

Introduction: Classical Topoi Tell a Woman's Story

The Other Voice

As a prolific author whose writings were published over a span of some fifty years, and encompassing a wide variety of topics and styles from heroic verse to hagiography, Lucrezia Marinella was already a remarkable “other voice” in the patriarchal culture of early modern Italy. She is probably best known today for her lengthy treatise *Le nobiltà, et eccellenze delle donne, et i difetti, e mancamenti de gli huomini* (*The Nobility and Excellence of Women and the Defects and Vices of Men*, 1600), written as a response to a virulently misogynistic tract. Less well known, but no less a statement of feminine strength and humanity, is *Amore innamorato et impazzato* (*Love Enamored and Driven Mad*, 1618), a poem largely based on the story of Cupid and Psyche yet utterly unlike it. In this work, published at the midpoint of her writing career, Marinella exhibits her intellectual independence and progressive standpoint by adopting a well-known plot from classical antiquity—with a twist. While ensuring its relevance to her day and age by interpreting it in allegorical fashion, consistent with prevailing religious concerns, she modifies the story so that it remains a vehicle for pious entertainment even as readers simultaneously become aware of another point of view—a woman’s—concerning the plot.

The story of Cupid and Psyche, which forms the narrative kernel of *Amore innamorato et impazzato*, is found in Apuleius’s *Metamorphoses* (or *The Golden Ass*), written in the second century CE. Apuleius’s female characters—from the inexperienced, passive Psyche and her petty, envious sisters to the self-absorbed and viciously misogynistic Venus—are hardly role models. The male characters, conversely, are compassionate and attentive; Cupid saves Psyche from death, searches for her after she flees, and implores Jupiter to allow them to marry, while the powerful Jupiter grants Cupid’s request with benevolent mercy.

Marinella’s poem turns this plot—and its gendered character traits—upside down. Proud and rebellious, Cupid decides he is greater than all the other gods, and Jupiter in turn resolves to punish him by making him feel the pains he inflicts on humans and deities alike, sending Mercury to set things in motion. Not only does Cupid fall in love, but he goes mad and becomes violent, destructive, even murderous in his irrationality. By contrast, the main female characters, Ersilia and Venus, offer behaviors that at the time would have been considered as positive: the virginal young woman who protects her chastity, and the devoted mother who travels to the end of the known world to recover her son. Minor female mythological figures such as the Graces and nymphs are portrayed as kind, compassionate, helpful, and observant. Even as she follows the prevailing moral and ideological

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compass of Counter-Reformation Italy, then, Marinella presents situations and characters that stray from traditional narratives and illuminate how women contribute to the workings and harmony of families and other groups.

Marinella's Life and Works

Lucrezia Marinella was one of the most prolific women writers in early modern Italy, aided in part by her longevity. We know relatively little about her life, in spite of attempts to find manuscripts of her work (none have surfaced, to date) and other documents about her (some of which have come to light, as we will see below). She was born in Venice, circa 1571,¹ to Giovanni Marinelli, whose family origin is uncertain.² Marinelli was a physician and a scholar of natural philosophy who also published several works, some of which were aimed specifically at women.³ Although he had not been born in Venice,⁴ his family belonged to the stratum of the *cittadini*, which included between five and eight percent of all Venetians who had never practiced an *arte meccanica* (any job involving manual labor); lower than the patriciate, they were nevertheless crucial to the city as they supplied civil servants and administrators to the *scuole*, charitable institutions central to social life in Venice.⁵ Lucrezia had two older brothers: Curzio, a physician who graduated from the Paduan *Studio* in April 1587,⁶ and who himself published in

1. On how scholar Girolami Tiraboschi established the date of her birth, see Susan Haskins, "Vexatious Litigant, or the Case of Lucrezia Marinella? New Documents Concerning Her Life (Part One)," *Nouvelles de la république des Lettres*, 25, no. 1 (2006), 84.

2. He was born in Modena, but sources report his coming from Naples and from Mola, near Bari, in Apulia. See Laura Benedetti, "Introduction," in *Exhortation to Women and to Others if They Please*, by Lucrezia Marinella, ed. and trans. Laura Benedetti (Toronto: Iter Inc. and Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2012), 7.

3. Among them are *La copia delle parole* [*The Abundance of Words*] (Venice, 1562), extolling the richness of the Italian vernacular and offering lists of synonyms; *Gli ornamenti delle donne* [*Women's Ornaments*] (Venice, 1562), concerning hygiene and beauty remedies; and *Le medicine pertinenti alle infirmità delle donne* [*Medicines Pertaining to Women's Illnesses*] (Venice, 1563; revised and reprinted, Venice, 1674). See Maria Luisa Altieri Biagi, Clemente Mazzotta, Angela Chiantera, and Paola Altieri, *Medicina per le donne nel Cinquecento: Testi di Giovanni Marinello e di Girolamo Mercurio* (Turin: Strenna UTET, 1992), introduction, 7–40, and selection from *Le medicine*, 45–64.

4. Nor is his name "listed in the catalogue of graduations from the Studio di Padova [i.e., the closest university to Venice] or that of the Venetian College of Physicians." See Haskins, "Vexatious Litigant (Part One)," 87.

5. *Ibid.*, 89.

