[260]

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[258] Moderata Fonte, *Floridoro: A Chivalric Romance*, ed. Valeria Finucci, trans. Julia Kisacky, The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 49.
[259] More details on how this strategy was used by Isotta Nogarola and Cassandra Fedele are in Ross, *The Birth of Feminism*.
[260] Ross, 50.

Tarabotti may have thought her claims to lack education were necessary to support her general criticisms of Venetian convents. She wrote that it would be a "great mistake… to attribute learning to women when they are so wondrously stripped of it, not through lack of native intelligence but lack of schooling… Let us consider for what reasons they do not grow up learned."[261] In this example she used her complaints about convent education as an introduction to her arguments about the negative aspects of being cloistered. She also used this approach to respond to men who criticized the intelligence of women. "Do not scorn the quality of women's intelligence, you malignant and evil-tongued men!"[262] she angrily wrote. She continued into one of her most detailed descriptions of convent life:

> Shut up in their rooms, denied access to books and teachers of any learning whatsoever, or any other grounding in letters, they cannot help being inept in making speeches and foolish in giving advice… You give them as governess another woman, also unlettered, who can barely instruct them in the rudiments of reading, to say nothing of anything to do with philosophy, law, and theology. In short, they learn nothing but the ABC, and even then this is poorly taught. (I know from experience so I can bear witness at length."[263]

This description stands in direct contrast with the number of books Tarabotti professes to have read and wealth of other evidence regarding the role of reading and writing in Venetian convents. But Tarabotti's purpose was to point out the hypocrisy of men who criticized the intelligence of women while denying them equal access to education.

As a profuse writer, Tarabotti provided ample evidence that she was well-educated and well-read, with access to an impressive number of books. Although some of her works and letters contained self-deprecating commentary and negative descriptions of the education available in the convent, these most frequently appeared as part of a typical humanist trope of

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[261] Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*, 97.
[262] Tarabotti, 99.
[263] Tarabotti, 99.

humility serving to highlight her actual accomplishments. At other times, Tarabotti used the same arguments to enforce her criticism of forced vocations or respond to men who questioned the intellectual abilities of women.

Tarabotti's Feminist Arguments

Tarabotti used her education and her access to reading material to argue for the equality of women with men and against forced vocations, but recognized benefits to education within a convent. Tarabotti argued that the presence of men, whom she believed inferior to women, was essentially a plague on the attempts of women to be virtuous and well-educated. She defended her position with a combination of contemporary scientific theories, Biblical examples, and anecdotes. Within her harsh criticisms of forced vocations and sharp analysis of the government's role in the problem, she recognized the potential of convents to offer something positive to girls: a place to learn while removed from the damaging influence of men.

One contention running through several of Tarabotti's works is the idea that women benefitted from avoiding men and spending more time with other women because first, men were spiritually and intellectually inferior and second, they often distracted women by relentlessly pursuing female affection. She gave this point particular emphasis in *Che Le Donne Siano della Spezie degli Uomini,* translated as *Women are of the Human Species* or *That Women Are of the Same Species as Men,* published in 1651. It was a point by point response to a Latin treatise initially published in Germany in 1595 and translated into Italian in 1647, known as *New Disputation Against Women in Which It Is Proved That They Are Not Human,* essentially arguing

that women did not have souls.[264] The work claimed to be making this argument in order to criticize Anabaptists, who denied the divinity of Christ, by making an equally preposterous claim with similar reasoning. Due to this claim as well as the work's over-the-top and absurd arguments and examples, modern readers assume that the work is truly an attack on Anabaptists instead of an authentically misogynist text. Yet this is not how Tarabotti and her contemporaries interpreted it. The Church saw the book as "an attack on religious doctrine regarding women" while Tarabotti took the opportunity to defend her sex against the heinous accusations it made.[265]

The contentious claim that women were not human inspired Tarabotti in her response to describe the differences between the sexes in a particularly condescending way:

> [W]oman… is more beautiful, more delicate, more admirable than man ever was. She enjoys more perfection, because if, as the naturalists tell us, man forms in forty hours and woman in eighty, there is no doubt that the work which requires greater concentration and diligence in its creation is going to turn out more excellent.[266]

Tarabotti here drew from contemporary discussions of the origins of sex and gender to argue for the superiority of women. Early modern society utilized what Thomas Laqueur has termed the

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[264] Westwater, "Disquieting Voice," 323; Theresa M. Kenney, ed., "Introduction," in *"Women Are Not Human": An Anonymous Treatise and Response*, trans. Theresa M. Kenney (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), 14–15.

[265] Westwater, "Disquieting Voice," 326–27; Westwater maintains that Tarabotti and her contemporaries were correct: "The jocularity of the style… does not negate… the offensiveness of the attack on women. The author seems to lose sight of his supposed religious foes for long sections of the tract, focusing only on his attack on women… the point becomes eclipsed by the frontal attack on women. Anonymous also indicates, in his concluding corollary, that the thrust of the text has been to prove women are not human, and that the criticism of the Anabaptists is only secondary. Additionally, since Anonymous also takes offense that the Anabaptists confer any status to women while denying Christ's divine nature, the misogyny of his attack is not necessarily separate from its religious aspect: the Anabaptists' views of women seems to have been as repugnant to him as their reading of the Bible." Westwater, 328–30.

[266] Arcangela Tarabotti, "Women Are of the Human Species," in *"Women Are Not Human": An Anonymous Treatise and Response*, ed. and trans. Theresa M. Kenney (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), 101.

"one-sex model," in which women were considered (in accordance with Galenic tradition) imperfect men with an inverted anatomy and cold, rather than hot, disposition. Despite the new focus on anatomy during the scientific revolution, very little changed in how these ideas were approached. Dissections and examinations simply confirmed for anatomists that females were inferior males.[267] Tarabotti's comments turned this approach on its head by using some of this evidence to say that men were actually inferior women. She then made the same argument based on a combination of metaphor and oblique Biblical evidence:

> To illustrate a story, a painter creates several different pictures. How could you ever say that different materials are there because the forms vary? God did the same thing when he differentiated the members of the man and the woman, but he still made them alike in substance and essence, and of one of the same equal species… But God privileged woman over man inasmuch as, delighting in the first portrait he made in a field, he wanted to make the second even better, and to paint her perfectly her made her in Paradise."[268]

Tarabotti here referenced the creation story in Genesis in which God creates the first woman, Eve, from the rib of Adam, the first man, while he sleeps in paradise. She also used the ever-popular example of painting to argue that although men and women appeared differently, they were made from the same materials and therefore equal.

Tarabotti detailed exactly why she believed that women were "more excellent" than men, an argument that encompassed both the intellectual and spiritual abilities of each sex. Women, she argued, are naturally more contemplative than men:

> But believe me, you could have better said that it is actually man, like an irrational and filthy animal, who often stands around gazing at the earth from which he took his origin, while woman, on the contrary, being created in paradise, looks up at heaven, enskying

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[267] Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 26, 34–35, 69–70.
[268] Tarabotti, "Women Are of the Human Species," 109.

> herself in divine contemplation, intent only on refilling those thrones that the enemy of our salvation once vacated.[269]

Tarabotti's language in this quote combined intellectual and spiritual commentary by opposing man's "irrational" nature to woman's tendency towards "divine contemplation." In other words, she assumed that greater rationality would produce greater interest in spiritual matters and women were superior in both arenas.

Tarabotti's views on women also emerge in her close friendships. One of Tarabotti's most moving works is *Le Lagrime,* or *Tears,* written upon the death of her close friend and fellow nun, Regina Donati. As a lifelong companion of Tarabotti in the convent, Donati's death caused the nun a great deal of misery, which she poured into *Le Lagrime.* Tarabotti wrote that she was "mad with grief," as the memory of Donati's friendship made her "lose [her] sense."[270] In desperation she asked "In whose heart will I ever find again a true and loving faith? A paradigm of purest love? The expression of a perfect friendship?"[271] Tarabotti showed full confidence that the souls of the two friends would one day come together again: "I will ceaselessly carry a pain in my heart that will never disappear until it is reunited with your soul. Over the course of a quarter century my heart became used to speaking with you on earth, and it yearns to come to enjoy your presence eternally in the Empyrean."[272] Here Tarabotti emphasized the length of the friendship while also revealing her confidence that Donati was being rewarded in the afterlife. In the meantime, she begged her absent friend to remember her: "Remember,

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[269] Tarabotti, 102.
[270] Arcangela Tarabotti, "The Tears of Arcangela Tarabotti Upon the Death of the Most Illustrious Signora Regina Donati," in *Letters Familiar and Formal*, ed. and trans. Meredith K. Ray and Lynn Lara Westwater, The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: The Toronto Series 20 (Toronto: Iter Inc. and Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2012), 293.
[271] Tarabotti, 293.
[272] Tarabotti, 293–94.

then, that love and that faithfulness which, with the bond of friendship, steadfastly held us together, for a quarter of a century without fail, almost as if we were the most loving sisters."[273]

Unlike many of Tarabotti's other works, *Le Lagrime* gave a more positive view of another nun's experience that emphasized the intertwining of intellect and spirituality. Tarabotti praised Donati's religiosity without reservation and recognized in her friend a true calling to the religious life. She wrote that "even before entering the convent" Donati spent her time reading the Bible, praying, reciting the divine office, and building home altars where "she offered her own heart in sacrifice to Jesus Christ, whom she had already chosen for her beloved Husband."[274] Tarabotti argued that Donati could not have been called to marriage because "no man would have been worthy of possessing such a precious jewel," and therefore God "chose her for his heart's delight, for his dear bride, and kept her just as a gem in a treasure chest, within the blessed cloisters dedicated to the great mother of his virgin genetrix."[275] This is an unusual description of convent life among Tarabotti's works because she describes it as a treasure chest rather than a prison, but the emphasis is not on the convent as a positive place, but rather on the value of the women within the convent. Tarabotti also praised Donati's mind and leadership:

> Just as her facial features were like those of a most striking Sybil, so did she possess an analytical mind worthy of such a comparison… she could boast of such noble and remarkable abilities which, possessing heavenly graces, rendered her worthy of the governance of a whole world. Under her leadership, this monastery did indeed expect all the good fortune that awaits those subjects who are ruled by a prudent and righteous leader… She was prudent in responding, wise in conversing, shrewd in spotting a lie, clever in learning, fair in judging, patient in affairs, quick to settle matters… In giving advice she was more valuable than Cato, making her living proof of the German belief that women partake of some measure of Divinity. In the acumen of her advice she gained a reputation as the most lively and sublime intellect of our time.[276]

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[273] Tarabotti, 296.
[274] Tarabotti, 287.
[275] Tarabotti, 288.
[276] Tarabotti, 291.

Tarabotti argued in her description that rather than simply leading a convent, Donati should have been able to lead "the whole world," a contention that simultaneously praises Donati and references the fact that women were not political leaders in the Republic of Venice. She then specified that the monastery flourished under Donati's leadership due to her prudence and intelligence. More specifically, Tarabotti suggested that Donati possessed these virtues in measures unavailable to men when she connected her praise to "the German belief that women partake of some measure of Divinity."[277] It is not clear what belief Tarabotti is referencing. While some have read Luther's work as assigning women a greater spiritual life, he never associates them with actual divinity. She could have been indirectly referencing a lesser-known Protestant idea or the opinions of an unknown personal connection.[278]

Tarabotti is most famous for her criticism of forced vocations, especially in her book, *Inferno Monacale,* which formed a trilogy with a *Purgatorio* and a *Paradiso.* The books together were meant to take the reader on a Dante-inspired tour of the things that might be experienced by a woman in marriage or in the convent, with Tarabotti acting in Virgil's place as the guide.[279] The reader is a passive and presumably horrified observer of the rampant sinfulness of convent life, mirroring the capital sins being punished in Dante's *Inferno.* According to Julie Robarts, Tarabotti's work is a "distorted mirror image of Dante's *Inferno:* it is a living hell, a journey from innocence to corruption and damnation, and a tragedy not a comedy."[280] She stressed the innocence of small children brought into the convent without understanding their fate and

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[277] Tarabotti, 291.
[278] Lee Palmer Wandel, email to author, 24 January 2018.
[279] Westwater, "Disquieting Voice," 100.
[280] Julie Robarts, "Dante's Commedia in a Venetian Convent: Arcangela Tarabotti's Inferno Monacale," *Italica* 90, no. 3 (2013): 379.

described the life of a novice as lonely and humiliating. In Tarabotti's narrative each new nun has to choose what her role will be in the continuous monastic tragedy.[281] *Paradiso Monacale,* published in 1643, in some ways served to contrast the horrific descriptions of the *Inferno*, but it was still not an entirely celebratory religious work.[282] The narrator contradicted herself by claiming to regret non-spiritual reading yet continuously quoting non-spiritual authors, such as Ovid, Petrarch, Ariosto, and Guarini.[283] The third book of the trilogy shifted focus to marriage. It was called *Il Purgatorio delle Malmaritate* and she had supposedly completed it by 1650.[284]

Tarabotti's critiques of convent life, although strong, were also quite specific and recognized variations in individual temperament. She argued that the seclusion required in an enclosed convent would be detrimental to both the intellectual and spiritual life of some women, two aspects of development that she, like many others, thought to be intertwined. In *Paternal Tyranny* she established that young women need to be able to use their divinely bestowed faculties in order to develop spiritually, an endeavor which involved the freedom to discern one's own vocation. She first commented that unlike the Virgin Mary, "these young girls have been conceived in original sin; and unlike John the Baptist, they have not been sanctified in their mothers' wombs. They come into the world tainted by sinful dispositions."[285] Although this emphasis on original sin might seem similar to the arguments of individuals who supported the

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[281] Robarts, 385.
[282] Westwater, "Disquieting Voice," 284.
[283] Westwater, 284–5fn.
[284] "In the 1644 Antisatira, Tarabotti promises to compose *Il Purgatorio Delle Malmaritate*, a meditation on women's subjugation in marriage; by 1650 her friend and literary backer Giovanni Dandolo advertises the completed work. The Purgatorio would complement Tarabotti's surviving works since it surely featured the nun's signature feminist appeals and since, together with the Inferno and the Paradiso, it would complete her dantesque trilogy." Westwater, "Disquieting Voice," 309.
[285] Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*, 44.

convent as a way to avoid the temptations of a worldly life, Tarabotti took her argument in the opposite direction:

> What a gross abuse… when divine Providence, after all, has granted free will to His creatures, whether male or female, and bestowed on both sexes intellect, memory, and will. By means of these faculties they are able to shun avoidable evil and pursue the good of their choice by their own voluntary inclination, not servile fear.[286]

In contrast to those who believed women benefitted from a cloistered life that helped them avoid sin, Tarabotti argued that forced monachization worked counter to divine Providence which gives women the ability to "pursue the good of their choice" freely without being forced into it by physical or emotional means. This was similar to the ideas of humanist education, which emphasized the need for each individual to use their distinctive gifts and follow the path designed for them. She also tied intellect and spirituality together more explicitly by stating that intellect and memory are two of the divine gifts used by any individual to "shun unavoidable evil."

Tarabotti supported this point by stating more clearly that convent life directly interfered with the ability of some women to obtain spiritual perfection. She wrote that "the vast number of women in religious life cannot reach spiritual perfection because they are unfortunately compelled to that state by parents and family. It is not theirs to say, 'This is my rest forever and ever: here will I dwell for I have chosen it' (Ps 131:14)."[287] After re-emphasizing the importance of choice, Tarabotti launched into some more specific critiques of Venetian convents:

> Why, then, do you defy the works of the Most Just One by decreeing that many women should live all together, alike in dress, dwelling place, food, and conduct, when the Lord of Lords makes it a miracle of His infinite wisdom for all things He created to be different? Why do you want to bend to your whim contrasting wills created so by nature?

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[286] Tarabotti, 44.
[287] Tarabotti, 61.

> It is nothing less than wanting to change and correct the deeds of a Creator who cannot err. For each young girl inclined to lead a secluded life, a thousand others will shun it.[288]

In this portion of Tarabotti's argument, she highlighted the fact that nuns were required to wear the same habit, eat the same food, and embrace the same habits while sharing a living space. Although in other works Tarabotti also discussed the benefits of a convent for those who had a vocation, this section of *Paternal Tyranny* suggested that most women were not destined for convent life because it suppressed their natural diversity in temperament and personality. At the end of the quote, she still recognized that there were girls called to the religious life, but reminded her reader that they must be quite rare.

As an alternative, Tarabotti's arguments in *Paternal Tyranny* referenced a potential lifestyle remarkably similar to that of a group of religious women known as third-order nuns:

> Women may serve Jesus Christ just as well by living a withdrawn life in their own homes. Modest, chaste, and devout, they can live with a simplicity and unworldliness arising from the promptings of the Holy Spirit and follow the practice of so many young virgins of the past whose hearts were their cloisters, the place where only heavenly thoughts were permitted. Thus virgins preserved intact their virginity for their heavenly bridegroom – may the whole world be full of them![289]

Tarabotti's focus was not to advocate for young women who may have wanted to get married. Instead, she idealized the unmarried state and perhaps even the vow of chastity in order to emphasize that not all women may live out their calling within a cloister. Her description matched the lives of tertiaries or third-order nuns, who remained unmarried but continued to interact with the outside world, typically in order to carry out charitable works. In some cases these women resided with family, as Tarabotti suggested, but in Venice the only example was La Compagnia delle Dimesse, who lived in an "open convent," which was not required to observe

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[288] Tarabotti, 68.
[289] Tarabotti, 64.

cloister. As I will discuss in the next chapter, these women also argued that they could fulfill their spiritual callings as charitable workers who were frequently visible in Venetian society rather than as cloistered nuns who were theoretically hidden behind convent walls.

The views of religious women of the potential benefits and drawbacks of life in a convent diverged in instructive ways. Maria Celeste Donato, abbess of San Giacomo, used her handbook for novitiates to extol the advantages of a nun's lifestyle. She wrote that "the grace of God has, among a million others… destined you for his most beloved spouse… You should know how great is this state, to which he has deigned to call you." She then argued that those who rejected the religious life were like children, who "because they do not know the value of diamonds, voluntarily exchange all of them for a single apple offered to them, drawn either by its beauty or by its taste and usefulness." But Donato continued by saying that it was God's will that this happen: "Likewise is the religious state profitable to those who embrace it… if all do not run to populate the cloisters, it is a secret of divine providence… that does not communicate to everyone the happy contents of the cloisters, so that it does not render the earth completely empty of habitants."[290] In other words, she argued that the religious life was infinitely more valuable than life outside the convent, but that God found it necessary that not everyone should enter the convents or monasteries. The contrast between Donato's and Tarabotti's attitudes

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[290] "Mentre che la gratia di Dio vi hà, trà millioni altre lasciate nel secolo, per sue dilettissime spose destinate, acciò possiate stimare meglio tal beneficio. Dovete conoscere quanto grande sia lo stato, al quale s'è degnata chiamarvi. I fanciulli, perche non conoscono il valore del Diamante, cambiaranno volentieri ogn'uno di questi con un sol pomo, che loro viene proferto, tirati ò dalla bellezza, ò dal gusto, & utilità del medesimo. Tale a punto è lo stato Religioso profittevole a chi l'abbraccia, riguardevole a chi lo professa, che se tutti non corrono, a popolare i chiostri è segreto della divina providenza, a parere d'un Santo, che non a tutti communica i contenti goduti da claustrali, per non rendere affatto spopolata d'habitanti la terra." Donato, *Direttorio per Il Novitiato*, 10–11.

towards convent life is interesting because although they differ fundamentally regarding who could benefit from becoming a nun, they share the implicit assumption that not everyone is meant to do so.

Tarabotti recognized the Venetian government as the ultimate source of the problems of forced vocations and overflowing convents. Her passion for the topic did not obscure her sharp analysis of the situation as she harshly denounced the government's role in suppressing women. She sarcastically dedicated *Paternal Tyranny* "to the most serene Venetian Republic," pointing out "you, Most Serene Queen, grant unconditional liberty to people dwelling in your beautiful city, whatever their nationality; even those who crucified the Son of your Most Holy Protector, the Virgin Mary, are its beneficiaries."[291] Jewish people in Venice were oppressed in many ways and forced to live in a walled neighborhood, but this was slightly better than the opportunity offered to them in many other cities. Tarabotti's purpose here was to point out the irony of Venice advertising itself as a republic of liberty when it imprisoned so many young women as unwilling nuns:

> This *Paternal Tyranny* is a gift that well suits a Republic that practices the abuse of forcing more young girls to take the veil than anywhere else in the world. My book does not deserve to be dedicated to their rules, as it might cause them too much outrage. It is fair, however, to dedicate my book to your great senate and its senators, who, by imprisoning their young maidens.. hope to make you eternal, most beautiful virgin Republic, Queen of the Adriatic."[292]

Tarabotti cleverly utilized Venetian devotion to the Virgin Mary to further underscore the hypocrisy of the Venetian government. "What else is it but deep ingratitude," she wrote, "when that country under the special protection of the Virgin Mary, that country which once triumphed

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[291] Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*, 37.
[292] Tarabotti, 37–38.

against the uprising of Baiamonte Tiepolo by means of a woman, finds itself engaged in degrading, deceiving, and denying liberty to its own young girls and women more than any other kingdom in the world?"[293] Baiamonte Tiepolo was a noble Venetian who attempted with his father-in-law, Marco Querini, to storm the ducal palace, kill the doge, and take over Venice. The doge was warned of the plan and fighting commenced. In the middle of the violence a woman let a heavy pot fall from an upstairs window and it hit Tiepolo's standard bearer. The lack of a rallying point caused the group to retreat, giving victory to the doge and ultimately sending Tiepolo into exile.[294] Tarabotti tied the unexpected salvation from an uprising through a woman to the protection and intercessions of the Virgin Mary to argue that Venetians should be respecting the liberty of women.

She did not limit herself to explaining why unwilling enclosure was wrong, but impressively analyzed the motivations of the men who enacted and allowed it. While many of her works mentioned the role of parents and other nuns in convincing a naïve girl to enter the convent or forcing a knowledgeable one to do so, *Paternal Tyranny* also discussed the religious and political leaders who argued in favor of the practice:

> If you believe that numerous daughters are prejudicial to reasons of state – since, if they all married, the nobility would increase and families be impoverished by paying out so many dowries – then, without greed for gain, accept the companions God has destined for you.[295]

In this quote, Tarabotti argued not just on the basis of how much women suffer, but in favor of fulfilling a divine design. By referring to women as "the companions God has destined for you"

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[293] Tarabotti, 38.
[294] Frederic Chapin Lane, *Venice, A Maritime Republic* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 115.
[295] Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*, 95.

she suggested that men throughout the city and the Republic's political leaders were working directly against divine order by forcing young women into convents. Most women, Tarabotti suggested, were destined to be wives, mothers, or perhaps third-order religious women. The calling to be enclosed is a very special and specific calling that is the exception to the norm.

