

Love in the Mirror:

A BILINGUAL EDITION

GIOVAN BATTISTA ANDREINI



Edited and translated by

JON R. SNYDER



Iter Inc.
Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies
Toronto
2009

Iter: Gateway to the Middle Ages and Renaissance
Tel: 416/978-7074 Fax: 416/971-1399
Email: iter@utoronto.ca Web: www.itergateway.org

CRRS Publications, Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies
Victoria University in the University of Toronto
Toronto, Ontario M5S 1K7 Canada
Tel: 416/585-4465 Fax: 416/585-4430
Email: crrs.publications@utoronto.ca Web: www.crrs.ca

© 2009 Iter Inc. & the Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies
All Rights Reserved
Printed in Canada

We thank the Gladys Kriebel Delmas Foundation for a generous grant of start-up funds for The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: The Toronto Series, a portion of which supports the publication of this volume.

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Andreini, Giovan Battista, 1576-1654
Love in the mirror : a bilingual edition / by Giovan Battista Andreini ; edited and translated by Jon R. Snyder.

(The other voice in early modern Europe : Toronto series ; 2)
Co-published by: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies.
Translation of: Amor nello specchio, with original Italian text on facing pages.
A play.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
Also available in electronic format.
ISBN 978-0-7727-2051-1
I. Snyder, Jon R., 1954- II. Victoria University (Toronto, Ont.). Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies III. Iter Inc IV. Title. V. Series: Other voice in early modern Europe. Toronto series ; 2

PQ4562.A7A8313 2010
852.5 C2009-906949-0

Cover illustration: Rome, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica in Palazzo Barberini, attr Guido Reni [now attr Elisabetta Sirani], *Portrait of Beatrice Cenci*, inv. 1944
Credit: Archivio Fotografico, Soprintendenza Speciale per il Patrimonio Artistico ed Etnoantropologico e per il Polo Museale della Città di Roma

Cover design: Maureen Morin, Information Technology Services, University of Toronto Libraries
Typesetting and production: Iter Inc.

The Other Voice: Amor nello specchio

There are two principal reasons for including *Amor nello specchio* (Love in the Mirror, 1622), by Giovan Battista Andreini (1576–1654), in the Other Voice series.

The first has to do with the highly unusual theme of this Baroque work, set in Florence early in the seventeenth century. For *Love in the Mirror* represents the triumph of women over the early modern patriarchal system that defined and regulated sexuality and gender roles. The play features a passionate, consensual love affair between its two female protagonists, Florinda and Lidia. Andreini knew the Italian theatrical tradition as few others could have, but in *Love in the Mirror* chose to break openly with the great sex comedies of the sixteenth century. In these works women may fall in love with women, but because of disguise and deceit the erotic bond between these earlier female characters is always seen as a comic error to be corrected by the end of the play. Instead, in Andreini's experimental comedy, Florinda and Lidia choose to love one another freely and openly, "breast to breast and mouth to mouth," with full awareness of their actions. Neither has a father or other male relative to command her; they fear no one and nothing; both are financially and intellectually independent; unwanted suitors are spurned, scorned, jailed, and even beaten by them; and the most powerful male figure in the play (the Wizard) cannot help to bring them back into line, even though he commands the art of natural magic. The conventions of the comic genre, whose roots may ultimately derive from the fertility rituals of ancient Greece, require that the two women be married off at the end of the play, for order must be restored to society, usually through marriage, so as to guarantee its rebirth in a new generation. Andreini, however, supplies an ingenious—if wholly Baroque—means of preserving Florinda's love for Lidia, even within the confines of her marriage to Lidia's brother. The love story between Florinda and Lidia is, in short, a milestone for the European stage, although destined to languish in oblivion for centuries after its initial publication.

The second reason for inclusion of *Love in the Mirror* in this series is biographical. Andreini was the eldest child of Isabella Canali

