

# Introduction

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## *The Other Voice*

Over the last two decades or so scholars have shown a fascination, indeed an obsession, for the recovery and publication of works penned by women from the early modern period, published or in manuscript. The present edition and translation attests to this ongoing fascination and hopes to provide further impetus for future such discoveries of this “other” voice, the voice of women past whose achievements need to be recognized and placed squarely within the (male) literary canon.

In her seminal study *Women’s Writing in Italy*, Virginia Cox calls attention to the years 1580–1620 by referring to this pivotal period in Italian literary history as one marked by “affirmation” insofar as it condoned, produced, and celebrated women’s excellence of character and women’s writing, which had by then engaged in a variety of genres, including drama.<sup>1</sup> That said, however, comedies authored by women are virtually non-existent. Comedy’s indecorous nature and its dubious Boccaccian ethics undoubtedly led respectable women writers to stay away from this particular genre. Nevertheless, there are some archival references pointing to women as authors of comedy. In his chronicle on the Miani clan, for example, the contemporary historian Cesare Padoano cites two comic plays being composed by Valeria Miani herself.<sup>2</sup> At present, we have only one surviving Italian secular comedy penned by a woman: Margherita Costa’s *Li buffoni* (*The Buffoons*; Florence, 1641).<sup>3</sup> Given her social status as a *cortegiana onesta*, but also keeping in mind her wholehearted embrace of Baroque aesthetics with its transgressive, anti-classicizing penchant at which she excelled, Costa is oddly

1. See Virginia Cox, *Women’s Writing in Italy, 1400–1650* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 131–65.

2. See Valeria Finucci’s introduction to the *Other Voice* edition of *Celinda: A Tragedy*, trans. Julia Kisacky and ed. Valeria Finucci (Toronto: Iter Inc. and Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2010), 1–51. Finucci quotes Padoano as indicating that Miani “is composing a tragedy and two comedies”; see her introduction, 9 and 9n21. Biographical facts and details about Miani are very much indebted to Finucci’s archival findings.

3. See the first modern bilingual edition, *The Buffoons, A Ridiculous Comedy*, ed. and trans. Sara E. Díaz and Jessica Goethals (Toronto: Iter Press; Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2018). Another female-authored seventeenth-century publication referred to as a “trattenimento comico” is *Serraglio aperto, ovvero, le Malattie politiche del Gran Sultano*, by the Venetian Orsetta Pellegrini (Venice: Niccolini, 1687). Nicola Mangini cites Pellegrini’s text under the rubric “commedia letteraria”; see his essay “La tragedia e la commedia” in *Dalla Controriforma alla fine della Repubblica: Il Seicento*, vol. 4 of *Storia della cultura veneta*, ed. Girolamo Arnaldi and Manlio Pastore Stocchi (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1984), 297–326, at 317.

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configured among respectable *cittadine* or noblewomen writers of her time. For the most part, women writers were ostracized from the literary domain during the seventeenth century as a result of that period's pronounced contrast with the decorous, measured aesthetics of the previous century, aesthetics that welcomed and encouraged women's participation. Costa remains the single exception in a genre that is otherwise exclusively dominated by male authors.<sup>4</sup> Although Miani has little in common with a figure as eccentric as Costa, she did, like her younger contemporary, dare to engage with a genre not easily accessible to women writers. Miani's tragedy *Celinda* (Vicenza: Francesco Bolzetta, 1611) is the only (and perhaps the first) extant specimen in its genre authored by a woman.<sup>5</sup>

The case for pastoral drama is more noteworthy and more remarkable. It was this genre in particular that seems to have opened the door for the success of both published and unpublished examples penned by women specifically in the northern part of the peninsula. One of the main reasons for the genre's success with audiences as well as with female writers was the fact that it offered a tremendous amount of latitude in terms of structure and themes: it was at once its own brand and a hybrid of comedy and tragedy forming an intriguing new blend of genre, character, dramatic style, and space/s.<sup>6</sup> In this way, the pastoral mode, sometimes dubbed a "tragicomedia pastorale," flourished toward the end of the sixteenth century and literally took over the Italian stage—to paraphrase the playwright Angelo Ingegneri's famous pronouncement in his theoretical discourse *Della poesia rappresentativa* (Ferrara, 1598). This flourishing allowed for the inclusion of some female writers, those already prominent on the literary landscape and those less well known. In the second part of his discourse, more precisely dedicated to the staging of plays, Ingegneri champions Barbara Torelli's *Partenia* (ca. 1587)—alongside Torquato Tasso's *Aminta* and Giovan Battista Guarini's *Il Pastor fido*—as one of the genre's most successful exemplars, and this in spite of the fact that her play never reached the printing press. Isabella Andreini's *Mirtilla* (1588) is referenced in the *Discorso*'s opening pages alongside a handful of others that follow Tasso's example.<sup>7</sup> Although Miani's *Amorosa speranza* is not

4. Finucci cites another comedy, now lost, that would have predated Costa's by several decades: *L'Interesse*, by the *commedia dell'arte* actress Vittoria Piissimi; see her introduction to *Celinda*, 17.

5. For a discussion of *Celinda*, including the reasons for which tragedy was not easily accessible to women writers, see Finucci's introduction (25–48) and the pages devoted to this play in Alexandra Collier, *Women, Rhetoric, and Drama in Early Modern Italy* (New York and London: Routledge, 2017), 91–109.

6. Although Torquato Tasso's *Aminta* (princeps 1580) heralds a new era of theatrical exploration on the Italian peninsula, the play above all celebrates its author's originality and can be considered a *unicum*.

7. *Della poesia rappresentativa e del modo di rappresentare le favole sceniche*, ed. Maria Luisa Doglio (Modena: Edizioni Panini, 1989), 25 and 4. And, although "thousands" of pastorals took over the Italian stage, not many, in Ingegneri's opinion, were properly conceived—hence the need for a *discorso*

mentioned by Ingegneri, it is more than likely that the two knew one another; both frequented Padua's Ricovrati academy in the years immediately prior to the publication of her pastoral in 1604 (Figure 1), and Miani's tragedy *Celinda* first appeared in print in Vicenza, the city of Ingegneri's birth and one with which he maintained very close ties. Moreover, as will be detailed below, both Ingegneri and Miani had contributed, along with others, to the important verse anthologies *Polinnia* and *Gareggiamento poetico*.