Even more interesting, however, is Tarabotti's recognition that the Venetian state feared the impoverishing of the nobility due to high marriage dowries. According to Tarabotti, these political fears were shared by the clergy:

> At this point, my pen takes flight – too boldly? – in censuring religious superiors as accomplices. They should concern themselves only with God's service… Political expediency, however, the father of all error, contaminates even these supreme ministers, who end up giving their permission for women to become nuns.[296]

Tarabotti described the fact that local religious leaders actually went against official Church laws in allowing young women to be forced into the convent. However, there were strong ties between success politically and as a religious leader. Tarabotti initially wished to publish *Paternal Tyranny* in Venice, but eventually realized it would not be possible because of her harsh critiques of the government.[297] She wrote to Vittoria Medici della Rovere, the grand duchess of Tuscany, to ask for assistance publishing it: "I dare beg you to lend me the support of your most authoritative patronage in order to obtain from Rome, or else from Florence, the publishing privileges… which for certain reasons I do not seek in my own state… I assure you on my word that the above mentioned work contains nothing that goes against the Holy Faith or against good manners."[298]

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[296] Tarabotti, 92.
[297] Westwater, "Disquieting Voice," 268.
[298] Tarabotti, *Letters*, 147.

In *Paternal Tyranny,* Tarabotti's thoughts on the superiority of women led her to make new arguments about the best way for women to be educated. In response to the idea that women cause problems by tempting the opposite sex with their beauty, Tarabotti placed the blame squarely back on men:

> The fault for the many downfalls caused by women's beauty lies not with them but solely, on the contrary, with your foul, untrammeled male libido. Who are the ones who lay siege to chastity's tower by means of glances, letters, gifts, spies, go-betweens, and hidden and open sallies – all for the purpose of capturing it? It's of no avail for these unfortunate women to lead a secluded life to get rid of your supplications.[299]

In this quotation Tarabotti went beyond the argument that the temptation to illicit relationships lie primarily with the uncontrollable male libido; she actually gave specific examples of the ways she thought men relentlessly pursued women who were ostensibly trying to avoid them in order to protect their own virtue. At this point her position regarding convents was not clear: she claimed that seclusion did not protect women from the overtures of their male counterparts. At other points, however, she suggested that the separation of men and women resulted in less flirtation:

> Once again my ears resound with a single protest from all men: women cannot be permitted to study grammar, rhetoric, logic, philosophy, theology, and the other sciences because by attending school they would easily lose their chastity. Men have learned from experience that occasions of sin cause even the wisest men to waver; their emotions and sense cannot resist the vivacious charm of a beautiful face or the darts of a pair of brilliant, flattering eyes.[300]

Tarabotti's main purpose in this passage was to refute the argument that women should not attend school because it would pose a threat to their virtue. It is the virtue of the men, she argues, that would be challenged because they lack self-control. She was not the only woman in the time

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[299] Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*, 110.
[300] Tarabotti, 109.

period to criticize the weak resolve of Venetian men. In the eighteenth century, a widow named Laura explained in a letter to a newspaper called the Thistle that she used the anonymity of Venetian cloaks and masks to avoid male attention. "I do not know if you respect the gentle sex," she wrote, "but you are reading the words of a woman." She then continued to explain how her work relied upon her costume:

> Without the aid of the mask, do you think I would be able to write? The gentlemen around me all think I'm a man. They leave me in peace to scratch out these lines without annoying me with their elaborate bows and handshakes and the pretty little phrases whispered in my ear and all the other artful things that men do when they talk to members of my sex.[301]

Both Tarabotti and the widow Laura expressed frustration at the inability of women to accomplish work when men were present. The key point they outlined was that women did not suffer from a lack of virtue or self-control that prevented them from attending school with men. Instead it was the fault of the men, an argument which highlighted the severe injustice of providing men with a formal education while excluding women.

Although she refuted the argument that the virtue of women would be challenged by attending school, Tarabotti did not necessarily believe that it was in the best interest of women to attend schools with men, especially not a school with male teachers:

> Unhappy is that woman who, desirous of knowing the good, should go to man to learn it! … With execrable fictions and infamous techniques, you send the sheep to learn of the wolf, and she will be instructed in things she never would have imagined… and will finally become his prey. With a semblance of goodness, under the appearance of good advice, you would like to adulterate the chastest women, and that is why you send them to learn from men not how to know God, but how to offend God.[302]

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[301] Quoted and translated in James H. Johnson, *Venice Incognito: Masks in the Serene Republic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 151.

[302] Tarabotti, "Women Are of the Human Species," 153.

This is where the potential benefit of convent life emerges. Tarabotti relentlessly criticized the lack of education provided to women, but did not advocate that young women attend regular schools, which typically had male instructors. Instead, her ideal was for young women to be able to learn from educated women. In this respect, convents offered something positive because residents could more easily avoid interacting with men. Yet Tarabotti used controlled interactions with men through letters to her advantage.

Tarabotti's ideas did not remain within the confines of her enclosed convent. She corresponded with an impressive array of men and women and advertised herself via the publication of her letter collection in order to circulate her arguments in favor of women's equality. Tarabotti's life is a particularly interesting example of how a nun could cultivate important friendships and share ideas with men and women both inside and outside the convent. As I discussed in the previous chapter, nuns and educande formed strong connections with other women in the convent while still interacting regularly with individuals outside. These individuals frequently included instructors (licensed and unlicensed), customers (including the families of students), and even audience members for nuns who performed theater. The opportunity to live in a community run by other women who managed businesses and hired a variety of males for outside expertise created a rich environment that many women outside the convent, especially if they were not wealthy, could never experience. It also reflected Tarabotti's ideal of women learning from one another rather than men.

Two of Tarabotti's closest friends, Betta Polani and Regina Donati, were women who had been novices with her. One of these women, Betta Polani, eventually left, but she and Tarrabotti enjoyed a warm friendship and continued to exchange letters and visits. Tarabotti regularly confided in Polani and looked to her for comfort in difficult times. When Tarabotti's

mother died, she wrote to Polani "since communicating the troubles of the heart to true friends is a great relief to disconsolate souls, I feel obliged to transmit… the bitter news of the death of she who gave me life."[303] In this example she makes a point to identify Polani as a "true friend," perhaps in contrast to certain nuns in Sant'Anna with whom she did not form close relationships. Tarabotti also showed great trust in Polani when it came to matters that were both emotional and practical. At one point when she was ill and convinced she was going to die soon, Tarabotti sent her works to Polani for safekeeping, writing "to you who have been the complete mistress of the dearest part of myself, I send my works, the dearest things I have and what I most regret leaving behind…"[304] It is interesting that she chose to send her works to Polani at this point, because Polani was not typically one of the individuals who helped Tarabotti circulate her work. But in this case she specified that three of the works she sent could be printed (these have all been lost).[305] At one point Polani even advised Tarabotti to give up writing for fear that it was detrimental to the nun's health, but Tarabotti responded that this was impossible: "I have lost my friends, I am a shadow without you; whence if I had not this diversion, I would be dead by now."[306] This example indicates that Tarabotti felt very lonely without her friend in the convent. But other letters reveal that the two women were also able to see each other in person. Tarabotti wrote to Polani that "the first breath that God has conceded me after I have long yearned to breathe I will blow into my quill to make it fly to Your Illustrious Ladyship, sending it as ambassador of my afflictions and bearer of my thanks for your kind visits."[307] Tarabotti's

[303] Tarabotti, *Letters*, 88–89.
[304] Tarabotti, 82.
[305] Tarabotti, 82–83.
[306] Tarabotti, 104.
[307] Tarabotti, 147.

mention of breathing difficulties is a reference to one of her physical ailments. In this case, it appears that Polani visited Tarabotti while she was sick and the nun was graciously thanking her friend for such attentions. Tarabotti also mentioned Donati in a letter to Polani, writing that "I was used to a most exacting attention to my ills, thanks to your love and the charity of my regal Regina, who forgot her own station to save me."[308] This suggests that Donati, as a convent resident, was able to provide more care and attention to the suffering Tarabotti during her illness. Tarabotti did not bond with all of her fellow nuns, but Betta and Polani are striking examples of the types of friendships that could begin during a novitiate or time as a student in a convent.

Tarabotti's interactions with women were not limited to those she bonded with within the walls of Sant'Anna. She also exchanged letters, works, and praise with women who never resided in the convent, many of whom were writers or had an interest in Tarabotti's work, meaning that their literary exchanges formed a small female literary community.[309] Her letters to Aquila Barbara are particularly interesting because Tarabotti showed serious concern for the content of Barbara's compositions, while simultaneously praising her writing abilities. In one letter she gently informed Barbara "if your Illustrious Ladyship's stature did non inhibit the freedom your affection and kindness offer, I would say, regarding those heretical thoughts you write me about, that I think you should step back over the threshold into the Church."[310] In another letter Tarabotti was even more stern, writing "I command you, as is my duty as a nun, to keep the treasures of your intellect hidden, since it seems to me that you wrong God, who

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[308] Tarabotti, 150.
[309] Meredith K. Ray and Lynn Lara Westwater, eds., "Introduzione," in *Lettere Familiari e Di Complimento* (Toronto: Rosenberg & Sellier, 2005), 35.
[310] Tarabotti, *Letters*, 154.

endowed you so freely with qualities he does not share widely."[311] These are strong words from a woman like Tarabotti, who often fielded religious critiques of her own works. It is particularly interesting that Tarabotti and Barbara held these exchanges because it indicates that Tarabotti was able to use letter writing to discuss a variety of unorthodox or problematic ideas with other women. Despite their disagreements on some subjects, Tarabotti and Barbara appear to have had a long and fulfilling correspondence. Barbara even sent Tarabotti a piece to be included in one of Tarabotti's works. It reached Tarabotti too late to be included, but the nun's gratitude was profuse. "Upon receiving such a composition," she wrote, "I was stunned by the greatness and singularity of the favor, but not so much that I did not immediately recognize it as an eagle's flight of pen… I regret that it did not reach me in time to adorn my poor little book with such rich and precious gems, as it had already gone to press…"[312]

Tarabotti also corresponded with another woman who was a nun and writer, Guid'Ascania Orsi of Bologna. The two women frequently exchanged works and asked one another for feedback. For example, regarding Orsi's work *Hieroglyphic Olive Branch,* now lost, Tarabotti wrote "truly the work is wonderful, and worthy no less of the intellect of Your Illustrious Ladyship who formed it than of our most serene sir who will receive it."[313] On another occasion Tarabotti begged Orsi for information about what other individuals were saying about Tarabotti's piece:

> I beg your kindness to be so pleased as to tell me what opinion those lofty intellects have of my *Paradise*. Please be assured, however, that my goal is not to hear praise... but only because, since I must reprint the book, I would follow the opinion of the majority of writers in revising it anew if I knew what they thought I should do, since I well know that

[311] Tarabotti, 274.
[312] Tarabotti, 284.
[313] Tarabotti, 125.

> Bologna is the mother of learning, the guardian of the virtuous, and the treasury of knowledge.[314]

Here Tarabotti showed the marks of an entrepreneaur as well as an intellect. She was interested in feedback on her book to revise it most effectively for its second printing. It is interesting that she regarded another religious woman as the best source of information regarding the popular opinion of her works.

Tarabotti made connections with many men outside the convent, some of whom were very influential. Tarabotti's sister, Lorenzina, married Giacomo Pighetti, a member of the Accademia degli Incogniti and Tarabotti began to establish important connections with the group. Tarabotti's connections with the Incogniti were key to the circulation of her work, but her relationships with individual members were sometimes turbulent. Gian Francesco Loredano, a particularly important figure in publishing who helped Tarabotti circulate many of her works, also played tricks on her and published works that angered her. Nevertheless, she dedicated her letter collection to him in thanks for his assistance.[315] Her relations with another member of the group, Girolamo Brusoni, began as a friendship but ended with Brusoni criticizing Tarabotti in writing and mocking her in public.[316] Tarabotti was further distressed that he published a work on convent life, originally called *Turbulence of the Vessels* but published under *Tragic Lives*, after reading the manuscript of *Paternal Tyranny*.[317]

Tensions also existed in Tarabotti's relationships with men who were not in the Accademia. Angelico Aprosio, itinerant friar and writer, initially encouraged Tarabotti's work.

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[314] Tarabotti, 208.
[315] Westwater, "Disquieting Voice," 261–62.
[316] Westwater, 263.
[317] Tarabotti, *Letters*, 264.

But his interactions with the nun changed dramatically after the publication of her *Antisatira* in 1644. He spread rumors that she did not actually write the *Paradiso* and wrote and circulated his own work called *La Maschera Scoperta* (The Mask Unveiled) criticizing Tarabotti. She managed to suppress the publication of *La Maschera Scoperta,* but expressed great anguish upon discovering that her brother-in-law had actually helped Aprosio produce the work.[318] She wrote to Pighetti that she considered this a great betrayal because he has suggested specfic ways to edit *Antisatira* but never discouraged her from publishing it.[319] Furthermore, she wrote, "never did I strive to offend or jeopardize you; rather I have always esteemed your pen and loved you as a brother, although you did not return my affection."[320]

Tarabotti used all of her friendships to deliberately and enthusiastically widen the audience for her work. A great deal of the evidence for her wide-ranging connections may be found in her published volume of personal letters, but the identity of the correspondents is not always present. For example, she wrote to an unknown individual "the darkest ink of my pen presents itself before the splendor of Your Excellency to beg illumination, that it too might legitimately appear on the world's stage."[321] In this example Tarabotti is quite straightforward about her goals to circulate her works as widely as possible, potentially by striking up friendships through epistolary exchange. But again, like her connections with other women, these friendships with men were not entirely limited to the written word; Tarabotti also received male visitors in the convent. She wrote to Enrico Cornaro about their mutual friend, musician Giovanni Francesco Busnello (1598-1659), who visited her in the convent, that during the visit

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[318] Westwater, "Disquieting Voice," 262–64.
[319] Tarabotti, *Letters*, 165.
[320] Tarabotti, 166.
[321] Tarabotti, 197.

she "admired his regal bearing," "enjoyed his refined conversation," and felt "transformed from nun to muse when, in proximity to an Apollo who is a friend to each, I heard praise attributed to me that would have made Humility itself arrogant."[322] The same letter specified that Busnello was wearing a mask, a practice that was specifically prohibited in convents but frequently occurred anyway. Tarabotti also corresponded without strain with writer and librettist Pier Paolo Bissari and lawyer and writer Nicolò Crasso.[323] Her letter collection includes messages with Venetian doges, the grand duchess of Tuscany, the duke of Parma, Pietro Ottobon, who would become pope Alexander VIII, and French Cardinal Jules Mazarin.[324]

Tarabotti was heavily involved in the planning of her letter collection, published two years before her death. With the publication of her letters, Tarabotti entered the epistolary tradition, newly flourishing after the discovery of Cicero's letters in the 14th century. Sharing a collection of letters was more than an effort to communicate ideas and opinions as Tarabotti had already done in her other works. It was also an opportunity to demonstrate her cultural and intellectual status.[325] It served to reflect her accomplishments and skills, and even show off the important individuals she corresponded with.[326] Most humanist letter collections were published by men, but Tarabotti was not the first woman to embrace the opportunity. Isotta Nogarola, Cassandra Fedele, and Laura Cereta all used letter collections to "establish their own literary status, advance their views, and respond to their critics."[327]

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[322] Tarabotti, 201–2.
[323] Westwater, "Disquieting Voice," 264–65.
[324] Westwater, 311–12.
[325] Ray and Westwater, "Introduction," 15.
[326] Ray and Westwater, 18.
[327] Ray and Westwater, 16.

In an unaddressed letter, probably written to Girolamo Brusoni, she used a tone very different from the modesty seen in her other works when she discussed the difficulties she had faced getting permission to print her letter collection. She described the fact that another unnamed person – probably Giovanni Dandolo – had already attempted to publish some of Tarabotti's letters:

> He gathered them from various people and especially from the illustrious and excellent Loredano, who is quite pleased and believes that my letters must not wait for the slowness of that Saturn you mention to me. Indeed he knows that my pen vanquishes the vainglorious beneath all the signs of the zodiac, while my pages dare to appear so often before you, who is yet the prince of planets. Let them plot tricks, let them prepare deceits, let the liars exaggerate falsehood, for in any case I will always be that unmasked Arcangela whom a certain reckless person wished to paint to the world as something different. I am she who created *Paternal Tyranny,* etc.: understand me who will, for I understand myself. Thus I reply that Saturn does not rule my hand and he does not record the strokes of my pen, which boldly presents itself before the greatest potentates, and anyone who wishes to insinuate otherwise to simple minds is lying."[328]

Tarabotti made it clear that she supported the publishing of her letters and, in fact, did not think she should need permission – "wait for the slowness of Saturn"- in order to do so. She also made a strong statement about those who criticized her or tried to question her authorship by proclaiming "I understand myself" and "Saturn does not record the strokes of my pen." Finally, she claimed that her works "boldly" went before "the greatest potentates," giving the impression that she was not at all ashamed of her works. We should not necessarily assume that this passage is the one that reflects Tarabotti's true personality or level of confidence. It is quite possible that this letter simply represents a different type of posturing from the writings that use false modesty. But this too reveals that Tarabotti knew what approach to take in different situations. Considered in conjunction with her efforts to circulate her writings, Tarabotti appears to have

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[328] Tarabotti, *Letters*, 205.

had great confidence in her knowledge and ability. When rumors circulated in Venice that Colisson, the secretary of the Marchioness di Galeranda, might be trying to publish Paternal Tyranny under another name, she warned the Marchioness in a letter "I am quite alive and ready to oppose anyone who might swindle me, or rather to make sure that the swindler ends up swindled." She further stipulated that if Signor Colisson were to publish her book under the wrong name "instead of that fellow robbing glory from a poor little woman, he would earn disgrace and blame before the whole world."[329]

Tarabotti used her widely circulated works to criticize many of the problems faced by Venetian women. She argued that men caused problems for women who wished to be virtuous and learned and particularly emphasized the problems that resulted from forced vocations. Yet within her sharp criticisms of the men and women who forced young girls into the convent and the government's role in allowing this to happen, she recognized the potential for convents to offer girls the opportunity to learn while removed from the damaging influence of men. Tarabotti used her education and access to an unusual number of books to write and circulate feminist ideas, particularly criticisms of forced vocations that still recognized the potential good of convent education.

Conclusion

It can be challenging to obtain a clear idea of Tarabotti's educational experiences from her narratives. Her words often create parallel visions, one of an unwilling young woman who struggles to gain rudimentary writing skills, the other an unapologetic and well-read feminist who successfully circulates her ideas. It is tempting to read Tarabotti as an avid critic of convent

[329] Tarabotti, 198–99.

education who recognized true vocations but thought they required women to sacrifice an intellectual life. But a closer examination of and comparison among her works reveals that Tarabotti was advocating more freedom and flexibility in educational options for women, wishing certain aspects of convent education to be more widely available while simultaneously criticizing men for forcing so many women to embrace a single path. Although she was an unwilling resident of Sant'Anna, Tarabotti took advantage of the convent's opportunities for intellectual enrichment and advanced arguments for women's equality.

IV. Maria Alberghetti and La Compagnia delle Dimesse

Introduction

There is an interesting discrepancy in how scholars interpret one word in Fonte's *Worth of Women*. Corinna, one of the primary characters gathered at the home of Leonora, is described in the original Italian as "una dimessa." The word "dimessa" could refer to any young, unmarried woman or to a member of La Compagnia delle Dimesse, a non-cloistered order of religious women, often known as a "tertiary" or "third order" nuns.[330] The Dimesse embraced teaching as their primary charitable activity. Although in this case I am inclined to agree with scholars who think Corinna is neither married nor a tertiary, the ambiguity in how the word "dimessa" may be interpreted is instructive. The other women praise the benefits of Corinna's position saying that by avoiding men she has "escaped the tribulations of this world" and can freely engage in "those glorious pursuits that will win you immortality."[331] Like the word "dimessa," the comments of Corinna and her friends apply equally well to a tertiary nun or to an unmarried woman living at home. In both cases, she could avoid the presence of men alongside the restrictions of the cloister. In the Republic of Venice, Dimesse contributed to the education of women by embracing learning within their convent and by teaching extremely poor girls at the Schools of Christian Doctrine. Maria Alberghetti, who was educated in Venetian convents, established a new house of Dimesse in Padua and used her literary skills to write educational works for novices who would also teach in the Schools of Christian Doctrine.

While scholarship has recently focused on the activities of cloistered nuns in Italy, there is comparatively very little information available on tertiary nuns, who theoretically should not

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[330] Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 45, n.5.
[331] Fonte, 48.

have existed after the Council of Trent. But in several cities, including part of the Venetian Republic, such as Padua and the island of Murano, these women continued to live and work, following a very different set of rules compared to officially cloistered nuns. Convents could provide rich educational activities and even the opportunity to develop feminist arguments, but nuns were still part of a social and economic system that expected them to sacrifice their personal desires for the good of others and to serve as symbols of the Republic's purity. Dimesse submitted to these restrictions in a much more limited capacity as they publicly served the poor but still resided in a community of other women. In many ways this provided more freedom for the Dimesse, but it also made them more susceptible to scandal. Like nuns in enclosed convents, the Dimesse trained their novices using a pedagogy that reflected fundamental aspects of the humanist and Counter-Reformation approaches to education. Maria Alberghetti used her literary knowledge to encourage particular aspects of this pedagogical approach, such as imitation of the saints, essentially training a group of women who would become the teachers of lower-class boys and girls in Venice.

Third Order Nuns and the Venetian Republic

Sixteenth-century Italy witnessed a significant increase in non-cloistered groups of religious women, who were an unusual exception to the general rule that a woman must become a cloistered nun or get married. The Council of Trent forced many tertiary or third-order nuns to become cloistered, but some were able to obtain exceptions, likely by pulling political strings. The Dimesse in Venice were one of the groups who avoided cloister and were therefore able to educate young girls outside their convent. Despite the clear benefits to avoiding enclosure, the order had a marked concern with scandal, perhaps due to living in the public eye.

Although non-cloistered female religious groups existed long before the early modern period, they became more common during the sixteenth century.[332] The reasons for this rise have not been completely identified. Gabriella Zarri argued that it was the result of the increase of primogeniture in inheritance practices combined with the enforcement of strict enclosure on female religious orders, resulting in a growing group of women who could neither marry nor become nuns in traditional convents.[333] Andrea Maurutto has also presented the increase as an attempt to reform and renew old religious orders.[334] Within the Veneto, the Dimesse also had the secondary purpose of allowing women who could not afford the dowry at most convents to become nuns.[335] Whatever the reason for the proliferation of these orders, they fit uncomfortably in the typical understanding of women in the early modern era choosing between marriage and traditional convents with no other options.

Non-cloistered religious women inhabited an unusual space between women who took traditional religious vows and women who married or otherwise remained firmly outside of a religious order. They led celibate lives but did not take formal vows. They often wore a plain garb that resembled, but was less elaborate than, the traditional nun's habit. Most importantly, although the women still led fairly solitary and reflective lives, the founders of these communities did not intend them to be cloistered. Some members of Third Orders lived and

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[332] Gabriella Zarri, "The Third Status," in *Time and Space in Women's Lives in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Ann Jacobson Schutte, Thomas Kuehn, and Silvana Seidel Menchi, vol. LVII, Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2001), 194.

[333] Zarri, 194.

[334] Andrea Maurutto, "Maria Alberghetti (1578-1664): La 'Tortorella' Mistica Del Signore," in *Vita Della Venerabile Maria Alberghetti, Fondatrice Delle Dimesse Di Padova: Edizione Critica Commentata a Cura Di Andre Maurutto*, Soggetti Rivelati: Ritratti, Storie, Scritture Di Donne 53 (Padova: Il Poligrafo Casa Editrice SRL, 2015), 29–30.