Andreini (1562–1604), the greatest actress of her age, and one of the leading European women of letters of the late sixteenth century. She married the actor Francesco Andreini (1548–1624) of the *Compagnia dei Gelosi*, one of the premier *commedia dell'arte* troupes, in 1575: Isabella was only fourteen years old when Giovan Battista was born, and her career as an actress and writer lay almost entirely in front of her. Although her son was eventually sent to study in Bologna, a profound and lasting bond formed between a young mother and son extremely close in age. By the 1580s, Isabella was a diva whose legendary performances as a chaste young lover (*innamorata*) made her a celebrity throughout Italy and France, in an age in which relatively few women appeared on stage in Europe.¹ Her range was remarkable, and she could cross over gender boundaries with ease: she was not only a supreme improviser as a lovestruck maiden but was also known to play male roles. Isabella could appear on stage, in other words, not only as the transvestite of Italian learned comedy (*commedia erudita*) or *commedia dell'arte*, in which a female character dressed like a young man before returning to her subordinate place in the patriarchal order, but also in the role of the main male character.² She seems to have transmitted some of her interest in publicly crossing gender boundaries to her son, who was later to write the transgressive *Love in the Mirror*, with its story of same-sex love and desire, in order to showcase two actresses. Compared with his theatrical contemporaries, Andreini was remarkably attuned to the range of women's experience and was himself deeply devoted to the cult of the Magdalen, to whom he dedicated several sacred works.

Both parents hoped, after investing in his education, that their son would practice a more socially respectable profession such as law. Giovan Battista chose the theater instead and was acting with

1. Women performed more freely in Italy than anywhere else in Europe, but they did perform in Spain, despite periodic but only temporary injunctions against actresses there, and sometimes in France as well. For Italy, see M. A. Katritzky, "Reading the Actress in *Commedia* Imagery," *Women Players in England, 1500–1660: Beyond the All-Male Stage*, ed. Pamela A. Brown and Peter Parolin (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 109–43. See, for Spain, Part 2 ("Actrices") of *Genealogía, origen y noticias de los comediantes de España*, ed. N. D. Shergold and J. E. Varey (London: Tamesis Books, 1985), 365–570.

2. For instance, Isabella is believed to have played the title role in the pastoral *L'Aminta* by Torquato Tasso. Aminta is a male shepherd who falls in love with a nymph, Silvia, who cannot return his love because she has devoted herself to the goddess Diana. See Valeria Finucci, "Isabella Andreini," *Routledge Encyclopedia of Italian Literature*, 2 vols. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 1: 39.

his parents' troupe by the time he was eighteen. As the *innamorato* named Lelio he would, presumably, have appeared regularly on stage with his mother, since she played a similar role, while Francesco Andreini usually played the role of Capitano Spavento—a brilliant refashioning of the traditional braggart warrior role (*miles gloriosus*). We may suppose that Giovan Battista learned his actor's craft from his parents but especially from his mother, whose principal stage role was closest to his own: he would in fact continue to play Lelio for decades after her death. Isabella was a gifted poet as well as the first published professional woman playwright in Italy, and, here again, her son followed her lead, publishing volumes of verse, both sacred and profane, as well as plays ranging from comedies to tragicomedies to tragedies. In this choice of a writing as well as an acting career, he took after his mother more than his father, although the latter also published several works (but not full-length plays of his own). Outside of England, no contemporary actor-writer in Europe even came close to matching Giovan Battista's literary output in the first few decades of the seventeenth century. Unlike many children of famous artists, Andreini was, in developing his own voice and creative direction, seemingly uninhibited by his mother's renown in Italy and abroad. Instead, she was a primary source of inspiration throughout his long life on the stages of Europe. His writings for the theater are highly original and stand on their own merits, but they may legitimately be viewed as the commemoration and transmission of the legacy of Isabella Andreini. Small wonder that, as an old man approaching death, when Giovan Battista wrote a letter recounting his life and that of his family, he signed it simply "Lelio, figlio d'Isabella"—Isabella's son Lelio.³

Text and Context

The Baroque, born in Italy, was the first global aesthetic. Spreading quickly across a large swath of the planet, from Rome to Goa and Manila, from Madrid to Mexico City and Lima, it not only internationalized Italian culture as never before but introduced a fundamentally new way of seeing, representing, and narrating. How did the Baroque differ from what came before it? The answer is to be found chiefly in its deliberate break with the tenets of ancient and Renaissance

3. Maurizio Rebaudengo, *Giovan Battista Andreini tra poetica e drammaturgia* (Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1994), 25.