6. *Ibid.*, 88.

the fields of medicine and history;⁷ and Angelico, a priest who died after 1630.⁸ She also had a sister, Diamantina, who married a doctor from Belluno and was dead by 1620.⁹ We do not know how Lucrezia acquired her considerable learning, although, as Sarah Ross pithily states, she “certainly read Latin.”¹⁰

In 1607, Lucrezia married Girolamo Vacca, also a physician. At approximately thirty-six years old, she was much older than the average Venetian spouse, as was he (forty-eight); as Haskins notes, he “may have been a widower.”¹¹ Her dowry, negotiated by Curzio, amounted to 3,500 ducats, whose source is unknown.¹² She had at least two children: her 1645 will mentions a son, Antonio, and a daughter, Paulina, who by 1648 had had a daughter, Angioletta.¹³ No documentation has been found concerning their birth or baptism in Venice; this, and other ties between Vacca and Padua, suggest that “Marinella may well have lived in or near [that city] for some time after her marriage.”¹⁴ Before and after her marriage, Lucrezia enjoyed a comfortable life in financial terms, as evinced by the documents assembled by Susan Haskins.¹⁵ Vacca died in September 1629, at the age of seventy,¹⁶ and she outlived him by many years. She died of a recurring fever, possibly malaria, on October 9, 1653, and was buried in her parish church of San Pantalon.¹⁷ Her tomb is no longer extant, presumably a victim of the radical rebuilding that took place later in the seventeenth century, when the floor plan of the church was rotated by 90 degrees.¹⁸

7. Françoise Lavocat mentions Curzio’s annotations to Paolo Giovio and to Livy, as well as his *Discorso nel quale si scrive il modo di studiar l’Historie per reggere stati* [*Discourse on the Way to Study History to Lead States*], published in 1580 alongside Francesco Guicciardini’s *Storia d’Italia* [*History of Italy*], in which he espouses “un republicanismo aristocratico machiavelliano, anti-mediceo ed anti-papale” [a position in favor of aristocratic republics, modelled on Machiavelli, anti-Medici, and anti-pope]. See Lavocat, “Introduzione,” in *Arcadia felice*, by Lucrezia Marinella, ed. Françoise Lavocat (Florence: Olschki, 1998), xii. All translations from texts other than *Amore innamorato* are by Maria Galli Stampino.

8. Haskins, “Vexatious Litigant (Part One),” 92.

9. *Ibid.*, 88 and 92.

10. Sarah Gwyneth Ross, *The Birth of Feminism: Woman as Intellect in Renaissance Italy and England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 202.

11. Haskins, “Vexatious Litigant (Part One),” 93.

12. *Ibid.*, 107 and 109. Documents pertaining to her marriage contract are found at 117–20.

13. Marinella’s will is found in Haskins, “Vexatious Litigant (Part One),” 122–23.

14. Susan Haskins, “Vexatious Litigant, or the Case of Lucrezia Marinella? New Documents Concerning Her Life (Part II),” *Nouvelles de la république des Lettres*, 26, nos. 1–2 (2007), 204.

15. *Ibid.*, 208–11.

16. *Ibid.*, 216.

17. *Ibid.*, 225–26.

18. See the history in the Italian Wikipedia entry of the church: <https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chiesa_di_San_Pantalon>.

Works, 1595–1605

While her life is ordinary in several critical aspects, including the paucity of documentation about it, Marinella's writings set her apart from the great majority of her contemporaries. She wrote and published in a variety of genres, and on several different topics, in two separate periods of her life. Between 1595 and 1605, seven works by Marinella circulated in print, some of them in more than one edition, starting with the epic poem on a religious topic *La Colomba sacra, poema eroico* (*The Holy Dove: Heroic Poem*, 1595), in *ottava rima*,¹⁹ her favorite poetic form for narrative works. As would be typical of most of Marinella's production, she selected a female saint from early Christianity and extolled her heroic status. Saint Columba was martyred for her faith by the emperor Aurelian in Sens, a city in modern-day France, in the third century CE. A virgin, she was miraculously protected from rape by a bear, and from certain death by fire when a rain shower extinguished the pyre on which she had been tied; she was then put to death by beheading. In this work, published by Giovanni Battista Ciotti in Venice and dedicated to Margherita Gonzaga d'Este, duchess of Ferrara, two elements are intertwined: a devout topic, and attention to a woman. Two years later, she published another religiously-themed work: *Vita del serafico e glorioso San Francesco. Descritta in ottava rima. Ove si spiegano le attioni, le astinenze e i miracoli di esso* (*Life of the Seraphic and Glorious Saint Francis, in ottava rima, in which his actions, asceticism, and miracles are explained*), with the publisher Pietro Maria Bertano and a dedication to Christine of Lorraine, grand duchess of Tuscany. The dedications to noblewomen, the alignment with prevailing Counter-Reformation hagiographic themes, and prefatory sonnets written by notable Venetians point to her "determination to insert herself into a prestigious male literary tradition"²⁰ even at an early age.