"[G]eographical trends" and an attendant "regional pride" were among the determining factors behind the voluminous output of writing by women.<sup>8</sup> Situated on the Venetian mainland, the city of Padua figures prominently as one such region. During the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, encompassing precisely the decades of Miani's activity, Padua was arguably the most prestigious and culturally rich city in Italy, and home to a university that attracted acclaim from within and from abroad. As such, this city's regional pride boasts a number of women writers of high caliber famous as well for their documented collaboration with *letterati*. Isabella Andreini, Giulia Bigolina, Camilla Erculiani, and Valeria Miani are among those often cited.<sup>9</sup>

Importantly, Miani wrote and published at a moment in history that was particularly ripe for women's intervention. In neighboring Venice, no fewer than three women were taking up the pen with the intention of defending women's equality vis-à-vis men in terms of intrinsic worth, intellect, and social prerogatives:

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such as the one he penned. Most authors failed to do what they should have, namely, to accommodate their writing to fit the parameters and requirements of the stage by "imagining" how the play might be *successfully performed* (17). Interestingly, as Lisa Sampson and others have argued, the fact that a dramatic composition never reached the press or remained unperformed (inviting some critics to label it as "closet drama") did not necessarily take away from the contemporary success it might have enjoyed among *letterati* at court or in the academies. See Lisa Sampson, "'Dramatica secreta': Barbara Torelli's *Partenia* (c. 1587) and Women in Late Sixteenth-Century Theatre," in *Theatre, Opera and Performance in Italy from the Fifteenth Century to the Present: Essays in Honour of Richard Andrews*, ed. Brian Richardson, Simon Gilson, and Catherine Keen (Leeds: Society for Italian Studies, 2004), 99–115. Torelli's pastoral drama has been edited and translated by Lisa Sampson and Barbara Burgess-Van Aken (Toronto: Iter Inc. and Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2013). A new edition and translation of Andreini's *Mirtilla* by Finucci and Kisacky is now available (Toronto: Iter Press; Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2018); all of my references to *Mirtilla* will come from this latest edition of the text.

8. Cox, *Women's Writing in Italy*, 144–45.

9. Camilla Erculiani Gregghetti (ca. 1540–ca. 1590), possibly the first female apothecary, published *Lettere di philosophia naturale* (Kraków: Lazaro, 1584). On Erculiani, see Meredith K. Ray, *Daughters of Alchemy: Women and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 114–31; and the edition of her work, *Letters on Natural Philosophy: The Scientific Correspondence of a Sixteenth-Century Pharmacist, with Related Texts*, ed. Eleonora Carinci, trans. Hannah Marcus, with a foreword by Paula Findlen (Toronto: Iter Press, 2020).



Figure 1. Frontispiece of Valeria Miani, *Amorosa speranza: Favola pastorale* (Venice: Francesco Bolzetta, 1604).

Moderata Fonte, Lucrezia Marinella, and Arcangela Tarabotti. Prior to Fonte's and Marinella's publications in 1600, Italian defenses of women had been written only by men. With the recent rediscovery of the Paduan Giulia Bigolina's *Urania* (1550s), a prose romance (possibly the first penned by a woman) which includes a

feminist mini-treatise embedded into its narrative, Fonte and her female contemporaries can now be said to have had a forerunner.<sup>10</sup> And just as Bigolina, Fonte, Marinella, and Tarabotti joined that formerly male-driven conversation, so too with women's eventual intervention in other genres.<sup>11</sup> As I have argued elsewhere, Miani's *Amorosa speranza* rests against the backdrop of three female-authored contributions to the genre, those of Barbara Torelli, Maddalena Campiglia, and Isabella Andreini. These plays and Miani's were in turn followed by Isabetta Coreglia's two mid-seventeenth century pastorals. As a result, we can now speak of a female-authored tradition in the making.<sup>12</sup> Miani is unique, however, since, as with her contemporary male writers, she engaged with all three dramatic genres: comedy, tragedy, pastoral. Although the comedies have not yet resurfaced and may in fact be lost, her tragedy (*Celinda*) and pastoral (*Amorosa speranza*) have not only reached us but—with the current volume's contribution—are now readily available in translation for the wider anglophone audience, for scholars and students interested in exploring female-authored drama on the continent and beyond as part of the history of theater and the ever growing fields of women's and gender studies. Miani's pastoral deserves recognition among the genre's most fascinating compositions, above all, because of its pronounced profeminist perspectives, as my analysis of the play will demonstrate.

### *Life, Works, and Afterlife of Valeria Miani*

Born into an intellectually vibrant family setting with close ties to the university in Padua, Valeria Miani (ca. 1560–after 1620?), although not of noble stock, did marry into the Venetian nobility and was exposed to a considerable amount of cultural wealth from a young age. Like her contemporary, the Venetian poet, philosopher, and feminist Lucrezia Marinella (1571–1653), Miani married relatively late in life (both were in their thirties), which would have assured her a solid educational foundation prior to taking on the duties of wife and mother. Moreover,

10. See Patricia H. Labalme, "Venetian Women on Women: Three Early Modern Feminists," in *Saints, Women and Humanists in Renaissance Venice*, ed. Benjamin G. Kohl (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Variorum, 2010), 81–109. For an introduction to Bigolina's life and works see *Urania*, ed. Valeria Finucci (Rome: Bulzoni, 2002), and *Urania: A Romance*, ed. and trans. Valeria Finucci (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 1–35. The mini-treatise may be found in the section appropriately entitled "The Worth of Women" in Finucci's translation, 106–19 (section titles have been added by the editor and are useful for guiding the reader). Bigolina's prose romance is the literary precursor to the later Baroque psychological novel.

11. The original refers to "le Muse" (the Muses) translated here as "poetry." On Fonte's and Marinella's contributions to the epic genre and how their feminist thought infused the writing of those works, see Francesca D'Alessandro Behr, *Arms and the Woman: Classical Tradition and Women Writers in the Venetian Renaissance* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2018).