art, in particular with the principle of mimesis, i.e., the imitation of nature or the real. If, prior to the late sixteenth century, artists and writers thought of their work in terms of a stable series of categories and norms such as verisimilitude, credibility, harmony, proportion, symmetry, balance, measure, unity, decorum and the like, it was because these were thought to derive ultimately from the order of nature itself. This proximity to the origin (the true, the real) granted artworks their authenticity and legitimacy. Baroque artists and writers instead called into question the necessity and even the possibility of mimesis, seeking to free art from the tyranny of rules by distorting—and even breaking—the mirror of nature. Once the imperative of imitation was weakened or done away with in art, as the Piedmontese Jesuit Emanuele Tesauro (1592–1675) noted approvingly in his famous treatise on Baroque metaphor, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico* (The Aristotelian Spyglass), “everything is licit.”⁴ The freely creative faculty of the human imagination, or what the Italians called “ingegno,” was to take the place of the canons of classical beauty. This same word was translated as “wit” in England from the late sixteenth century on, becoming the first term in the history of Western aesthetics without either a Greek or Latin etymology. For the Baroque, beauty was to be made anew, not discovered in what already exists: representation did not repeat the real but rather altered it irrevocably. The result of this revolt was cultural tumult, a free-for-all of new techniques of representation that transgressed against long-established aesthetic codes by disorienting and overwhelming the senses of the spectator, reader, or listener. And no artist or writer, in Italy or elsewhere, embraced the artistic freedoms of the Baroque more wholeheartedly than did Giovan Battista Andreini in *Love in the Mirror*.

These freedoms came, however, at a price. The Baroque aesthetic was a key component of what José Antonio Maravall calls the “lyrical engineering of the human world” in early modernity.⁵ The scientific and geographical discoveries of the age had irreversibly transformed Western knowledge: the microscope and the telescope were the emblems of the Baroque discovery of infinity, whether in a drop of water or in deep space. The epistemological foundations and certainties of the past were shaken to their very core by these dis-

4. Emanuele Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico* (Savigliano: Editrice Artistica Piemontese, 2000 [1670]), 735.

5. José Antonio Maravall, *Culture of the Baroque: Analysis of a Historical Structure*, trans. Terry Cochran (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986 [1975]), 263.

coveries. The widespread sense of cultural decentering and dispersion that accompanied this paradigm shift in knowledge was not met, however, without resistance from those who had the most at stake in preserving the status quo. One of the principal ways in which the profoundly conservative social and political system of hereditary privilege, which we now call the Old Regime, reacted to the new epistemological instability was through patronage of the arts. In what amounted to the first European mass societies with huge urban centers, the role of communication was understood by those in power to be central, and art was seen as the most persuasive means with which to reach the masses and integrate them into the Old Regime hierarchy of values. The Baroque artistic product, charged with intellectual and emotional force, was intended not only to sway but to transport the spectator, overcoming any possible resistance to its message. The patronage programs of seventeenth-century popes and princes, sometimes remaking entire cities in the process, have been widely studied in recent years. This “lyrical engineering,” with its search for new modes of deployment of power through aesthetic innovation and experimentation, accounts in no small part for the remarkable intensity and variety of Baroque artwork. Although Andreini was a complex and multifaceted intellectual, we cannot think of his writings for the theater without recalling the paradoxical situation of the Seicento, in which a radically transgressive aesthetic was often—although not always—in the service of those who held tightly to the reins of power.

For much of Andreini's life, Italy experienced a period of relative peace known as the Pax Italica.⁶ The Italian Wars (1494–1559), which had devastated the peninsula, were brought to an end with the signing of the Treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis in 1559. This did not mark a return, however, to the old medieval and Renaissance system of fiercely independent city-states. The treaty instead confirmed Spain, whose world empire was still expanding, as the dominant power in Italy. From the Ionian Sea to the Alps, dynastic absolutism was the order of the day. The Spanish crown directly controlled Milan, Naples, Sicily, and Sardinia, with garrisons along the west coast of

6. See the dedication by the printer Pandolfo Malatesta to Andreini's *Lo schiavetto*: “From those years, when beautiful Italy began to enjoy a tranquil peace, almost as a restorative to the hardship of such continuous wars, the most valiant persons began to rediscover the ancient forgotten practice of performing comedies.” As cited in Anne MacNeil, *Music and Women of the Commedia dell'Arte in the Late Sixteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 165.

central Italy. Spain also kept on a tight leash the rulers of Tuscany, Genoa, and most other regional states north of Rome: as its gateway to northern Europe, Genoa played a particularly crucial role in Spanish military and economic affairs. Relations with the papacy were complex but the Pontifical States and the Spanish Empire were allies.⁷ That left the Republic of Venice, which was losing its grip from the eastern Mediterranean to the Ottoman Empire, and the Duchy of Savoy in Piedmont as the only fully independent Italian states of the Old Regime. If in the 1570s Italy still seemed to figure prominently in the calculations of the European powers (the Holy League fought at Lepanto in 1571 with, among others, Genoese, Venetian, Tuscan, and Piedmontese warships), by the turn of the century the situation had changed, as the peninsula became increasingly peripheral to the central events of continental and global politics. Even after the Pax Italica finally collapsed, and despite the ups and downs of the great empires of Spain, France, and England, the system of the Italian states changed relatively little in the course of Andreini's long lifetime: this was the political world that he knew and that figured largely in the writing of *Love in the Mirror*.