Her next work is the one for which she is best known to twenty-first-century readers: *Le nobiltà, et eccellenze delle donne, et i difetti, e mancamenti de gli huomini* (*The Nobility and Excellence of Women and the Defects and Vices of Men*). Ciotti published it in 1600, then in an expanded version in 1601 with the title *La nobiltà, et l'eccellenza delle donne, co' difetti, et mancamenti de gli huomini*; it was also published by Giovanni Battista Combi in 1621. Marinella dedicated it to Lucio Scarano, a doctor and *letterato*. Although *La nobiltà* is in many ways least representative of her production, being one of two texts in prose, and polemical in its outlook, it is nevertheless a fundamental work: a long tract in response to

19. *Ottava rima* is composed of stanzas of eight eleven-syllable lines with three rhymes: one connecting the first, third, and fifth lines; a second one tying the second, fourth, and sixth lines; and the third one for the couplet at the end of the stanza, i.e., the seventh and eighth lines.

20. Cox, *The Prodigious Muse. Women's Writing in Counter-Reformation Italy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 143. Cox devotes ten pages (141–51) to these two poems.

Giuseppe Passi's virulently misogynist *I donneschi difetti* (*The Defects of Women*, 1599).²¹ Widely read and cited in the seventeenth century,²² *La nobiltà* is a "formally argued academic treatise, setting out its case for the superiority of women to men through a combination of theoretical reasoning and exemplification."²³ Marinella forcefully defends women from Passi's attacks, turning the tables on him by underscoring men's shortcomings.²⁴ It is, to cite Laura Schnieders, "a hefty work, a compilation built on a thick grid of direct and indirect citations from literary, philosophic, religious works, etc., as well as on numerous, and at times long, lists of *exempla*."²⁵ Not always a linear text, its strength lies in the quantity of its examples as well as in the force of its argument.²⁶

After this foray into polemical writing, Marinella returned to hagiographic topics. In 1602 she published *La vita di Maria Vergine, imperatrice dell'universo* (*Life of the Virgin Mary, Empress of the Universe*), a prose and verse narrative in which Marinella "fleshe[d] out the meager Gospel record" of Mary's life by drawing on "the vast body of apocryphal material that had accumulated around the figure of the Virgin."²⁷ This was her most appealing work for her contemporaries, judging by the number of editions: it was reprinted in 1604, 1610, and 1617 (the

21. For a helpful introduction to Passi and selected translation from his treatise, see Suzanne Magnanini, with David Lamari, "Giuseppe Passi's Attacks on Women in *The Defects of Women*," in *In Dialogue with the Other Voice in Sixteenth-Century Italy: Literary and Social Contexts for Women's Writings*, ed. Julie D. Campbell and Maria Galli Stampino (Toronto: Iter Inc. and Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2011), 143–94.

22. Cox, *The Prodigious Muse*, 364n109.

23. *Ibid.*, 237.

24. In the 1601 edition, as Laura Benedetti has pointed out, Marinella devotes 132 pages to praising women and 192 to criticizing men. She further notes that the English translator, Anne Dunhill, has "overturn[ed] this ratio" [stravolgendo questo rapporto], since her translation offers 106 and 34 pages respectively, depicting Marinella as "more moderate, reasonable, and therefore more acceptable, but overall far from the seventeenth-century Venetian woman" [più moderata, ragionevole e dunque assimilabile, ma in fondo lontana dalla veneziana del Seicento]. See Laura Benedetti, "Tradurre Marinella in America: opportunità e pericoli di una nuova frontiera," in *Conflitti culturali a Venezia dalla prima età moderna ad oggi*, ed. Rotraud von Kulesa, Daria Perocco, and Sabine Meine (Florence: Franco Cesati, 2014), 216.

25. "[U]n'opera molto ampia dal carattere compilativo, costruita su una fitta rete di citazioni dirette o indirette da opere letterarie, filosofiche, religiose etc., nonché su numerose, e in alcuni casi lunghe, liste di *exempla*." See Laura Schnieders, "La polemica dei sessi: Lucrezia Marinella e Giuseppe Passi," in *Conflitti culturali a Venezia dalla prima età moderna ad oggi*, ed. Rotraud von Kulesa, Daria Perocco, and Sabine Meine (Florence: Franco Cesati, 2014), 193.

26. On the connections between *La nobiltà* and Marinella's scientific knowledge, see Meredith K. Ray, *Daughters of Alchemy: Women and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), particularly 94–100.

27. Cox, *The Prodigious Muse*, 151.

latter is a much expanded and revised version).²⁸ As Susan Haskins points out, the connections between Mary and Venice were deep, firmly rooted in the history and self-image of the city;²⁹ this might explain the fact that, in an unusual move, Marinella dedicated the book to the reigning doge, Marino Grimani, and to the senate of the Venetian republic.