12. See especially chapters 4 and 5 of Collier, *Women, Rhetoric, and Drama in Early Modern Italy*.



once married to Domenico Negri in 1593, Miani's intellectual stimulation did not diminish, as was often the case with women (whether of noble or more modest stock) who entered the confines of this emphatically patriarchal institution; rather, her intellectual stimulation flourished and solidified.<sup>13</sup> Although archival documentation points to as many as five children in the family, it is uncertain how many of them were products of the union between Valeria and Domenico. By 1614 Miani was left a widow, which would have given her more independence for governing the household and also more time to devote to her intellectual pursuits.<sup>14</sup> Several family members possessed a literary background, and two of them—one in her own clan, the other in her husband's clan—were playwrights.<sup>15</sup> Miani's father, Vidal (Vitale), made a living practicing and teaching law in addition to housing students, details which confirm the family's ongoing stable connections to the university.<sup>16</sup>

Famous for its university and also for its influential learned societies, Padua, positioned against the backdrop of the Euganean Hills, was characterized by its many transalpine visitors as an "earthly paradise." It was the mecca of Europe's students and its savants, who looked upon it as a progressive and religiously tolerant city.<sup>17</sup> A province of Venice but also quite cosmopolitan on its own, Padua was home, at one time or another, to a number of literary and cultural icons: Angelo Ingegneri, Sforza degli Oddi, Sperone Speroni, Benedetto Varchi, Torquato Tasso, Alessandro Piccolomini, Giovanni Battista Guarini, Francesco Contarini, and Cesare Cremonini, all of whom belonged to its various academies (the Animosi, the Elevati, the Eterei, the Infiammati, the Ricovrati, the Serafici, etc.). All of these men—a point worth emphasizing—experimented with dramaturgy at one time or another. Indeed, the pastoral dramas of Tasso and Guarini, as is well known, would become models not just for writers on the peninsula but for those on the European continent. Padua's university boasted no less a figure than Galileo Galilei (1564–1642), who taught there (at the university as well as privately) during the period in which Miani was actively experimenting with a variety of genres,

13. A well-known negative example of this custom is Isotta Nogarola's younger sister, Ginevra, who gave up her studies upon marrying in 1438. A later example is that of the Paduan artist, Emilia Papafava Borromeo, whose activity ceased once she married; see Caterina Limentani Virdis, "'Nimica implacabile dell'ignoranza.' I saperi delle donne accademiche," in *Tracciati del femminile a Padova: Immagini e storie di donne*, ed. Caterina Limentani Virdis and Mirella Cisotto Nalon (Padua: Il Poligrafo, 1995), 79–83, at 79.

14. Finucci, *Celinda*, 11–12.

15. Finucci, *Celinda*, 10–11.

16. Finucci, *Celinda*, 9–10.

17. See the illuminating account by Aldo Stella, "Galileo, il circolo culturale di Gian Vincenzo Pinelli e la 'Patavina Libertas,'" in *Galileo e la cultura padovana: Convegno di studio promosso dall'accademia Patavina di scienze, lettere ed arti nell'ambito delle celebrazioni galileiane dell'Università di Padova, 13–15 febbraio 1992*, ed. Giovanni Santinello (Padua: CEDAM, 1992), 307–25.

and she even had the opportunity to publish some of her own work.<sup>18</sup> Miani's publisher, Francesco Bolzetta, was the most famous book seller in Padua at the time, with obvious connections to the university as well as to the local Accademia de' Ricovrati (founded in 1599), to which Galileo belonged as one of its founding members.<sup>19</sup> Bolzetta was in fact the academy's publisher.<sup>20</sup> In his dedicatory letter to her pastoral drama, Bolzetta champions Miani's achievements while he also pointedly praises women's "femminile ingegno" (feminine intelligence), not as a rarity but as a gift and source of inspiration among their sex in all periods of history, past and present. As Katie Rees remarks, "Miani does not seem to have written directly for print, and her plays were probably first directed towards a private audience, whose approval gave her the confidence and perhaps the means to publish them."<sup>21</sup> That "private audience" likely consisted, in large part, of various Ricovrati members, including Francesco Contarini, whose pastoral drama *La fida ninfa* (1595) was arguably on Miani's mind (among others) as she was crafting her own.<sup>22</sup> Aside from the encouragement that this local entourage would have afforded our author, one should keep in mind that the Veneto itself was a particularly fertile environment for a woman interested in dabbling in literary pursuits, perhaps even thriving as a result of her *ingegno*, given the region's pronounced intellectual activity.<sup>23</sup> Neighboring Venice was the center of all theatrical

18. Finucci, *Celinda*, 4, 10, and 10nn25–26.

19. For a brief historical synopsis of this academy see Michele Maylender, "Accademia dei Ricovrati—Padova," in vol. 4 of *Storia delle accademie d'Italia* (Bologna: L. Cappelli, 1926–1930), 440–45. On the academy's inauguration and details regarding its administration, see Ezio Riondato, "La fondazione dell'Accademia dei Ricovrati del 25 novembre 1599," in *Atti e memorie dell'Accademia Galileiana di scienze, lettere ed arti già dei Ricovrati e Patavina* 112 (Padua: L'Accademia, 1999–2000), Parte 1, Atti, vol. 112, part 1, 73–85. For a revealing account of the Ricovrati during their first decades, see Gino Benzoni, "I Ricovrati nel '600," in *Dall'Accademia dei Ricovrati all'Accademia Galileiana*, ed. Ezio Riondato (Padua: Accademia Galileiana di scienze, lettere ed arti, 2001), 11–57. In 1997 the Ricovrati became known as the Accademia Galileiana (Galilean Academy).

20. His election to this post came about in 1600. See Antonio Gamba and Lucia Rossetti, ed., *Giornale della gloriosissima Accademia Ricovrata A: Verballi delle adunanze accademiche dal 1599 al 1694*, ed. Antonio Gamba and Lucia Rossetti (Vicenza: Edizioni LINT, 1999), 36. All references to this volume will henceforth appear as "*Giornale A*."

21. "Female-Authored Drama in Early Modern Padua: Valeria Miani Negri," *Italian Studies* 63:1 (2008): 41–61, at 43.

22. Rees discusses some of the parallels in her "Satyr Scenes in Early Modern Padua: Valeria Miani's *Amorosa Speranza* and Francesco Contarini's *Fida Ninfa*," *The Italianist*, 34:1 (2014): 23–53. For a reading that includes women authors in the genre preceding Miani, see Collier, *Women, Rhetoric, and Drama*, 142–52.

23. The Veneto boasted 450 printers, publishers, booksellers, and print-dealers (Finucci, *Celinda*, 7). See also Marco Callegari, *Dal torchio del tipografo al banco del libraio: Stampatori, editori e librai a Padova dal XV al XVIII secolo* (Padua: Il Prato, 2002).

publication on the peninsula, claiming over ninety percent of its output.<sup>24</sup> From a geographical perspective, then, Miani was certainly well positioned.