Andreini was born in Florence, the capital of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, but spent most of his working life in the Po River valley, which was—politically speaking—a patchwork of dynastic regimes large and small, with the exception of “La Serenissima” (as the venerable Venetian Republic was called). To travel from Venice to Ferrara, and thence to Mantua and Milan—a distance of a few hundred kilometers across the Po's rich alluvial plains—meant to traverse the respective territories of at least four states, each with its own distinct political and cultural coordinates. The members of the Gonzaga dynasty in Mantua, who had managed to cling to power against considerable odds, were Andreini's chief patrons in this period, and it is not surprising that he purchased a home in the nearby countryside in 1616. He also had, however, powerful supporters in Spanish Milan: the Count Pedro Fuentes, governor of Milan, was perhaps the godfather of one of the Andreinis' children, and there the itinerant actor-author published several of his most important devout works.⁸ In autonomous Venice, on the other hand, with its deep-

7. On the role of Spain in Italy in this period, see Thomas J. Dandeleit and John A. Marino, eds., *Spain in Italy: Politics, Society and Religion 1500–1700* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007).

8. Fabrizio Fiaschini, *L'“incessabil agitazione”: Giovan Battista Andreini tra professione teatrale, cultura letteraria e religione* (Pisa: Giardini, 2007), 67.

rooted theatrical culture and important printing trade, he published or republished many of his comedies, whose colorful dialogues risked violating the rules of Counter-Reformation decorum or, far worse, earning the opprobrium of zealous local authorities. His most avant-garde plays—including *Love in the Mirror*—may or may not have ever been performed in Italy, but Andreini waited to publish them until his company was ensconced in far-off Paris, with patrons from among the highest-ranking French nobility.⁹ As a professional actor and man of letters, Andreini had to negotiate constantly the visible and invisible boundaries—territorial, economic, political, and linguistic, as well as cultural—that fractured or splintered the peninsula.

When armed conflict finally returned to northern Italy, as the War of the Mantuan Succession (1628–31), Andreini suffered serious losses: his property was sacked by the marauding armies, and his first wife died (perhaps of the bubonic plague that followed the Spanish army into Italy) the following summer. Financially speaking, his fortunes seem never to have recovered from this catastrophe, which occurred in a period of overall economic and demographic decline. Central-north Italy was the most densely populated area in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.¹⁰ However, plague, famine, and disease repeatedly decimated the population between 1575 and 1630, especially in the towns and cities, which were the mainstay of Andreini's itinerant acting company. The decline in economic prosperity in central-north Italy, where traditional industries such as silk and wool had fallen on hard times, forced the *capocomico* and his troupe farther and farther afield in search of patrons and public alike (Vienna, Prague, Florence, Lucca, Paris).¹¹ The precarious economics of the profession and the transitory nature of theatrical fame and fashion, as well as fierce competition from other Arte companies, meant that Andreini, even at the peak of his powers, faced a daily struggle to keep his theatrical enterprise afloat. The dedicatory

9. The only known performance of *Love in the Mirror* appears to have taken place in Paris in 1622.

10. Paolo Malanima, "A Declining Economy: Central and Northern Italy," *Spain in Italy*, ed. Dandeleo and Marino, 386. For a different viewpoint, see Giovanni Muto, "Dopo 'I testate di San Martino' dell'economia italiana," *Italia 1650: Comparazioni et bilanci*, ed. Giuseppe Galasso and Aurelio Musi (Naples: CUEN, 2002), 71–86.

11. Malanima, "A Declining Economy," 388–89. Robert Henke, *Performance and Literature in the Commedia dell'Arte* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 215, adds: "In Italy, the commedia dell'arte did wane after the 1630s because the northern courts that had patronized [the companies] declined in power and prestige."

preface to *Love in the Mirror*, with its fawning and hyperbolic praise of Andreini's patron, François de Bassompierre, will give even readers wholly unfamiliar with Italian Baroque culture a sense of the asymmetrical social and economic relations that marked the age of absolutism and defined the limits of Andreini's sphere of action. Those who were at the margins of the world of the great and powerful had, with few exceptions, to conform to the latter's demands or face the consequences: as Elizabeth S. Cohen has remarked, in early modern Italy "subordination was the norm for nearly everyone."¹² The players' independence—in crossing borders between states and in marketing their "products" wherever they went—nevertheless did not place them outside of this norm. Thus, despite its revolutionary gestures, in the end Andreini's sex-comedy restores the established order of things, as the Governor's wishes are carried out and the characters obediently return to their "proper" places in society.