The following year (1603), a collection of *Rime sacre* (*Sacred Poems*) appeared in Venice, paid for by its printer, Ascanio Collosini, who dedicated it to Eugenia Ceruti Scaini. It includes sonnets and madrigals, as well as a narrative poem in *ottava rima*.³⁰ Two works by Marinella were printed in 1605: *Scielta d'alcune rime sacre* (*Selection of some Sacred Poems*), by Comin Ventura of Bergamo, who dedicated it to Cornelia Casale; and *Arcadia felice* (*Happy Arcadia*), by Ciotti, with Marinella's dedication to Eleonora Medici Gonzaga, duchess of Mantua. The latter is a mostly prose text in the pastoral genre, a choice which Françoise Lavocat has rightly dubbed as "original,"³¹ with political and mythological sources and a possible reading connected to contemporary events.³²

To crown this intense period of publication, Marinella provided "learned annotations and an allegory" for an edition of Luigi Tansillo's *Le lagrime di San Pietro ... poema sacro, et heroico* (*St. Peter's Tears, A Sacred and Heroic Poem*), which appeared in Venice in 1606. Her role, noted on the title page and on the cover of the volume, "strikingly" inverted the convention of men as literary annotators, and in fact her annotations were commissioned by the book's publisher, Barezzo Barezzi, "on the strength of the learning and intellect that made her universally admired." As Virginia Cox notes, Marinella's role as annotator "mark[ed] the high point of women's erudite performance in this period."³³

28. Susan Haskins has translated the prose portion on the basis of the 1610 edition: "Lucrezia Marinella's *Life of the Virgin Mary, Empress of the Universe*," in *Who is Mary? Three Early Modern Women on the Idea of the Virgin Mary*, ed. and trans. Susan Haskins (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 119–246.

29. *Ibid.*, 122.

30. A brief analysis of the stylistic innovations of this collection is in Cox, *The Prodigious Muse*, 54–55. On the figure of the Virgin Mary in Marinella's religiously-themed verses, see Leonardo Giorgetti's essay "Colei che 'l mondo e 'l cielo empie di luce: Mary's Glorification and Poetic Fame in Lucrezia Marinella's Spiritual Poetry," in *Genealogías. Rewriting the Canon: Women Writing in XVI–XVII Century Italy*, ed. Stefano Santossuosso (Seville: ArcCiBel, 2018).

31. Lavocat, "Introduzione," xxi.

32. See *ibid.*, xxv–xli. On the use of prose and poetry, see xli.

33. Virginia Cox, *Women's Writing in Italy, 1400–1650* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 154.

Works, 1617–1648

After this flurry of work, Marinella's voice goes silent until 1617, when a much expanded version of *La vita di Maria Vergine imperatrice dell'universo*, now including lives of the apostles and of the evangelists, appeared for Barezzi. It was followed by *Amore innamorato et impazzato* in 1618, for Giovanni Battista Combi, bearing Marinella's dedication to Caterina Medici Gonzaga, duchess of Mantua (daughter of Christine of Lorraine, who succeeded her cousin Eleonora as consort to the duke).³⁴ The reasons for this silence are unknown, but her marriage and motherhood, as well as the decline and ultimate dissolution of the *Accademia veneziana*, with which Marinella was loosely connected, can be mentioned as possible causes.³⁵ In this second phase of her creativity, Marinella's works appeared more infrequently: After *Amore innamorato* and the 1621 printing of *La nobiltà* we have *De' gesti heroici e della vita meravigliosa della serafica S. Caterina da Siena* (*Heroic Deeds and Marvelous Life of the Seraphic St. Catherine of Siena*, 1624); *L'Enrico, overo Bisanzio acquistato* (*Enrico, or Byzantium Conquered*, 1635); *Le vittorie di Francesco il serafico, li passi gloriosi della diva Chiara* (*The Victories of the Seraphic Francis and the Glorious Steps of the Blessed Claire*, 1643); *Essortationi alle donne et a gli altri se saranno loro a grado* (*Exhortations to Women and to Others if They Please*, 1645); and lastly *Holocausto d'amore della vergine Santa Giustina* (*Love Sacrifice of the Virgin St. Justine*, 1648). The dedications of these works are remarkable for their ambition: *De' gesti heroici* is dedicated to Maria Maddalena of Austria, grand duchess of Tuscany, widow of grand duke Cosimo II de' Medici and co-regent with Christine of Lorraine between 1621 and 1628;³⁶ *Enrico* to the ruling doge, Francesco Erizzo, and the Venetian senate; *Le vittorie* to Pope Urban VIII (Maffeo Barberini); *Essortationi* to Gaspar de Teves y Guzmán, Spanish ambassador to Venice; and *Holocausto* to the doge Francesco Molin. Marinella's desire to insert herself within the ranks of the political and cultural intelligentsia in Venice and on the Italian peninsula is evident in these choices.

34. Lavocat gives a publication date of 1598 ("Introduzione," xviii), but draws her citations from the 1618 edition. Panizza does the same: Letizia Panizza, "Introduction to the Translation," in *The Nobility and Excellence of Women and the Defects and Vices of Men*, by Lucrezia Marinella, ed. and trans. Anne Dunhill (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 8. Cox's extensive research failed to uncover any copies of this hypothetical first edition; she notes that *Amore* is not included in Ciotti's "otherwise compendious list of Marinella's publications" in his "Avvertenza" to the readers of *Arcadia felice*: Cox, *Women's Writing*, 334n94. It may be significant that Lavocat also refers to a 1622 edition of *Enrico*, which likewise is not found anywhere: Lavocat, "Introduzione," xx, n78.

35. Lavocat, xiii–xiv.

36. As Cox states, Maria Maddalena was "coregent of Tuscany with Christine [of Lorraine] at the time of Marinella's writing": *Prodigious Muse*, 154. Her son Ferdinando II began ruling in his own right after he came of age in 1628.