Miani was also heir to her famous Paduan predecessor, who was mentioned earlier: the noblewoman Giulia Bigolina (ca. 1518–before 1569), the first woman to venture into prose with a novella and a prose romance—although, in the case of Bigolina, both works remained in manuscript and were only recently rediscovered. We may deduce from details that mark their individual biographies that Bigolina and Miani were recognized as sources of civic pride. In 1581, at the age of eighteen, Miani had been chosen by the city of Padua to deliver a public oration in honor of a visitor of great prestige, the Dowager Empress Maria, daughter of Charles V.<sup>25</sup> Bigolina—like Miani, celebrated for her *facundia* (eloquence)—was featured in an unpublished mid-sixteenth-century dialogue on love as an active interlocutor, and was known to have engaged in a literary correspondence with the eccentric *poligrafo* Pietro Aretino, who referred to her as a poet.<sup>26</sup> We know from references made about Miani’s literary career that at least one volume of her poetry has gone missing. Even more relevant to our discussion here is the connection Bigolina may have had to members of academies. Her prose romance, *Urania*, is dedicated to Bartolomeo Salvatico or Selvatico, a Paduan nobleman, member of the Accademia degli Elevati and, eventually, of the Ricovrati.<sup>27</sup> We may speculate based on the language used that Salvatico was a mentor or spiritual companion to the young and talented Bigolina. Whatever the exact relationship may have been between the two, one can imagine that by the time Miani entered the scene in the late sixteenth century, a favorable terrain for fellow *letterate* had already been established in Padua, and specifically within its academic societies.

Contemporary critics, poets, and other prominent figures of the literary landscape such as Pietro Paolo Ribera, Pietro Petracchi, Agostino della Chiesa, and Giovanni Mario Crescimbeni, recognized and applauded Miani’s talents and her

24. See Tiziana Pesenti, “Stampatori e letterati nell’industria editoriale a Venezia e in terraferma,” in vol. 4 of Arnoldi and Stocchi, *Storia della cultura veneta*, 4:93–129.

25. Finucci, *Celinda*, 7.

26. On Bigolina’s presence in the dialogue “A ragionar d’amore,” see Finucci’s introduction to *Urania: A Romance*, 8 and 8n29; on the correspondence between Bigolina and Aretino see in the same work, 5 and 5n14.

27. On Salvatico and Bigolina see Finucci’s introduction to *Urania: A Romance*, 15–16. Salvatico appears among those present at the home of Federico Cornaro on November 25, 1599, on the occasion of one of the Ricovrati’s first meetings, and we also know that he was one among other members nominated to devise the academy’s *impresa* or motto; see *Giornale A*, 4 and 12. In 1601, he was elected general censor (*censore ordinario*) together with Angelo Ingegneri, who was elected censor of publications (p. 73); the latter’s job was to oversee the quality of the academy’s productions. I caution the reader that his last name is spelled with an “e” in the Index of the Ricovrati’s *Giornale A* (see Selvatico, B.). In *I soci dell’Accademia Patavina dalla sua fondazione* (Padua: Accademia Patavina di scienze, lettere ed arti, 1983), Attilio Maggiolo also lists him as Bartolomeo Selvatico (305).



achievements in their publications.<sup>28</sup> In 1609, shortly after its publication, Ribera remarked that the *Amorosa speranza* was “well received and commended.”<sup>29</sup> In 1620, Francesco Agostino della Chiesa mentioned Miani’s *Celinda* in his monumental *Theatro delle donne letterate*.<sup>30</sup> Thanks to Crescimbeni’s 1698 reference to a volume of poetry, we can deduce that Miani was in fact more prolific than it now appears by what has survived. In the early eighteenth century, the Venetian poet Luisa Bergalli (1703–1779) included Miani in her *Componimenti poetici delle più illustri rimatrici d’ogni secolo* (Venice: Antonio Mora, 1726), and, like Crescimbeni, she signaled a by then lost volume of poetic compositions. The first of its kind edited by a woman, Bergalli’s anthology was a two-part volume that drew its inspiration from the earliest collection of women’s poetry, edited by Lodovico Domenichi in 1559, and the much later one by Giambattista Recanati (1716), while it aimed to greatly amplify both.<sup>31</sup> Miani’s verse compositions, as they appeared in *Polinnia* and the *Gareggiamento poetico*, two anthologies to be revisited later, were republished in Bergalli’s collection, with the exception of her only extant sonnet composition, which was left out of this sample. Notwithstanding her choices regarding inclusion and selection, Bergalli’s overarching intention was to show evidence of women’s pronounced presence within the traditionally male-centered canon, but also, as one critic has recently argued, to underline the existence of a “linea veneta,” that is, of a group of women poets specifically from the Veneto region in which she included herself as a poet and playwright.<sup>32</sup>

28. Finucci, *Celinda*, 49. Crescimbeni held a key role in the Roman Academy of Arcadia, the first such institution to openly admit women as bona fide members; in fact, it was Crescimbeni himself who had “explicitly set out the requirements for the admission of women.” See Elisabetta Graziosi, “Revisiting Arcadia: Women and Academies in Eighteenth-Century Italy,” in *Italy’s Eighteenth Century: Gender and Culture in the Age of the Grand Tour*, ed. Paula Findlen, Wendy Wassyng Roworth, and Catherine M. Sama (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 103–24, at 108.

29. See *Le glorie immortali de’ trionfi, et heroiche imprese d’ottocento quarantacinque donne illustri antiche e moderne* (Venice: Evangelista Deuchino, 1609), 355; Ribera’s comment is translated and cited in Finucci, *Celinda*, 24n71.

30. Francesco Agostino della Chiesa, *Theatro delle donne letterate, con un breve discorso della preminenza, e perfezione del sesso donnesco* (Mondovi: Per Giovanni Gislandi and Giovanni Tommaso Rossi, 1620), 295. Also cited in Finucci, *Celinda*, 49. Alexandra Collier’s book project in progress, *Women and Letterati in Italian Dialogues and Treatises of the Late Renaissance*, includes della Chiesa’s treatise.

31. Bergalli’s collection includes a total of 250 women poets spanning the centuries from the ancients to the modern period, this compared to Domenichi’s 53 and Recanati’s 35; interestingly, she is quite selective and excludes more than half the poets in Domenichi’s volume.

32. See Gilberto Pizzamiglio, “Sull’antologia poetica al femminile di Luisa Bergalli,” *Quaderni veneti* 5:1 (June, 2016): 55–67. Gaspara Stampa (ca. 1525–1554), for instance, is represented in Bergalli’s collection with thirty-five poems, Isabella Andreini with eighteen compositions, and Chiara Matraini (1515–1604), with twelve; by comparison, Miani appears with four compositions—although we may deduce that Bergalli might have included more if they were available at the time of her compilation.