The Counter-Reformation authorities' intolerance of the theater did have an impact on both the composition and production of comedies in Italy. In Milan, the devout Charles Borromeo (1538–84) censored comedy and even called for an end to Carnival itself, sifting through the scenarios of the Compagnia dei Gelosi in 1583 in search of scandalous dialogues and situations to suppress before they could appear on stage. Comedies, as he saw them, made a dangerous display of every kind of vice, from adultery to prostitution, and actors were mere nomads and vagabonds to be expelled from the city.¹³ Actors were barred from burial in consecrated ground, and in the Papal States actresses were banned from the public stage.¹⁴ Andreini was intimately familiar with the ecclesiastical critique of comedy, and sought to forestall it (wherever possible) in writing his plays. *Love in the Mirror* contains none of the bawds, ruffians, or parasites of earlier Renaissance comedies. There are no adulterers, thieves, frauds, corrupt priests, or crooked public servants. No patriarch (the *senex* of the

12. Elizabeth S. Cohen, "Evolving the History of Women in Early Modern Italy: Subordination and Agency," *Spain in Italy*, ed. Dandeleit and Marino, 329.

13. For Borromeo's attitude toward comedy, see his "Lettera al Cardinale Gabriello Paleotti, Arcivescovo di Bologna (luglio 1578)," in Ferdinando Taviani, *La commedia dell'arte e la società barocca: la fascinazione del teatro* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1991 [1969]), 23–24. Taviani, 315–526, has also republished the Jesuit Giovan Domenico Ottonelli's (1584–1670) important critique of the Baroque theater in Italy.

14. Richard Andrews, *Scripts and Scenarios: The Performance of Comedy in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 224.

Plautine tradition) is tricked or humiliated by the younger generation. Although biblical figures and episodes are briefly mentioned, no religious sentiment is expressed, in order to avoid any possible controversy. Finally, all the characters are reconciled at the end of the play.¹⁵ However, the difference between theory and practice was great indeed in the case of clerical antitheatricalism in early modern Italy. Borromeo's proscription was not in fact followed by many other members of the clergy, who saw in the theater a didactic and propaganda tool of great efficacy for the faith: Andreini's sacred plays, such as his three versions of the Mary Magdalen story, bear witness to this. Besides, many members of the Italian aristocracy—upon which the church depended for political and financial support—had no intention of depriving themselves of either the pleasures of the theater or of the possibilities it afforded them to display their own status and enhance their prestige through patronage.

Above all, however, it was the new phenomenon of the professional theater that ultimately proved unstoppable. Because of Shakespeare's canonical status, many English-language readers are likely already familiar with the story of the explosive growth of theatrical culture in London between the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In Italy the first permanent theaters were built at court in Mantua and Ferrara in the mid-Cinquecento, followed soon afterward by smaller professional theaters in Venice, Florence, and Naples.¹⁶ (Although built for an academy rather than for the commercial stage, the oldest surviving early modern theater in Europe, Andrea Palladio's Teatro Olimpico in the city of Vicenza, was begun in 1575 and completed in 1585, long before ground was broken for the Globe Theatre in London.) Venice, with its vast wealth, quickly became the new theatrical center of Italy: in the seventeenth century, in fact, its network of theaters was larger and more important than that of any other European city.¹⁷

15. Compare this to Malvolio's last line in the final act of *Twelfth Night* (V.i): "I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you!" This is hardly consonant with the principles of comic closure.

16. Siro Ferrone, *Attori mercanti corsari: la commedia dell'arte in Europa tra Cinque e Seicento* (Turin: Einaudi, 1993), 56. The Teatro Baldracca in Florence, for instance, was a second-floor space of the Dogana outfitted into a theater. See Annamaria Evangelista, "Le compagnie dei comici dell'arte nel teatrino di Baldracca a Firenze: notizie dagli epistolari (1576–1653)," *Quaderni di Teatro* 24 (1984): 50–72.