[335] Maurutto, 27.

followed the appropriate rules from home, while many others lived in open monasteries (communities that were not cloistered).[336] In many ways the concept of clausura was opposed to the purpose of Third Order communities, who saw charitable work in society as their main purpose, often adopting a specific cause as their primary focus. For example, two of the early groups that arose in the first half of the 1500s were the Ursulines, who are quite well-known for their work in education, and the lesser-known Angeliche, who helped reform monasteries and convert women leading immoral lives.[337] The Dimesse similarly devoted their time to teaching Christian doctrine and assisting the poor.[338]

Despite this emphasis on performing charitable work outside the convent, the Church forced many of the Third Order communities to become cloistered after the Council of Trent's ruling on enclosure.[339] But the enforcement varied widely depending upon the order and its location. In 1566, three years after the Council of Trent, Pope Pius V issued the bull *Circa Pastoralis,* which encouraged tertiaries to take solemn vows, making them the equivalent of professed nuns and subjecting themselves to cloister. Groups of tertiaries who refused to take these vows were banned from receiving postulants.[340] Pope Paul V ruled in 1612 specifically that the Ursuline order should be cloistered, forcing them to limit their mission of educating young girls to what they could accomplish behind convent walls, a need that was already fulfilled in Venice by other cloistered nuns. In most locations the Ursulines were forced to become enclosed

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[336] Maurutto, 28.
[337] Maurutto, 27–28.
[338] Zarri, "Time and Space," 189–90.
[339] Danielle Culpepper, "Court, Convent, and Counter Reformation: Ursulines in the Farnese Duchy of Parma and Piacenza, 1575-1731" (University of Virginia, 2002), 93.
[340] Culpepper, 94.

communities but the Ursulines of Brescia were allowed to continue as a society of laywomen who performed charitable works until 1810.[341]

Antonio Pagani (1526-1589) founded La Compagnia delle Dimesse della Madonna, which loosely translates to "the Society of the Humble Ones of Our Lady," in 1579 in Vicenza, at that time part of the Venetian Republic. He simultaneously founded the Company of the Most Holy Cross and intended the two groups to serve as female and male counterparts, jointly pursuing the same program. Members of these companies were expected to dedicate themselves to the contemplative life alongside pastoral activity, such as teaching the Catechism, visiting the sick, and preaching.[342] One of Pagani's main purposes in establishing these companies was to increase the moral and cultural education of lay people.[343] The Dimesse gradually expanded throughout the Republic of Venice. In 1595, Patriarch Lorenzo Priuli refused to allow a new house of Dimesse in the city of Venice itself, so three women from the house in Vicenza (Angiola Paldina Odoni, Diana Crivelli, and Caterina Fiorini) instead founded a new company on the island of Murano, using Angiola's dowry money to buy a house there.[344] Within a few years, the Dimesse had established additional houses throughout the Veneto in Verona, Bergamo, Thiene, Schio, Feltre, Padova, and Udine.[345]

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[341] King, *Women of the Renaissance*, 110.

[342] Maurutto, "Maria Alberghetti," 2015, 69; Pagani was baptized Marco Pagani in Venice (Canareggio) in 1526. He attended the University of Padua. Rosalba Ferraresso, "Il Venerabile Antonio Pagani," *Le Venezie Francescane*, no. 5 (1988): 18.

[343] Giovanni Mantese, "Il Ven. Antonio Pagani Nella Storia Religiosa Del Cinqueceno Vicentino e Veneto," *Le Venezie Francescane*, no. 5 (1988): 34–35.

[344] Flaminio Cornaro, *Notizie Storiche Delle Chiese e Monasteri Di Venezia e Torcello* (Padova, 1758), 660–61.

[345] In 1810, when a Napoleonic decree dissolved and suppressed all religious orders and congregations, the Dimesse kept their houses in Padua and Udine open because the government recognized them as schools directed by pious women rather than religious sisters. Maurutto, "Maria Alberghetti," 2015, 72–73; Both of these establishments still exist today;

While the Ursulines in Venice were formally cloistered (to the extent that cloister was a reality anywhere in Venice), the Dimesse there were established over a decade after the Council of Trent and managed to avoid cloister due to the intercessions of some influential religious leaders in the area. It was not easy to convince everyone that this novel arrangement was a good idea and some Church leaders thought it was inappropriate. Jesuit father Gagliardi expressed concern that members of Pagani's orders were trained to depend on themselves and their own rules rather than guidance from the priesthood, only going to priests to confess their sins and not for any other type of advice.[346] But the early Dimesse remained determined to avoid clausura and maintain freedom of movement throughout the Veneto. They were successful at least partially due to the help of Agostino Valier, bishop of Verona, who recognized open convents as a legitimate option for women.[347]

The lack of complete enclosure directly changed the type of charitable enterprises taken on by the women. While nuns were limited to carrying out tasks physically within the physical convent, Dimesse were allowed to complete tasks in the public realm. The rule of the order specifically stated that the members did not wish to take solemn vows and would not be obligated to observe cloister in order to better serve their communities:

> As much as the sisters of Our Company revere holy religion, nonetheless they do not feel inclined and called to obligate themselves to the religious life, neither by closing

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the groups of sisters in Padua and Udine each run the equivalent of a kindergarten, elementary school, and middle school, and a type of boarding house for local university students. "Oggi," Collegio Dimesse Padova, accessed October 25, 2016, http://www.collegiodimesse.it/oggi.asp; "Oggi," Collegio Dimesse Udine, accessed October 25, 2016, http://www.dimesse.org/oggi.html.

[346] Gagliardi's concerns, expressed in a letter to the Superior General in Rome, are quoted in Mantese's article. But Mantese does not clarify whether the Gagliardi in question is Lodovico Gagliardi or Achille Gagliardi (1537-1607). Mantese, "Il Ven. Antonio Pagani Nella Storia Religiosa Del Cinqueceno Vicentino e Veneto."

[347] Maurutto, "Maria Alberghetti," 2015, 68.

> themselves in a monastery nor binding themselves by solemn vows. Solemn vows of obedience, poverty, and chastity always obligate the women to the cloister; but usually they desire to attend to life and Christian discipline in that state in which they are found...[348]

Instead of entering a convent that at least theoretically observed cloister, these women felt that they had a specific religious calling that required more freedom of movement. This passage describes some of the charitable teaching activities that the Venetian Dimesse were involved in, including instructing children in the Schools of Christian Doctrine:

> We have resolved that on each holy day each of the houses of our Company will offer one mistress who knows how to read. This mistress will go into another Church of the city, with the consent of the most reverend Monsignor Bishop, to teach the Christian doctrine… And they want finally, that once or twice a month one of the older sisters comes with one of the leaders of the house to visit the city's hospitals of women. The same is done in our other locations, where with spiritual and temporal help they assist as much as possible (with divine favor) the spirits and bodies of the sick.[349]

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[348] "Percioche quantunque le sorelle di essa nostra Compagnia riveriscano le sante Religioni, nientedimeno non si sentono inchinate, e chiamate à doversi obbligare ad alcuna Religione, ne à richiudersi ne i monasteri; ne a legarsi à voti solenni; sicome è di obedienza, di povertà, e di castità; i quai voti solennemente fatti sempre obligano le donne alla clausura: ma solamente desiderano di attendere alla vita, e disciplina christiana in quello stato, nel qual si trovano, studiando di schifar le occasioni del mondo, e di mortificare in loro le passioni vitiose, che dispiacciono a Dio, & impediscono le sue maggior gratie; & procurando etiandio di acquistar le virtù christine, per l'obligo, che si sentono di conformità d'amore, e di costumi verso di esso Giesù Christo crocifisso." *Gli Ordini Della Divota Compagnia Delle Dimesse; Che Vivono Sotto Il Nome, et La Protettione Della Purissima Madre Di Dio Maria Vergine* (Venice: Domenico Nicolini, 1587), 2.

[349] "Por habbiamo deliberato, che tutte le case della nostra Compagnia siano tenute di dare, ogni festa, una Maestra per casa di essa Compagnia, che sappia leggere. Le quali vadano in alcuna Chiesa della città, col consentimento del Reverendissimo Monsignor Vescovo, per insegnar la dottrina christiava; la dove procureranno d'haver alcuna altra secolare devota, che governi le pute che veniranno. Et venendo il caso che esso Reverendissimo Monsignor ordinasse la compagnia di S. Orsola, siano tenute di compartire le dette dorelle, che vanno alla dottrina, in modo che parte di esse attendessero à tale opera;& parte alla dottrina suddetta. Et vogliamo finalmente, che ogni mese una volta, o due, vada alcuna delle piu attempate con una delle maggiori di casa à visitar quelli hospitali di donne, che si trovano in questa città, & l'istesso si faccia, dove fossero altri luoghi nostri. La dove con l'aiuto spirituale, & temporale sovengano quanto possano (col favor divino) alle anime, & à i corpi delle inferme." *Gli Ordini Della Divota Compagnia Delle Dimesse; Che Vivono Sotto Il Nome, et La Protettione Della Purissima Madre Di Dio Maria Vergine*, 3.

On every holy day, one of the Dimesse who could read taught girls at a church that was hosting a School of Christian Doctrine. Once or twice a month, one of the older Dimesse and one of their leaders would visit the hospital to serve the sick through prayer and physical assitance.

It may have been a relief for many of the sisters to engage with the community in their teaching activities. But it also meant that church officials were more involved and able to directly observe the activities of the Dimesse; the above example mentions the bishop. Furthermore, life as a Dimessa still came with some theoretical limits on a young woman's social interactions. According to the rules of the order, a Dimessa should have a particular reason for leaving the house each time she went out in public. The rule specifically banned Dimesse from bride visits, visits to women giving birth, "or of another idle person of theirs" when it was simply for the purpose of socializing or enjoying worldly comforts.[350] Instead, it stated, Dimesse should interact with the world "when they hope to produce, with divine favor, some spiritual fruit; and where there might be a sick person, whose soul they believe they can with divine grace benefit."[351] The rule also commented:

> The women of our company, not only when they are in the house but also outside the house, should have words and customs that render the scent of goodness and Christian discipline, always disgusted by excessive, or vain words. They should always have a

[350] "Et oltra ciò niuna delle donne vada fuor di casa senza ragionevole cagione; ne faccia visite di spose, o di donne di parto; o d'altre persone vane della sua, o dell'altrui parentela; si come suole usare il mondo sensuale, & ambitioso." *Gli Ordini Della Divota Compagnia Delle Dimesse; Che Vivono Sotto Il Nome, et La Protettione Della Purissima Madre Di Dio Maria Vergine*, 11–12.

[351] "Ma ben possono andar dove sperano di produr, col divin favore, alcun frutto spirituale: e dove fosse alcuna persona inferma; alla quale (page 12) credessero di poter con la divina gratia apportare alcun beneficio; per la salute di tale anima." *Gli Ordini Della Divota Compagnia Delle Dimesse; Che Vivono Sotto Il Nome, et La Protettione Della Purissima Madre Di Dio Maria Vergine*, 11–12.

> watchful eye in every occasion for spiritual gain for themselves and of others, with whom they speak or converse.[352]

All time spent outside the house should be used to spread the Christian faith, whether through charitable work or through example.

These rules were a far cry from the theoretical requirements placed on cloistered nuns, who were not supposed to leave the convent unless there was a very grave reason. But it was much easier for outsiders or authorities to observe what the Dimesse did on a daily basis. An unintended consequence of the Dimesse lifestyle was a marked concern with avoiding any scandal, perhaps because their position as third order nuns was precarious in the post-Tridentine Church. The rule mentioned the avoidance of scandal several times, mainly in regard to excursions outside the convent:

> Those who must go every month to the hospitals of women and those who go every feast day (according to the order of the most reverend Monsignor) to teach Christian doctrine or to attend to the Company of St. Ursula and those who must go to sick women or to another pious work, and all, finally, who go outside the house, should always be reflections of mortification, and of virtue within and outside themselves by dressing simply and poorly, by walking, speaking, and working in all places and at all times with every person, with modesty, prudence, and sobriety, in a manner that always brings them edification and never scandal.[353]

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[352] "Deono le donne di questa nostra Compagnia non solamente in casa; ma ancor fuor di casa con le parole, & con li costumi rendere odor di bontà, e di disciplina christiana, schifandosi sempre dalle soverchie, o vane parole; & havendo sempre l'occhio attento in ogni occasione al guadagno spirituale di se stesse, & anco delle altre, con le quali parlano, o conversano." *Gli Ordini Della Divota Compagnia Delle Dimesse; Che Vivono Sotto Il Nome, et La Protettione Della Purissima Madre Di Dio Maria Vergine*, 11.

[353] "Et quella, che hanno da andare ogni mese alli hospitai delle donne: & quelle, che vanno ogni festa (secondo l'ordine di esso Reverendissimo Monsignor) ad insegnar la dottrina christiania: o ad attendere alla Compagnia di Santa Orsola: & quelle che hanno da andar da donne inferme, o ad altra opera pia: e tuttte finalmente, che vanno fuor di casa, deono sempore esser specchi di mortificatione, e di virtù dentro, & fuor di loro; così nel vestir semplice, & povero; come nel caminar, nel parlare, & nell'operare in tutti i luoghi, e tempi; & con ogni persona, con modestia, prudenza, & sobrietà; in modo che sempre ne riesca edificatione, & non mai scandalo." *Gli Ordini Della Divota Compagnia Delle Dimesse; Che Vivono Sotto Il Nome, et La Protettione Della Purissima Madre Di Dio Maria Vergine*, 13.

The rules demonstrated an extra level of concern for younger women, who were perhaps considered more likely to give into temptation, or perhaps simply more likely to inadvertently cause scandal. Even spiritual outings were reason for caution in the case of younger Dimesse:

> Such respect and discretion should be used so that when going to sermons, as in other public devotions or actions, they should go to those that bear spiritual fruit and not those that cause distraction, curiosity, damage, or scandal in themselves, or in others. When it is not expedient for them to go, they can be supplied in the house with holy readings and other spiritual exercises that are used among the Company.[354]

They were also banned from going "to wash clothes in public places" or in any place "where there are great heaps, tumult, and multitudes of people" all so they could "avoid every scandal… that could occur."[355] While avoiding enclosure, the Dimesse were still subject to the judgements of the public and were especially easy for local Church officials to observe, meaning that it was probably more difficult for them to ignore rules the way nuns in traditional convents often did.

The Dimesse were among few tertiary orders allowed to avoid enclosure in post-Tridentine Italy. This meant that they were free from requirements to observe – or at least appear to observe – a strict separation from society. But it also meant that their actions were less

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[354] "Et tal rispetto, e discretione anco si usi così nell'andara alle prediche, come in altre publiche divotioni, o attion; dove solamente habbiano da andar quelle, che fogliono cavar frutto spirituale; & non quelle, che prendano cagione di distrattione, curiosità, o danno, o scandolo in se, o in altrui; le quali (non essendo à loro espediente di andarvi) possano supplire in casa con sante lettioni, & con altri essercitii spirituali, che tra la Compagnia si usano." *Gli Ordini Della Divota Compagnia Delle Dimesse; Che Vivono Sotto Il Nome, et La Protettione Della Purissima Madre Di Dio Maria Vergine*, 11.

[355] "Et non vadano le giovini in particolar à lavar panni in luochi publici; ne mai sotto alcun buon colore, ne con qual si voglia scusa, o cagione vadano alle fenestre, o à fissure sopra la strada, per ogni buon rispetto; ne vadano in luochi, ove sia gran fracco, tumulto, & moltitudine di persone; per schifare ogni scandolo loro, o d'altrui, che potesse occorrere." *Gli Ordini Della Divota Compagnia Delle Dimesse; Che Vivono Sotto Il Nome, et La Protettione Della Purissima Madre Di Dio Maria Vergine*, 11.

removed from the prying eyes of outsiders and Church officials, resulting in a significant concern with possible scandal.

Maria Alberghetti: Convent Student, Dimessa, and Pedagogue

Maria Alberghetti, a Venetian woman who became a third-order nun, is one example of a former convent student who did not become a nun in an enclosed convent. She was educated by the Ursulines and used her skills to write a variety of religious works and encourage learning in the open convent she founded in Padua. Just like many early modern pedagogues, these women saw morality and intellect as mutually reinforcing pursuits. Alberghetti's works, particularly her *Giardino di Poesie Spirituali,* encouraged both intellectual and spiritual learning. The pedagogy used by the Dimesse within their own convent reflected the same combination of humanist and Counter-Reformation ideals as the instruction provided by Venetian nuns and was particularly similar to the approach taken by Jesuit instructors. Alberghetti used her education to produce works that put a particular emphasis on spiritual and intellectual development through singing, reciting poetry, and imitating the saints.

The Dimesse took an exact approach to the relationship between teacher and student within their convent, reflecting many aspects of Jesuit pedagogy. The rule of the order encouraged these women to take account of the temperament, weaknesses, and strengths of the sister in question before giving an assignment to her:

> But it is a very useful and fitting thing that the teacher, or elder not grant to the disciple, or subject any special assignment, if at first she has not considered how well she will be able and know how to solve the problem and not be bogged down. Therefore (as was said) according to her capacity or disposition, she should be given an assignment which she can do with love and have the confidence that she can harvest good fruit from it.[356]

[356] "Ma è molto utile, & convenevole cosa che la Maestra, o maggiore non dia alla discepola, o suddita alcuno essercitio particolare, se prima non havrà considerato, come la potrà, & saprà

Rather than giving the same exercises to all of the young women, these activities should be modified or occasionally omitted when appropriate:

> That most successful outcome is when the teacher by herself, as is appropriate, speaks with charity to encourage [the pupil] and with the experience of the exercise that she has assigned to others to know when to be sympathetic, when to liven up the exercise, now to give it more spirit, now to translate it or to change the exercise up to the point that from it she can be qualified and capable. And this teacher will be able to confer according to need with another teacher and sometimes with the entire congregation about his pedagogical issue.[357]

This approach is very similar to the instructions given by Possevino to Jesuit instructors. He encouraged teachers to identify each student's strengths and recognize the variation of individual minds, which resulted from God granting everyone different gifts and abilities.[358] The Dimesse mistresses were also asked to have respect for one another's work and to support each others' efforts. The rule warned that "no teacher should… blame, and throw to the ground the training of some other teacher, or elder" but instead "speak with the teacher, if she is rendered understanding; if there is a need speak with the elders, and they will provide what is necessary concerning the government, and training of these disciples."[359]

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da quel sollevar, quando essa suddita (page 18) no potesse portare: però (sicome è detto) secondo la sua capacità, o dispositione, nella qual si trova, ha da assegnarle quell'essercitio, dal quale ella possa con amore, & fidanza cavarne buon frutto." *Gli Ordini Della Divota Compagnia Delle Dimesse; Che Vivono Sotto Il Nome, et La Protettione Della Purissima Madre Di Dio Maria Vergine*, 17–18.

[357] "Il che piu riuscità quando La Maestra in se (come suo proprio) con carità esserciterà con l'oratione, & con l'esperienza lo essercitio, c'ha da assegnare ad altrui; per poi saper compatie, & sovenire alla essercitata; hora inanimandola; & hora tralasciando, o mutando lo essercitio; finche di lui ella si rende idonea, & capace. Et essa Maestra potrà conferir (secondo il bisogno) con l'altra Maestra; o anco alle volte con la Congregatione circa tal governo." *Gli Ordini Della Divota Compagnia Delle Dimesse; Che Vivono Sotto Il Nome, et La Protettione Della Purissima Madre Di Dio Maria Vergine*, 18.

[358] Possevino, *Coltura de Gl'Ingegni*, Chapter 15.

[359] "Et è da avertir che à niuna Maestra si convien che usi con le discepole tale indiscretione, & superba presontione, di biasmar, & gittar à terra li ammaestramenti di alcuna altra Maestra, o

The Dimesse rule outlined a detailed and rigorous method for paying attention to the development of the younger members of the order. After their second year residing with the order, the elders should exhort novices to improve lacking areas and learn more spiritual practices:

> And the second year finished, or even (if so it should seem to the elders) before it is finished (being by the congregation judged capable), she should be exhorted and should be trained in what is appropriate … little by little, and introduced to other spiritual exercises with charity, affability, modesty, and discretion, according to what is seen of her ability and fervent desire...[360]

The instruction should continue once the novitiate stage is over. The congregation should "open her eyes and advise her about those failings that have begun… so that she can amend her failings."[361] But these corrections should be presented to the order "with brevity and modesty of words and with merciful spirits, and desirous of spiritual profit of such dimessa; not ever

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Maggiore; se ben à lei paresser fuor di proposito; ma piu tosto li escusi, & li risolva in alcun buon senso quanto meglio può; & piu tosto incolpi esse discepole, che non habbiano ben inteso quel, che udivano con distrattione di mente; con poca capacità, & imperfetta intelligenza; secondo la propria loro imperfettione. Et poi parli con tale Maestra; se si rende capace; o anco con le Maggiori se fa bisogno, & si proveda a quanto bisognasse circa il governo, & ammaestramento di esse discepole." *Gli Ordini Della Divota Compagnia Delle Dimesse; Che Vivono Sotto Il Nome, et La Protettione Della Purissima Madre Di Dio Maria Vergine*, 18.

[360] "Et finito il secondo anno; o pur anco (se così paresse ad esse maggiori) innanzi che sia finito (essendo dalla congrega giudicata capace) dee essertolta; & da alcuna à ciò idonea (dall'istessa congrega di tutte le sorelle assegnata Maestra) à poco à poco dee essere ammaestrata, & introdotta in alcuni essercitii spirituali con carità, affabilità, modestia, e discretione, secondo che si vedrà la sua capacità, & fervente volontà: sicome si dirà ne i seguenti capi." *Gli Ordini Della Divota Compagnia Delle Dimesse; Che Vivono Sotto Il Nome, et La Protettione Della Purissima Madre Di Dio Maria Vergine*, 15.

[361] "Oltra ciò dee ciascuna; da poi finito il tempo d'ogni novella, o novizziale prova; & quindeci giorni dopo che sarà fatta dimessa; humilmente dimandare in Congregatione, alla preserza delle maggiori di quelle case, che l'hanno già accettata, che vogliano per carità aprirle gli occhi, & avisarla intorno quei mancamenti, c'ha commessi, & che commetterà contra il suo proponimento, & la sua vocatione in tal vita ritirata; accioche si possa emendare." *Gli Ordini Della Divota Compagnia Delle Dimesse; Che Vivono Sotto Il Nome, et La Protettione Della Purissima Madre Di Dio Maria Vergine*, 16.

however saying things, that are not overt, or that could carry another minimum damage, or scandal to them, neither to another; but according to the usual way given in the spiritual exercises."[362] The rule even suggests putting the advice of the old Dimesse in writing:

> And they will also tell her the remedies that against such failings or inclinations they harbor… And they place them with brevity in two or three chapters in writing, according to the judgement of these elders. And that way she will remember them, with the government of the assigned teacher discussed in chapter 13. The mistress will have diligent care of her or even of others to whom they were assigned.[363]

This should continue, the rules state, once a month for the first year.[364] This systematic approach to fixing a young novice's failings is reminiscient of Possevino's description of a good teacher, who must occupy himself with not only planting good seeds but pulling the weeds of incorrect throughts from a student's mind.[365]

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[362] "Et quelle, che sapranno di lei alcna cosa bisognosa di emendare, o nelle parole, o ne i costumi; diranno ciò per ordine; & con brevità, & modestia di parole; & con l'animo piatoso, e desideroso del profitto spirituale di tale dimessa; non mai però dicendo cose, che non siano palesi, o che possano apportar alcun minimo danno, o scandalo à se, ne ad altrui; ma secondo il solito modo dato nelli essercitii spirituali." *Gli Ordini Della Divota Compagnia Delle Dimesse; Che Vivono Sotto Il Nome, et La Protettione Della Purissima Madre Di Dio Maria Vergine*, 16–17.