Not long thereafter, as Valeria Finucci points out, Miani was honored with an entry in Francesco Saverio Quadrio's magisterial seven-volume history of Italian writers.<sup>33</sup> The nineteenth century also showed appreciation for Miani, as both her tragedy and pastoral were included in Leopoldo Ferri's *Biblioteca femminile italiana* and in Ginevra Canonici Facchini's biographical dictionary of famous Italian women writers, wherein she was remembered as a "donna coltissima" (extremely learned woman) who was very well known in the republic of letters of her time.<sup>34</sup> During the same period she was described by Giuseppe Vedova in his *Biografia degli scrittori padovani* as a "gentile poetessa" (elegant poet) and "garbata oratrice" (refined orator) as she took her place alongside other literary figures of her family. Miani was also remembered by Napoleone Pietrucci in his biographical volume *Delle illustri donne padovane*.<sup>35</sup>

Early twentieth-century critic and literary historian Emilio Bertana deserves to be mentioned in connection to Miani, for it was he who drew attention to Miani not only as a rarity in her time but also with respect to *Celinda* as the one tragedy "among others" he chose to review.<sup>36</sup> Bertana offered a detailed synopsis of *Celinda*, and concluded that the author ingeniously wove together the dismal, the pathetic, and the tender—although, the critic remarked, the "excessive" and "soppy" tenderness achieved was a "characteristic of her age" and therefore less remarkable. Other twentieth-century Italian scholars, such as Delfina Forti, were dismissive of women's writing *tout court*, including Miani's, while Bruno Brunelli, in his *I teatri di Padova*, ignored Miani's accomplishments altogether.<sup>37</sup> In her overview of Italian women writers from the twelfth century to the nineteenth century, Jolanda de Blasi mentioned Miani and the misnamed "Isabella" Coreglia simply as contemporaries of Laura Guidiccioni Lucchesini, a poet and playwright from Lucca.<sup>38</sup> Several decades later, in a segment on the Seicento in her own

33. Francesco Saverio Quadrio, *Della storia e della ragione d'ogni poesia*, 7 vols. (Milan: Agnelli, 1739–1752), 1:78 (Finucci, *Celinda*, 49). Quadrio was a Ricovrato; see Maggiolo, *I soci dell'Accademia Patavina*, 261.

34. See Pietro Leopoldo Ferri, *Biblioteca femminile italiana: Raccolta, posseduta e descritta dal Conte Pietro Leopoldo Ferri, padovano* (Padua: Crescini, 1842), 234–35, and Ginevra Canonici Facchini, *Prospetto biografico delle donne italiane rinomate in letteratura* (Venice: Alvisopoli, 1824), 158 (Finucci, *Celinda*, 18n51 and 50).

35. Giuseppe Vedova, "Miani (Valeria)," in vol. 1 of *Biografia degli scrittori padovani*, 2 vols. (Padua: Coi tipi della Minerva, 1832), 2:600–2; Napoleone Pietrucci, *Delle illustri donne padovane: Cenni biografici* (Padua: Bianchi, 1853), 45–46 (Finucci, *Celinda*, 10n25 and 50n129).

36. Emilio Bertana, *Storia dei generi letterari italiani: La tragedia* (Milan: Francesco Vallardi, 1905), 132–35.

37. See Forti, "I drammi pastorali del 1600 e le rappresentazioni a Venezia prima del teatro," *Ateneo veneto* 26 (1903): 25–40, at 31; Brunelli, *I teatri di Padova dalle origini alla fine del secolo XIX* (Padua: Draghi, 1921), 67 (Finucci, *Celinda*, 50n133).

38. See *Le scrittrici italiane: Dalle origini al 1800* (Florence: Nemi, 1930), 178.

publication on Italian women writers, Natalia Costa-Zalesow did not mention Miani at all.<sup>39</sup> Even more surprising perhaps was the omission of Miani's name from a 1991 anthology specific to women writers from the Veneto region, although even Isabella Andreini received short shrift in that publication.<sup>40</sup> Another 1990s anthology promised to unearth "unknown" or "undervalued" Italian women writers from the origins to the modern period, yet even so, this anthology's Seicento list once again ignored any of Miani's contributions, although it included those of Margherita Costa, Lucrezia Marinella, and Arcangela Tarabotti alongside less well known figures.<sup>41</sup> Miani finally received mention, albeit in very brief format, in an article from the mid-1990s by Mariella Magliani, who pointed to Miani's "rarity" alongside two other Paduan ladies (including the daughter of Sperone Speroni, Giulia). In the two paragraphs dedicated to her, Miani was described as a "celebrated poet."<sup>42</sup>

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, we come across another anthology, this time specifically focused on Italian women writers from the Seicento and edited by Giuliana Morandini; unfortunately, there too Miani's name is missing.<sup>43</sup> Finally just one year after the publication of Morandini's anthology appeared in Italy, however, critic Françoise Decroisette offered a reading of Miani's pastoral alongside other plays. In 2008 and 2014, Katie Rees published two articles resulting from a University of Cambridge doctoral dissertation on Miani within the broader context of women's writing for the theater. Finucci's edition and translation of *Celinda*, in the *Other Voice* series, reached the American press in 2010. And in 2017, Alexandra Collier published a monograph awarding Miani pride of place in a comparative study engaging with both her pastoral and her tragedy alongside male and female authors of early modern Italian drama.<sup>44</sup>

39. See *Scrittrici italiane dal XIII al XX secolo: Testi e critica* (Ravenna: Longo, 1982).

40. See Antonia Arslan, Adriana Chemello, and Gilberto Pizzamiglio, ed., *Le stanze ritrovate: Antologia di scrittrici venete dal Quattrocento al Novecento* (Venice: Eidos, 1991). For a critique of Piermario Vescovo's entry on Isabella Andreini in this volume, see Finucci's review essay, "La scrittura femminile: Considerazioni in margine alla lettura di *Le stanze ritrovate: Antologia di scrittrici venete dal Quattrocento al Novecento*," *Annali d'italianistica* 9 (1991): 322–29.

41. See Angelo Gianni, ed., *Anch'esse "quasi simili a Dio": Le donne nella storia della letteratura italiana, in gran parte ignote o misconosciute dalle origini alla fine dell'Ottocento* (Lucca: Mauro Baroni, 1997).

42. See "Giulia, Lucia e Valeria: Tre donne comuni poco 'comuni,'" in Viridis and Nalon, *Tracciati del femminile a Padova*, 64–69, at 69 ("Valeria Miani, celebrata poetessa").