Leaving aside *Amore innamorato* for the moment, since we will devote more attention to it in due course, we see among these texts a prevalence of hagiographic themes; a different sense of Marinella's self as author; and a different scope of her works. The prose biography of St. Catherine is explicitly connected with the dedicatee, Maria Maddalena, and her marital family: as Virginia Cox explains, its "fifth book ... has Catherine experiencing a divinely sent vision of the triumph of the Medici dynasty," and later, "at the moment of her death," she is portrayed "praying ... for the protection of her homeland [i.e., Siena] by its future Medici rulers," destined to impending power even beyond Tuscany.³⁷ Furthermore, as Armando Maggi reveals in the "Introduzione" to his critical edition of this text, Marinella combines four different genres: biography (on the basis of earlier hagiographies); religious writing, aiming at eliciting the reader's emotional response; epic poetry; and panegyric.³⁸ *Enrico* is notable for its genre, its dedication, its political positions, and its references to Marinella as authoritative point of reference for the history of Venice.³⁹ Additionally, as Francesca D'Alessandro Behr has shown, *Enrico* is replete with references to and reworkings of classical poetry.⁴⁰ *Le vittorie* is not only dedicated to the pope, but it includes philosophy and theology, "the latter incorporated via a dense series of marginal notes," as is also the case in *Holocausto d'amore*.⁴¹

Among the later Marinella works, *Essortationi* has perhaps garnered the most attention from literary and cultural historians, as it offers strong criticism of Marinella's own earlier pro-woman position. Stephen Kolsky sees it as "a rhetorically charged narrative parallel to *La nobiltà e l'eccellenza delle donne*,"⁴² while Virginia Cox considers it as "something of a paradox, in that a work that contains the period's most despondent analysis of women's literary possibilities

37. *Ibid.* The Medici acquired the Republic of Siena in 1555, while St. Catherine was born in 1347 and died in 1380.

38. Armando Maggi, "Introduzione: Lo sperimentalismo di Lucrezia Marinella," in *De' gesti heroici e della vita meravigliosa della serafica S. Caterina da Siena*, by Lucrezia Marinella, ed. Armando Maggi (Ravenna: Longo, 2011), 11.

39. Maria Galli Stampino, "A Singular Venetian Epic Poem," in *Enrico; or Byzantium Conquered: A Heroic Poem*, by Lucrezia Marinella, ed. and trans. Maria Galli Stampino (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 2–3, 7, 12–13, 27, and 61–62. For an analysis of the rhetorical topoi utilized by Marinella to address her narrative persona, see Maria Galli Stampino, "The Woman Narrator's Voice: The Case of Lucrezia Marinella's *Enrico*," *Italian Studies* 69 (2014): 75–94. Laura Lazzari's work also contextualizes *Enrico* with respect to social and cultural references: *Poesia epica e scrittura femminile nel Seicento: L'Enrico di Lucrezia Marinelli* (Leonforte: Insula, 2010), in particular 45–52.

40. Francesca D'Alessandro Behr, *Arms and the Woman: Classical Tradition and Women Writers in the Venetian Renaissance* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2018).

41. Cox, *Women's Writing*, 372n250.

42. Stephen Kolsky, "Moderata Fonte, Lucrezia Marinella, Giuseppe Passi: An Early Seventeenth-Century Feminist Controversy," *Modern Language Review* 96 (2001), 984.

is also probably the most confident and wide-ranging female-authored secular didactic text of the age.”⁴³ Paola Malpezzi Price and Christine Ristaino refer to earlier rhetorical *topoi*, particularly “the Greek *paignion*, or a playful exercise ascribed to oratory,” connecting it to twentieth-century criticism, and conclude that “Marinella’s *Essortationi* are both a prose record of their author’s struggle and a documentation of the disconnect among women of the time.”⁴⁴ Laura Benedetti, the English translator of this treatise, interprets it as a recantation of Marinella’s pro-female positions—“a reactionary work, not only because of Marinella’s endorsement of conservative views of women but also for her disregard for the contemporary literary scene,” in which she “implicitly presents herself as an Amazon, a phoenix, an exception to the rule, established by God and nature, that women should not waste their time in intellectual endeavors.”⁴⁵ It is difficult to avoid construing *Essortationi* as part of the “backlash” that Virginia Cox sees occurring in seventeenth-century Italy against women writers.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, Marinella’s incredible range in both forms and topics, and the extensive chronological span of her publications, make her a unique writer within the panorama of early modern Italy, and indeed western Europe.

Historical Context

Amore innamorato would be a difficult text to interpret within the frame suggested by Carlo Dionisotti in 1967. As the earliest scholar to attract attention to the flourishing of women’s writing in sixteenth-century Italy, he connected it to Petrarchan poetry and enterprising publishers, particularly in Venice. In his analysis, women only “constituted a group”⁴⁷ from 1538, when Vittoria Colonna’s *Rime* were first printed, to “around 1560, when, for a variety of economic and sociocultural reasons, the publication of vernacular literature entered a decline.”⁴⁸ Virginia Cox has since offered a different view, one that moves away from (mostly male) publishers and narrow generic scope, significantly expanding Dionisotti’s chronological span.⁴⁹ Within this reading *Amore* is in many ways exemplary: it is situated in the most productive period for women writers, and it belongs to a

43. Cox, *Women’s Writing*, 224.

44. Paola Malpezzi Price and Christine Ristaino, *Lucrezia Marinella and the “Querelle des Femmes” in Seventeenth-Century Italy* (Madison and Teaneck, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2008), 154–55.