[363] "Et diranno anco insieme i rimedi, che contra tali mancamenti, o inchnationi si convengano, secondo che saranno dal Signor inspirate, & dalla lunga loro esperienza in se stesse ammaestrate. Et li metteranno con brevità in due, or tre capi in scritto, secondo il giudicio di esse maggiori. Et à tale si daranno per suo ricordo; col governo della già assegnata Maestra; sicome fu detto a capi 13. La quale havrà diligente cura di essa; o anco di altre, che fossero assegnate." *Gli Ordini Della Divota Compagnia Delle Dimesse; Che Vivono Sotto Il Nome, et La Protettione Della Purissima Madre Di Dio Maria Vergine*, 17.

[364] "Et poi, per quel primo anno una volta al mese, tra esse maggiori si potrà alla sua presenza trattar delle cose, che à lei si conviene osservar secondo il suo desiderio, per correggere, & regolare le sue attioni; dandole à bocca, o replicandole quei pochi salutiferi ricordi; ch'al suo bisogno spirituale si convengano." *Gli Ordini Della Divota Compagnia Delle Dimesse; Che Vivono Sotto Il Nome, et La Protettione Della Purissima Madre Di Dio Maria Vergine*, 17.

[365] "...il terreno quanto è più buono, se esso nó si lavora, ne si farchia, ne si purga, tanto piu germoglia di trsite herbe, & la perspicace natura dell'huomo, la quale non può cessare dall'operare, quando... tanto intricata, che l'aiuto humano non basta per liberarla." Possevino, *Coltura de Gl'Ingegni*, Chapter 10.

Alberghetti was born in Venice on September 4, 1578 to a noble family and baptized "Marieta Bernardina" in San Biagio di Castello on September 13, 1578.[366] Her parents were Sigismondo Alberghetti, known for his skill in military arts and Lisabetta (or Isabella) Giraldi detta Marendella.[367] She began attending school at the age of four and at the age of eleven went to live with and study under the Ursulines. At fourteen, her father made her return home.[368] Maria wanted to join the Dimesse in Vicenza but her mother objected. Her mother died in 1595 and Alberghetti reentered the Ursuline convent very briefly when her father remarried.[369] This is when Maria, age twenty-one, had her first experiences teaching. Soon afterwards she joined the Dimesse of Murano and was chosen to help extend the schools of Christian Doctrine to Murano. She was the maestra of spiritual exercises, maestra of the novices, and finally the superior. In 1615 she went to Padua to found a house of the Dimesse there, the accomplishment for which she is most often mentioned. [370] Alberghetti remained with her nuns in Padua until she died in 1664 at the age of eighty-five.[371]

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[366] Paolo Botti, *Vita Della Venerabile Maria Alberghetti, Fondatrice Delle Dimesse Di Padova*, ed. Andrea Maurutto (Padova: Il Poligrafo Casa Editrice SRL, 2015), 98.

[367] Antonio Ceoldo, *Brevi Cenni Sulla Vita Della Gran Serva Di Dio Maria Alberghetti Fondatrice Delle Dimesse Di Padova* (Padua, 1845), 5; Emmanuele Antonio Cigogna, *Delle Inscrizioni Veneziane Raccolte Ed Illustrate Da Emmanuele Antonio Cigogna Cittadino Veneto*, vol. 1 (Venice: Giuseppe Orlandelli Editori, 1824), 142; Botti, *Vita Della Venerabile Maria Alberghetti*, 98.

[368] Ceoldo, *Vita Della Maria Alberghetti*, 8–9; Botti, *Vita Della Venerabile Maria Alberghetti*, 105–16; Maurutto, "Maria Alberghetti," 2015, 40.

[369] Ceoldo, *Vita Della Maria Alberghetti*, 7–9; Andrea Maurutto, "Cronologia Della Vita e Delle Opere Di Maria Alberghetti," in *Vita Della Venerabile Maria Alberghetti, Fondatrice Delle Dimesse Di Padova: Edizione Critica Commentata a Cura Di Andre Maurutto*, Soggetti Rivelati: Ritratti, Storie, Scritture Di Donne 53 (Padova: Il Poligrafo Casa Editrice SRL, 2015), 243.

[370] Ceoldo, *Vita Della Maria Alberghetti*, 10–16.

[371] Ceoldo, 30–31.

Alberghetti embraced her vocation with the Dimesse, yet was also a writer and local celebrity who saw no conflict among these different facets of her life. Her contemporaries did not obscure the details of her life and works and contemporary society did not condemn her for being well-read and skilled in the production of both prose and poetry. On the contrary, more than one biographer found it beneficial to celebrate her accomplishments. At least three individuals wrote biographies of Alberghetti's life, using her autobiographies as one of their sources of information. Bernardino Benzi, who was a consultant of the Holy Congregation of Indulgences and Relics, published one biography in 1672. This was closely followed by a biography by Paolo Botti, member of the Order dei Chierici Regolari Teatini and prolific writer of spiritual works.[372] Antonio Ceoldo published yet another biography of Alberghetti in 1845.[373]

Alberghetti began writing in earnest between 1604 and 1606 when she completed *Ordinetti, Alcuni Dubi Spirituali et Alcuni Essercitii Interiori et Rimedi*, and an autobiography, *Narratione di Alcune Gratie et Favori Che il Benigno Signore si Degnò Fare ad Un'Anima Chiamandola al Suo Santo Servitio con Particolar Vocatione.* In the years that followed before her death, she wrote an additional autobiography, biographies of three other women, and many more spiritual works. She often aimed these spiritual works specifically at the development of young Dimesse. For example, in 1610 she wrote *Serto di Varie Gioie e Documenti Spirituali per Aiuto et Ammaestramento d'Ogni Una Che Desidera Essere Vera Dimessa e Sposa del Nostro*

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[372] Botti penned a total of fourteen published works and at least six manuscripts. Among these, three were advice books for nuns and four were hagiographies (one man and three women). His biography of Alberghetti, written sometime between 1672 and his death in 1696, was not published during his lifetime. Maurutto, "Maria Alberghetti," 2015, 73–78.

[373] According to Cigogna, Alberghetti was also included in the "Dizionario degli uomini illustri (Bassano 1796)" and "il Prospetto di Ginevra Canonici Facchini (Venezia 1824, p. 145)." Cigogna, *Delle Inscrizioni Veneziane*, 1:142.

Signor Giesù Christo and in 1611 she wrote a set of three dialogues "for spiritual recreation of the sisters, containing various exercises and documents of virtues that conform to our institute."[374] In 1609 she even produced a work aimed at other *maestre* within the order: *Avvertimenti alle Maestre per Essercitar Se Stesse et le Capitolate o Novicie con Profitto delle Anima Loro*.[375] It is not clear when she penned *Giardino di Poesie Spirituali,* the work I will primarily use in my analysis, but the Dimesse had it printed in Padua in 1674, only ten years after her death, and dedicated it to Donada Foscari Gradenigo.[376]

Alberghetti's biographers did not see a conflict between her moral and practical education; instead, her spiritual and intellectual growth often appeared in their writings as two sides of the same coin. Botti, for example, claimed that by age seven Alberghetti had learned to read and write without any instruction from her teacher and therefore suggested that the Virgin Mary taught her to read and "intended her to use her pen in the service of God, to profit so many souls with her learning and her more heavenly than human compositions."[377] He praised her wisdom without reserve claiming that it was so "singular" that "priests… had to say that, having opinions of their own, after having heard the doctrine of the woman Maria, they knew nothing."[378] Writing almost three centuries later, Ceoldo still embraced many early modern perspectives on what talents should be expected from a member of the female sex, but he claimed that Alberghetti was unexpectedly proficient in many of the "male" disciplines, writing

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[374] Maurutto, "Maria Alberghetti," 2015, 245.
[375] Maurutto, 245.
[376] Maria Alberghetti, *Giardino Di Poesie Spirituali Diviso in Quattro Parti* (Padua, 1674); Maurutto, "Maria Alberghetti," 2015, 247.
[377] Botti, *Vita Della Venerabile Maria Alberghetti*, 101–2.
[378] "Singolarissimo il suo sapere a tale che sacerdoti, per bontà di vita, dottrina e prudenza segnalati, ebbero a dire che, tenendo di se stessi qualche opinione, dopo aver udita la dottrina di donna Maria, conoscevano di saper nulla." Botti, 235.

that "in the development of reason she showed much intelligence and a tenacious memory, and she distinguished herself in work appropriate to women, and in the study of letters which is not common in them."[379] This praise is significant because the study of letters and a tenacious memory were so fundamentally valued by humanists. Simultaneously Ceoldo claimed that from a young age Alberghetti was "inclined to piety" and took on many extra devotions, such as reciting one thousand *Hail Marys* every Sunday. She loved to read but would only study spiritual books and the holy gospel. In fact, she "abhorred profane books so much that whenever she was offered a book, she observed whether in it were the names of Jesus and Mary, and otherwise she refused it."[380] It would be easy to interpret this last example as a restriction of a young woman's intellectual development and Alberghetti's religious convictions certainly shaped the books she chose to read. But it is important to remember that this did not constitute a lack of desire for education, as the profuse praise for her wisdom demonstrates.

Although Ceoldo expressed surprise at Alberghetti's proficiencies in the "male" disciplines, neither he nor Botti expected her to eschew her talents, but presented them as tools used to further her religious vocation. On her deathbed, both claimed, she reassured her spiritual daughters that her written works would continue to guide them in her absence:

> I do not leave you alone. You hear me in the books I leave you. I have written so much that through those I will speak to you. As you read them, you will realize that I speak to you just as before. God has made me write that which I wrote for your good; in these and in the wounds of Christ crucified you will find me.[381]

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[379] "Allo sviluppo della ragione spiegò molto ingegno e tenace memoria, e si distinse nel lavoro ch'è proprio di donna, e nello studio delle lettere in allora non comune." Ceoldo, *Vita Della Maria Alberghetti*, 5–6.

[380] "Inclinata alla pietà colla guida della madre adottava ogni divozione fino a recitar nel sabbato mille Ave Maria. Amante della lettura trovava pascolo ne' libri spirituali, ne' santi vangeli, ed abborriva i libri profani a tal che qualunque volta le venisse offerto alcun libro, osservava se in quello vi fossero i nomi di Gesù e di Maria, chè altrimenti li rifiutava." Ceoldo, 5–6.

[381] "Manifestando queste vivo cordoglio per la vicina sua perdita, per rimaner ulteriormente prive

In addition to being a source of emotional comfort for her spiritual daughters, this quote clearly implies that Alberghetti produced her works for educational purposes. Ceoldo also praised Alberghetti's works in his own voice, arguing that "yet dying, she left her daughters rich patrimony."[382] But instead of annuities, she "left fruitful copies of noble examples and healthy counsel full of vivacity, intellect, and doctrine more than human."[383]

Alberghetti's *Giardino di Poesie Spirituali* is divided into four parts, each distinguished by its dedication to a particular religious subject or theme. Part one contains "spiritual songs" on "the principal holy mysteries of our lord Jesus Christ: and others concerning the Holy Spirit, the most Holy Trinity, and the most holy sacrament of the altar."[384] Part two instead uses "Devotional Canticles" to honor "the most blessed Virgin, of many Saints and Saints."[385] Part three has a broader theme: "many and various inspired poems to excite devotion and practice the

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de' suoi ammaestramenti: No, figlie, rispose, no non vi abbandono. Mi sentirete ne' libri che vi lascio: ho scritto tanto che per quelli vi parlerò: come leggerete quelli, fate conto che vi parli io stessa. Iddio mi ha fatto scriver quello che ho scritto per vostro bene; in quelli e nelle piaghe di Gesù crocefisso mi ritroverete." Ceoldo, 30–31; Also described in Botti, *Vita Della Venerabile Maria Alberghetti*, 213.

[382] "Eppur morendo lasciò alle sue figlie ricco patrimoniio…"Ceoldo, *Vita Della Maria Alberghetti*, 33–35.

[383] "L'Alberghetti fondatrice e superior per 48 anni in Padova, come si è veduto, non lasciò pingui rendite alle Dimesse, ma oltre nobili esempli e salutari consigli lasciò copia ubertosa di scritti pieni di vivacità, d'ingegno e di dottrina più che umana." Ceoldo, 33–35.

[384] "Parte Prima. Nella quale si contengono molte, e varie Compositioni de S. Misterii principali di Nostro Signor Giesù Christo: Et altre concernenti Al Spirito Santo, alla Santiss. Trinità, & al Santissimo Sacramento dell'Altare Per far devotamente la Santissima Communione, Tutte al Numero di 171. spiegate sotto il comun Titolo di Cantici Spirituali." Maria Alberghetti, "Parte Prima," in *Giardino Di Poesie Spirituali Diviso in Quattro Parti* (Padua, 1674).

[385] "PARTE SECONDA. Nella quale si contengono molte, e varie Compositioni in honore della Beatissima Vergine, di molti Santi, e Sante; ET ALTRI QUALIFICATI SOGGETTI Per eccitar la devotione verso i medemi, & apprender l'imitatione de loro santissimi essempii. Tuttte al Numero di 123. spiegate sotto il comun Titolo di Cantici Devoti." Maria Alberghetti, "Parte Seconda," in *Giardino Di Poesie Spirituali Diviso in Quattro Parti* (Padua, 1674).

united love for Our Lord God."[386] The fourth, and final, section serves as a catch-all for a diverse array of compositions "on various matters and ordained for different purposes, which could be called miscellaneous devotions; so that they are not of mediocre utility, to habituate yourself to the true knowledge of your own nothingness, and the highest goodness of God; for acquiring every holy virtue, and becoming rich in divine Grace."[387] Alberghetti claimed that this large group contained, among other things, "sacred odes," "devotional madrigals," "faithful warnings," "spiritual counsels," "moral hieroglyphics," and "officious compositions."[388] Although the Dimesse did not take students into their home, Alberghetti's work reveals that she created a convent atmosphere in which learning was valued. The novices and other young nuns were trained in rhetoric and virtue through singing, reciting poetry, and imitating the saints.

Even when speaking on purely spiritual matters, Alberghetti often used the language of school and studying. In a poem written in the voice of St. Joseph, she began by having the saint introduce himself as a special patron of the listener: "I say, I am Joseph, whom you love so, / Both day and night you call to your aid."[389] He then explains that he has arrived in order to celebrate a young girl's arrival at the house of the Dimesse:

I came from that glorious kingdom

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[386] "PARTE TERZA. Nella quale si contengono molte, e varie Poesie Geniali Per eccitar la Devotione, e praticar l'Amore unitivo verso Dio Nostro Signore. Tutte al numero di 140; le prime cento de'quali, sono spiegate per conveniente motivo sotto il Titolo di Soliloquii devoti, e gl'altri 40 di Colloquii spirituali." Alberghetti, *Giardino Di Poesie Spirituali Diviso in Quattro Parti*.

[387] "PARTE QUARTA. Nella quale si contengono molte Compositioni, che per esser di varie materie, & ordinate à diversi fini, si possono chiamar: MISSELANEE DEVOTE; Poiche sono d'utilità non mediocre, si per habituarsi nella real cognitione del proprio Niente, e somma Bontà di Dio; come per far acquisto d'ogni santa virtù, & arricchirsi della divina Gratia; Tutte son 506." Alberghetti.

[388] Alberghetti.

[389] "Io, dico, son Giofesso, che tanto ami, / E giorno, e notte, in tuo pressidio chiami." Alberghetti, "Parte Seconda," 63.

Sent to you by your Divine spouse.
To rejoice with you, dear daughter,
that you came here where one learns,
By disowning one's self, and searching for God
with strong and ardent desire.
Herein one learns to follow Jesus Christ;
To make him glorious in Heaven obtained.
Attend well, blessed daughter,
If you yearn to apprehend a life more perfect.
This is the school of God, Word made flesh
That one, who into my care was delivered.[390]

The main aim that Alberghetti identified in the voice of St. Joseph is "to follow Jesus Christ," a clearly spiritual goal to be reached through the religious activities of "disowning oneself" and "searching for God." Yet Alberghetti chose to use very educational language by repeating the verb "learn" *(s'impara)* twice and referring to the convent as "the school of God" (*scola di Dio).* In a poem written from the perspective of St. John the Baptist she similarly admonished "study well to be diligent/ in guarding the heart and the mind" and "[t]ire yourself yet to learn/ how you can imitate your good Jesus."[391] Although her focus in these poems was on the acquisition of spiritual strength in order to have a more perfect life, she chose to use language strongly reminiscent of traditional schooling, suggesting the intertwined nature of the two endeavors before addressing it explicitly.

Alberghetti's poems also demonstrated that other types of study were necessary in order to become truly virtuous. Like most humanists, Alberghetti placed intellectual development

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[390] "Son venuto da quel Regno glorioso, / Mandato à te dal tuo Divino sposo, / Per rallegrarmi teco, Figlia cara, / Che sei venuta qui dove s'impara, / A rinegar se stesse, e cercar Dio / Con efficace, & ardente desio. / Quivi s'impara à seguir Giesù Christo; / Per far di lui glorioso in cielo acquisto. / Attendi bene, figlia Benedetta, / Se brami apprender vita più perfetta. / Questa è scola di Dio, Verbo humanato / Quel, ch' in custodia à me fù consegnato." Alberghetti, 63.

[391] "E studia bene d'esser diligente / Nella guardia del cor, e della mente; / Acciò in quelli non entri alcuna cosa, / Che il suo dolve riposo sturbar posa. / Affatticati ancora d'imparare, / Come il tuo buon Giesù possi imitare." Alberghetti, 57.

firmly on the path to salvation and saw it as an integral part of developing virtue. She again often used the saints to make her point by emphasizing their wisdom and erudition. She called the Virgin Mary "Pure mother and virgin / more worthy, illustrious, and wise/ than any other creature"[392] and Mary Magdalene "beloved of good Jesus;/ moreover full of wisdom."[393] She could have chosen to focus exclusively on the many spiritual qualities of these saints; purity would be particularly relevant for an audience of dedicated virgins. Instead, she described holy women with the word "wise" (*saggia)* or as having "wisdom" *(sapienza)*. It is possible to argue here that Alberghetti was once again emphasizing moral development and using "wisdom" in a sense that referred primarily to spiritual understanding. But theology and higher spiritual understanding were subjects understood to require a great deal of intellectual study, unavailable to the typical man or woman of the time period. Furthermore, the wording "*moreover* full of wisdom" presents Mary Magdalene's sagacity as an important addition to her spiritual development and suggests that Alberghetti saw intellectual learning as a praiseworthy accomplishment that contributed to a holy life.

In addition to presenting holy women as potential role models for young women, Alberghetti emphasized the religious and intellectual accomplishments of highly learned men. In a poem entitled, "In praise of the angelic doctor Saint Thomas Aquinas" Alberghetti wrote copiously about the many admirable qualities of the saint.[394] She began by emphasizing the importance of his devotion to God:

> St. Thomas Aquinas
> he is dedicated to the Lord,
> being a young child;

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[392] Alberghetti, *Giardino Di Poesie Spirituali Diviso in Quattro Parti*, chap. 26.
[393] Alberghetti, "Parte Seconda," 130.
[394] Alberghetti, 111.

and always keeps his fervor alive.[395]

But Aquinas' devotion was not just a matter of personal importance; it also allowed him to become a leader in the Church:

Such a great champion
He is of the Holy Church
Because, with prayer,
Doctrine and so much sanctity is acquired.[396]

Later stanzas combine praise of his religiosity with praise of his intelligence and his intellectual contributions to the Church. Alberghetti informed her readers that Aquinas was called "The Angelic Doctor" because "he inflames the minds / and lights them up with his great splendor."[397] She also credited him with revealing greater truths about God:

Of the Divinity
He wrote learnedly;
That the high Truth,
Said 'you wrote well of me, Thomas.[398]

But it was important to clarify that his intelligence did not distract him from making his way to heaven. On the contrary:

Always he went elevated
In God with his mind,
Being abstracted from the world,
and breathing to Heaven with ardent heart.[399]

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[395] "San Tomaso d'Aquino / Si dedicò al Signore, / Essendo Fanciullino; / E tenne sempre vivo il suo fervore." Alberghetti, 111–12.
[396] "Così gran Campione / E' della Chiesa Santa, / Perche con l'oratione / Dottrina, e santità s'acquistò tanta." Alberghetti, 112.
[397] "Che dà tutti si chiama, / L'Angelico Dottore, / Perche le menti infiama / E le richiara col suo gran splendorè." Alberghetti, 112.
[398] "Della Divinitade / Si Dottamente scrisse; / Che l'alta Veritade, / Hai scritto ben di me, Tomaso, disse." Alberghetti, 112.
[399] "Sempre andava elevato / In Dio con la sua mente, / Stando dal mondo astrato, / E sospirando al Ciel con cuor ardente." Alberghetti, 113.

He took care of the cultivation of virtues alongside his intellectual pursuits:

> Of his great wisdom
> and rare sanctity;
> but also strict obedience
> and humble poverty he took such care.[400]

Alberghetti took a similar approach to Jesuit missionary Francis Xavier, calling him a "stupendous man" who "converted innumerable people to Christ."[401] Later she reminded the reader of both Xavier's intellectual capacity and generous nature:

> The profound wisdom,
> The suave speech,
> To possess nothing,
> Cheerful, and ready to give,
> Rendered him friendly, and grateful for everything;
> Always full of heavenly fruits.[402]

Alberghetti could have chosen to focus solely on female role models in this work, especially if she felt that male and female learning was fundamentally different. By focusing on men as well as women, she revealed an emphasis on aspects of morality that both men and women should prioritize. She also demonstrated that she was familiar with the importance of these individuals and that perhaps she also wanted young Dimesse to be familiar with these influential men.

Alberghetti was fond of writing her poetry in the person of a saint, encouraging performance and role playing. Coupled with the general popularity of reading aloud in convents, this suggests that the Dimesse in Padua were embracing the Jesuit approach of using role playing

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[400] "Della sua gran sapienza, / E di santità rara; / Mà la stretta obedienza / E l'humil povertà così hebbe cara." Alberghetti, 113.

[401] "Francesco huomo stupendo / Li pensieri profondi / Del Padre suo scoprendo / Non li lasciò infecondi; / Mà volando per tutto l'Oriente, / Convertì à Christo innumerabil gente." Alberghetti, 115.

