

Introduction

The Other Voice of Eleonora Fonseca Pimentel

Eleonora Fonseca Pimentel (1752–1799) was the first Italian woman to write overtly about politics. Descended on both sides from Portuguese aristocrats, she became the chief journalist and opinion maker of the Neapolitan Jacobin Republic of 1799, and one of its most outspoken, imaginative and hard-hitting political commentators. Her prominence was acknowledged by the returning monarchical regime, when they included her among the Jacobins who were put to death by hanging after the Republic was overturned.

Her political involvement dated back to the period of sovereign-led enlightened reforms, which she supported in a series of essays on political and economic matters. She had been a writer all her adult life, producing poetry from a very young age, and was admitted into membership of the prestigious poetic academy Arcadia in 1768, when she was just sixteen. For the next twenty years, experiencing marriage, motherhood, and the wrenching loss of her one child, she labored prodigiously, writing letters, essays, and verse, even as the autocratic Neapolitan state evolved through a series of political reforms. By the 1790s, she was a full-fledged Jacobin, who saw revolutionary politics as the only possible road to the future. Her fiery devotion to that cause is evident in the pages of the *Monitore Napoletano* (Neapolitan Monitor), the biweekly newspaper she wrote and published, recording the events of the short-lived Neapolitan Republic of January to June, 1799.

Fonseca Pimentel is a tantalizing figure, presenting contradictory images. As a poet she conforms to the canon of women's writing in eighteenth-century Italy, poetry being the genre most frequented by women, regardless of their other writings. But she infringed the canon in that, unlike most other women essayists of her century, she ignored gender issues. Thus she is both typical woman and aberrant woman; indeed, twice aberrant. She infringes both the traditional male-made gender model by being a protagonist not a victim—and a protagonist in a revolution at that—and the feminist canon by not tackling any questions of particular relevance to women. Nor did she ever attempt, as most women writers did, to justify herself for meddling in “unwomanly” things. She wrote as if her sex did not matter.

The absence of explicit feminist concerns in her writings has been perceived as problematic by recent feminist scholarship, an issue to be addressed later in this volume. For now, it might be useful to keep in mind that women writers who addressed the woman question completely ignored the plight of women below the

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educated classes. Fonseca Pimentel chose to focus her attention on the impoverished masses, to which the vast majority of women belonged.

Part One of this volume tracks Fonseca Pimentel's career against the backdrop of the history of the Neapolitan state: from her youth as a member of the academy Arcadia until her maturity as a Jacobin agent. Part Two presents selections from the *Monitore Napoletano*, the vehicle by which she expressed her ardent advocacy of the revolutionary agenda. The Epilogue reviews the directions in modern studies of Fonseca Pimentel's literary works and political career. The many places both in Naples and Italy more broadly named in the text are identified in the Glossary of Places, and a Chronology summarizes important dates in tabular form.

Part One: From Arcadia to Revolution

Poet, Mother, Jacobin

As her name suggests, Eleonora Fonseca Pimentel was not of Italian origin. Her mother, Caterina Lopez de Leon, was of a Portuguese family who had lived in Rome since the beginning of the eighteenth century. Her father, also Portuguese although of a family who were originally Spanish, had settled in Rome two years before Eleonora was born on January 13, 1752. In 1760, the family went to live in Naples.¹

Fonseca Pimentel's multicultural environment made a difference to her outlook. She retained a special interest in Portuguese affairs, as shown in her celebration of the policies of the Marquis of Pombal, the Portuguese chief minister, as the epitome of enlightened reforms.² She was certainly at ease with written Portuguese, as well as French, English, and, of course, Italian. What language, or more likely, languages she spoke at home, one can only surmise. Interestingly, she appears to have learned enough Neapolitan dialect to enable her at least to write a sonnet in it.³

Her family belonged to the minor Portuguese nobility, and was granted the status of full subjects of the Kingdom of Naples in 1778.⁴ She received an impeccable classical education according to the most traditional male curriculum: she

1. In July 1760, the Portuguese ambassador in Rome had instructed all Portuguese subjects to leave within three months, on account of the deteriorating relationship between Lisbon and the Roman curia following Portugal's expulsion of the Jesuits. Benedetto Croce, *La rivoluzione napoletana del 1799: Biografie, racconti, ricerche*, ed. Cinzia Cassani, 2 vols. (Naples: Bibliopolis, 1998–1999), 1:26. For more details of Fonseca Pimentel's maternal and paternal families, see Franco Schiattarella, *La marchesa giacobina: Eleonora Fonseca Pimentel* (Naples: Schettini, 1973), 9–13.

2. Sebastião José de Carvalho e Melo, Marquis of Pombal; see 34. Fonseca Pimentel and her family were clearly perceived as Portuguese, at least during her early years in Naples: the Tuscan writer Domenico Saccenti referred to her as a “giovine gentildonna portoghese di circa sedici anni” (“a Portuguese young lady about sixteen years of age”), and the celebrated poet Metastasio called her “l'amabilissima musa del Tago” (“the very charming muse from the Tagus”) in his letter to her dated July 11, 1776. For Saccenti's comment, see Croce, *La rivoluzione napoletana*, 1:27–31; for Metastasio, see Pietro Metastasio, *Lettere*, in *Tutte le opere di Pietro Metastasio*, vol. 5, ed. Bruno Brunelli (Milan: Mondadori, 1954), letter no. 2251, 397. She also acknowledged her Portuguese roots when she referred to Portugal as “a nation where I was not born, but whose daughter I am” in her 1777 letter to Pombal. See 39.

3. See 52–56.

4. On January 11, 1778, her father, Clemente Henriquez de Fonseca Pimentel, obtained from the king a guarantee that all family members born in Naples would enjoy the full prerogatives of their aristocratic status. Croce, *La rivoluzione napoletana*, 1:27.

was taught not only mathematics, natural history, ancient history, but also Latin and Greek; that is to say, she was given the tools to reach a level of intellectual knowledge such as was rarely accessed by women, even women from cultured families. One cannot overestimate the impact that her family environment had on her upbringing and outlook. Not only were the Fonseca Pimentels cultured and appreciative of culture, to the extent of hosting *conversazioni* with men and women of letters who gathered at their home to exchange news and views, but they were also very well connected within the enlightened, cosmopolitan circles that dominated the Neapolitan elite at the time. And Naples itself had for some time been not unfavorable to learned women.⁵

Who were the teachers of the young Fonseca Pimentel? Typically for well-educated women, she was encouraged by sympathetic male family members: her father, who continued to give her invaluable support throughout the vicissitudes of her personal life, and her maternal uncle, Antonio Lopez. He was her first tutor. Many others followed. It is fascinating to try and unravel her educational itinerary, closely intertwined as it was with the world of the Neapolitan progressive elite in what was seen as an age not only of peace but also of enlightened reforms. Among them was Gianvincenzo Meola, lawyer and writer, who taught her classical Greek, and the mathematician and philosopher Filippo Maria Guidi, who tutored her in those subjects at the behest of her father. Both Meola and Guidi frequented the gatherings hosted by the Fonseca Pimentels. Also, both would be among the witnesses who spoke in her favor at the court case that saw her and her father pitched against her husband some fifteen years later.⁶