45. Benedetti, “Introduction,” 30 and 32.

46. See Cox, *Women’s Writing*, viii.

47. “[F]anno gruppo”: Carlo Dionisotti, “La letteratura italiana nell’età del Concilio di Trento,” in *Geografia e storia della letteratura italiana* (Turin: Einaudi, 1967), 191.

48. Cox, *Women’s Writing*, xx.

49. Cox, *Women’s Writing*, xx–xxi.

genre well beyond the lyric poetry that Dionisotti identified as central for female authors.

Marinella's predilection for narrative poetry emerges clearly from the short précis of her writings offered above. In terms of genre, *Amore innamorato* falls squarely within her taste even as it adds two new elements: on the one hand, a source from classical antiquity (rather than hagiography); on the other, allegorical readings of characters and plot. These features present interesting challenges to Marinella, historically and ideologically, while offering significant advantages.

Ovid: Metamorphoseon libri (Metamorphoses)

Proceeding chronologically, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (finished in 7 CE) exerts a fundamental influence on *Amore innamorato*, as it had and would continue to do in early modernity throughout western Europe.⁵⁰ Whether directly or through other authors (such as Petrarch), Ovid's stories recounting shape-shifting humans due to the will and whim of gods allowed writers (especially women writers) to reimagine and refashion classical antiquity according to their cultural expectations, or against them.

In the case of *Amore innamorato* specifically, Ovid is a point of reference: early on in the poem (Canto 1:41–50) Marinella mentions several of the Ovidian stories, as if to display her knowledge of classical literature. More importantly, the story of Phoebus/Apollo and Daphne, recounted in Book 1 of the *Metamorphoses* (1: 452–567), is a crucial point of reference, one that Marinella turns upside down. Apollo has just killed a monstrous python with his bow and arrows, and, seeing Cupid drawing *his* bow, mocks him: “What hast thou to do with the arms of men, thou wanton boy? ... Do thou be content with thy torch to light the hidden fires of love, and lay no claim on my honours.”⁵¹ Angered, Cupid replies, “Thy dart may pierce all things else, Apollo, but mine shall pierce thee; and by as much as all living things are less than deity, by so much less is thy glory than mine.”⁵² Marinella explicitly alludes to this in Canto 1, octave 48; the very placement of this echo in

50. The scholarly literature on this topic is extensive. The following essay collections provide good starting points: *Ovid and the Renaissance Body*, ed. Goran V. Stanivukovic (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001); *Metamorphosis: The Changing Face of Ovid in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* ed. Alison Keith and Stephen Rupp (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2007); and, with respect to two national traditions, *Shakespeare's Ovid: The Metamorphoses in the Plays and Poems*, ed. A. B. Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and *Ovid in the Age of Cervantes*, ed. Frederick A. De Armas (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010).

51. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, ed and trans. Frank Justus Miller, rev. G. P. Goold, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 1: 35. “quid’ que ‘tibi, lascive puer, cum fortibus armis?’ / ... ‘tu face nescio quos esto contentus amores / inritare tua, nec laudes adserere nostras!’” *Ibid.*, 1:34.

52. *Ibid.*, 1:35. “‘figat tuus omnia, Phoebe / te meus arcus’ ait; ‘quantoque animalia cedunt / cuncta deo, tanto minor est tua gloria nostra.’” *Ibid.*, 1:34.

Canto 1, mirroring Book 1, is likely to be deliberate. Cupid then shoots a golden arrow at Apollo and a leaden one at Daphne, with predictable results. The god pursues the frightened nymph, calling out to her as she flees: “Oh nymph, O Peneus’ daughter, stay! I who pursue thee am no enemy. Oh stay! ... Nay, stop and ask who thy lover is. I am no mountain-dweller, no shepherd I, no unkempt guardian here of flocks and herds. Thou knowest not, rash one, thou knowest not whom thou fleest, and for that reason dost thou flee.”⁵³ Run indeed she does, praying to her father (the river deity Peneus) for help; she has barely finished speaking when she is transformed into the laurel tree. In *Amore innamorato*, Ersilia prays to Diana as she flees Cupid, and Diana covers her with a white cloud into which she disappears (Canto 3, 43–44). Marinella thus takes Ovid’s story—in which Cupid has been affronted and avenges himself through the use of the golden and leaden arrows—and turns it around so that Cupid himself, not Phoebus, is the target, so to speak. Furthermore, Cupid blasts Jupiter, who believes himself to be the most powerful god, but does not recognize that Cupid holds sway over him (3.59).

Marinella draws two important themes from Ovid: the arrogance of Cupid on the one hand; and the motif of the chase, which echoes in several Canti, involving—as we will see—references not just to Ovid, but to Petrarch’s famous sonnet “Una candida cerva” (190 in *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta*, also known as the *Canzoniere*).