43. See *Sospiri e palpiti: Scrittrici italiane del Seicento* (Genoa: Marietti, 2001).

44. See Decroisette, "Satyres au féminin dans la pastorale italienne de la fin du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle," in *La campagna e la città: Letteratura e ideologia nel Rinascimento: Scritti in onore di Michel Plaisance*, ed. Giuditta Isotti Rosowsky (Florence: Franco Cesati, 2002), 149–82; Rees, "Female-Authoring Drama"; Rees, "Satyr Scenes in Early Modern Padua"; and Collier, *Women, Rhetoric, and Drama*.

### *The Ricovrati of Padua*

And now some details about the Accademia dei Ricovrati, in order to better understand the setting of Miani's literary achievements and the academy's tendency toward philogyny. The Ricovrati were numerous, mostly local noblemen with strong ties to the Palazzo Ducale, and, with some exceptions, the academy demonstrated its utmost dedication to and praise of the Serenissima. Their meetings were both private and public, as attested to by the minutes dating from its founding in 1599 to the year 1694.<sup>45</sup> When compared to other Paduan academies, Gino Benzoni emphasizes, the Ricovrati were a stable and long-lasting entity precisely because they were backed by the Venetian patriciate; indeed, the two groups mirrored one another.<sup>46</sup> Several of this academy's members belonged to the famous patrician families—Contarini, Cornaro, Loredan, Mocenigo, Querini, and Venier.

The Ricovrati's intermingling of Venetian and Paduan patricians was unique in the Veneto.<sup>47</sup> Rather than thinking of the Ricovrati as yet another private male social club, one should consider their meetings as having had a broader geographical reach than others while they maintained, in addition, strong ties to and support from the Venetian *laguna*. The Venetian playwright, performer, and theoretician Angelo Ingegneri, whose discourse was mentioned above, became a member of the Ricovrati in 1600. Antonio Negri, a relative of Miani's husband, Domenico, was elected to the academy in the same year. Battista Guarini, Pomponio Torelli, and Muzio Manfredi, playwrights of notable acclaim, joined the following year. Giambattista Marino, the renowned Baroque poet, became a Ricovrato in 1602.<sup>48</sup> The prestige of participation and inclusion in this academy's gatherings was thus evident, as was one's proximity to members of the ruling elite. The Ricovrati's founder, Federico Cornaro, proposed Silvestro Aldobrandini, great-grandson of Pope Clement VIII and future cardinal, as the academy's protector.<sup>49</sup> In sum, if you had any influence and subsequent success—literary or political—you were likely to be a member of the Ricovrati clan.<sup>50</sup>

45. See *Giornale A*.

46. See Benzoni, "I Ricovrati nel '600," 25–26, for a list of prominent Ricovrati members, and the Index of *Giornale A* for a complete list; across the several decades in which the academy was active there were 314 members in attendance with roughly 181 admitted in the seventeenth century (Benzoni, 42).

47. Benzoni, 42.

48. For Ingegneri, see *Giornale A* 32, 39, 73; for Negri, 70; for Guarini and Torelli, 77; for Marino, 93. Torelli had written a number of tragedies, as well as *Galatea*, a tragedy set in the pastoral mode, published in 1603.

49. *Giornale A*, 88.

50. Benzoni offers the example of one Angelo Portenari, who, because his publication was deemed injurious to Venetian sensibilities, was denied entry into the Ricovrati clan; see "I Ricovrati nel '600," 32–37.

In 1604, the same year as the publication of Miani's pastoral, Giuseppe Passi, author of the infamous treatise *I donneschi difetti* (Venice: Antonio Somaschi, 1599), was elected as a member.<sup>51</sup> Passi's publication sparked a polemic that arguably served to reinforce women's voices on the socio-literary platform rather than to extinguish them. Indeed, the antifeminism of such writers would add more fuel to the fire of the ongoing *questione delle donne*. Lucrezia Marinella's incisive rebuttal of Passi's disparaging views of her sex was penned and published shortly thereafter as *La nobiltà et l'eccellenza delle donne co' difetti et mancamenti degli uomini* (Venice: Giovan Battista Ciotti, 1600).<sup>52</sup> Moderata Fonte's *Il merito delle donne* appeared in print in the same year, a fact that some scholars have argued was not coincidental.<sup>53</sup> "The Passi controversy is an important moment in the development of feminism," writes Stephen Kolsky, "for it puts on centre-stage women who argue for themselves, who have a notion of their worth, who intuit the foundations of the anti-woman tradition, and begin to question it vigorously."<sup>54</sup> Miani's two surviving dramatic plays attest to our author's embodiment of the attributes Kolsky describes.

Although we have no protofeminist tracts written by her, Miani's profile and her entry into the publication world resonates with those of Marinella. Like Miani, Marinella was closely connected to an academy that included one of her kin (her brother, Curzio). Ciotti, Marinella's publisher, was the official publisher of the Accademia Veneziana, a role parallel to Bolzetta's in Padua; moreover, Marinella's paratext suggested that her treatise might have been commissioned by this academy, thereby making its link to late Renaissance academic culture all the more evident.<sup>55</sup> In a number of ways Miani's protofeminism, juxtaposed to the

51. On Passi's entry into the academy see *Giornale A*, 122 and 132. On Passi's 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 Writing*, ed. Julie D. Campbell and Maria Galli Stampino (Toronto: Iter Inc. and Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2011), 143–94.

52. On this important seventeenth-century debate and the much amplified second edition of Marinella's text, see Stephen Kolsky, "Moderata Fonte, Lucrezia Marinella, Giuseppe Passi: An Early Seventeenth-Century Feminist Controversy," *Modern Language Review* 96 (2001): 973–89. See also Patrizia Bettella, "Women and the Academies in Seventeenth-Century Italy: Elena Lucrezia Cornaro Piscopia's Role in Literary Academies," *Italian Culture* 36 (2018): 100–19, at 104.