Some of the literary salons that operated in Naples at the time functioned as academies, namely places of learning, often endowed with magnificent libraries, but also as meeting places for foreign scholars who were visiting Naples—places of learning and places of networking, crucial levers for the advancement of clever

5. Scientists Faustina Pignatelli and Maria Angela Ardinghelli and philosopher Giuseppa Eleonora Barbapiccola were Neapolitan, and so was sociologist Matilde Perrino, a near contemporary of Fonseca Pimentel who wrote a socioeconomic survey of Apulia based on her own research undertaken during a trip to the region (*Lettera di Matilde Perrino ad un suo amico, nella quale si contengono alcune sue riflessioni fatte in occasione del suo breve viaggio per alcuni luoghi della Puglia* [Naples: Nella Stamperia Simoniana, 1787]). On Pignatelli and Ardinghelli, see Marta Cavazza, “Minerva e Pigmaliione: Carriere femminili nell’Italia del Settecento,” *The Italianist* 17 (1997): 5–17, and Paula Findlen, “Translating the New Science: Women and the Circulation of Knowledge in Enlightenment Italy,” *Configurations* 3 (1995): 184–91. On Barbapiccola, see Paula Findlen’s introduction and translation in Maria Gaetana Agnesi, et al., *The Contest for Knowledge: Debates over Women’s Learning in Eighteenth-Century Italy*, ed. and trans. Rebecca Messbarger and Paula Findlen, with an introduction by Rebecca Messbarger (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 37–66. It was in Naples that Francesco Algarotti’s *Newtonianismo per le dame, ovvero Dialoghi sopra la luce e i colori* was first published in 1737, the most famous among the books written at this time with the specific aim of reaching a female readership.

6. See 10–11.

and ambitious young intellectuals. One such salon was that of the Marquis of Vatolla, Don Michele Vargas Macciucca. It was here that, as a very young woman, probably under the age of fifteen, she recited her first poems. Vargas Macciucca's salon was also frequented by Domenico and Giuseppe Cirillo, who would reappear alongside her, some twenty-five years later, as protagonists of the Jacobin movement.

Fonseca Pimentel was undoubtedly a polymath, writing in both verse and prose, on topics that apparently included science and economics.⁷ Her extant writings cover three areas: poetry, political tracts, and journalism—in that order. She was a poet and a political essayist—two roles that complemented each other—during her younger years, when she was part of the coterie of enlightened intellectuals who gravitated around an enlightened Bourbon court. She was a journalist in the very last months of her life, a life now solely dedicated to the Jacobin cause.

It was as a poet that she became known and celebrated as a young woman, and she regularly recited her poems.⁸ Her first published work, *Il tempio della gloria* (The Temple of Glory), appeared in 1768, when she was sixteen years old. It was a lengthy verse composition celebrating the wedding of the king of Naples, Ferdinand IV, with the Austrian archduchess Maria Carolina. It appeared under the name of *Epolnifenora Olcesamante*—a (quasi) anagram of Eleonora Fonseca Pimentel—which was her given name as a member of the Accademia dei Filaleti. Soon after came another sign of recognition, membership of the most prestigious of Italian poetic academies, the Accademia dell'Arcadia, with the given name of Altidora Esperetusa: a name, interestingly, allusive to the classical names—Esperia and Lusitania—of the two nations that she felt were her own, Italy and Portugal.⁹

7. One finds mention of a book on a project for a national bank written by her in the 1780s, but it was apparently never published. Croce, *La rivoluzione napoletana*, 1:40.

8. Croce mentions an occasion when the one sonnet recited by Fonseca Pimentel, interestingly referred to as “la Portoghesina,” was judged to be way above the other six, recited by as many priests, in that her thinking was vastly superior. This recitation took place on May 5, 1780, at the opening of the Accademia delle Scienze e Lettere and in the presence of the king. The source of this comment was a manuscript document kept in the Vatican Archive and published by the Jesuit priest Ilario Rinieri in *Dall'Arcadia al capestro: Di Eleonora Pimentel Fonseca letterata e giacobina* (Rome: A. Befani, 1900); cf. Benedetto Croce, *Aneddoti di varia letteratura* (Naples: R. Ricciardi, 1942), 2:372–73. See also the testimonies given at the Fonseca/Tria court case: Archivio di Stato di Napoli, Gran Corte della Vicaria, fascio 133, fascicolo 43, tra D. Pasquale Tria de Solis e D. Eleonora Pimentel Fonseca; cited henceforth as ASN. This document lay buried in the National Archives in Naples, unknown even to Croce, until it was discovered by Franco Schiattarella in the 1960s. This discovery led to his volume *La marchesa giacobina*, cited above, note 1. It is from this document that we learn much about Fonseca Pimentel's studies and poetry recitals as a young girl (testimonies by Vincenzo Meola, Filippo Maria Guidi, and Francesco Mazzarella Farao, fols. 90, 95, and 104).

9. The Accademia dell'Arcadia, founded in Rome in 1690, was highly influential in the formation of a new shared poetic canon, which opposed the previously prevailing Baroque style in the name of order, clarity, and decorum. As Giovanna Gronda has pointed out, such principles were generic enough to

Fonseca Pimentel continued to write poetry along similar lines, namely poetry eulogizing the reigning monarchs, for a number of years. It would be only too easy to dismiss this kind of poetry as pointless, and it is certainly not the kind of writing that appeals to our modern penchant for unaffected authenticity. Yet it is evident that her fulsome praise of the monarchs was clearly focused on their policies of reform. Fonseca Pimentel's poetry is part and parcel of her political persona, which at this stage was typical of the many enlightened intellectuals who believed in the project of enlightened despotism and gave it their active support. As time went on, she wrote less poetry and more on political issues, supporting more and more openly the sovereigns' policy of reforms. Interestingly, she made her first foray into political writing in her prose preface to a poem, *Il trionfo della virtù* (*Virtue Triumphant*), written in 1777 and dedicated to the Marquis of Pombal, whom she praises as the epitome of the enlightened minister working side by side with an enlightened sovereign.¹⁰ We find tantalizing references to what would have been a revolutionary poem, an *Inno alla libertà* (*Hymn to Freedom*), written in January 1799 in the castle of Sant'Elmo immediately prior to the proclamation of the Neapolitan Republic.¹¹ Unfortunately, like many of her earlier writings, it is lost.