[402] "Il profondo sapere, / Il soave parlare, / Il niente possedere, / L'allegro, e pronto dare, / Amabile lo rese, e grato à tutti; / Sempre copioso di celesti frutti." Alberghetti, 116.

in order to learn to imitate the virtue of the saints. Alberghetti's poem about Luigi Gonzagha, referred to as “Beato Luigi Gonzagha” because he had not yet been canonized, addressed the theme of imitation more explicitly:

> Your words and perfect examples,
> Impressed inside the heart I brought always;
> to imitate you in each of my actions
> with right, pure, and simple intentions.[403]

The title of part two of the work as a whole includes "And other qualified subjects to excite the devotion toward the same, and to learn the imitation of their most holy examples. All to the number of 123. Explained under the common title of Devotional Canticles.”[404] One poem called “Tribute of Devotion to the Holy Protectors of the Oratory” celebrates several saints and clearly emphasizes the importance of imitating their goodness. The saints include “Great father Dominic / Of the Preachers,” “Francis of the Minors,” “The pious Bonaventure,” “Great doctor Thomas,” and “Anthony for whom Padua remains secure.” According to Alberghetti, these saints have “given perfect standard / of Religion and holy discipline.”[405] They all followed “[t]he footsteps of Jesus” and “have imitated his Holy virtues.” She ends with the invocation to imitate these saints:

> These all humbly
> Day and night we invoke;
> Their virtues we praise

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[403] “Le tue parole, & essempi perfetti, / Impressi dentro al cor sempre portai; / Per imitarti in ogni mia attione / Con retta, pura, e semplice intentione.” Alberghetti, 118.

[404] "...ET ALTRI QUALIFICATI SOGGETTI Per eccitar la devotione verso i medemi, & apprender l’imitatione de loro santissimi essempii. Tuttte al Numero di 123. spiegate sotto il comun Titolo di Cantici Devoti." Alberghetti, “Parte Seconda.”

[405] "Con essempi, e dottrina / Han’ il mondo illustrato / Perfetta norma han dato / Di Religiosa, e santa disciplina. // Domenico gran Padre / Dè gli Predicatori, / Francesco de’Minori, / Ambo seguiti dà gloriose squadre. // Il pio Bonaventura; / Tomaso gran Dottore; / Giacinto grato odore / Antonio per cui Padoa stà sicura." Alberghetti, 126.

Procuring faithfully to imitate them.[406]

Alberghetti wrote many poems to provide opportunities to practice this type of imitation. The poems written from the perspective of St. Joseph and St. John the Baptist, for example, would force the reader or performer to fully embrace the role of the saint. Another poem about Blessed Stanislaw takes a similar approach. She does not specific which Stanislaw she is referring to, but it is likely Stanislaw Kostka, who at this time had been beatified but not canonized. "In the first years of my childhood," the poem began in the voice of the saint "I anticipated my dear and beloved God / In the blessings of sweetness." He desired "[o]nly to love the eternal beauty, / And consecrate my body and soul to him, And his mother…" As a result he was given graces and favors.[407] The second half of the poem went into more detail about his determination:

Like a deer wounded and sliced
With a great ax, looks for a clear spring,
I lust to make myself servant of God.
I searched for Religion with ready desires,
Supported in peace from arrogant brethren
Beatings, moreover threats, injuries, and insults
Very long and difficult travels
Made on foot, full of hardships[408]

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406 "Tutti Vergini puri. / A la Vergine grati, / Dal buon Giesù guidati, / I lor teseri portorno sicuri. // Di Giesù le pedate / Seguendo fino al fine / Con opre peregrine / Le sue sante virtudi, hanno imitate. // Questi tutti humilmente / Giorno, e notte invochiamo; / Le lor virtù lodiamo, / Procurando imitarli fedelmente." Alberghetti, 126–27.

407 "Ne' i primi anni di mia fanciullezza, / Mi prevenne il mio caro, e amato Dio, / Nelle benedittioni di dolcezza / Et infiammomi di santo desio, / Di solo amare l'eterna bellezza, / E consecrarli l'alma, e'l corpo mio, / E la sua Madre Vergine Maria / Prender per Madre, e insiem' Signora mia. // Grandi furon le gratie, & i favori, / Concessi à me dalla Madre, e dal Figlio; / Mi mandorno da quei Celesti Chori / Angioli, e Santi à trarmi di periglio, / Et acciò tosto me ne uscissi fori / Del cieco mondo, agionsero al consiglio / Gratia efficace, e forte motione, / Per inviarmi à piu soda perfettione." Alberghetti, 121–22.

408 "Come ferito, & affettato Cervo / Con anscia grande, cerca chiara fonte; / Io per brama di farmi di Dio servo, / Cercai la Religion, con voglie pronte: / Sostenni in pace dal Frattel protervo / Percosse; oltre minaccie, ingiurie, e d'onte; / Molti longhi, e difficili viaggi, / A

In addition to providing more detail, the second half of the poem has a distinct change in tone, becoming surprisingly graphic. It is not entirely clear why Alberghetti chose to make this poem more violent than her other works. It is possible that she wanted to dramatically highlight the standards of devotion she encouraged in younger Dimesse.

One could dismiss these examples as a more poetic or roundabout way to make the same points about learning and morality that Alberghetti made in previous examples. But it is important to remember the popularity of reading poetry aloud – both for other nuns and for visitors to the convent. In fact, several of Alberghetti's poems make explicit references to poems being produced for the occasion of a certain visitor. Her "Tribute to the Holy Protectors of the Oratory" begins with the following:

> We all sing, oh sisters,
> We sing with fervor
> Hymns in praise and honor
> Of the Sun, of the Moon, and of the Stars.[409]

This suggests that the work was designed specifically to be sung and likely performed for outsiders. Another poem specifies the visitor it was prepared for: "On the feast of the holy habit of the Carmeni, the Dimesse having it occupied by the most Reverend Father Master Gregory Canal General of the Order the 16th day of July."[410] The poem itself provides a description of the purpose of the performance:

> Today, when the beautiful Carmel
> is loosely decked with flowers

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piedi feci, colmo di disaggi." Alberghetti, *Giardino Di Poesie Spirituali Diviso in Quattro Parti*, 121–22.

[409] "Cantiam' tutte, ò Sorelle, / Cantiamo con fervore / Inni in lode, & honore, / Del Sole, della Luna, e delle Stelle." Alberghetti, "Parte Seconda," 125.

[410] "Nella festa del Santo Habito dè i Carmeni, havendolo le Dimesse preso dal Reverendiss. Padre Maestro Gregorio Canal Generale dell'Ordine il giorno 16.di Luglio." Alberghetti, 36.

We sing to the King of Heaven
And to Maria, our Mother, and Lady.
With new hymns, and songs
O darling sisters,
Holy Jesus, of Holies[411]

This was not the only poem written for a special occasion. One is titled “to another new spouse of Jesus on the day of their annual exercise.”[412] Another is called “in the two following is made a scholarly congratulation and excitement of the new spouse of Jesus for happiness of much benefit.”[413] Alberghetti’s works were not intended to remain entirely secretive, or even kept for the eyes of the other Dimesse. She often produced poems on important feast days or other occasions when the convent might have outsiders listen to the Dimesse sing. This supports the theory that her poems about the saints would have been read aloud within the house and used to help young women learn to imitate the saints.

In addition to role-playing, Alberghetti embraced the use of mnemonic devices as a method for helping the young Dimesse learn important themes. Her poems include several "spiritual alphabets," in which each letter of the alphabet is assigned to a specific injunction. One example, in which St. John (the lesser) encourages a devoted spirit to learn a spiritual alphabet, begins with the saint addressing a young Dimessa:

Come, dear spirit
Eager to learn
For I, although you are a child
Want to teach you a heavenly Alphabet
Blessed are you,

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411 "Hoggi, che il bel Carmelo / Sì vagamente infiora, / Cantiamo al Rè di Cielo, / Et à Maria, Madre nostra, e Signora. // Con nuovi Hinni, e canti, / O dilette Sorelle, / Giesù Santo, de’Santi, / Lodiamo con le matutine Stelle" Alberghetti, 36.

412 “Ad alcune Novelle spose di Giesù nel giorno del loro essercitio Annuale.” Maria Alberghetti, “Parte Quarta,” in *Giardino Di Poesie Spirituali Diviso in Quattro Parti* (Padua, 1674), 97.

413 "Nelli due seguenti si fà un’ erudita congratulatione, & eccitamento delle Nov. Spose di Giesù per allegrezza di tanto beneficio." Alberghetti, 98.

If you learn it well,
For the Lord will give you a
Reward in heaven, with eternal honor.
This is great wisdom,
That advances all knowledge
For the learned of the world,
And makes one live for God with joyful hearts
For this that you attend
To become perfect
daughters of the eternal father
With Christ heirs of the supernal Kingdom.[414]

The person of St. John then continues to recite an "alphabet" of emotions – but now in the voice of Jesus Christ - that a devoted young girl should feel. "A" is for "Amar devi la mortification, / Pensando spesso nella mia passione" ("You should love mortification / Thinking often of my passion"). A similar poem in part four is called "Brief Instruction by Way of the Alphabet; That Contains the Exercise of Perfection."[415] Similarly, "A" is for "Amate Dio":

Love God of solitary Love
Admiring only him always, and at all times,
The minds, the sense, and the heart guarded.[416]

"E" is for "Eccitate la mente":

Stimulate the mind with eternal goods,
With loving sighs, and with affections,
Alive, effective, strong, ardent, internal.[417]

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[414] "Venite Anima Care / Bramose d'imparare, / Ch'io, benche Pargoletto / Voglio insegnatui un celeste Alfabetto. // Beate voi sarete, / Se ben l'imparerete, / Che vi darà il Signore / Mercede in ciel, com sempiterno honore. // Quest'è si gran sapienza, / Ch'avanza ogni scienza / De'Sapienti del Mondo, / E fà viver à Dio con cuor giocondon. // A questa dhe attendete, / Per divenir perfete, / Figlier del Padre Eterno / Con Christo heredi del Regno superno." Alberghetti, "Parte Seconda," 53–54.

[415] "Compendiosa Instruttione per via d'Alfabetto; che contiene l'esercitio di Perfettione." Alberghetti, "Parte Quarta," 71.

[416] "Amate Dio di solitario Amore; / Lui sol sempre mirando, e in ogni tempo, / Custodite la mente, i sensi, e'l core." Alberghetti, 71.

[417] "Eccitate la mente à i beni eterni, / Con sospiri amorosi, e con affetti, / Vivi, èfficaci, forti, ardenti, e interni." Alberghetti, 71–72.

These devices are also in line with the instructive tools used by Jesuit instructors: Possevino argued that teachers must use signs, games, and exercises to help students learn material.

The Dimesse mistresses were expected to pay careful attention to the spiritual and intellectual development of their novices by learning each student's strengths and giving them frequent advice. Maria Alberghetti received a convent education and was well-prepared to embrace this approach to training young third-order nuns. She wrote a variety of works for both young Dimesse and their mistresses. Her poetry collection *Giardino di Poesie Spirituali* embraced the Dimesse use of humanist and Counter-Reformation pedagogy by putting a particular emphasis on the combination of intellectual and spiritual learning through reading, singing, reciting poetry, and imitating the saints.

The Schools of Christian Doctrine

The Dimesse who were trained as novices using the methods described above used their education to do charitable work, including teaching at the Schools of Christian Doctrine. Founded in the early sixteenth-century in Milan, the Schools of Christian Doctrine existed throughout Italy as a way of educating the very poorest boys and girls who might otherwise receive no religious education. Pagani, the founder of the Dimesse, was heavily involved with the Schools of Christian Doctrine because of his mission to better educate the laity.[418] Although the schools were not entirely uniform, they had many features in common and there is some basic information available about the schools in and around Venice. In the Republic of Venice, the Dimesse were integral to the success of these schools where the very poor girls went to learn.

[418] Mantese, "Il Ven. Antonio Pagani Nella Storia Religiosa Del Cinqueceno Vicentino e Veneto," 35.

The first School of Christian Doctrine, founded in Milan in 1536 by the priest Castellino da Castello and his lay associates, was one of many educational initiatives formed as part of the Catholic Reformation due to the emphasis on teaching as an act of charity. The popular account of the establishment of the first school relates that one of Castellino's colleagues used apples to convinced boys in the street to come to a church where he and Castellino began to teach them about salvation and prayer. They promised more apples to any boys who returned to learn more on the next holiday. Three years later, Castellino established a lay confraternity to establish and run schools thorughout Italy.[419] Around 1540, one of the Schools of Christian Doctrine was established in Venice.[420]

The Schools of Christian Doctrine met in churches on Sunday and religious holidays, adding up to between eighty and eighty-five days per year.[421] Attendees were usually between the ages of five and fifteen and divided into different levels; occasionally there was an addditional class for students ages fifteen and above. The education provided was meant to be accessible to lower-class children, so books were provided if students could not buy their own.[422] Schools taught religion, reading, and writing. Some schools also taught arithmetic and the 1568 regulations of the Venice school mention Latin grammar: "First, that they introduce only in the schools these books for the children to learn, that is, the booklet or table, Donato, in time, and the

[419] Paul Grendler, "The Schools of Christian Doctrine in Sixteenth-Century Italy," *Church History* 53, no. 3 (September 1984): 320.
[420] Grendler, 321.
[421] Grendler, 322 and 327.
[422] Grendler, 323.

office of Our Lady… and give them to learn above all else the *Interrogatorio."*[423] The term "il Donato" was used to refer to an elementary Latin textbook.[424]

The "libretto" (booklet) mentioned in the Venetian rule was the lower-level textbook. Typically called *Summario*, it was used in Schools of Christian Doctrine throughout Italy in slightly different forms. It generally included basic prayers and precepts and other information such as the five sense of the body, the seven sacraments, and the ten commandments. It also contained hymns and gave advice about how to spend the sabbath. A few of the prayers were printed in Latin.[425] Schools also used a more advanced book, generally known as *Interrogatorio.* It was a question-and-answer catechism. Although different communes did not use the exact same book, there was little variation in its contents.[426] It was designed to teach the catechism to a standard layperson with no interest in arguing with Protestants or exploring the intellectual underpinnings of the faith.[427] It is not clear whether the same subjects were consistently taught over time in schools throughout Europe. While sixteenth-century rules explicitly mention reading and writing, seventeenth-century schools do not mention these subjects.[428] At the end of the sixteenth-century, Maria Alberghetti was teaching in the School of Christian Doctrine in Murano. According to her biography, she and the other women were teaching "on the mysteries

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[423] "Prima, che se introduchino solamente nelle Scole per l'imparar di Putti questi libri, cioè, il libretto overo tavola, il Donato, a tempo, & lufficio della Madonna… & si metti a imparare, sopra ogni cosa, lo Interrogatorio…" Quoted in Grendler, 324, fn 17.
[424] Grendler, 324, fn 17.
[425] Grendler, 325–26.
[426] Grendler, 327.
[427] Grendler, 330.
[428] Grendler, 327.

of the faith, on the precepts of the law, on the obligations of the state, on the recitation of prayers."[429] This matches the materials that were in a typical *Summario.*

The pedagogical methods used imitated those of many of Counter-Reformation educators. Teachers divded the students into small groups, with many rules emphasizing that each teacher should only have eight to ten pupils at a time. The school met for a total of two hours, but this time was split up and allocated to different tasks. In some schools, children moved from room to room within the Church for different portions of the time. One school in Milan posted signs so children could find their way to the place for studying various topics: alphabet, *Summario, Interrogatorio,* writing and counting, Holy Communion, and dispute. According to Grendler, "guidelines always stressed that the schools should be joyful. Singing, processions, contests, and prizes were used to make the learning experience pleasurable. Nor should teachers be severe; all the rules forbade the use of force against pupils."[430] Typically boys went to one church, where men taught them, and girls to another, where women taught them.[431]

The Dimesse played a key role in establishing and teaching in the Schools of Christian Doctrine in and near Venice. The rules of the general order stated that each house of Dimesse must send one sister to teach in the Schools of Christian Doctrine one each holiday. But Maria

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[429] "Il padre spiritual di quell luogo, ispettore eziandio delle pie scuole della cristiana dottrina in Venezia era stimolato dal vescovo di Torcello ad estendere la sua carità in Murano bisognoso piucchè mai dell'introduzione di tal opera. Maria che contava l'anno 21, venne trascelta con altre tre, e non può dirsi con quanto giubilo del suo cuore. Per ogni festa in sul meriggio nella più cocente stagione recavasi alla contrada di s. Canziano, donde fassi tragitto a Murano, e girando su e giù in traccia di fanciulle e di donne le conduceva all'oratorio di s. Giovanni Battista allettandole colla dolcezza delle maniere, istruendole sui misterii della fede, sui precetti della legge, sui doveri dello stato, sulla recita delle orazioni, e traeva sommo profitto." Ceoldo, *Vita Della Maria Alberghetti*, 10.

[430] Grendler, "The Schools of Christian Doctrine in Sixteenth-Century Italy," 323.

[431] Grendler, 323.

Alberghetti's biography suggests that in Venice the Dimesse were more heavily involved. Regarding the opening of a chapter in Murano, it stated that the "inspector of the pious schools of Christian doctrine in Venice" was convinced by the bishop of Torcello "to extend his chairty into Murano, more in need than ever of the introduction of such a work."[432] The establishment of a new chapter of Dimesse in Murano was tied directly to the need for more of the Schools of Christian Doctrine.

But the Dimesse consistently worked alongside other volunteers. The rule also mentions both seculars and Ursulines teaching in the schools:

> This mistress will go into another Church of the city, with the consent of the most reverend Monsignor Bishop, to teach the Christian doctrine; where they will arrange to have another devout secular, who governs the children who come. And arriving the case that this Most Reverence Monsignor ordaines the company of St. Ursula, they are held to share the said sisters, who come to the schools of doctrine, so that some of them would attend to such work and some to the said doctrine.[433]

The rule specified that at least one secular volunteer would help the tertiary sisters teach the girls who came to learn. It also mentioned that in certain cities the bishop may have assigned the

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[432] "Il padre spiritual di quell luogo, ispettore eziandio delle pie scuole della cristiana dottrina in Venezia era stimolato dal vescovo di Torcello ad estendere la sua carità in Murano bisognoso piucchè mai dell'introduzione di tal opera. Maria che contava l'anno 21, venne trascelta con altre tre, e non può dirsi con quanto giubilo del suo cuore. Per ogni festa in sul meriggio nella più cocente stagione recavasi alla contrada di s. Canziano, donde fassi tragitto a Murano, e girando su e giù in traccia di fanciulle e di donne le conduceva all'oratorio di s. Giovanni Battista allettandole colla dolcezza delle maniere, istruendole sui misterii della fede, sui precetti della legge, sui doveri dello stato, sulla recita delle orazioni, e traeva sommo profitto." Ceoldo, *Vita Della Maria Alberghetti*, 10.

[433] "Le quali vadano in alcuna Chiesa della città, col consentimento del Reverendissimo Monsignor Vescovo, per insegnar la dottrina christiava; la dove procureranno d'haver alcuna altra secolare devota, che governi le pute che veniranno. Et venendo il caso che esso Reverendissimo Monsignor ordinasse la compagnia di S. Orsola, siano tenute di compartire le dette dorelle, che vanno alla dottrina, in modo che parte di esse attendessero à tale opera;& parte alla dottrina suddetta." *Gli Ordini Della Divota Compagnia Delle Dimesse; Che Vivono Sotto Il Nome, et La Protettione Della Purissima Madre Di Dio Maria Vergine*, 3.

Ursulines to the Schools of Christian Doctrine. In this case, the Dimesse were to share duties with the Ursulines, although the rule was rather vague concerning how this division of labors should work. This probably did not happen in Venice, where the Ursulines were fully cloistered.

There is very little information about the non-religious volunteers at these schools, but the biography of Maria Felice Spinelli suggests a potential profile. Born to a well-off family in Venice in 1621 and given the name Bianca, Spinelli was educated by tutors at home. She was married at fifteen although she wished to enter the religious life and her husband died when she was sixteen. She did not yet enter the religious life but spent her time as a young, childless widow performing charitable works:

> On the festival days she assisted at the Schools of Christian Doctrine, teaching the rudiments of faith to the young girls. This holy exercise is practiced in more places of this most noble city, but particularly flourishes in the church of S. Luca, for the priors elect those that in the maturity of age... and in good example and fervor advance the others. Although our Bianca was still young, she was elected by the Prioress for her elderly solemnity and modesty with universal joy of the company... She rendered at one time admiration and devotion this good servant of God by going from one class to another to observe those young girls if they profitted; and finding them well grounded she gave them loving caresses, and she gave them with such liberality, that it served as a pungent spur to the others to employ themselves with more vigorous force for such a praiseworthy ministry.[434]

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[434] "Ne'giorni festivi assisteva alle scuole della Dottrina cristiana, insegnando i rudimenti della fede alle fanciulle. Questo santo esercizio si pratica in più luoghi di quella nobilissima Città; ma particolarmente fiorisce nella Chiesa di San Luca, ve per Priore si eleggono quelle, che nella maturità degli anni, nella canutezza del crine, e nel buon esempio e fervore avanzano le altre. Ivi dunque con tutto che la nostra Biance fosse ancor giovane, per la sua senile gravità, e canuta modestia fu eletta per Priora con giubilo universale delle compagne, facendosi in quell'uffizio conoscere veramente superiora; perocchè scordata di sé stessa ogn'altra superava nel proccurare gli avanzamenti spirituali de'prossimi, ed in esser tutta intenta alla loro salute. Rendeva in un tempo ammirazione, e divozione questa buona Serva di Dio col passare da una classe all'altra per osservar quelle fanciulle se facevano profitto; e scorgendole ben fondate faceva loro caritative carezze, e le regalava con tanta liberalità, che serviva di pungentissimo sprone alle altre per impiegarsi con ogni sforzo più vigoroso a sì lodevole ministero." Tommaso Baldassini, *Vita Della Serva Di Dio Suor Maria Felice Spinelli Fondatrice, Ed Abbadessa Del Monistero Delle Madri Capuccine Di S. Maria Degli Angioli Nell'Isola Delle Grazie Di Venezia* (Venezia: Andrea Poletti, 1752), 16–17.

According to this description there were several schools set up throughout Venice in the seventeenth century and each one had more than one class of girls, presumably divided by age. This also suggests that wealthy women who had received a home education would work with religious sisters such as the Dimesse in order to provide an education to lower-class girls. Spinelli eventually entered religious life and became the abbess of the Capuchin convent Santa Maria degli Angioli.[435]

Venetian bishops were involved in running of the Schools of Christian doctrine, but control of the daily operation of the schools fell to priests and other teachers, including the Dimesse. In 1604, Patriarch Matteo Zane wrote a letter to "parish priests and chaplains of the churches where Christian Doctrine healthy in the Lord is taught to young girls."[436] Zane admonished the clerics for disregarding the work being done to save the souls of poor girls in their parishes:

> Being the most important work of Christian Doctrine, it should be favored and helped, especially by those who have as their particular office the care of souls. It is especially important because we know that in schools of girls it is possible for there to be many occasions for the fruit of this holy exercise to be impeded with offense to the divine majesty, and damnation of souls. Therefore ... we exhort with every paternal affection the reverend parish priests and chaplains of the churchs in which the girls are gathered to provide every help possible to those devoted persons who with such charity and purely for love of God, also prayed for by us, have embraced this enterprise...[437]

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[435] Baldassini, *Suor Maria Felice Spinelli*.