53. Both Marinella's and Fonte's defenses have appeared in English translation. See Marinella's *The Nobility and Excellence of Women, and the Defects and Vices of Men*, ed. and trans. Anne Dunhill, introd. Letizia Panizza (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), and Fonte's *The Worth of Women: Wherein is Clearly Revealed Their Nobility and Their Superiority to Men*, ed. and trans. Virginia Cox (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997). Fonte's text now also appears in an abridged format, entitled *The Merits of Women* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

54. Kolsky, "Moderata Fonte," 989.

55. Kolsky, "Moderata Fonte," 975.



anti-masculine perspectives present in her writing, illustrates yet another early seventeenth-century defense of women's worth authored by a woman. How this plays out in the fiction of her drama will be demonstrated below.<sup>56</sup>

While one cannot assume that all Ricovrati members were avid admirers of the female sex, the evidence of certain members' acknowledgement of and admiration for learned women flies in the face of detractors such as Passi.<sup>57</sup> The evidence suggests not only that women were welcomed to attend gatherings but that the Ricovrati were progressively minded enough to entertain discussion of the possibility of women joining as members and the related topic of conceding a degree of power to the opposite sex. Tied to the issue of whether or not women should be admitted as veritable members of an academy was the problematic issue of whether or not women should be allowed to govern; the topic was debated by the Ricovrati in a public meeting on June 16, 1691. The controversial subject of whether or not women should be permitted a university education followed soon thereafter.<sup>58</sup> These gendered polemical topics were debated alongside the many and various literary subjects broached and discussed during the Ricovrati's *adunanze*, such as those on ethics, the attributes of a successful poet, and which would be more useful: memory or artistic creativity. Literary discussions sometimes focused on the definition of the various genres and their utility, whether one should opt for prose or verse in the composition of comedy and tragedy, and so forth.<sup>59</sup> Members therefore had the opportunity to engage in these *tenzoni* (debates) and, as a result, to hone their rhetorical skills. In theory, if not always in fact (especially around the turn of the century with the increasing weight of the Counter-Reformation), these learned societies were places in which one could find a certain openness to unorthodox trains of thought, where one could experiment with alternative theories on language, culture, and gender inclusivity that

56. For an analysis of *Celinda* with respect to its protofeminist and anti-masculine agenda, see Collier, *Women, Rhetoric, and Drama*, 91–109.

57. Although even Passi may be viewed as a somewhat ambiguous figure if we take into account his later treatise, *Dello stato maritale* (Venice: Iacomo Antonio Somascho, 1602), which reads more like a straightforward defense of women and can be construed as an attempt, on the author's part, to make amends for his earlier flagrantly anti-feminist position; see Kolsky, "Moderata Fonte," 984–87. In fact, Passi's later publication, the *Fucina monstuosa delle sordidezze degli uomini* (1603), can be regarded as a means to tone down some of his criticism of the female sex; the text is referenced in *Giornale A* (134). On the impetus behind male-authored defenses of women see Androniki Dialeti, "Defending Women, Negotiating Masculinity in Early Modern Italy," *The Historical Journal* 54 (2011): 1–23.

58. See Benzoni, "I Ricovrati nel '600," 55–57, as well as the discussion that follows on this topic, based on a document published by the Accademia de' Ricovrati in 1729.

59. See, for instance, the meeting that took place on May 10, 1601; see *Giornale A*, 80. Another such example is the public discourse of June 7, 1604, on the definition and utility of poetry, lyric, epic, tragedy, and comedy according to the precepts of Aristotle and Horace; see *Giornale A*, 130.

were less eagerly entertained in the more conservative confines of the university.<sup>60</sup> As some scholars have pointed out, in the early decades of the sixteenth century Padua was well known as a center for the diffusion of reformist ideas in which the writings of Erasmus, for instance, were welcomed.<sup>61</sup> Bearing in mind this tradition of openness to the avant-garde, then, it is not so surprising that a learned woman such as Miani could have found a niche inside one of Padua's most prestigious academies. In spite of occasional figures such as Passi, it would be useful perhaps to envision the early modern Italian academy as one patriarchal institution that was not necessarily retrogressive in its perception of the female sex.

Although female membership was scarce, women did on occasion attend meetings at various *accademie* on the peninsula, and the Ricovrati was no exception.<sup>62</sup> Membership itself did not guarantee participation for women, since, more often than not, membership was understood as an honorary gesture. Two well-known and equally exceptional cases were those of Laura Battiferri (1523–1589), who joined the Intronati of Siena and the Accademia degli Assorditi of her native Urbino around 1560, becoming the first female member of an Italian academy, and Isabella Andreini, who gained entry into the Accademia degli Intenti of Pavia as a bona fide member in 1601, around the same time Miani was active in Padua, Andreini's native city. Aside from cultivating her own *fama* as a poet, playwright, and *prima donna* of the early modern stage, Andreini is known to have had an active role in the academy's meetings and discussions.<sup>63</sup> Such *letterate*, however, would remain a minority for decades to come.<sup>64</sup> And even though the invitation

60. Notwithstanding this apparent freedom from censorship, figures such as Paolo Beni, Galileo Galilei, and Cesare Cremonini were ousted from the Ricovrati soon after its founding in 1599 on account of their perceived heterodoxy; see Maurizio Sangalli, *Università, accademie, Gesuiti: Cultura e religione a Padova tra Cinque e Seicento* (Trieste: LINT, 2001), 37–55, especially 47–51. It was within this academic environment that Paolo Beni, for instance, enthusiastically proposed (and later published) his thoughts on Tasso as superior to the ancients, and indeed as “prince” among the moderns; so too his perspectives on language, which would go against those of the more conservative Accademia della Crusca. Eventually, Beni's *L'Anticrusca* (1612) was banned following the orders of Cosimo II de' Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany (Sangalli, 53). On Beni's *Comparazione di Omero, Virgilio e Torquato* (1607) see Maria Luisa Doglio, “Tasso ‘Principe della moderna poesia’ nei discorsi accademici di Paolo Beni,” in *Formazione e fortuna del Tasso nella cultura della Serenissima*, ed. Luciana Borsetto and Bianca Maria Da Rif (Venice: Istituto Veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti, 1997), 79–95.

61. On this subject see Massimo Firpo, *Riforma protestante ed eresie nell'Italia del Cinquecento: Un profilo storico* (Rome: Laterza, 1993), esp. 15–16.

62. Finucci, *Celinda*, 5–6.

63. Andreini has been the subject of scholarly investigation for some time now. For a detailed summary of her life and works, along with pertinent bibliography, see Finucci's Introduction to *Mirtilla, A Pastoral*, 1–42.