Her writing, especially her poetry, won her increasing signs of recognition, among which was the inclusion of one of her sonnets in the prestigious *Rime di donne illustri* (*Poems by Illustrious Women*) published by Luisa Bergalli in 1773.¹² And she was very adept at forging links with people that mattered. One of the friends of the Fonseca Pimentels was Don Giuseppe de Souza, secretary to the Portuguese ambassador in Naples. In August 1772, he was transferred to the Portuguese embassy in Vienna, where Pietro Metastasio then lived. Fonseca Pimentel was quick to use the de Souza connection to make contact with Metastasio, who was at the time the unchallenged authority among Italian literati. Her letters to him are lost, but we have Metastasio's own letters to her, twelve over a six-year period (1770–1776). She had sent him her first published works, and in the lengthy correspondence that ensued he poured boundless admiration on her verse.¹³ Later, probably around 1775, she started a correspondence with Voltaire,

satisfy a widely felt need for change and renewal. Giovanna Gronda, ed., *Poesia italiana del Settecento* (Milan: Garzanti, 1978), Introduction, xi–xii.

10. See 36–39.

11. This *Inno alla libertà* is mentioned in No.14 of the *Monitore Napoletano*, to be cited henceforth in these notes as MN. Several editions are listed in the Bibliography.

12. *Rime di donne illustri*, a S. E. Caterina Delfin cavaliera e procuratessa Tron nel gloriosissimo ingresso alla dignità di Procurator per merito di San Marco di S. E. Cavalier Andrea Tron, ed. Luisa Bergalli (Venice: Pietro Valvasense, 1773), 34.

13. Metastasio, *Lettere*, nos. 1890, 2037, 2059, 2111, 2126, 2136, 2175, 2186, 2214, 2229, 2251, 2262.

who wrote a charming octet in response to a sonnet of hers, in which he called her *Beau rossignole de la belle Italie* (Beautiful nightingale from beautiful Italy).¹⁴

By her early twenties, Fonseca Pimentel was clearly a very successful woman, highly cultured, productive, ambitious, well-connected, both with prominent writers and with the enlightened coterie who gravitated around the enlightened court, and widely admired—an exceptional woman, even within the parameters of the elite environment in which she lived.

She also evidently enjoyed a close and warm relationship with her blood family. But even before the whirlwind of revolution wrenched her away from her golden youth, other more personal tragedies cast their shadows on her life. However we choose to view her public successes, her private life was very heavily conditioned by her sex. Not only did she have to endure seven years of marriage to Don Pasquale Tria de Solis, a boorish and probably violent man, she also lost her only child, who died at eight months of age. The marriage ended in 1785 after a lengthy and extremely acrimonious court case.

The papers related to the Fonseca/Tria court case are an invaluable source of information on her life up to this point, covering as they do, through the testimonies of various witnesses, not only the events that were directly related to the separation case, but also her earlier years.¹⁵ They span a period of ten months, starting with September 1784, when the first skirmishes between the two parties began, and ending with the actual conclusion of the court case in June 1785. Included in this document are lengthy statements both by herself and her husband, as well as declarations by witnesses cited by the two parties, writers and diplomats

14. The full text of the poem appears in several collections of Voltaire's works, including the Voltaire Foundation edition: *Les œuvres complètes de Voltaire*, ed. Nicholas Crank (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1980–), vol. 78A (2010), 336. This is where the matter becomes problematic: the text of the poem reproduced in this edition is prefaced by a dedication to an anonymous male (“A Monsieur ***”), and the editor states that it has been impossible to “discover the addressee,” claiming also that the poem was first published in the “Kehl edition,” that is to say in the *Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire*, ed. Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, Jean-Antoine-Nicolas de Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet, and Jacques Joseph Marie Decroix, vol. 14 (Kehl: Imprimerie de la Société littéraire typographique, 1785), no. CLXXXVI, 429. The version in this edition is indeed identical to the one published by the Voltaire Foundation. But there was in fact an earlier, and most likely first, version of the poem, published in the *Giornale letterario di Siena* 2 (1776): lxxi, entitled “Versi del Sig. di Voltaire responsivi ad un Sonetto della nobile ed egregia donzella Eleonora Fonseca di Pimentel abitante in Napoli” (Poem by Monsieur de Voltaire in response to a Sonnet by the noble and excellent young lady Eleonora Fonseca di Pimentel who lives in Naples). This version of the poem is identical to the one reproduced in the Voltaire Foundation edition, with the exception of “italie” instead of “Italie” (line 4), “païs” instead of “pays” (line 5), and “& privé de génie” instead of “et surtout sans génie” (line 4). This version of Voltaire's poem, with the dedication to Fonseca Pimentel, was first discovered by Franco Venturi: see Venturi, “Il Portogallo dopo Pombal: La Spagna di Floridablanca,” in *Settecento riformatore*, vol. 4, part 1: *La caduta dell'antico regime, 1776–1789* (Turin: Einaudi, 1984), 228.

15. See above, note 8.

on her side, shopkeepers and artisans, the “people of Naples,” on her husband’s side. Unfortunately the documentation relating to her later years is much scarcer, the glaring omission being the transcripts of the trial that ended with her death sentence, destroyed four years after her execution on order of the restored King Ferdinand.¹⁶

Fonseca Pimentel’s match with Tria de Solis had been arranged by her father when she was twenty-four years old.¹⁷ There had been a previous engagement, to her cousin Michele Lopez—also arranged as was the custom—which had lasted three years (1773–1776) but then came to nothing. Why was the engagement terminated? Some have speculated that he might have been put off by her “overconfidence” and excessive concentration on her “books and studies.”¹⁸ Quite simply we do not know, although it would be not unusual for a man—an eighteenth-century man, of course—not to be too keen on an intellectually superior wife.

If the engagement with Michele was indeed broken because of Fonseca Pimentel’s perceived intellectual hauteur, then her father could not have chosen worse when he married her off to Tria de Solis. A forty-four-year-old army officer and member of the very minor Neapolitan nobility, he appears to have been the type of “plebeian nobleman”—ignorant and proud of it, dialect-speaking and popular with the plebs—that, according to Benedetto Croce, had taken shape in the city of Naples from around the middle of the century,¹⁹ the opposite end of the spectrum from the cultured, enlightened aristocratic circle to which the Fonseca Pimentels belonged. Besides, while they were careful with their money, the Trias de Solis aspired to live in luxury, and most definitely above their means, a habit that would have dire consequences.

A major source of conflict from the beginning appears to have been Fonseca Pimentel’s intellectual activity, which Don Pasquale found pointless at best, threatening at worst, and in any case unsuitable for a lady. Another was his profligacy, which resulted in his de facto bankruptcy and the family being forced to move out of their patrician *palazzo* at the Pignasecca in central Naples to a far more modest place on the outskirts of the city. Not long after the death of her baby son, she became pregnant again, but suffered a miscarriage which very nearly killed her.²⁰ Another pregnancy followed, which also ended in a miscarriage, possibly caused by her husband’s physical violence. Episodes of spite, humiliation

16. On the destruction of this documentation see Giuseppe Galasso. “I giacobini meridionali,” in Giuseppe Galasso, *La filosofia in soccorso de’ governi: La cultura napoletana del Settecento* (Naples: Guida, 1989), 520.