[436] "Alli nri diletti in Xpo li Rd. Pievani, et Capellani delle chiese, dove s'insegna alle Figliuole la Dottrina Cristiana salute nel Signore." Matteo Zane, "Matteo Zane Alli Reverendi Pievani et Capellani," July 28, 1604, 9v, MS Cicogna 2583, Intorno Chiese e Clero Veneto, BMC.

[437] "Essendo l'opera importantissima della Dottrina Cristiana depra di esser favorita, et aiutata da ciascuno, et molto più da chi ha per offitio particolare cura dell'Anime, et sapendo Noi, che nelle Scole delle Figliole si possono esser molte occasioni, per le quali il frutto di questo santo esercizio venghi impedito con offesa della Divina Maestà, et danno delle anime; Per tanto col tenor delle presenti esortiamo con ogni affetto paterno li Rd. Pievani, et capellani delle chiese, nelle quali si convocano dette figliole, che d'ano ogni aiuto possibile a quelle devote persone, le quali con tanta carità, et puramente amor di Dio, cosi anco pregate da Noi hanno

This quote clarifies that the men and women who taught alongside clerics in the Schools were not paid. This explains why the volunteers were likely made up of religious women, such as the Dimesse, and women of other means, such as Spinelli. Zane also clarified that the primary goal of the schools was spiritual development, meaning that the reading exercises so commonly used were thought to contribute to the spiritual goal.

Zane showed particular apprehension about the running of the girls' school in the evening. He commanded that "in particular we require that at the time of the disputes which they make after Vespers they make sure the doors are tightened and do not permit any man of any condition to stop in the Church, assigning a cleric where it is possible who make sure that he holds the doors tight."[438] Clerics were even more involved in the schools for boys, where they would actually help teach. In 1612 Patriarch Francesco Vendramin commanded that all clerics must teach in the schools every Sunday and on all feast days.[439] In fact, those wishing to receive holy orders must have "communicated at least once per month and have attended on all the festival days the school of Christian Doctrine."[440]

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abbracciata quest'impresa..." Zane, 9.

[438] "...et in particolare le commettiamo che habbiano cura, che all'hora delle dispute, che si fanno doppo il Vespero stiano serrate le putte, ne permettano che alcun huomo di qualunque conditione si fermi in Chiesa, deputando un chierico dove si potrà, che habbi cura di tener serrate le porte..." Zane, 9.

[439] "Oltra di ciò commandamo parimente a tutti gli stessi Chierici, che tutte le Domeniche, e tutti li giorni festivi, nel quali per antica, e laudabile consuetudine si suole insegnare nelle chiese nre parochiali la Dottrina Cristiana..." Francesco Vendramin, "Francesco Vendramin Alli Chierici per La Frequenza de Smi Sacramenti e Della Dottrina Cristiana," October 31, 1612, 20v, BMC: MS Cicogna 2583, Intorno Chiese e Clero Veneto.

[440] "Dechiarando di più, et ordinando, siccome per le presenti dechiariamo et ordiniamo, che ogni volta che li prefati chierici corranno all'esame per dover ricever gli Ordini si minori come maggiori prima che si sotto pongano all'esame, oltre la solita fede testimoniale delle bontà della vita et honestà de costumi, et dall'habito clericale da loro portato giusta la forma delle costituzioni sinodali, et dei nostri ultimante promulgati Ordini porti anco similmente

Giovanni Tiepolo also showed specific concern for the girls' school, but regarding an entirely different issue – fashion. Tiepolo was concerned that the students were distracted from their work and "in danger of applying to themselves the allurements of vanity."[441] He therefore wrote a letter to the "teachers and girls of Christian Doctrine" commanding that certain parameters be enforced:

> We prohibit the girls ... from appearing in the churches for the disputations ... with ornaments of jewels, gold, and silver. We also prohibit the teachers from allowing them to recite and to make these disputations when they are dressed this way because it is necessary for these girls to appear when doing these things with clothes of modesty that excite devotion instead of distraction, and provide a good example and concept so that everyone who comes will wish to hear similar demonstrations...[442]

In some ways these rules sound similar to the restrictions placed on girls who were educated in convents, but the girls at the Schools of Christian Doctrine were not paying for their education or under any real obligation to imitate the austere life of the nuns. Tiepolo's concerns probably reflect broader Catholic Reformation ideas about the appropriate environment for learning,

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ciascheduno seco, et ci presenti la fede del suo Pievano d'essersi communicato almeno una volta al mese, et d'haver frequentato tutti li giorni festivi la scuola della Dottrina Cristiana..." Vendramin, 20v–20r.

[441] "Intendendosi da Noi con commo dispiacer nostro, che nelli essercizii della Drina Christiana che s'insegna alle figliole nelle Chiese di questa Città và tuttavia facendo progresso un'abuso gia incominciato, per il quale non solo esse figliuole si divertiscono dell'opera principale, ma anco si mettono à pericolo di applicarsi con allettamenti di vanità a quello che meno li può convenire; e volendo perciò a tale inconveniente con ogni possibil modo provedere, con il presente Ordine nostro da esser affisso e publicato in tutte esse scole." Giovanni Tiepolo, "Giovanni Tiepolo Alle Maestre e Figliole Della Dottrina Christiana," August 17, 1623, 33v, BMC: MS Cicogna 2583, Intorno Chiese e Clero Veneto.

[442] "..prohibemo alle figliole di essa Dottrina il comparir nelle chiese alle dispute, o solenni o private della Dottrina predetta, con ornamenti di gioie, ori, et argenti, et anco alle Maestre di admetterle cosi vestite a recitare et al fare di esse dispute; Dovendo esse figliole comparir in questa azione con quelli abiti di modestia che possino eccitare anzi divozione che distrazione, et ogni sorte di buon esempio, et concetto in tutte quelle persone che anderanno a volere et udire simili Dimostrazioni, volendo che all'Ordine predetto sottogiaciano sotto precerto di obbedienza tutte esse figliole e Maestre nelle cose predette per quello che accorrerà di farsi nelle chiese." Tiepolo, 33v.

particularly when spiritual development was the underlying goal. Futhermore, the fact that Tiepolo specifically mentions recitation, demonstration, and disputation indicates that these types of performances were a regular and integral part of the pedagogy in the Schools of Christian Doctrine. His statement that "we also prohibit the teachers..." shows that while Church authorities maintained ultimate control over the schools, Dimesse and other women were the main instructors.

Originally founded in sixteenth-century Milan, the Schools of Christian Doctrine became widespread and fairly effective way of educating the poorest children in many Italian cities, including parts of the Venetian Republic. Young children were taught to read and write and to recite basic prayers, while the more advanced students studied apologetics. The pedagogical approach to the school reflected the practices of many Counter-Reformation educators such as division into smaller groups by ability and the use of singing and other performances. The Dimesse played a key role as teachers of girls in these school in and near Venice, alongside a few secular volunteers. Young Venetian women who became Dimesse were able to pass on their knowledge and training to lower-class girls who could not afford any other schooling.

Conclusion

Previous approaches to women's education and to the experiences of women in convents have assumed that during the early modern period a focus on morality belied the importance of female education and distinguished it from the education of men, assumed to be more secular and public. An individual such as Alberghetti would have been assumed to be irrelevant to general developments because she lived in a religious community and her level of education was not representative of the time period. In previous chapters I showed that cloistered nuns were

able to lead rich intellectual lives and provide education for students and novices that was unique to the convent atmosphere yet closely aligned with the pedagogical standards of the time. The activities of the Dimesse were, in many ways, less radical. They did not put on the same lavish and extravagant public performances that fully-professed nuns on the Venetian mainland produced on a regular basis. But Maria Alberghetti's legacy was not that of a woman who eschewed learning in favor of morality. Rather, her own writing, that of her contemporaries, and even those studying her in the nineteenth century, testify to the possibility of a woman seeing morality and intellect as mutually reinforcing pursuits. As a result, the philosophy and pedagogy evident in *Giardino di Poesie Spirituali* aligns closely with the Jesuit approach that places learning firmly on the path to salvation, uses imitation of holy people as an enriching experience, and believes in instructive devices to help shape young minds. Alberghetti used her own education from an enclosed convent to instruct novices in the open convent of the Dimesse.

There is a distinct lack of discussion of female tertiary orders when assessing the state of female education in Venice during this time period. Perhaps because other tertiary orders were forced to become enclosed, it has been assumed that a life with such flexibility was simply not an option within the Venetian Republic. But the existence of the Dimesse as an option –albeit unusual - must be taken into consideration. The amount of writing produced by Maria Alberghetti is comparable to that produced by Arcangela Tarrabotti and she did not suffer as much in order to earn the right to produce it. Compared to Tarrabotti, Alberghetti conformed to many more of society's expectations regarding a religious woman. But these traits seem to have involved at least some level of personal choice and a vocation that she discerned and even joyfully embraced, as opposed to Tarrabotti whose family forced her into a convent due to her physical differences. Although Tarrabotti's writing makes it clear that she would have preferred

life far outside the walls of any convent, it is not too much of a stretch to suppose that she would have found life as a tertiary preferable to her life as a cloistered nun in Sant'Anna, where the rules of cloister were often broken, but still oppressive as a façade.

V. Drawing Gold from the Mines: Moderata Fonte, Former Educanda

Introduction

> The nuns taught her the kind of little recital pieces and other things they usually teach in such places; and her memory proved so keen and tenacious that no sooner had she read these things once than she could repeat them from memory… So, whenever some lady came to visit the convent… she would always be taken to see the little girl and hear her perform.[443]

In Giovanni Niccolò Doglioni's biography of Moderata Fonte, he indicates that she was one of many educande who memorized poems and possibly performed plays. Born in Venice in 1555 and baptized Modesta Pozzo, she adopted "Moderata Fonte" as a pen name. Her father, Girolamo da Pozzo, was a lawyer and both her parents were Venetian citizens, meaning that they were below the nobles but above the *popolani* or lower class in wealth and prestige.[444] Her parents died of the plague when she was a baby, so Fonte and her brother were adopted by their maternal grandmother and her husband. From the ages of six to nine, Fonte resided in the convent of Santa Marta as an educanda. After leaving the convent, she continued her education by learning all the information her brother brought home from his grammar school. Fonte used her convent education to continue reading and studying throughout her life and eventually to pen works that argued for women's equality. Like Tarabotti, her discussions of gender equality were largely concerned with the education of young women and saw convent education as a potentially positive force.

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[443] Giovanni Niccolò Doglioni, "Life of Moderata Fonte," in *The Worth of Women: Wherein Is Clearly Revealed Their Nobility and Their Superiority to Men*, The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 33–34.

[444] Courtney Quaintance, "'Le Feste' of Moderata Fonte," in *Scenes from Italian Convent Life: An Anthology of Convent Theatrical Texts and Contexts*, ed. Elissa Weaver (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 2009), 193; Paola Malpezzi Price, *Moderata Fonte: Women and Life in Sixteenth-Century Venice* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003), 27.

In the later 1570s Fonte moved in with Saracena Saraceni (daughter of her step-grandfather) and Saraceni's new husband Giovanni Niccolò Doglioni, who became Fonte's mentor and biographer. In 1583, Fonte married the Venetian lawyer Filippo de' Zorzi.[445] Fonte completed and circulated several works of different genres. They included *Tredici Canti del Floridoro* (1581), a chivalric romance; *Le Feste* (1581), a play performed at a state banquet for the Doge of Venice; and *La Passione di Christo* (1582), a religious narrative poem. Fonte also contributed to an anthology of encomiastic poetry dedicated to the King of Poland in 1583. She was working on her most famous work, *Il Merito delle Donne* or *Worth of Women*, around the time of her death in 1592. Doglioni published it in 1600, eight years after Fonte's death.[446]

Unlike Tarabotti and Alberghetti, Fonte married instead of devoting herself to religious life. But historians have theorized that Fonte's time in the convent as a youth influenced the content and style of her writing. Bhasin's dissertation briefly examined Fonte's life as "an interesting example of the confluence of a convent education in religious theatre and a career beyond the cloister as a writer for the secular stage."[447] Bhasin argued that the time Fonte spent enjoyably reading and writing convent drama as an *educanda* laid the foundation for her later success as a writer, especially with her musical play, *Le Feste* (1581).[448] Fonte's biography suggests that this is true: according to Doglioni, the nuns of Santa Marta were utterly delighted with the young girl's "lively intelligence" during her time there and often had her perform for

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[445] Quaintance, "'Le Feste' of Moderata Fonte," 194.
[446] Quaintance, 195–96; Adriana Chemello, "Foreward," in *Moderata Fonte: Women and Life in Sixteenth-Century Venice*, trans. Paola Malpezzi Price (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003), 10.
[447] Bhasin, "Nuns on Stage," 40.
[448] Bhasin, 40–41.

guests.[449] Although he referred primarily to her performances for visiting ladies, he also provided an example of the young Moderata performing for Padre Fiamma, a famous preacher and eventually the bishop of Chioggia.[450] In a similar vein, Quaintance pointed out that *Le Feste* imitates the tradition of a religious play or *sacra rappresentazione*.[451] We lack information about the plays written or produced at Santa Marta during Fonte's time there, but Fonte wrote her two religious compositions, *La Passione di Christo* and *La Resurretione di Giesù Christo* (1592), in *ottava rima* like a sacred drama.[452]

Sarah Ross took a different approach to Fonte's work by emphasizing that Fonte's relationship with her father and husband were important to her success. Ross argued that both Fonte and Lucrezia Marinella used their marriages to educated men and their statuses as "culturally normal mothers" in order to gain renown and respectability.[453] In general, Fonte and Marinella "presented themselves as writers with proven credentials," in contrast to earlier women writers who focused on their own status as devoted daughters. Fonte and Marinella also "flattered their patrons in political, rather than filial, terms. It is only in their works in defense of women… that domestic rhetoric reappears to establish the writer's credibility."[454] Ross suggested that Fonte saw potential in home education to improve the status of women, pointing out that women's education is referenced in the domestic context in *Floridoro* when Fonte

[449] Doglioni, "Life of Moderata Fonte," 33–34.
[450] Doglioni, 34.
[451] Quaintance, "'Le Feste' of Moderata Fonte," 196.
[452] Quaintance, 197.
[453] Ross, *The Birth of Feminism*, 194.
[454] Ross, 194.

argues that differences between the knowledge/abilities of men and women are the result of nurture rather than nature.[455]

Fonte's life as a secular woman who was educated in a convent is important because many women in Venice shared the same background. Because she was born to parents who were Venetian citizens but not nobles, she demonstrates the opportunities offered by convent education to a "middle class" Venetian woman. Fonte used her education to argue for the equality of women and in addition to encouraging home education, she made subtle commentary on convent education. Her works contain idealizations of female communities and complaints about the problematic influence of men upon the ability of women to learn, discuss, and pursue their interests that likely stem from her time as an educanda within a community of all women. It is true that Fonte did not use her position to advocate for convent education exactly as it occurred during her time and it is likely that she recognized some of the same problems highlighted by Tarabotti. Yet Fonte did gesture towards the positive potential of a community of unmarried women learning in an atmosphere in which the presence of men was rare and generally under their control – an atmosphere completely unavailable to most women educated at home. Like Tarabotti, Fonte used her education to write works that advanced women's equality and recognized that convents could potentially contribute to her goal.

Support for the Education of Women

Fonte used several strategies in *Le Feste, Worth of Women, and Floridoro* to argue for gender equality and the importance of education for women. Like other early modern feminists, she discussed the wisdom of women in conjunction with virtue. In *Le Feste,* she uses a sybil to

[455] Ross, 197.

settle a dispute between two men who treat the sybil with great deference. The female characters in *Worth of Women* make a variety of comparisons between men and women that generally favor female intellect and virtue. In her chivalric romance, *Floridoro,* Fonte comments on women's education through both storylines and text that directly addresses the reader. In *Worth of Women, Floridoro,* and *Le Feste,* Fonte contended that women had the same intellectual abilities as men and therefore should be educated, reflecting many of the arguments used by early modern pedagogues who supported the education of women.

In *Le Feste,* Fonte uses the Eritrean Sibyl to solve a dispute between an Epicurean and a Stoic in order to extol female wisdom and virtue. Fonte purposely mirrored Valla's *De Voluptate,* which featured the resolution of a similar debate by a Christian interlocutor who explains that both philosophers have drifted from Christian teaching in their arguments.[456] But instead of allowing a man to resolve the debate in *Le Feste*, Fonte chose a Sibyl, a symbol of female power and intellect.[457] The Epicurean and the Stoic immediately relish the opportunity to hear the Eritrean Sibyl's wisdom. "Is this woman the Sibyl?" asks the Stoic, then continues:

> We certainly could not
> have had better luck than this,
> in order to resolve this dispute.
> Shall we both agree to let her be the judge,
> and happily abide by what she decides?[458]

The Epicurean likewise beseeches the Sibyl to resolve the disagreement before launching into another attack on the Stoic, who responds with another appeal to the Sibyl: "I subject myself to

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[456] Quaintance, "'Le Feste' of Moderata Fonte," 209.
[457] Quaintance, 209.
[458] "La Sibilla è costei? Miglior ventura / non ci potea incontrar di questa certo, / ond'abbia a terminar tanta contesa./ Vogliam giudice farla ambo d'accordo, / e star contenti a quell ch'ella decide?" Printed and translated into English in Quaintance, 222–23.

the extraordinary judgment / of this very wise woman, who discerns / the truth. Thus it is up to you, / oh admirable woman, to judge between us."[459] The Sibyl lays out the middle ground between Stoicism and Epicureanism and her words are accepted as wisdom. By using a Sibyl in the place of a male interlocutor, Fonte subtly demonstrated a contention present in many of her works – that women are capable of the same intellectual accomplishments as men.

Fonte's *Worth of Women* also argues for the intellectual equality of men and women, as well as the importance of women being educated. *Worth of Women* relates a fictional dialogue among seven Venetian noblewomen.[460] Their conversation includes a passionate debate on the merits and shortcomings of men, in which the women focusing on male shortcomings maintain the upper hand. After the debate they discuss whether there is any cure for the inexcusable way men treat women. Leonora, a young widow, describes arguments used by men who oppose the education of women "on the pretext that learning is the downfall of women."[461] She scoffs at this reasoning and undermines it by taking the traditional humanist approach to education and its merits:

> As though the pursuit of virtue (which is where learning leads) led straight to its contrary, vice! ... For it's obvious that an ignorant person is far more liable to fall into error than someone intelligent and well read; and we see from experience that far more unlettered women slide into vice than educated women who have exercised their minds… they are more gullible than women like us, who have read our cautionary tales and learnt our

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[459] "…mi remetto poscia al gran giudizio / di lei sapientissima, ch'intende / la verità. Così in tuo arbitrio sia, / mirabil donna, il giudicar tra noi…" Printed and translated into English in Quaintance, 224–25.

[460] Virginia Cox, "Moderata Fonte and The Worth of Women," in *The Worth of Women: Wherin Is Clearly Revealed Their Nobility and Their Superiority to Men*, ed. Virginia Cox, The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 1.

[461] "Sogliono anco molti a questo proposito - seguì Leonora - proibir alle lor donne l'imparar a leggere e scriver, allegando ciò esser ruina di molte donne..." Fonte, *Il Merito Delle Donne*, 168; The English translation is from Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 237.

> moral lessons and developed a love for virtue… it's only very rarely that an educated woman allows herself to be carried away by her appetites.[462]

Leonora is confident that learning leads directly to virtue and away from vice and is therefore a way of protecting women from moral downfall. Her approach imitates the arguments of pedagogues like Leonardo Bruni, Lodovico Dolce, and many others who saw the benefits of a full humanist education for women even if it was still necessary to work against the opposing arguments from Leon Battista Alberti's *On the Family* and Francesco Barbaro's *On Wifely Duties.* Leonora then returns to a comparison of the abilities of men and women: "Women have just as much right to speak about these subjects as men have, and if we were educated properly as girls… we'd outstrip their performance in any science or art you care to name."[463] This statement actually surpasses claims of gender equality to argue that with proper training women would be more intellectually accomplished than men. Earlier in the conversation, Lucretia points out that "it would be a good thing if there were women who knew about medicine as well as

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[462] "…quasi che dalla virtù ne segua il vizio suo contrario; e pur non si aveggiono che, come voi avete detto del pulirsi, così, e con più ragione si dee dire dell'imparar alcuna scienza, poiché è da creder che più facilmente possi cascar in errore un ignorante, che un saputo ed intelligente; poiché si vede per esperienza, esser molto più le impudiche ignoranti, che le dotte e virtuose. Quante serve che non sanno leggere, quante contadine e femine plebe sono che si lasciano con poca Guerra vincere da gli amanti loro, per esser is esse la semplicità maggiore che in noi, che per li esempi letti, per li avertimenti raccolti e per amor della virtù, se ben avessimo qualche tentazione dai sensi, si sforzamo di astenersene, e rare si lasciano trasportar da loro apetiti e quelle poche che traboccano, così farebbono anco non sapendo leggere, come sapendo, poiché non mancono mai mexi facili per mal operare a chi vuole e si dispone di satisfar i suoi desideri." Fonte, *Il Merito Delle Donne*, 168–69; The English translation is from Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 237.

[463] "Quanto all'aver noi ragionato sopra diverse materie – rispose Corinna – non avriano anco essi da burlarsi, sì perché ne avemo parlato, anzi accennato, così a caso ed alla sfuggita e non per tenersi di saperne, sì anco perché possiamo ragionarne ancor noi come essi, che se ci fusse insegnato da fanciulle (come già dissi) gli eccederessimo in qual si voglia scienza ed arte che si venisse proposta." Fonte, *Il Merito Delle Donne*, 169–70; The English translation is from Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 238.

men, so men couldn't boat about their superiority in this field and we didn't have to be dependent on them."[464] Although at other points in the work Fonte's characters praise specific Venetian doctors who are renowned in their field, this comment encourages the reader to contemplate the possibility of female doctors.

Fonte also demonstrated the intellectual and spiritual equality of the sexes throughout her chivalric romance, *Tredici Canti del Floridoro.* She dedicated the work to Francesco de'Medici on the occasion of his marriage to the Venetian Bianca Capello and wove references to the couple throughout *Floridoro's* thirteen cantos of numerous intertwined stories.[465] The work was not complete, perhaps because Fonte rushed it to publication in order to celebrate the Medici marriage, but she claimed in her dedicatory letter that she had already outlined the remaining cantos.[466] *Floridoro* imitates many features of other chivalric romances but often with a twist. One of Fonte's most prominent characters – possibly even more prominent than Floridoro, the title character – is Risamante. Kidnapped from the Armenian royal family and raised by a wizard, Risamante attempts to claim her half of her father's inheritance from her twin sister, Biondaura, and is refused. But thanks to her unconventional upbringing, Risamante is skilled in

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[464] "Anzi… è bene che noi ne impariamo per tenir da noi, acciò non abbiamo bisogno dell'aiuto loro; e sarai ben fatto che vi fussero anco delle donne addotrinate in questa materia, acciò essi non avessero questa gloria di valer in ciò più di noi e che convenimo andar per le man loro." Fonte, *Il Merito Delle Donne*, 125; The English translation is from Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 181.

[465] The story of Bianca Capello had a much more scandalous beginning. She eloped with a less prestigious Florentine lover, shocking and angering the rest of the Venetian nobles, before marrying the duke of Florence. Price, *Moderata Fonte*, 29; Fonte, *Floridoro*, 9.