Prudentius: Psychomachia (Battle of the Soul)

Prudentius’s *Psychomachia* (penned late in the fourth century CE) is usually considered as the earliest allegorical work in Western literature. Like other patristic texts, it was a significant source of rhetorical examples and ideological stances in the early modern *querelle des femmes*, although it was reprinted only rarely, in the original Latin, and mostly north of the Alps (France, Switzerland, and Germany) in post-Reformation Europe. Marinella’s knowledge of it, then, was perforce indirect.⁵⁴ In the context of *Amore innamorato*, Prudentius embodies all virtues and vices as female, in keeping with the grammatical gender of those terms in Latin (e.g., *Ira* for wrath, *Luxuria* for lust, *Patientia* for forbearance).⁵⁵ As Jessamyn

53. *Ibid.*, 37 and 39. “nympha, precor, Penei, mane! non insequor hostis; / nympha, mane! ... cui placeas, inquire tamen: non incola montis, / non ego sum pastor, non hic armenta gregesque / horridus observo. nescis, temeraria, nescis, / quem fugias, ideoque fugis” *Ibid.*, 36 and 38.

54. Rosa Giorgi points out that the visual theme of psychomachy “returned in the Baroque era as part of the allegorical imagery promoted by the Counter-Reformation”: *Angels and Demons in Art*, ed. Stefano Zuffi, trans. Rosanna M. Giammanco Frongia (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2005), 125.

55. As Valerie Edden has noted, this stems from two sources: “some of the virtues [he represents] derive directly from Roman deities, such as Fides, Pudicitia and Concordia ... ; others derive from a tradition of personified abstractions which had been popularised particularly by Statius and Claudian.”

Lewis has pointed out, it would be reductive to present *Psychomachia* rhetorically as a straightforward misogynistic text, as it includes distinct gender tensions: all these characters are both negatively and positively female.⁵⁶ Prudentius is not simply following the position of other Church fathers (to mention but one, Tertullian calls women *diaboli ianua*).⁵⁷ He attributes positive aspects to his (female-embodied) virtues, via *virtus* (male-like attributes);⁵⁸ moreover, all characters are “‘daughters’ of God,” whether vices or virtues.⁵⁹ Also noticeable is the fact that *Psychomachia*’s “highest number of verbal allusions [are] to Vergil’s *Aeneid*,”⁶⁰ making this text a potentially crucial exemplar for Marinella, whose attraction for the ideology and the form of the epic are well established. In Lewis’s words, “Prudentius’ relationship with the classical and pagan past, while occasionally critical, is more about re-imagining it and adapting it to a Christian present than it is about destroying it.”⁶¹ In this vein, the appreciation for and homage to classical antiquity is in some sense parallel to Dante’s undertaking in the *Divina*

See Edden, “Prudentius,” in *Latin Literature of the Fourth Century*, ed. J. W. Binns (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), 164–65. In other words, what we consider to be an early Christian trait is in fact inherited from classical antiquity. For an in-depth analysis of how Prudentius melds classical and Christian elements, see Jacques Fontaine, *Naissance de la poésie dans l’Occident chrétien: Esquisse d’une histoire de la poésie latine chrétienne du III^e au VI^e siècle* (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1981), particularly chapter 12.

56. Jessamyn Eva Lewis, “Gender and Violence in Prudentius’ *Psychomachia*” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2000), 72.

57. “Tu es diaboli ianua, tu es arboris illius resignatrix, tu es divinae legis prima desertrix”: Q. *Septimii Florentis Tertulliani de habitu muliebri liber*, in Q. *Septimii Florentis Tertulliani Opera Volumen Tertium*, ed. Johann Salomo Semler (Halle an der Saale, Germany: Johann Christian Hendel, 1770), 28. “You are the one who opened the door to the Devil, you are the one who first plucked the fruit of the forbidden tree, you are the first who deserted the divine law.” Tertullian, *The Apparel of Women*, trans. with an introduction by Edwin A. Quain, in *Disciplinary, Moral, and Ascetical Works*, ed. and trans. Rudolph Arbesmann, Sister Emily Joseph Daly, and Edwin A. Quain (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 118.

58. According to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, the term “virtue” comes from the Old French *vertu*, modeled, like the Italian *virtù*, on the Latin *virtus* (“valour, worth, merit, moral perfection”), which in turn comes from *vir*, man as leader, emblem of physical and moral courage. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, ed. T. F. Hoad (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), online.

59. Lewis, “Gender and Violence,” 2. Lewis adds that other works by Prudentius, in particular his *Peristephanon*, are connected with the *Acta* tradition concerning early martyrs, including their focus on women (mothers, wives, and virgins): *ibid.*, 5–6. This is Marinella’s own inclination in *Colomba sacra*, although she eschews the dichotomy present in canonical (and male-authored) works, as Laura Benedetti has pointed out in “Saintes et guerrières: L’héroïsme féminin dans l’œuvre de Lucrezia Marinella,” *Écritures* 1 (2005), 100–1.

60. Lewis, “Gender and Violence,” 8.

61. *Ibid.*, 8–9. Recall Edden’s point in note 55, above.

commedia. *Psychomachia* works as an essential connector between the classical tradition, the *Divine Comedy*, the epic genre, allegory, and Marinella, who utilizes *Amore innamorato*, among other things, to pay homage to Dante.