17. The marriage was celebrated in February 1778, after lengthy negotiations which began in 1776.

18. This claim is made by Bice Gurgo in *Eleonora de Fonseca Pimentel* (Naples: Cooperativa Editrice Libreria, 1935), 37–38, and supported by Schiattarella, *La marchesa giacobina*, 31.

19. Benedetto Croce, *Storia del Regno di Napoli* (Bari: Laterza, 1925), 178–79.

20. See her sonnets on her son’s death, and her ode on a miscarriage,

and violence seem to have intensified as time went on. In the court case, Fonseca Pimentel testifies how Don Pasquale's three unmarried sisters had been living with them from the start of the marriage—three sad women, one of them mentally unbalanced, who tormented their brainy sister-in-law and fueled the flames of their brother's suspicion of her scholarly friendships. From her testimony a portrait transpires of an infernal marriage between a cultured woman, keen not only on acquiring books but also on maintaining her links with the cultured coterie among which she had grown up, and a man who would at best deprive her of the necessary money to purchase books, and at worst actually scatter and destroy them, accuse her of adultery with fellow writers who might visit, and beat her and even threaten to have her killed. Besides, he who falsely accused her of adultery was himself guilty on this count.²¹

Tria de Solis in his turn retorted by trying to portray his wife in a very different light, skillfully interweaving with her persona the assumptions of a patriarchal society. In a tone that manages to be both unctuous and intimidating, he presents himself as an "honorable officer of good family" who is being "assaulted and slandered by a foolish capricious woman such as is his wife." Not only did she want to live according to "current fashions" against her husband's wishes, but responded to his disapproval by redoubling her slanderous assaults instead of "falling silent and mending her ways" (ah, the silence of women). Had she not shown "insubordination" towards her intended from the start? Had she not offended her sisters-in-law by living "as she pleased"? Had she not falsely blamed her miscarriages on his maltreatments, when in fact these were clearly the result of a congenital physical malformation? And had she not been obsessed with reading and studying, instead of seeing to her duties as a wife and homemaker? And besides, the books she devoured with so much relish were of the kind that upheld the modern subversive doctrines condemned by the church. Moreover, she who had dared to accuse him falsely of adultery had in fact herself been guilty of infidelity. As proof of this charge, Tria de Solis produced ten letters to Fonseca Pimentel by Alberto Fortis, as well as a draft of a letter she had written to Fortis.²² Don Pasquale skillfully ended on a supposedly magnanimous note: a caring husband such as he was could only wish for his wife's "redemption," and he was therefore pleading for her to be "confined to a nunnery, so she would restrain her ways and learn upright doctrines and her duties, prior to returning home."²³

Fonseca Pimentel's accusation of adultery against her husband concerned the coming into their marriage of "one Angela Veronica from L'Aquila." Angela Maria Veronica had at first worked as a *cuffiara* (milliner) with financial help from Don Pasquale, then little by little wormed her way into the Tria-Fonseca

21. ASN, fols. 77–89.

22. For Fonseca Pimentel's letter to Fortis, see 51.

23. ASN, fols. 48–50.

household, making and mending clothes, making herself generally useful, and ingratiating herself with Don Pasquale's sisters. While Fonseca Pimentel appears to have been sympathetic and willing to help at first, she became increasingly uncomfortable and suspicious when Angela brought in her three-year-old daughter (was she Don Pasquale's child?), and took to spending long periods as their guest. Some of the details of this cohabitation sound bizarre to say the least. According to Fonseca Pimentel's testimony, her husband made the two women share the marital bed, while he slept in a small bed in the same room.²⁴ In response, in September 1784, before things came to a head and her father initiated the court case for separation, she had decided to take action, using her connection with the Portuguese diplomat don Giuseppe de Souza—he who had put her in touch with Metastasio—to obtain an audience with Sir John Acton, the commander-in-chief of the Neapolitan military, asking him to arrange for the expulsion of this “evil woman” from “Naples and its hinterland,” in the name of the “decorum” of an officer in the royal army. A lengthy court case had ensued, at the end of which Angela Veronica was found not guilty.²⁵

Angela Veronica's life appears rather typical of a certain type of woman of poor origin who was determined to make her fortune by whatever means available to her. In some ways she was not unlike her contemporary Amy Lyon, later to become Emma Hart, and later still Lady Hamilton, and best known as Horatio Nelson's lover.²⁶ Originally from the Abruzzo, Veronica had married, been in prison for perjury, and taken various lovers—one of whom, the lawyer who helped her with the court case, she shared with her sister. She might even have been involved in a murder. She eventually left these and other troubles behind by escaping to Naples, where she managed, on the recommendation of a marquis, to obtain a post as maidservant with a noble family. When it transpired that she was, as the saying went, a “woman of easy virtue,” she was sacked. She reinvented herself first as a haberdasher, and then a milliner. At some point she ran a milliner's shop with her sister. This account emerges both from Fonseca Pimentel's own testimony and those of the witnesses who spoke in her favor, while a rather different story emerges from the witnesses on the opposite side.

The court case entailed a series of well-documented accusations and counteraccusations. Both sides produced witnesses. Among those who testified in favor of Fonseca Pimentel were her old tutors Vincenzo Meola, Filippo Maria Guidi, Vincenzo Mazzarella Farao, and the Portuguese diplomat don Giuseppe de Souza, who all confirm that she was a highly cultured woman above all suspicion,

24. ASN, fols. 80, 81, and 84.

25. ASN, fols. 7–8 and 1–5.

26. On Emma Hamilton, of a large literature, see most usefully in this context Croce, *Aneddoti di varia letteratura*, 2:303–12. The British Admiral Horatio Nelson was in Naples during 1799–1800 in charge of the naval campaign against the French.

who had been maltreated and maligned by her husband and his sisters. They paint a picture of a woman who was ever more isolated as her friends became reluctant to visit because of her husband's insane and ill-founded jealousy; and they all emphasize her desperate need for books and his cruel refusal to let her have the money to buy them, to the extent that she was reduced to buy a particular set of volumes containing poems by Petrarch and Guidi only when she won a "small amount on the lottery." And they all concur in portraying Angela Veronica as not only Don Pasquale's lover but as *meretrice* (harlot), or indeed *puttana* (whore).²⁷ Belonging to the enlightened elite did not prevent them from indulging in sexualized attacks on women. Don Clemente himself, for that matter, had submitted, in defense of his daughter, a written document that purported to prove the "depraved lives of such women" (Angela Maria Veronica and her sister) through the evidence of two "professional midwives" who "having examined the private parts of Angela Rosa Veronica [Angela's sister], found her to have been ravished and used since a very long time."²⁸

But while the Fonseca Pimentels were well connected with intellectuals and diplomats, the Trias were able to draw on the support of shopkeepers, small artisans, barbers, market traders, coach drivers—the common people who lived in their neighborhood. They all supported his claims against his opponents, just as they had supported Veronica in the case that Fonseca Pimentel had attempted to bring the previous year, and they all portrayed the milliner, as well as her sister, as "honest women." Their testimonies—which, betraying the writers' illiteracy, are not surprisingly signed with a cross or occasionally with a very wobbly hand—have a strikingly formulaic quality that suggests they may have been prompted to repeat a prepared text. This court case that pitched Fonseca Pimentel and her family against her husband was also, patently, a showcase of class issues cutting across gender issues, featuring a clash between an enlightened upper class on the one hand, and on the other, an (un)holy alliance between the popular classes and the reactionary aristocracy. Fonseca Pimentel was encountering in her personal life, probably for the first time, questions that she would later confront at a political and ideological level.