17. Siro Ferrone, "Il teatro," in *Storia della letteratura italiana*, ed. Enrico Malato (Rome: Salerno, 1997), 5:1086.

After the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1606, the Venetian nobility threw its entrepreneurial energy and financial resources into the building and management of theaters. Audiences, in which different social strata intermingled, embraced enthusiastically this new professionalized mode of spectacle, especially opera. As Venetian commerce contracted in the eastern Mediterranean, the city's theatrical industry attracted increasing amounts of investment capital: the theaters were money-making enterprises, with performances put on for a paying public, and more and more extravagant productions were needed in order to keep the box-office receipts flowing in.¹⁸ The Compagnia dei Fedeli worked frequently in the city, and Andreini's unconventional comedies, some of which were published (if not performed) in Venice, could well have been written with the needs of this new class of impresarios in mind. His plays not only reached beyond the Arte tradition in terms of theme and plot, but, as in the case of *Love in the Mirror*, sometimes may have been staged with elaborate crowd-pleasing special effects (mirrors, flames, and monsters are mentioned in the stage directions) requiring the newest theatrical-industrial technology. These "new comedies," as Andreini called them,¹⁹ could not be easily played on the small stages that the Arte actors used in most northern Italian cities: they instead called for a performance space with the kind of technically advanced equipment found only where the new theatrical system flourished. Even if *Love in the Mirror* was never seen in public on the peninsula in Andreini's lifetime, the play needs to be read in the context of the far-reaching process of professionalization and technological innovation of the early modern theater that was then underway.

Although the Fedeli continued for many years to mount Arte performances as part of their repertory, the *commedia dell'arte* was the target of frequent censorship by the Venetian authorities, to say

18. Ellen Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice: The Creation of a Genre* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 15, notes that in Venice "commercial success was of primary concern, and that could be achieved only by creating works with broad audience appeal"

19. The purpose of the "new comedy" was to be, he argued, free of the frank immorality so often found in the learned comedies of the Renaissance, which would allow it to flourish in the Counter-Reformation climate. For, as Andreini remarked in the prologue to *Lelio bandito*, "Although in comedies we often see lascivious acts and profane actions, they are not put there in order to teach us [how to perform] them, but in order to show us the way in which we may avoid them." See G. B. Andreini, *Lelio bandito: tragicommedia boschereccia* (Venice: G. B. Combi, 1624), 12.

nothing of those in less tolerant cities across Italy. Comedy is, generally speaking, a conservative genre, but the bold irreverence of the Arte players could be perceived, in some places, as subverting not only official “high” culture but public order. As a number of scholars have shown, however, one of the main reasons for the authorities’ concern was the prominence of actresses in the companies. Municipal officials and clergymen railed against them, accusing actresses of every conceivable public and private impropriety, but it was too late: in most of post-Renaissance Italy, professional acting companies that included women were an established fact of life. Indeed, even before Andreini’s birth in 1576, women were not only the leading attractions of their companies, but may have functioned as troupe leaders as well.²⁰ Life in the professional theater might have been a choice that relatively few women outside of the lowest ranks of society made willingly, given the marginal social status of all but a handful of famous actresses in Italy, but within that profession it was possible for women to play a prominent role. If performance on stage was like writing on water, namely, a transient and ever-changing event that left no permanent trace behind, the very fact of public performance—particularly in the case of actresses—nevertheless in itself marked a signal moment in the slow transition toward modernity in Italy.

Andreini was *capocomico* (lead actor and director) of the Fedeli as well as the resident playwright, but Virginia Ramponi and the rest of the troupe had a great deal of input into the writing of his comedies. We know that Andreini often worked, in fact, by composing in performance, drawing on the company’s extensive experience in Arte improvisation. As Anne MacNeil observes of the comedy *Lo schiavetto* (The Little Slave), “while Andreini’s name appears on the title page, the contents of the play are in fact a collaborative effort, representing the ideas and talents of all the members of his troupe.”²¹ If the Fedeli’s actresses had to speak on stage through conventions set by male playwrights and reworked by Andreini, there is nevertheless good reason to think that their voices came through onto the printed pages of *Love in the Mirror*, in which they figure as its indisputable protagonists. Andreini himself was, as Lelio, to play only a secondary role on stage.²² In the play the chief female characters walk boldly—

20. Henke, *Performance and Literature in the Commedia dell’Arte*, 85.

21. MacNeil, *Music and Women*, 165.

22. Piermarco Vescovo, “Virginia Ramponi e Virginia Rotari nello specchio di Giovan Battista Andreini,” *Donne e teatro*, ed. Daria Perocco (Venice: Ca’ Foscari/Comitato per le