[466] Price theorized that Fonte "found it impossible to give her herione the ending she desired given the religious and social environment in Venice during the 1580s." Price, *Moderata Fonte*, 31–32; Valeria Finucci, "Moderata Fonte and the Genre of Women's Chivalric Romances," in *Floridoro: A Chivalric Romance*, The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 9.

military arts. She therefore travels around the world dressed as a knight and "does good deeds for this and that lord," so she can ask them for military support when she is ready to force Biondaura to relinquish half of the inheritance.[467]

Fonte directly discusses intellectual equality and women's education in the fourth canto of *Floridoro.* She indicates that Risamante's accomplishments are intended to illustrate that men and women are identical in their abilities. The canto begins with a clear statement about intellectual and spiritual equality:

> Women in every age were by nature
> endowed with great judgement and spirit,
> nor are they born less apt than men to demonstrate
> (with study and care) their wisdom and valor.
> And why, if their bodily form is the same,
> if their substances are not varied,
> if they have the same food and speech,
> must they have then different courage and wisdom?[468]

This is a straightforward statement of many things Risamante's actions demonstrate throughout the book: that women are intelligent, brave and wise just like men. Fonte then proceeds to discuss how there are women who are successful in every arena, even those in which men typically dominate:

> Always one has seen and sees (provided that a
> woman wanted to devote thought to it)
> more than one woman succeed in the military,
> and take away the esteem and acclaim from many men.
> Just so in letters and in every
> endeavor that men undertake and pursue;
> women have achieved and achieve such good results
> that they have no cause at all to envy men.[469]

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[467] Fonte, *Floridoro*, 99.
[468] Fonte, 144.
[469] Fonte, 145.

It is interesting that Fonte assumes the ability of women to succeed in military arts will be more familiar and acceptable than the idea that women are equal to men in literary and other endeavors. Indeed, she argues that the lower number of women in these fields was due to disinterest:

> And although of so worthy and so famous
> a status there are not a great number of women,
> it is because on heroic and valorous acts
> they have not set their hearts for various reasons.
> Gold which stays hidden in the mines
> is no less gold, though buried;
> and when it is drawn out and worked,
> it is as rich and beautiful as other gold.[470]

Fonte does not specify why exactly women have not set their hearts on the same "heroic and valorous acts" that men seem to cherish or whether Fonte sees this disinterest as a problem: while *Floridoro* features Risamante, who carries out a variety of heroic acts, it also features Biondaura and Celsidea, both princesses who are content to let others fight battles for them. But Fonte then suggests that there is an additional explanation for the lower number of accomplished ladies – differences in education:

> If when a daughter is born the father
> set her with his son to equivalent tasks,
> she would not be in lofty and fair deeds
> inferior or unequal to her brother,
> whether he placed her among the armed squads
> with himself, or set her to learn some liberal art.
> But because she is raised in other pursuits,
> for her education she is held in low regard.[471]

Fonte indicates that with the right training, women can do anything men can do, even in the realm of military arts. But if the wizard Celidante had not "proposed the military / to Risamante,

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[470] Fonte, 145.
[471] Fonte, 145–46.

nor disposed her heart toward it, / she would not in the end have carried out with her own hands / so many glorious feats of valor."[472]

Fonte illustrates the equal capabilities of women using minor characters as well. Celsidea, the daughter of King Cleardo, is the first female character who appears in *Floridoro*. Fonte's first canto declares that with his wife, the daughter of King Alismondo, Cleardo "brought into the world a girl / who surpassed in esteem and acclaim all other beautiful women, / a girl endowed as well with excellent wits, / for an unworthy spirit cannot reign in a beautiful body."[473] Although Cleardo is a minor character in the larger story, Fonte still makes a point of hilighting the princess' intellectual gifts alongside her beauty. An alternate storyline describes how Silano, the prince from Latium, accidentally arrives at the abode of Circetta, the daughter of Ulysses and Circe. The presence of Circetta as a character is fascinating in itself: although other authors had written of Ulysses and Circe having a son, Fonte was the first to invent a daughter.[474] According to Fonte, "the eloquence of her discourse / proved equal to her father's; / her speech was so sweet and so pleasant / that in her age she had few peers in the world."[475] In addition to introducing a female perspective in a generally male-dominated story, Fonte used Circetta to emphasize an example of a daughter inheriting her father's speaking abilities.

Fonte used a variety of strategies in *Le Feste, Worth of Women, and Floridoro* to argue for gender equality and the importance of education for women. In *Le Feste*, she symbolically reminded listeners of women's wisdom by using a sibyl to settle a dispute between two men. In *Worth of Women,* a collection of Venetian women from many walks of life extolled the intellect

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[472] Fonte, 146.
[473] Fonte, 59.
[474] Price, *Moderata Fonte*, 116.
[475] Fonte, *Floridoro*, 332.

and virtue of women and drew on popular humanist arguments to support the education of young women. In *Floridoro,* Fonte breaks from her narration of several storylines in order to comment upon the way that education shapes the abilities of men and women, arguing that it is lack of training that prevents the genders from appearing equal in many skills. Fonte contended that women had the same intellectual abilities as men and therefore should be educated, reflecting many of the arguments used by early modern pedagogues who supported the education of women.

The Argument for Convent Education

Because Fonte experienced education both inside and outside the convent, she could have explicitly criticized convent education but chose not to. Most sources suggest that Fonte was content in her marriage to Venetian lawyer Filippo de' Zorzi and that he supported her work, even writing a sonnet to be included in her publication of *La Resurrezione di Gesù Christo.*[476] But Fonte's discussion of the potential pitfalls of a bad marriage suggest concern for her fellow Venetian women who were unhappy with their husbands. While she gestured towards some problems with convents, she generally discouraged marriage and praised women who grasped

[476] De'Zorzi returned Fonte's dowry to her only a year and a half after their wedding. This was quite unusual because Venetian law only required the return of a dowry to either the bride or her family when a marriage ended, typically upon the death of either husband or wife. According to Price "De'Zorzi's early return of the dowry to his wife shows both his trust in her affection and his generous desire to allow Fonte to enjoy her dowry's revenues." Fonte also named her husband as the executor of her will instead of naming her brother as was typical. Price, *Moderata Fonte*, 33–34.

opportunities to live a chaste life apart from men, indirectly highlighting benefits of convent education.

Floridoro takes a nuanced approach toward the virtuosity of men, but contains numerous warnings about their tendency to deceive or mistreat women. Fonte's title character, Floridoro, is a man, but sports fairly feminine features:

> Love laughed in his tranquil brow;
> rather he appeared Love's very image
> His splendid white and vermilion complexion
> made every eye eager to contemplate him.
> Every part of him, except his speech,
> appeared that of an illustrious and beautiful girl.[477]

Fonte presented Floridoro as the pinnacle of a virtuous man, but assigned him a feminine appearance, perhaps suggesting that most virtues are really feminine traits. A faithful and steadfast lover, Floridoro's virtue contrasts with some of the more traditionally masculine characters who are less faithful to their love interests. Risardo, for example, is the son of the Emperor of Thrace and agrees to help a distressed lady in Egypt. Although initially described as virtuous, he is constantly distracted by alternate adventures, such as King Cleardo's tourney and Odoria's trip to Delphi.[478] He serves as a warning about men who are unreliable.

Floridoro contains examples of admirable men, but they are ultimately used to highlight the problematic actions of others. One is Nicobaldo, who is both steadfast and honorable in his devotion to Lucimena. When describing his beloved to Risamante he says that after discovering Lucimena's beauty and courtesy, he focused on entirely on planning their marriage: "nothing

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[477] Fonte, *Floridoro*, 180.

[478] The English edition also comments in a footnote that "In Fonte's hands, Risardo is the poster child for male inconstancy, in sharp contrast with the dwarf's single-minded steadiness in love and purpose toward Raggidora." Fonte, fn159.

else do I seek and plan / (for this is the goal of every good lover)."[479] Unfortunately for the two of them, there are still men intent on meddling with their plans; uninformed about this budding romance, Nicobaldo and Lucimena's fathers have made marriage arrangements which they plan to force onto their children despite any objections.[480] Lucimena tells Nicobaldo that her father "is no less fierce, / no less harsh than yours, nor less cruel. / Therefore I must either die, or stay under / his rule and set my course to another love."[481] In his narration to Risamante, Nicobaldo reflects, "if a man is forced to submit to his father, / what can a weak damsel do?"[482] This storyline highlights the negative impact of a patriarchal society on both men and women who may have wished to choose their own marriage partners.[483]

Due to a happy misunderstanding, Nicobaldo and Lucimena are ultimately able to wed and Nicobaldo is an honorable spouse. But in other parts of her work, Fonte further warns against romantic entanglement, especially at the beginning of the fifth canto, when she discusses the pitfalls in choosing a truly honorable partner:

> For one whom Love makes well-mannered
> and reverent, courteous and noble,
> infinite are those who retain a malicious
> treacherous, disgraceful, and base mind.[484]

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[479] Fonte, 193.
[480] Fonte, 194–96.
[481] Fonte, 196.
[482] Fonte, 198.
[483] Finucci and Kisacky point out that "Women's inability to marry without their father's approval has often been remarked upon, but men's need to follow a father's fiat in the same matter has received only scant attention. Yet it was specifically to control both men's and women's choice of a marriage partner that the Counter-Reformation imposed the rule that marriage banns had to be posted for an extended period of time at a church's door before a wedding could take place." Fonte, 197n.
[484] Fonte, 166.

Although the wording of these lines suggests a general warning to both men and women, Fonte soon clarifies who the true criminals are when it comes to romance and deception:

> Let ladies avoid even more than sin,
> more than death, the undertaking of love,
> for most men have ungrateful hearts,
> from what I read and often hear tell.[485]

In addition to deceiving the naïve women who love them, she argues that men are also presumptuous and unforgiving when matters do not go according to their selfish plans:

> If the lady to their ardent desire
> does not show herself humble right away,
> if she does not give in to impious and annoying entreaties,
> behold them quick to hate, to vengeance.[486]

Fonte refers not only to men who abandon or deceive their lovers and spouses but also men who mistreat women as a punishment for refusing to return romantic feelings. Another storyline in *Floridoro* illustrates this point: when Raggidora, the niece of the King of Egypt, refuses the entreaties of Lideo, a knight from Euboea, the spurned lover attempts revenge by murdering the King and convincing everyone that Raggidora is guilty. Thus Fonte highlighted the conundrum faced by early modern women who faced difficulties because they married or tried to refuse an unacceptable partner.

Fonte also comments on the savagery of men after describing Circetta's power to transform humans into wild animals. She claims that it was not actually a particularly impressive feat: "It seems to me she did not do much in changing / human bodies into bears, wolves, and bulls, / when in our age men in erring / are transformers of themselves."[487] Although Fonte uses

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[485] Fonte, 167.
[486] Fonte, 166–67.
[487] Fonte, 233.

the word *uomini*, meaning men, this passage could be understood to refer to humans more generally rather than male humans, specifically.[488] However, the next canto references attributes that she has associated with men: "I would tell you how now this man, now that one, / often takes on the semblance of a greedy wolf; / others of the muddy and filthy animal; / others of the stolid bear, fell and treacherous."[489] In both *Worth of Women* and *Floridoro,* Fonte discussed the frequency with which men were greedy or treacherous because these behaviors were likely to hurt their mothers, sisters, or daughters.

In *Worth of Women,* Fonte directly discouraged marriage by arguing that women were kinder than men and therefore often mistreated by them. When Adriana divides the group in half to debate whether men are good or evil, the ensuing discussion frequently flips between comedy and tragedy. Cornelia, who has been assigned the job of arguing against men, jokes that the other women "would as well look for blood in a corpse as for the least shred of decency in a man."[490] When Virginia asks why men are the superiors of women, Corinna responds simply that men have unjustly claimed superiority that they do not deserve. In fact, she cleverly argues that "when it's said that women must be subject to men, the phrase should be understood in the same sense as when we say that we are subject to natural disasters, diseases, and all the other accidents of this life… they have been given to us by God as a spiritual trial."[491]

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[488] The original Italian reads "Poco mi par che fesse elle cangiando / Gli umani corpi in orsi, in lupi, in tori, / Quando alla nostra età gli uomini errand / Di lor medesmi son trasformatori." Fonte, 448.

[489] The original Italian reads "Io vi direi come di lupo ingordo / Spesso pigli sembianza or questo or quello, / Altri dell'animal fangoso e lordo, / Altri di stolido orso iniquo e fello." Fonte, 233.

[490] "Se tutto il Vostro fondamento da mo'… consiste solo nella onestà c'hanno gli uomini, certo che voi già vi potete tenire per vinte, poiché in essi così si trova onestà, come il sangue nei morti." Fonte, *Il Merito Delle Donne*, 24–25; The English translation is from Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 58.

[491] "Questa preminenza si hanno essi arrogata da loro, che se ben dicono che dovemo star loro

Fonte backs up Corinna's assertion by including in the conversation a plethora of examples of Venetian women mistreated by their male relatives, including daughters deprived of their inheritance, sisters imprisoned by brothers and forced to wait on nephews and nieces, widowed mothers abandoned by their sons, and wives dealing with husbands who were controlling, jealous, unfaithful, abusive, or addicted to gambling. She also comments on that ever-present Venetian problem of dowries, pointing out that many women could live luxuriously on their dowries if they could remain unmarried. But instead they are often forced to take husbands and then "instead of being her own mistress and the mistress of her own money, she becomes a slave, a loses her liberty and, along with her liberty, control over her own property, surrendering all she has to the man who has bought her, and putting everything in his hands – so that he can run through the lot in a week?"[492] Although Fonte avoids addressing convents directly, they were one of the few places where women brought their dowries without handing them over to a man. Of course, rather than retaining their own control over the money, it served convent needs. But the nuns took care of their own budgeting and bookkeeping.

Some of the women proactively warn the others about the pitfalls of marriage. The women are meeting at the home of Leonora, a young widow, whose garden features a striking fountain with six figures: liberty, solitude, naivety, falsehood, cruelty, and chastity. The fountain

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soggette, si deve intender soggette in quella maniera, che siamo anco alle disgrazie, alle infermità ed altri accidenti di questa vita... poiche ci sono dati per nostro essercizio spirituale." Fonte, *Il Merito Delle Donne*, 26; The English translation is from Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 59.

[492] "Ma pigliando marito e per aventura povero, come spesso accade, che altro viene ad acquistar di grazia, salvo che di compratrice e patrona diventi schiava e perdendo la sua libertà, perda insieme il dominio della sua robba e ponga tutto in preda ed in arbitrio di colui che ella ha comprato, il quale è bastante in otto giorni a farle far di resto d'ogni cosa?" Fonte, *Il Merito Delle Donne*, 69; The English translation is from Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 113.

was designed by Leonora's aunt, who never married and thus gave Leonora her house when she died. Each figure holds a relevant symbol and the women discuss their meanings in relation to the benefits of life without men and the pitfalls of romantic relationships. The figure of naivety has a lantern with a butterfly burning in its flame, "signifying that women (poor wretches!) when they are to be married, put too much faith in the false endearments and empty praises of men, who seem so kind and charming that women… allow themselves to be caught in their snares and fall into the fire that burns and devours them."[493] Falsehood holds a peach and the motto in her left hand reads "All too different is the message of the heart from that of the tongue."[494] According to Leonora, "the motto too tells of the deceit and falsity of men, whose words to women all speak of love and good faith, but whose hearts tell a very different story."[495] Cruelty has a crocodile and the message "I first kill my victims and then, when they are dead, mourn them," which "means that men harrow and kill those women who become involved with them and then feign a brutish compassion for their victims."[496]

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[493] "La quarta è la Semplicità e l'impresa è la Farfalla che si arde nel lume, significando perciò che le misere donne, che sono per maritarsi, troppo credono ai falsi vezzi ed alle finte lusinghe de gli uomini; li quali in apparenzia sono benigni, e graziosi di sorte, che elle pensando che sempre abbino ad esser così buoni, come prima loro paiono, si lasciano avviluppare nella rete e cascano nel fuoco, che le abbruscia e consuma fin alla morte." Fonte, *Il Merito Delle Donne*, 22; The English translation is from Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 55.

[494] "Troppo diverso è da la lingua il core." Fonte, *Il Merito Delle Donne*, 20; The English translation is from Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 52.

[495] "…co'l moto che dà ad intender pur l'inganno e falsità de gli uomini, i quali nelle parole dimostrano amor e fede verso di noi donne e poi nel cuore sono il contrario." Fonte, *Il Merito Delle Donne*, 22–23; The English translation is from Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 55.

[496] "Io l'uomo uccido e poi lo piango morto." Fonte, *Il Merito Delle Donne*, 20; "La sesta è la Crudeltà e l'impresa del Cocodrillo significa che così l'uomo strazia ed occide quella donna, che gli si intrica, e poi finge di acerne una bestial compassione." Fonte, 23; English translations are from Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 52 and 55.

The seven women frequently discuss how the necessity of interacting with men is affecting their own lives, particularly the decision to marry or remarry. When Adriana suggests that Leonora remarry, Leonora replies "I'd rather drown than submit again to a man! I have just escaped from servitude and suffering and you're asking me to go back again of my own free will and get tangled up in all that again? God preserve me!"[497] The other women "agreed that she was talking sense and that she was lucky to be in the position she was."[498] Virginia, a single woman of marriageable age, proclaims with confidence that she would "prefer to do without" a husband, but that she must obey her family.[499] Adriana, Virginia's mother and an elderly widow responds "I'd be quite happy to respect your opinion, but your uncles have decided you must marry, because you've inherited such a fortune and it needs to be in safe hands, so I don't really know what else I can do with you."[500] This is in stark contrast to Leonora, whose independent aunt was also able to fund Leonora's life as an independent woman after her husband's death. Because Virginia's uncles do not trust her to handle her inheritance properly, she will not have the opportunity to lead a life of solitude and will likely be unable to empower another woman to do so in her will.

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[497] "Più tosto mi affogherei che sottopormi più ad uomo alcuno; io sono uscita di servitù e di pene e vorresti che io tornassi da per me ad avvilupparmi? Iddio me ne guardi." Fonte, *Il Merito Delle Donne*, 21; The English translation is from Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 53.

[498] "Tutte le donne allora dissero che parlava bene e che beata lei." Fonte, *Il Merito Delle Donne*, 21; The English translation is from Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 54.

[499] "Quanto a me – disse allora Verginia – io so bene che non lo piglieri, ma mi conviene obedir li miei maggiori." Fonte, *Il Merito Delle Donne*, 17; The English translation is from Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 48.

[500] "A questo – aggiunse Adriana – figliuola mia io sarei del per la gran facultà che tu hai ereditata, la qual alcuno non ti può usurpare; io però non so che altro farmi di te…"Fonte, *Il Merito Delle Donne*, 17; The English translation is from Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 48.

Corinna's situation is also different. As I briefly mentioned in chapter two, Fonte's vocabulary makes it difficult to know whether Corinna is a professed *dimessa* or simply an unmarried woman. Either way, unlike Virginia, Corinna seems to have the option of avoiding marriage. She tells the others that "I'd rather die than submit to a man!" and that she is happy as a single woman, "safe from the fear of any great rough man trying to rule my life."[501] Leonora praises Corinna's choice without reservation.

> What other woman in the world can compare her lot with yours? Not one! Not a widow, for she cannot boast of enjoying her freedom without having suffered first; not a wife, for she is still in the midst of her suffering; not a young girl awaiting betrothal, for she is waiting for nothing but ill … by rejecting all contact with those falsest of creatures, men, you have escaped the tribulations of this world and are free to devote yourself to those glorious pursuits that will win you immortality. But perhaps you should devote that sublime intelligence of yours to writing a volume on this subject, as an affectionate warning to all those poor simple girls who don't know the difference between good and evil, to show them where their true interests lie; for in this way you would become doubly glorious, fulfilling your duties to God and to the world.[502]

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[501] "La infinita speranza occide altrui – disse Corinna – ma non inganna già me questa vostra speranza, che più tosto morrei che sottopormi ad uomo alcuno; troppo beata vita è quella che io passo così con voi senza temer di barba d'uomo che possa commandarmi." Fonte, *Il Merito Delle Donne*, 17; The English translation is from Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 48.

[502] "O felice Corinna – disse allora Lucrezia – e quale altra donna al mondo è che vi si possa agguagliare? Certo niuna: non vedova, poiché non può vantarsi di non aver prima pennato un pezzo; non maritata, poiché stenta tuttavia, non donzella che aspetti maritato poiché aspetta di penare e si suol dir per proverbio che marito è mal'anno non manca mai. Felice e beatissima dunque voi e chi segue il vostro stile e molto più poiché vi ha Dio dato così sublime ingegno che vi dilettate ed essercitate nelle virtuose azioni e impiegando i vostri alti pensieri nei cari studi delle lettere, così umane, come divine, cominciate una vita celeste, essendo ancora nei travagli e pericoli di questo mondo, li quali voi rifutate, rifiutando il comercio delli fallacissimi uomini, dandovi tutta alle virtù che vi faranno immortale. E certo che voi, mediante il vostro sublime intelletto dovereste scriver un volume in questa materia, persuadendo per carità alle povere figliuole che non sanno ancora discernere il mal dal bene, quello che sia il loro meglio e così voi diverreste a doppio gloriosa e fareste servizio a Dio ed al mondo intieramente." Fonte, *Il Merito Delle Donne*, 18; The English translation is from Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 48–49.

Fonte's main point in Leonora's monologue is that the happiest woman is one who avoids marriage completely and instead uses her time to read and write. Leonora's response to Corinna's monologue also suggests that it is God's will that Corinna spend her time writing and share her wisdom with the rest of world. The fact that Corinna is a writer and even performs sonnets to the other ladies over the course of the two days supports speculation that Corinna is meant to represent Fonte.[503]

Fonte experienced a life free from of the company of men when she was educated in the convent of Santa Marta in Venice. In addition, Moderata Fonte's uncle noted in his 1593 biography of her how quickly she produced most of her works, attributing her speed to the fact that as a married woman household tasks often tore her away from her work. Despite the fact that Fonte's wealth allowed her servants to take care of most menial domestic tasks, Doglioni still observed that "as a woman, she had to attend to womanly tasks like sewing, and she did not wish to neglect those labors because of the false notion, so widespread in our city today, that women should excel in nothing but the running of the household."[504] Although she continued writing, according to Doglioni at a greater speed to make up for her lack of time, Fonte's productivity decreased after her marriage. It is possible that the way Fonte's family life limited her literary activity inspired her critique of marriage. She would not have faced these specific limitations had she continued to reside in a convent instead of getting married.