After Fonseca Pimentel's attempt to be rid of the woman whom she viewed as her husband's lover, his behavior towards her, she said, became more and more offensive and abusive. It was at this point that her father intervened with a view to obtaining a separation from her husband. This intervention necessitated, first of all, his obtaining authorization from the Royal Council for his daughter to leave the marital home. If Fonseca Pimentel had been the victim of gender-specific abuse in the course of her marriage, now she had to rely on the sympathetic support of another man to try and remedy the situation. To begin, she had to be

27. ASN, fols. 105, 96, and 92–95.

28. ASN, fol. 113.

formally entrusted to her father, as the law did not allow for a woman to take legal action, so she returned to live in the Fonseca Pimentel family home. Though compelled to subordinate herself in this way, she was nonetheless fortunate to have a sympathetic father to sue for separation on her behalf.

Fonseca Pimentel ran a very real risk of ending up being “confined to a nunnery,” as her husband had advocated, since it is very likely that the judge would have felt compelled to pronounce against her—such was the apparent strength of her husband’s case—had Don Pasquale not suddenly declared, quite unpredictably, on June 26, 1785, that he was withdrawing all his previous submissions, also retracting all accusations against his wife, whom he now acknowledged to be “a thoroughly blameless woman beyond all suspicion.” Don Clemente de Fonseca Pimentel had died on May 14.²⁹

With the end of the court case, Fonseca Pimentel was free to return to her favorite occupations, studying and writing. She was also still on very good terms with the royal court. In August 1785, finding herself in financial difficulties, she applied for, and through their support obtained from the Banchi di Napoli a monthly grant of twelve ducats, with the explanation that the lady showed “extraordinary talents superior to the range of her sex.”³⁰ In the same year she produced the last of her eulogizing pieces, *Il vero omaggio* (*True Homage*), to celebrate the royal couple’s return from a trip to Sicily. But more and more, she focused on political and jurisdictional matters. In 1786, she wrote a book, now lost, on a project for a national bank, and between 1790 and 1792, she produced essays that made important contributions to the heated debate on the respective powers of state and church—in particular to the anticurial campaign of the Kingdom of Naples, aimed at rescinding all remaining feudal dependence on Rome.³¹ Further, in 1789, she had contributed a sonnet to a collection of poems written with the specific aim of celebrating the establishment of the San Leucio settlement, a manufacturing enterprise based on strictly egalitarian principles.³² Its establishment was the pinnacle of King Ferdinand IV’s reformist forays. It was to be also its swan song.

29. ASN, fols. 116–17. Don Pasquale’s declaration was in response to a request by Fonseca Pimentel to be allowed to continue living with her paternal aunt and uncle now that her father was dead and her brother had left Naples. On being told by Judge Tontolo that a reconciliation would be the best solution, Don Pasquale stated that while a reconciliation would not be possible, he agreed to her request, confident as he was in her “good conduct and blamelessness.” Elena Urganì hypothesizes that, following the death of her father on May 14, she might have used her inheritance to bribe Tria de Solis. Elena Urganì, *La vicenda letteraria e politica di Eleonora de Fonseca Pimentel* (Naples: La Città del Sole, 1998), 31.

30. Registro of Banco della Pietà, vol. 301, 137, quoted in Croce, *Aneddoti di varia letteratura*, 3:3.

31. See 27–28 and 59–64.

32. The sonnet is in *Componimenti poetici per le leggi date alla nuova popolazione di Santo Leucio da Ferdinando IV re delle Sicilie* (Naples: Stamperia Reale, 1789), 123.

For 1789 was, of course, the year of the storming of the Bastille. Soon news of events in Paris would put an end to the long honeymoon between enlightened sovereigns and progressive intellectuals. Enlightened reforms under the hegemony of the sovereigns were no longer possible; enlightened despotism had run its course. The process of polarization that took place during the 1790s pushed rulers to adopt policies of defensive repression against francophile intellectuals, while at the same time, some enlightened reformers moved towards Jacobinism, a more radical ideology of democracy and equality.

Fonseca Pimentel was among them: the monarchist reformer of earlier years turned to revolutionary conspiracy in the 1790s. It is difficult to reconstruct her biography in detail for the period 1790–1798. But it is known that sometime after 1789, she was dismissed from her position she had held since 1775 as librarian to Queen Maria Carolina, consort of Ferdinand IV. It is known that she was involved with Jacobin activists who gathered at her house to discuss the news from France, which she was able to glean from the journal *Le Moniteur*, the major French newspaper published during the Revolution, obtained through her contacts with Portuguese diplomats. And it is known that in 1798, she was charged with reading prohibited books and holding seditious meetings, for which offenses she was arrested and jailed in the Vicaria prison.³³

In January 1799, the sovereigns having fled to Sicily, French armies entered Naples. Now Fonseca Pimentel took a leading role in the establishment of the Repubblica Napoletana (Neapolitan Republic), the last to be established of the Italian Jacobin republics. Soon after she was put in charge of the *Monitore Napoletano*, which was to be its chief political journal. Like the Republic itself, it only lasted for five months. It appeared for the last time on June 8, 1799. On June 13, the peasant army of Cardinal Fabrizio Ruffo entered Naples, the Republic fell, and the Bourbon Kingdom was reestablished. Fonseca Pimentel, together with other prominent leaders of the Jacobin Republic, was arrested and kept prisoner for a while in a ship anchored in the bay of Naples. These prisoners were supposed to be given safe passage into exile, an agreement guaranteed by British Admiral Horatio Nelson, who then reneged on the agreement. On August 12, some of the prisoners were removed to the Vicaria prison and put on trial. On August 17, Fonseca Pimentel and ten others were condemned to death. Four of these were reprieved. Fonseca Pimentel and the other six were hanged in the Piazza del Mercato on August 20, 1799. Before being given burial, her body was left hanging from the gallows for a whole day, to be scorned and mocked by the populace of Naples.