In his study of *Psychomachia*, James J. Paxson insists on the physicality of bodies presented in the poem; in his words, “the most memorable details of Prudentius’ descriptive discourse are the moments of graphic demolition that befall the Vices at the hands of their conquerors,” connected with “the Vergilian descriptive tradition of epic battle.”⁶² Lewis has underscored the gender dimension in the characters doing battle in Prudentius’s text:

The nature of women is viewed as essentially sexual, prone to vice and capable of corrupting men as well. But women who could transcend their feminine natures through continence had a claim to virtue, often conceived in terms of masculinity. Prudentius grounds his allegory in this line of thought and characterizes the psychomachic struggle in ascetically-gendered and sexualized terms.⁶³

Whether we choose to emphasize violence or gender, in Prudentius these types are figural, not physical, and devoid of the descriptive richness of early modern epic poems.⁶⁴

Dante: Divina commedia (Divine Comedy)

It is noteworthy that *Amore innamorato* includes sustained references to Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, arguably the most well-known allegorical text within the Italian literary canon. Just as Cupid’s journey is, in part, motivated by lust, Dante’s, too, is similarly propelled by it; it leads them both to a search for their respective lost beloveds. It is on their journeys that they learn they must transform this love from carnal lust to spiritual *caritas*.⁶⁵ Structurally, we have Cupid follow the path of the

62. James J. Paxson, *The Poetics of Personification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 66.

63. Lewis, “Gender and Violence,” 85–86.

64. Or, to quote Paxson (*Poetics*, 66): Prudentius’s characters are “abstract universals contained in a narrative continuum.”

65. Dante’s notion of love is transformed throughout the *Commedia* from the *amor* encountered in his preceding work in *Vita nuova*. The *Vita nuova* follows the genre of courtly love writing, in which the emphasis is on an earthly love, arguably lust, toward a lady. For an example, see Dante’s sonnet “Amore e ’l cor gentil sono una cosa” [Love and the noble heart are one and the same] in *Vita Nuova* 20: Dante Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, *Digital Dante* edition (New York: Columbia University Libraries and Department of Italian, 2014), <<https://digitaldante.columbia.edu/library/la-vita-nuova/#cap20>>. In *Inferno* 2, through Virgil’s mediation, Beatrice expresses her personal love for Dante: “Love prompted me, that Love which makes me speak” [Amor mi mosse, che mi fa parlare] (*Inferno* 2.72): <<https://digitaldante.columbia.edu/dante/divine-comedy/inferno/inferno-2/>>. Beatrice’s words resonate with

pilgrim—that is, of a man who is lost, descends into hell, climbs a mountain, goes to heaven, and eventually needs a Marian (to wit, female) intercessor in order to complete his transformation. While structurally Marinella has her protagonist, a pagan demigod, follow in the steps of a Christian allegorical journey, her cleverness is in her choice of having the god of love himself conduct the journey. Marinella transforms Cupid from the god of love into a Christ-like figure who embodies the love of the Christian God.

The connection between Marinella and Dante emerges in the strongest terms in Canto 5 of *Amore innamorato*. At the center of her allegorical poem, Marinella has Cupid descend into hell in what appears to resemble Dante's circle of the lustful, Canto 5 of the *Inferno*.⁶⁶ Like Dante,⁶⁷ Cupid encounters female beings placed here because of their excessive passions, which overrun their reason. However, these are not the passive, pity-seeking victims that we find in the *Inferno*—quite the contrary. As soon as the female shades recognize Cupid, they blame their eternal damnation on him and brutally beat him. In Marinella's poem, women have not only a voice but are given a chance to defend themselves and their reputation by taking an active stance.⁶⁸ *Amore innamorato* provides a distinctly pro-woman viewpoint, and an explicit response to one of the earliest (and most important) texts within the Italian literary canon.

Boccaccio: Genealogia deorum gentilium (Genealogy of the Pagan Gods)

One more recognized writer must be mentioned as a possible source of inspiration and model for Marinella: Giovanni Boccaccio. His retelling of Apuleius's story of Cupid and Psyche occupies a short portion of chapter 3 of the second book of

Francesca's repetition of *Amor* (*Inferno* 5.100–108), which once again also recalls Dante's own sonnet in *Vita Nuova* 20. Additionally, even as Dante becomes a Pauline figure (*Inferno* 2.32), Dante the pilgrim and readers of the *Inferno* perhaps cannot distinguish the difference between lust and love until later in the *Commedia*. At the end of the *Commedia* the transformation from earthly to spiritual love, or the Pauline notion of *caritas*, is clear when it becomes "the Love that moves the sun and the other stars" [*l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle*] (*Paradiso* 33.145): <<https://digitaldante.columbia.edu/dante/divine-comedy/paradiso/paradiso-33/>>.

66. The correspondence is too precise to be casual; in other words, Marinella's gesture is certainly metaliterary.

67. While Dante meets male sinners (Paolo, for example, who was equally incontinent), the strongest similarity between Marinella's Cupid and Dante, the pilgrim, is that Dante engages in conversation with a female, Francesca.

68. Reputation was an unmarried woman's most prized trait in early modernity. On this, see in particular chapter 1 of Margaret L. King, *Women of the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), and, specifically about Venice in Marinella's time, chapter 7 of Daria Martelli, *Polifonie: Le donne a Venezia nell'età di Moderata Fonte (seconda metà del secolo XVI)* (Padua: Cleup, 2011).