Fonte used the conversation in *Worth of Women* to encourage specific aspects of the religious life, including chastity. Helena, a newlywed who attempts to defend men throughout the two-day conversation, argues for the decency of men based on their ability to have sex with

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[503] Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 132–133n.
[504] Price, *Moderata Fonte*, 19; Doglioni, "Life of Moderata Fonte," 39.

their wives. When Leonora jokingly says that Helena's new husband has caused his wife to "lose something she had before," Helen responds that marital sex is a decent act, so when men have sex they are decent subjects: "So if the effect – the act of propogation – is not merely decent in itself, but legal and necessary, it can well be said that when a man unites with his wife, he is the agent and cause of a decent act, and hence a decent subject. And for this reason he cannot be said to have taken away any part of the woman's natural decency."[505] Corinna is willing to cede a very small amount of ground, responding that "men do have some merits when they are married – which is to say, when they are united with a wife. Now *that* I don't deny."[506] However, outside of this activity, she still argues that men are "like unlit lamps: in themselves they are no good for anything, but, when lit, they can be handy to have around the house… In other words, if a man has some virtues, it is because he has picked them up from the woman he lives with… for over time, inevitably, some of her good qualities will rub off on him."[507]

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[505] "«…che mi abbia anzi fatto perdere a lei parte di quall ache ella aveva inanzi». Sorrise a questo e venne rossa Elena e rispose: «Non si può dir con ragione che manchi di onestà quella donna, la qual si aggiunge con uomo per via di matrimonio; poiché in tale atto di generazione la necessità è madre natural e la licenzia è figliuola legittima. E voi ben sapete che tutte le cose licite possono anco essere oneste; e se l'effetto del propogare è non pur onesto, ma licito e necessario, ben si può dir anco che l'uomo auttor e cagione di una onesta opera, così unito alla moglie, sia soggetto onesto e perciò non lievi parte alcuna a noi donne della nostra natural onestà»." Fonte, *Il Merito Delle Donne*, 25; The English translation is from Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 58.

[506] "Con tutto ciò – disse Cornelia – ella non ha Saputo inferior altro, salvo che l'uomo nel matrimonio, cioè unito alla moglie, ha qualche bontà in sé. Il che non niego…"Fonte, *Il Merito Delle Donne*, 25; The English translation is from Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 58.

[507] "…ma senza questo aiuto, si può dir che sia apunto come la lampada estinta, che da sé non è buona a nulla, ma appicatovi il lime, fa pur servizio alla casa; così se l'uomo contiene in sè qualche buon costume, lo ha dalla donna con cui pratica, o madre, o sorella, o balia, o moglie che ella si sia; che a lungo andara è pur forza, che egli prenda qualche buona qualità di lei." Fonte, *Il Merito Delle Donne*, 25; The English translation is from Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 58.

Despite allowing her characters to recognize sex as a positive thing, the conversation ultimately makes it clear that this alone is not enough to make marriage worthwhile. Leonora, for example, complains that women are ashamed of sex, even within marriage, "while the man cannot wait to tell the whole world about it, as though his glory and happiness depended on it."[508] Then she uses the conversation to argue for the superiority of women:

> Surely this is a way of declaring clearly the dignity and nobility of women and the corresponding indignity of men. Because, since this great gulf in perfection exists between the sexes, it *is* a very shameful thing when we, who are so far superior to them, stoop so far as to have anything to do with these inferior creatures – especially outside the necessity of marriage, which, since it is imposed on us, we can hardly avoid. But even in marriage, this intercourse with men abases us.[509]

Although Helena and Corinna, the younger characters, are willing to view sex as a "decent" thing, Leonora argues that such close interactions are abasing for women who are far superior to men. According to her, this is why women are always ashamed of their sexual activity and men are always inclined to brag about it. The idea that it is better to remain unmarried and avoid sexual encounters with men is further suggested by another figure in Leonora's fountain: chastity, who holds "a little snow-white ermine over her shoulder, holding it away from her breast to keep it dry" and a scroll bearing the words "Let this body rather perish than suffer any

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[508] "Che avendo un uomo amorosa pratica con una donna a lei ne risulta così gran biasimo ed a lui più tosto laude ed onore; di maniera tale che ellsa sempre cerca di nasconderlo quanto può ed egli non vede l'ora d'appalesarlo, quasi da ciò dependa ogni sua gloria e felicità…" Fonte, *Il Merito Delle Donne*, 53; The English translation is from Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 90–91.

[509] "…per dar ad intendere con ciò la dignità e nobiltà manifesta di noi donne, e la indignità espresso de gli uomini. Perché essendo tra questi due sessi tanto gran distanza di perfezione, ci è vergogna troppo grande che noi, che gli avanzamo così in ogni conto, ci degnamo di accompagnarci con soggetti manco degni di noi e specialmente fuori della necessità del matrimonio, il qual perché ci è commandato non possiamo negare, ma con tutto ciò anco in questo perdemo gran parte della nostra riputazione." Fonte, *Il Merito Delle Donne*, 53–54; The English translation is from Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 91.

stain."[510] Leonora does not discuss this figure at length, but tells the other women that her aunt was particularly devoted to chastity, perhaps because she saw it as a crucial aspect of remaining independent of male control.

Despite the fact that Fonte was married, she may have used occasions like this to associate herself with the virtue of chastity. Fonte obliquely advertises her own success in *Floridoro.* When the title character visits the Oracle at Delphi, he admires an elaborate set of facades that celebrate accomplished writers of the future. Along with a variety of famous men, Fonte incorporates herself without actually mentioning her own name, perhaps to celebrate her own accomplishments while remaining behind a veil of false modesty. When describing the actual sculpture of her person, the canto includes a note that "she wore a long white skirt, / as for the virginal state is appropriate, / and she seemed at an early and youthful age / to have lofty thoughts kindled in her heart."[511] Fonte was not yet married when she wrote *Floridoro* in 1581. But Fonte also did not reside in a convent and likely knew that she would be married eventually. Her choice to associate herself with virginity was probably an attempt to create a respectable public image but may also indicate that she thought unmarried life was beneficial for an aspiring writer.

Due to the disruptive influence of men, Fonte idealized the possibility of living entirely alone, or, at least, with other women. One of the predominant themes in *Worth of Women* is how much the women relish spending time together without men. Near the beginning of the work,

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[510] "Percioché una di esse vi aveva un Armellino bianchissimo, che si teneva sopra la spalla, allargandolo dal petto per non bagnarlo…" and "Prima morte, che macchia al corpo mio." Fonte, *Il Merito Delle Donne*, 20; The English translation is from Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 52.

[511] Fonte, *Floridoro*, 288.

Fonte specified that the group of seven 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."[512] Leonora's fountain inspires further commentary on the subject; the figures of liberty and solitude are most relevant to Leonora's home where they are able to gather and talk without any interference from men. The figure of liberty holds a sun, which, as Leonora explains, "stands free and alone, giving light to itself and sharing its light with the whole universe."[513] Thus Leonora explains that the figure of liberty symbolizes that "my aunt, living free and alone as she did… shared the treasures of her mind with every person of refinement with whom she came into contact – something she might not have been able to do under the rule and command of a husband."[514] Another significant figure is that of solitude, who holds a phoenix, "to show that my aunt enjoyed living alone and that she lived on her own terms and, after death, was reborn in the fame she gained by her good works."[515]

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[512] "...le quali percioché molto si confacevano insieme, avendo tra loro contratto un acara e discrete amicizia, spesse volte si pigliavano il tempo e l'occasione di trovarsi insieme in una domestica conversazione; e senza aver rispetto di uomini che le notassero, o l'impedissero, tra esse ragionavano di quelle cose che più loro a gusto venivano; quando di loro donneschi lavori ed ora di onesti spassi trattando…"Fonte, *Il Merito Delle Donne*, 14; The English translation is from Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 45.

[513] "La terza è la Libertà e l'impresa è il Sole, il quale libero e solo illustrando se stesso comparte la sua luce a tutto l'universo…"Fonte, *Il Merito Delle Donne*, 22; The English translation is from Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 55.

[514] "…dinotando che ella libera e sola divenne Chiara per molte degne ed onorate qualità e ha compartito anco i tesori della sua virtú ad ogni gentile spirito, che ne ha avuto conoscenza; il che sotto la signoria ed imperio del marito, forse non averiapotuto fare." Fonte, *Il Merito Delle Donne*, 22; The English translation is from Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 55.

[515] "L'altra è la Solitudine e l'impresa è la Fenice, a dinotar che ella si compiacque di viver sola; e da per sé è chiarissima." Fonte, *Il Merito Delle Donne*, 22; The English translation is from Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 54.

During their wandering and often comic discussion, the women continually comment on the freedom of expression that comes from being in a group of only women. In response to one of Leonora's jokes, Cornelia comments "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 put us down."[516] Leonora agrees, saying "If a man could hear us now, joking together like this, how he would scoff! There'd be no end to it!"[517] But the real clincher comes from Lucretia, who gives voice to the underlying desires of most of the women: "To tell the truth, we are only ever really happy when we are alone with other women; and the best thing that can happen to any woman is to be able to live alone, without the company of men."[518] Leonora again agrees, saying "For my part, I derive the greatest happiness from living in peace, without a man. For we all know what a marvelous thing freedom is."[519] After they all praise the beautiful and charming garden at Leonora's house, Corinna remarks that her friends have left out the best aspect of the gardens in their praise: "You haven't mentioned that among its other charms there's the very important fact that there are no men here."[520] The relentless emphasis on the theme of relishing the absence of

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[516] "Lodato sia Dio, poiché pur possiamo dire delle piacevolezze così per rider tra noi e far ciò che più ne aggrade che qui non è chi ci noti o chi ci dia la emenda." Fonte, *Il Merito Delle Donne*, 16; The English translation is from Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 47.

[517] "Apunto – respose Leonora – che se per caso qualche uomo ci sentisse ora a contar queste si fatta burle, quante beffe se ne farebbe egli? Non potressimo vivere." Fonte, *Il Merito Delle Donne*, 17; The English translation is from Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 47.

[518] "Se noi vogliamo poi dire il vero – disse allora Lucrezia – noi non stiamo mai bene se non sole e beata veramente qualla donna che può vivere senza la compagnia de verun'uomo." Fonte, *Il Merito Delle Donne*, 17; The English translation is from Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 47.

[519] "Parmi – soggiunse Leonora – che io mi viva in riposo e che io senta una somma felicità nel ritrovarmi senza, considerando quanto sia bella cosa la libertà." Fonte, *Il Merito Delle Donne*, 17; The English translation is from Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 47.

[520] "Avete lasciato di dir il meglio – disse Corinna -. Voi non dite che fra le altre sue grazie, egli vi ha questo, che non via sono uomini." Fonte, *Il Merito Delle Donne*, 21; The English translation is from Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 53.

men suggests that convent education could offer an important an advantage over home education, which typically involved a man in some capacity.[521]

Fonte sometimes favored convents in more explicit ways. Corinna argues that the women need a leader for the discussion, saying "Come now, let us please elect one amongst us to take command of the others and let the others obey her, for, in truth, in the private as well as the public sphere, obedience is not merely useful but one of the most necessary virtues. And that way, we shall harmonize the desires of all."[522] The women select Adriana and Fonte explicitly mentions that she is past fifty.[523] In accepting her election, Adriana states that "as the oldest of the group, this role you have given me sits well on my shoulders."[524] Virginia Cox has pointed out that this reflects the election of a Venetian doge, but it also reflects the election of an abbess. Like Adriana's tenure as queen, appointments as abbess were temporary, usually for one or two years, and candidates were required to be at least forty years old.[525]

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[521] This works against Ross' contention that Fonte preferred for girls to be educated in the home and lean on the support of a father-figure or husband. Fonte was able to find success this way, but in Worth of Women, she is determined to highlight the difficulties presented by men who scoff at the conversation of women or limit their intellectual activities.

[522] "Di grazia – disse Corinna – eleggiamo tra noi una, che commandi alle altre e sia ubidita; perché invero la ubidienzia così in una casa, come in una città è non per utile, ma necessaria quanto altra virtù e così verremo ad esser tutte conformi di volere." Fonte, *Il Merito Delle Donne*, 23; The English translation is from Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 56.

[523] Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 57.

[524] "Per esser io la più vecchia di tutte, ben mi si acconviene tal peso, qual voi mi avete dato…"Fonte, *Il Merito Delle Donne*, 24; The English translation is from Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, 57.

[525] Laven, *Virgins of Venice*, 57–58; Laven also points out that "[t]he constitutions of a Venetian convent closely paralleled the structures of the Venetian state. Just as the republic was founded on a mixed consitution… so the system of conventual government rested on the sharing of authority between the abbess, a group of elders… and the chapter, which encompassed all the choir nuns." Laven, 55.

Despite her harsh critiques of marriage, I do not suggest that Fonte approved of convent life without reservation. Given her complaints against women forced into unhappy marriages, she likely strongly disapproved of women forced into convents, especially in order for the rest of the family to gain monetarily. This may be why *Floridoro* includes a variety of women, including Circetta and Lucimena, who are held in isolated locations. Circetta's island and Lucimena's castle could be metaphors for the convent.[526] Furthermore, Some of Fonte's commentary on stoicism in *Le Feste* could also be interpreted as oblique criticisms of convent life. At one point the Epicurean says to the Stoic

> I am amazed that you have come to take part in our pleasure.
> I was sure that you were off in a cave somewhere,
> contemplating your stoic doctrine,
> which teaches others how to live a life among the living,
> that is worse than death, and without any hope.[527]

The comparison of the life of a Stoic to life "in a cave somewhere," is similar to the criticisms of convents as a prison, by Tarabotti and others. In addition the idea that Stoics live "a life among the living / that is worse than death," could be compared to Tarabotti's assertions that being forced to become a nun is like being buried alive.[528] The voice of the Epicurean is not meant to represent Fonte's true feelings, but similar assessments come from the chorus and the Sibyl herself. The chorus advises a union of serious contemplation with pleasure:

> Players often pluck
> first some strings, and then others
> in order to create a more joyful sound.
> As worthy souls, more greatly endowed with talent
> by Virtue (who in this way enriches them
> with honor) sometimes let their minds
> turn sweetly away

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[526] Fonte, *Floridoro*, 126n.
[527] Quaintance, "'Le Feste' of Moderata Fonte," 217.
[528] Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*, 92 and 95.

> from serious thoughts and calmly
> turn briefly to pleasure so that they are united.[529]

Evidence suggests that in reality some convents had plenty of time for pleasure and not very much for serious contemplation. But at least in theory, convents were meant to be places of strict asceticism with rules against loud chatter, playing cards, or needless socializing. At the very least, the words of the chorus suggest that Fonte felt a person spending their time in deep contemplation should find it a pleasurable enterprise. In the Sibyl's summary of the problems with both Stoicism and Epicureanism, she admonishes them both, saying

> Stoic, you should not completely disdain the pleasures of nature,
> and neither should you [Epicurean,] praise them above all other things.
> Because, while they themselves are not the true good,
> if one enjoys them discretely, and in moderation,
> goodness can also be found in them.[530]

This sends a message similar to the earlier statement by the chorus, but is more explicit in supporting "the pleasures of nature." Rather than simply allowing for brief moments of pleasure, the Sibyl says "goodness can also be found" within pleasurable activities. The Sibyl then turns to knowledge, working the benefits of wisdom into her assessment of pleasure and virtue:

> In the same manner, one should not despise human knowledge
> such that men live in lowly ignorance,
> like the animals,
> and neither should one exalt it
> as the only true and perfect way to happiness.
> Knowledge, too, is part of goodness, and man,
> finding a compromise between these two extremes,
> and participating in both of them is able to open the path

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[529] "…ma spesso tenta / l'uomo or quei nervi, or questi, / perché più gioia presti. / Tal sì degne alme / a cui meglio talenta / virtù, (che sì arricchille / d'onor) talor la mente / pur disvian dolcemente / dai pensier gravi, a fin che sì tranquille / volte a breve piacer, ch'insieme unille." Printed and translated into English in Quaintance, "'Le Feste' of Moderata Fonte," 222–23.

[530] "…I naturali / piacer biasmar non dei, Stoico, del tutto, / né tu lodarli sopra ogni altra cosa. Perché (quantunque il vero ben non sieno) / se l'uom discretamente e con misura / gli gode, anch'essi son parte di bene." Printed and translated into English in Quaintance, 224–25.

(just as these noble fathers have done),
that leads to the true, eternal, highest good.[531]

Here Fonte followed in the footsteps of many other humanists by arguing that human knowledge separates mankind from animals and that it is an integral part of goodness. She specifies that it should not be exalted "as the only true and perfect way to happiness," ultimately suggesting that the most virtuous life with involve a moderate amount of pleasure and a healthy approach to learning. Although her commentary on Stocism suggest that Fonte would have found some convent regulations extreme, the Sibyl's praise of human knowledge support the theory that she recognized positive potential in convent education.

In *Floridoro,* Fonte contrasted the untraditional education of Risamante with the more traditionally feminine, royal upbringing of her twin sister Biondaura. Neither of them received a convent education, meaning that Fonte did not explicitly promote convent education as the ideal.[532] Nevertheless, I argue that Risamante and Biondaura represent a contrast between the typical home education provided for women at the time vs. the type of training one might receive from a wizard who is old, wise, and magical and, perhaps as a consequence, does not feel bound to society's usual gender norms. Because Biondaura was educated within a more typical domestic, patriarchal context, she fails to develop the same level of virtue and self-sufficiency found in Risamante.

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[531] "Così la Sapienza umana tanto / non si dee vilipender, che l'uom viva / a guise de le bestie ignaro e vile, / né tanto anco essaltar, che riputata / sia la felicità sola e perfetta. / Parte anch'ella è di bene, e l'uom, trovando / (come fa questi eccelsi padre apunto) / fra tali estremi il mezzo, e d'ambi fatto / partecipe, si può la strada aprire, / ch'al vero, eterno, e sommo ben conduce." Printed and translated into English in Quaintance, 224–25.

[532] This led Ross to argue that Fonte ignored convent education when she could have used her work to promote it. Therefore, Ross argued that Fonte saw no reason to celebrate any possibilities in convent education but instead focused on the ideal of young girls being educated on equal footing with their brothers at home.

Fonte presented convents in a relatively positive light. Although *Le Feste* gestures towards some potential drawbacks to convents, Fonte's works devoted much more energy to criticisms of marriage, praising women who were able to remain single. In *Floridoro,* she valued the non-traditional education of Risamante over the home education of Biondaura. In *Worth of Women,* she details the endless negative scenarios experienced by women whose lives are controlled by husbands, fathers, or brothers, instead idealizing a gathering of women who can speak freely without the company of men. By praising women who grasped opportunities to live a chaste life apart from men, she used her own convent education to indirectly highlight its potential benefits to gender equality.

Conclusion

Fonte's focus on female equality in conjunction with her idealization of living alone or with other women and discussing intellectual ideas within a community of women suggest that she saw benefits to learning in a convent, even if she did not entirely approve of certain aspects of convent life. Fonte could have chosen to explicitly criticize convent life, but instead her harshest critiques were aimed at the ways husbands treated their wives. It would be misleading to suggest that Fonte supported convent life in the way it played out in reality, because she recognized some of the same problems highlighted by women such as Tarabotti. But in many ways Fonte acknowledged positive elements of convent life, such as the opportunity to learn in an atmosphere in which the presence of men was rare and generally under their own control.

Many young girls who were educated in convents eventually left to get married instead of becoming nuns. It is important to examine how Fonte, as an example of this phenomenon, used her education. Fonte's way of arguing for equality reflected the ideas of early modern

pedagogues who encouraged women's education: she argued for the intellectual and spiritual equality of women (and the connection between the two) to argue that women should be educated. In addition, she frequently idealized communities of women who were able to avoid the influence of men (and their interruptions). In this way, Fonte pointed out the positive potential of a community of unmarried women learning together and teaching one another. As a secular woman who had been educated in a convent, Fonte used her training to advance gender equality and she recognized that convents could potentially contribute to her goal.

VI. Conclusion

Isotta Nogarola was born into a family of hereditary nobility as humanism became fully entrenched in Italian culture and literary activity returned to classical forms such as dialogues, orations, and letterbooks. Isotta and her sister, Ginevra, carefully entered this milieu and Isotta eventually corresponded with a wide variety of respected scholars, including both religious and secular leaders. She also delivered two orations in Verona to inaugurate Ermolao Barbaro's tenure as bishop.[533] Scholars have debated society's response to Nogarola's success, with some claiming she was devastated by accusations of promiscuity but others arguing that such criticisms were proof she had entered the public stage.[534] Nogarola and other women such as Cassandra Fedele, Elena Cornaro Piscopia, and Lucrezia Marinella indicate an expansion of female participation in the cultural flowering of the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries. This expansion was particularly notable in the Republic of Venice, the home of an unusual number of well-educated and independent women.

While extremely wealthy girls in Venice were educated by tutors and boys could attend either private or government-sponsored schools, Venice lacked similar resources for middle-class and many upper-class girls. Venetian convents were perfectly positioned to fill this gap as convent education was more financially accessible than private tutoring. Convent students, known as *educande,* were trained for their future roles as either nuns or wives. They formed

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[533] Ross, *The Birth of Feminism*, 30–40.

[534] Stock, *Better Than Rubies*, 32; King, *Women of the Renaissance*, 194–98; Patricia A Labalme, "Introduction," in *Beyond Their Sex: Learned Women of the European Past*, ed. Patricia A. Labalme (New York: New York University Press, 1980), 4; Margaret L. King, "Book-Lined Cells: Women and Humanism in the Early Italian Renaissance," in *Beyond Their Sex: Learned Women of the European Past*, ed. Patricia A. Labalme (New York: New York University Press, 1980); Ross, *The Birth of Feminism*, 38.

important social connections within the convent and were allowed fairly regular interactions with family. They likely received vocational training and girls who wanted to become nuns were expected to know how to read. Convents provided a quasi-public education that included an unusual range of creative activities for young Venetian women whose families could not or would not hire a private tutor. Attending school in an all-female atmosphere and receiving literary training similar to that received by many middle-class boys could shape the lives of educande in important ways. The lives of Arcangela Tarabotti, Maria Alberghetti, and Moderata Fonte demonstrate that both nuns and married women could use their education to teach other women, argue for the spiritual and intellectual equality of the sexes, and correspond with prominent thinkers of the time**.**

Studying the lives of former educande tells us about more than the availability of education and how it shaped the lives of those who spent part of their childhood in a convent. It also helps explain the mystery of Venice's unusual gender norms. Women like Tarabotti and Fonte, who participated so enthusiastically in intellectual discourse, changed the atmosphere of Venetian intellectual circles to make them more accessible to educated women. At the same time, religious women like Alberghetti trained teachers who provided education to the very poorest children in the Schools of Christian Doctrine. Convent education changed the lives of future nuns alongside future wives, and these women used their education to shape the experiences of women who would never set foot behind the parlor grate. By understanding more about Tarabotti, Alberghetti, and Fonte, we also understand more about Nogarola, Fedele, Piscopia, and Marinella.

These findings raise a variety of additional questions about the education of early modern women. We still know relatively little about individual Dimesse other than Maria Alberghetti or

about the Venetian Schools of Christian Doctrine where she and her sisters taught. In addition, the efforts of Tarabotti and Fonte to argue against contemporaries who opposed or limited women's education indicate that there was a complicated relationship between perceived physical differences and conceptions of an appropriate education. Thomas Laqueur has established that early modern perceptions of biological differences were embedded in gender politics.[535] Future research could build on his contentions by examining the interactions of early modern medical evidence about the differences between the sexes with political and religious claims about what type of education was appropriate for each gender.

In general, there are remarkable similarities between contemporary and early modern debates about education. Pedagogues and political leaders still ponder the ideal role of federal and local governments, religious groups, and gender in educational policy and learning environments. Early modern Italy saw an unprecedented debate on the same issues, although the details of the discussion have evolved over time.

[535] Laqueur, *Making Sex*.

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Provveditori Sopra Monasteri, 264 and 312
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