Her execution by hanging and the exposure of her body soon became the subject of a popular song:

33. See Croce, *Aneddoti di varia letteratura*, 2:374–78; Croce, *La rivoluzione napoletana*, 1:45–48.

and the great *Repubblica Cisalpina*, incorporating the territory of the Cispadana and Lombardy; and even in Rome, the *Repubblica Romana* in February 1798. The last of all was the *Repubblica Napoletana* (Neapolitan Republic), which was proclaimed on January 21, 1799. The Neapolitan Jacobins were now in charge, faced with the task of tackling huge unresolved problems of poverty, inequality, financial bankruptcy, and unreformed feudalism. All this amid endemic popular hostility and in a country occupied by French armies.

Arcadia and Beyond: Poetry, Letters, Politics

Writing poetry in the eighteenth century did not always mean, in fact hardly ever meant, being just a poet. Poetry at this time was “a tool of social interaction,” flourishing as it did within academic and social milieus, relying as it did on public recitals, and often written with a celebratory aim.⁶⁰ If this was true of poetry writing in general, it was even more so in the case of poetry written by women. Not only was poetry the genre that allowed women the most secure and confident position as writers, but women poets in Italy were by now firmly embedded in the canon. They gained full membership of the Arcadia in 1708, and were clearly regarded with approval by the male establishment. Moreover, writing verse was almost a form of cultural or societal obligation for women interested in writing, “part of the baggage of cultural good manners, like being able to play a musical instrument.”⁶¹

In fact, verse writing appears to have been practiced by most women writers irrespective of their main focus of interest. Poetry was written not only by the women who are known principally as poets, such as Faustina Maratti Zappi, Petronilla Paolini Massimi, Silvia Curtoni Verza, Paolina Grismondi, Angela Veronese, and others, but also by other learned women: for example, Diamante Medaglia Faini, author of thoughtful reflections on philosophical matters and women’s role in their study; Eleonora Barbapiccola, translator of Descartes’ *Principia philosophiae* (*Principles of Philosophy*), who was a pupil of Giambattista Vico and herself a philosopher;⁶² and Eleonora Fonseca Pimentel, political writer and journalist.

60. Gronda, *Poesia italiana*, vii.

61. Luisa Ricaldone, *La scrittura nascosta: Donne di lettere e loro immagini tra Arcadia e Restaurazione* (Paris: Honoré Champion; Fiesole: Cadmo, 1996), 39. On Italian women’s poetry in the eighteenth century, see also Ricaldone, “Eighteenth-Century Literature,” in *A History of Italian Women’s Writing*, ed. Letizia Panizza and Sharon Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 95–106, and Giulio Natali, “Gli studii delle donne,” in *Storia letteraria d’Italia*, vol. 8, *Il Settecento*, ed. Giulio Natali, part 2 (Milan: Vallardi, 1929), 132–90.

62. On Barbapiccola, see Agnesi, *The Contest for Knowledge*, 37–46.

The nature of poetry as “a tool of social interaction” came to the fore in the “deluge of rhymes” unleashed by occasions such as weddings, births, admissions to a nunnery, and such like, that is to say what the English language rather euphemistically describes as “occasional poetry.” The Italian expression *poesia encomiastica* (celebratory, or eulogizing poetry) is more precise: this was its function, to sing the praises and win the favor and support of the addressee. It was, indeed, poetry as “social interaction.”⁶³

Much of Fonseca Pimentel’s verse was of this sort.⁶⁴ After her first published work *Il tempio della gloria*, written to celebrate the wedding of King Ferdinand, she composed various sonnets related to weddings, funerals, social advancements, and a birth: that of a second baby daughter to Queen Maria Carolina. The latter was followed by a much grander, and longer, work to mark the birth of the queen’s first son in 1775. Entitled *La nascita di Orfeo (The Birth of Orpheus)*, it was a libretto of over six hundred lines for a musical cantata that would be put to music and performed two years later.⁶⁵ In 1777, Fonseca Pimentel published a theatrical piece of four hundred lines entitled *Il trionfo della virtù*, this time in praise of a foreign dignitary, the Portuguese chief minister the Marquis of Pombal, who had survived an assassination attempt. In 1780, she published a sonnet in a collection marking the reopening of the Royal Academy of Sciences and Letters, and in 1782, *La gioia d’Italia (The Joy of Italy)*, a four-hundred-verse cantata apropos of a visit to Naples by the grandduke and grandduchess of Russia, accompanied by a sonnet in praise of the Russian empress Catherine II. In 1785, she wrote another

63. On this point see Carla Cacciari and Giuliana Zanelli, *Faustina Maratti: Tra Roma ed Imola: Immagine pubblica e tormenti privati di una poetessa italiana del Settecento* (Imola: La Mandragora, 1995), 54–55. An interesting case of a woman’s outburst of resentment at the social obligation of writing eulogizing poetry instead of tending to loftier matters is the sonnet composed in the 1760s by philosopher and scientist Diamante Medaglia Faini, in *Versi e prose di Diamante Medaglia Faini con altri componimenti di diversi autori e colla vita dell’autrice*, ed. Giuseppe Pontara (Salò: presso Bartolomeo Righetti, 1774), 163. Its first eight lines make the point: *Io che finor tanti a altrui richiesta / Fatti ho sonetti, stanze, e madrigali / Per medici, per sposi, per legali, / E per chi cinse velo, o sagra vesta: / Nò più non voglio rompermi la testa / Senza profitto, e dietro a cose tali / Gettar il tempo; che di mover l’ali / A più alto segno in me desio si desta* (I, who so far have written / on order sonnets, stanzas, madrigals, / For medics, brides and bridegrooms, and attorneys, / And those who took the veil, or holy garments: / I do not want to split my head no more / Without advantage, and on matters such / To waste my time; as I am yearning now / To lift my wings to higher things indeed).

64. The following pages present an overview of Fonseca Pimentel’s literary production prior to the *Monitore Napoletano*. A full list of her writings is found in the Bibliography at the end of this volume.

65. Carlo Schmidl, *Dizionario universale dei musicisti*, vol. 2 (Milan: Sonzogno, 1929), 282. Schmidl states, in a short entry under “Pimentel (marchesa di Fonseca) Eleonora” containing this and other inaccuracies, that the cantata was put to music by either “De Majo or Sale” and performed in Naples in August 1777. Nicola Sale, a frequent composer for court-linked celebratory cantatas, would seem to be more likely to have set to music Fonseca Pimentel’s cantata, not least because Gianfrancesco De Majo died in 1770.

cantata of about the same length, *Il vero omaggio* (*A True Homage*), to celebrate the return of the king and queen from a trip to Sicily. In 1789, she wrote three sonnets praising King Ferdinand's efforts at political reform, and in 1792, her last eulogizing work: *La fuga in Egitto* (*The Flight into Egypt*), a sacred oratorio of almost six hundred lines dedicated to a Bourbon princess. She may have written one last sonnet in 1794, entitled *Sull'eruzione* [sic] *vulcanica del monte Vesuvio* (*On the Volcanic Eruption of Mount Vesuvius*), on the occasion of that terrifying seismic event; or possibly it had been written in 1779, to mark the first of two volcanic eruptions she herself witnessed. This sonnet was discovered by Daniela De Liso, who thoroughly examines the arguments for one or other date of composition, but reaches no firm conclusion.⁶⁶

Amid this quantity of eulogizing poetry, the sonnets written in the late 1780s stand out for their openly political message. They pay tribute to two concrete examples of Ferdinand's policies as enlightened despot: the establishment of the San Leucio Settlement, an institution prefiguring the phalanstery later advocated by French social theorist Charles Fourier, where working men and women would work and live according to precise quasi-religious rules;⁶⁷ and his defense of the jurisdictional independence of the state from papal claims. But Fonseca Pimentel's support for the reformist thrust of enlightened despotism is evident from the very beginning of her poetic career. It is not that she conceals a covert political message in her eulogistic poetry—poetry as “social interaction”—but rather that her “social interaction,” at this stage in her life, was entirely situated within the parameters of an enlightened aristocracy fully committed to the reformist project of the enlightened sovereigns. She praises the sovereigns for doing what she, and her whole social circle, believed to be the right thing to do, and so encourages them in their mission.

In *Il tempio della gloria*, accordingly, the sixteen-year-old Fonseca Pimentel praises King Ferdinand as one who helps the oppressed, carefully including in the encomium his bride's mother, the great reforming Habsburg Empress Maria Theresa. Seven years later, in 1775, in the cantata celebrating the birth of the first male child of the Neapolitan queen Maria Carolina, *La nascita di Orfeo*, she encodes in classical mythological references an affirmation of the skills required of an enlightened sovereign seeking to construct a society based on mutual cooperation. Two years thereafter, in 1777, in *Il trionfo della virtù*, written ostensibly to celebrate Marquis of Pombal's survival of an assassination attempt, she explicitly states her

66. Daniela De Liso, “Un sonetto inedito di Eleonora de Fonseca Pimentel,” *Critica letteraria* (2000): 577–87.

67. On the San Leucio experiment see Davis, *Naples and Napoleon*, 31; also Mario Battaglini, *La fabbrica del re: L'esperienza di San Leucio tra paternalismo e illuminismo* (Rome: Edizioni Lavoro, 1983); and Giovanni Tescione, *San Leucio e l'arte della seta nel Mezzogiorno d'Italia* (Naples: Montanino, 1961).

support for enlightened reforms: she outlines her vision of a reformed state, praising the Portuguese minister's policies of limiting the powers of the clergy and the aristocracy. It should be noted, too, that this long poem in praise of an enlightened politician marks her first foray into political prose writing, in the form of the dedicatory letter addressed to Pombal himself. Her next cantata, *Il vero omaggio*, written in 1785, contains the following lines underscoring the relation between the greatness of the ruler and the welfare of the ruled: *Ma se felice è il regno/ Sol quando il Rege è prode;/ Sol quando il regno ha lode/ È glorioso il Re* (But if a happy kingdom/ needs a valiant king;/ only a worthy kingdom/ gives glory to the king).⁶⁸

Then for a while no more poetry. Instead, Fonseca Pimentel turned to an ambitious project concerning jurisdictional policy: the translation of a work published in Latin in 1707 by Nicolò Caravita with the self-explanatory title *Nullum ius Pontificis Maximi in Regno Napolitano* (*The Supreme Pontiff Has No Right over the Kingdom of Naples*), to which she penned a substantive introduction. This work came out in 1790, and was followed in 1792 by another on the relations between church and state. It was once again a translation, this time of a work by a Portuguese writer, Antònio Pereira de Figueiredo, which had appeared the previous year with the title *Analyse da Profissão de Fè do Santo Padre Pio IV*.⁶⁹ In Fonseca Pimentel's version, it bore the title *Analisi della professione di fede del Santo Padre Pio IV* (*An Analysis of the Holy Father Pius IV's Profession of Faith*), and was prefaced by her discussion of the relationship between faith and politics, calling for a sharper division between matters ecclesiastical and political.

Fonseca Pimentel's extant political essays published prior to the *Monitore* bear witness, first, to her general support for enlightened reforms by enlightened despots (the preface to the poem dedicated to Pombal, *Il trionfo della virtù*), then specifically for their policies concerning church-state relations. Although these prose works are undoubtedly in a minority compared to her large verse production, she had acquired, as Croce reminds us, a reputation as a formidable all-rounded scholar. She was admired, for example, by Vincenzo Cuoco, who wrote that "poetry was but one of the many skills that adorned her."⁷⁰ At the same time, she aroused the antipathy of the archeologist bishop Federico Münter, who, following a visit to Naples in 1785, commented with some distaste in his diary on her tendency to talk

68. *Il vero omaggio, Cantata per celebrare il fausto ritorno delle loro Maestà di Eleonora de Fonseca Pimentel* [Naples: s.p., 1785], 11.

69. *Analyse da Profissão de Fè do Santo Padre Pio IV, por Antònio Pereira de Figueiredo, Deputado da Real Meza dea Comissão Geral sobre o Exame, e censura dos Livros* (Lisbon: na Offic. De Simão Thaddeo Ferreira: Vende-se na loja da Viuva Bertrand e filhos, Mercadores de Livros, junto á Igreja dos Martyres ao Xiado em Lisboa, 1791).

70. Croce, *La rivoluzione napoletana*, 1:38: "in Eleonora, come ben disse Vincenzo Cuoco, 'la poesia formava una piccola parte delle tante cognizioni che l'adornavano.'"

too much—a loquacity that flaunted her huge erudition.⁷¹ Croce describes as her main area of intellectual activity *studi di economia e di diritto pubblico* (economics and public law)—so not only law, but economics, too. In addition, he suggests that she wrote a volume on a project for a national bank, although this work may never have been published, or at least it is not to be found in any library.⁷² The pages of the *Monitore* dedicated to the discussion of the financial predicament of the Republic certainly bear witness to her expertise in this field.

Yet oddly, Fonseca Pimentel's last extant work prior to the *Monitore* was a composition in verse, and on a distinctly religious topic: the 1792 oratorio on the flight of the Holy Family into Egypt (*La fuga in Egitto*). What are we to make of this? It is tempting to see it as just a final eulogizing piece—indeed as nothing but a eulogizing piece—perhaps composed with a view to retaining the financial support of the royals at a time when she was already involved in the Jacobin movement. But it is not unlikely that the religious theme was triggered by the fact that, at the same time, she was translating Figueiredo's work, and was therefore immersed in theological matters. Perhaps, as Ugnani has suggested, one might even detect, in an oblique reference to lamenting the failings “of all but specially of kings (lines 308–9), an echo of Fonseca Pimentel's present state of disillusion with the Enlightenment dream.⁷³

If most of her poetry was a mixture of eulogy and politics, Fonseca Pimentel also penned compositions to mark traumatic events in her personal life as a woman: five sonnets on the death of her child and an ode on a subsequent miscarriage. This kind of writing was not unusual. It was both personal and public: personal because it was triggered by private distress, and public inasmuch as it was written for publication. It was devoid of any aspiration to forge a novel poetic language, written as it was with strict adherence to the prevailing poetic canon—which in Italy, as indeed in much of Europe, meant the Petrarchan model. It has been suggested that it might have been precisely this “filtering” of “raw life experience” through the strict parameters of the literary poetic tradition that made for its “comforting,” even “therapeutic” function.⁷⁴ The ode describing her miscarriage is also an unusual, possibly unique, example of a verse composition on a scientific matter written by a woman.

71. Croce, *Aneddoti di varia letteratura*, 2:406.

72. Croce, *La rivoluzione napoletana*, 1:39–40, quoting from the contemporary Italian-born diplomat and author Giuseppe Gorani, who states, following a visit to Naples between 1786 and 1788, that Fonseca Pimentel had “composé un livre sur un projet de banque nationale où il y a des vues très-profondes qui pourroient intéresser les hommes les plus instruits dans ces matières.” Joseph Gorani, *Mémoires secrets et critiques des cours, des gouvernemens, et des moeurs des principaux états de l'Italie* (Paris: Buisson, 1793), 1:76–77.

73. Ugnani, *La vicenda letteraria e politica*, 235–37 and 322–27.

74. Cacciari and Zanelli, *Faustina Maratti*, 55.

Fonseca Pimentel also wrote a poem, one of her last, in Neapolitan dialect: the sonnet in praise of King Ferdinand's refusal to bow to papal demands. In addition, she wrote many letters: some very formal, which may have been meant for publication, some less so, and some very informal indeed, giving us a tantalizing glimpse of aspects of her personality not apparent from her other writings. These letters were never collected in her lifetime and, as a consequence, are scattered: they are found in the Naples State Archives among the papers relating to the court case that led to the separation from her husband, and in various other archives and libraries, both in Italy and Portugal, and not necessarily among papers marked with the author's own name; one is even in the Historical Archives of the Banco di Napoli. Clearly many are lost, or at least not found yet, among them her own letters to Pietro Metastasio and Voltaire (while theirs to her are available).⁷⁵ Because of this state of affairs, it is not impossible that more will be found in the future.

Indeed, as recently as 1999, Giorgio Fulco discovered eighteen letters by Fonseca Pimentel written to Alberto Fortis.⁷⁶ Born in Padua in 1741, Fortis was, at the time of the correspondence with Fonseca Pimentel, an established scholar in the fields of geology, archeology, and what we would now call anthropology, and had worked in journalism as a collaborator of Elisabetta Caminer Turra.⁷⁷ In 1783–1784, he was in Southern Italy pursuing a research project sponsored by the government into the saltpeter deposits of the region. As much of his time was spent in Naples, it is not surprising that Fortis and Fonseca Pimentel should have met: both were well connected and keen to pursue further contacts within the Neapolitan circle of enlightened intellectuals. Some of their contacts indeed overlapped: for example, accompanying Fortis in his travels through Dalmatia, documented in his famous *Viaggio in Dalmazia (Travels in Dalmatia, 1774)*, was

75. See 6–7.

76. In December 1999, in a seminar given at the Faculty of Letters of the University of Naples, Fulco talked of his plans for the publication of these letters “with an introduction and notes” in the course of the following year, adding also, somewhat tantalizingly, that only then would he reveal the details of the “private collection” that contained them. He died unexpectedly soon after, so the letters remain unpublished, nor does it seem that there are any prospects for further developments in the foreseeable future. All we know about them comes from Fulco's presentation, the text of which was published in Giorgio Fulco, “Diciotto lettere inedite di Eleonora de Fonseca Pimentel ad Alberto Fortis, 1784–1791,” *Notiziario dell'Università degli Studi di Napoli* 5 (1999): 51–64.

77. On Caminer Turra, see the splendid volume Elisabetta Caminer Turra, *Selected Writings of an Eighteenth-Century Venetian Woman of Letters*, ed. and trans. Catherine M. Sama (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). On Fortis, see especially Luca Ciancio, “Fortis, Alberto,” in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, 49 (1997), 205–10 <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/alberto-fortis_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/>, and Gianfranco Torcellan, “Alberto Fortis,” in *Riformatori delle antiche repubbliche, dei ducati, dello stato pontificio e delle isole*, vol. 7 of *Illuministi italiani*, ed. Giuseppe Giarrizzo, Gianfranco Torcellan and Franco Venturi (Milan: Ricciardi, 1965), 281–390.

Domenico Cirillo, who had known Fonseca Pimentel for most of her life and who would, like her, be executed as a Jacobin after the defeat of the Republic.

The letters of Fonseca Pimentel that Fulco discovered are dated between 1784 and 1791, that is to say, from the start of the court case that would result in the end of her marriage to the beginning of her Jacobin activity. They offer beguiling glimpses of the private persona intertwined with her public involvement. She alludes to scientific matters of interest to them both, and talks about what she “says to” the king, especially on jurisdictional matters—a king who emerges here with traits of human fragility suppressed in her public writings. Strikingly, she gives expression to her pain at what she calls the *affaire grande* (big affair) of the court case with her husband, accompanied by flashes of self-reflection verging on self-deprecation. We see here a woman intent at times on looking inside herself—at one point she defines herself as belonging to the category of people who are *burbere* (severe) and *scabre* (brusque)—but at other times indulging in recollections of a charmed childhood (being taken to a picnic by a spring), or tales of hilarious events such as an attempt to talk to her coachman, which resulted in her falling from the coach. She was saved, she says, by having rather short legs. From these letters, in fact, we learn virtually all there is to know about her body and her physical afflictions: she had short legs, her eyes sometimes troubled her, and she suffered from a skin affliction—erysipelas—which made her feel weak to the point of obliging her to take to her bed. And always her cryptic, allusive, even mischievous tones, her penchant for word games, which recur also in her other letters when she writes as a personal friend.

All the letters by Fonseca Pimentel known as of 1998—that is to say, excluding the letters discovered by Fulco—are published by Ugnani.⁷⁸ Of these eight letters, five are written in Italian, one in French, and two in Portuguese. Two of the Italian letters (to her cousin, Michele Lopez, and to Michele Vargas Macciucca) are of a personal nature, as is the one in French to Alberto Fortis. The other three letters, in Italian, include two addressed to the king and a royal councilor regarding the dispute with Angela Veronica; one requesting financial support from the court following the separation from her husband; and one exchanging pleasantries with the Venetian poet Silvia Curtioni Verza. Of the letters in Portuguese, one, addressed to Bishop Manuel de Cenaculo, contains an intriguing account of current educational projects in the Kingdom of Naples, while the other, addressed to António Pereira de Figueiredo, concerns some details of her translation of his work.

The selection given here of eight of Fonseca Pimentel’s writings prior to the *Monitore* comprises poetry, political essays, and letters. They are presented chronologically, rather than by genre, in order to outline her development both

78. Ugnani, *La vicenda letteraria e politica*, 273–96.