64. More than elsewhere on the peninsula, Graziosi observes, it was in Tuscany and the city of Naples that the polemical topic of women's education surfaced in the years prior to the more liberal admission of women into learned academies and before the actual welcoming of women as stable or

was a late one compared to other earlier cases, the Ricovrati did offer membership to one noblewoman of exceptional talents. On February 11, 1669, the Venetian noblewoman Elena Cornaro Piscopia (1646–1684) was admitted as a bona fide member of the Ricovrati.<sup>65</sup> She belonged to the family of Federico Cornaro, who had spearheaded the academy in 1599.<sup>66</sup> Notably, Cornaro Piscopia was the first woman to receive a doctoral degree—she received her *laurea* in philosophy from the University of Padua in 1678, and her mentor, Carlo Rinaldini, was a Ricovrato.<sup>67</sup> Cornaro Piscopia's intellectual collaboration with the Ricovrati not only led to her university degree but also encouraged other academies to follow suit. As a result, this learned lady was courted by no less than six other academies in five different cities on the peninsula between 1669 and 1672.<sup>68</sup> An educated woman's participation at such gatherings could only reap the benefits of what academies were known to foster: intimate collaboration with established literary figures, cultural and intercultural exchanges facilitated by its inclusion of *soci stranieri* (foreigners), and, as Mangini points out, a particular interest in and in-

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frequent participants of the Roman Arcadia, the first institution to actively engage with a pronounced female entourage; see "Arcadia femminile: Presenze e modelli," *Filologia e critica* 17 (1992): 321–58, at 329; see also Graziosi's "Revisiting Arcadia." However, the Seicento does furnish another example similar to that of Miani in Isabetta Coreglia and her engagement with the Incauti academy of Naples. For a discussion of the Incauti's celebration of Coreglia's achievements see chapter 4 of Collier, *Women, Rhetoric, and Drama*. An edition and translation by Alexandra Collier of Coreglia's pastoral drama, *La Dori*, is in preparation for the *Other Voice* series.

65. See *Giornale A*, 150 and 270–71. Cornaro Piscopia was preceded by the Neapolitan Margherita Sarrocchi (1560–1617), whose admission to multiple academies in the early Seicento is otherwise unique; see Bettella, "Women and the Academies," 103–4, and Virginia Cox, "Members, Muses, Mascots: Women and Italian Academies," in *The Italian Academies, 1525–1700: Networks of Culture, Innovation and Dissent*, ed. Jane E. Everson, Denis V. Reidy, and Lisa Sampson (Cambridge: Legenda, 2016), 132–69, at 143–45.

66. The Cornaro family gave Venice no less than four of its Doges, nine cardinals, and Caterina di Cipro (1454–1510), queen of Cyprus.

67. See *Giornale A*, 148 and Benzoni, "I Ricovrati nel '600," 51. Padua's academies do not appear to have admitted women as members until the late seventeenth century; see Rees, "Female-Authored Drama," 46. As a point for comparison, the Siense Accademia degli Intronati can serve as example of an especially progressive academy that regularly allowed noblewomen to participate in their so-called "veglie" or salon-type gatherings and encouraged women's literary talents. On the Intronati and their female entourage see Alexandra Collier, "The Siense Accademia degli Intronati and its Female Interlocutors," *The Italianist* 26 (2006): 223–46; Diana Robin, *Publishing Women: Salons, the Presses, and the Counter-Reformation in Sixteenth-Century Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); and Konrad Eisenbichler, *The Sword and the Pen: Women, Politics, and Poetry in Sixteenth-Century Siena* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012). On Cornaro Piscopia, see Labalme, "Nobile e donna: Elena Lucrezia Cornaro Piscopia," in Kohl, *Saints, Women and Humanists*, 163–67; Cox, "Members, Muses, Mascots"; and Bettella, "Women and the Academies."

68. For an investigation of what these memberships entailed for Cornaro Piscopia, see Bettella, "Women and the Academies."

volvement with dramatic compositions.<sup>69</sup> In some instances, this participation had more than just an auxiliary or perfunctory function. Such seems to have been the case for Miani, and later, for Cornaro Piscopia. Both Miani and Cornaro Piscopia were celebrated for their talents, and both were included in poetic anthologies alongside their male counterparts. Although little is extant of the latter's *oeuvre*, we are fortunate enough to still have a good sample (although by no means a complete one) of Miani's. A milieu such as that of the *accademia* seems to have been the perfect place wherein that "other" voice could find an appreciative audience, respite from the traditional unenlightened view of male detractors, and refuge from stereotypical judgments.<sup>70</sup> As some scholars have observed, the Ricovrati would set a trend that would be widely adopted in the Settecento, when the doors finally opened to include female members.<sup>71</sup> Unlike most other female participants, however, both Miani and Cornaro Piscopia "produced culture" alongside their *letterati* counterparts well before women in academic circles—even while admitted as members—would be encouraged and recognized for doing so.<sup>72</sup>

69. See Mangini, "La tragedia e la commedia," 298. As Mangini explains, dramaturges were often members of more than one academy, and most of them belonged to academies founded in the northern part of the peninsula (Venice, Vicenza, Verona, Brescia). There were roughly 250 academies founded in Italy in the sixteenth century, and that number would increase to nearly 600 in the next century. Benzoni offers a panoramic view from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, with Rome and Naples in the forefront boasting the highest number of academies: 177 in the former and 146 in the latter; during the same 200-year period, Venice claimed 121, while Padua had only 37—the numeric differences based largely on the size of each city's population; see Benzoni, "I Ricovrati nel '600," 12. The Ricovrati's *soci stranieri* included a Scotsman and a Frenchman; the latter, Charles Patin (1633–1693), a professor of medicine at the University of Padua whose wife and daughters participated in academic gatherings, promoted the attendance of other learned ladies; see Riondato, "La fondazione dell'Accademia dei Ricovrati," 76; Benzoni, "I Ricovrati nel '600," 44. See also Simone Testa's recent monograph, *Italian Academies and Their Networks, 1525–1700: From Local to Global* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); on Patin and the Ricovrati, see chapter 4 of Testa's volume. On the Patin women as well as those who followed, see Lino Lazzarini, "La vita accademica dei 'Ricovrati' di Padova dal 1668 al 1684 e Elena Lucrezia Cornaro Piscopia," in *Atti e memorie dell'Accademia Patavina di scienze, lettere ed arti già Accademia dei Ricovrati* 94 (1981–1982): 51–109. Bettella, currently at work on the Ricovrati's female membership during the Seicento, claims that thanks to the efforts of Patin there were more than twenty French learned women accepted by the academy in the last decades of the seventeenth century; see "Women and the Academies," 117n34.

70. This "other" voice included, of course, the promotion and support of unorthodox thinkers such as Galileo, Paolo Beni, and others.

71. See Graziosi, "Revisiting Arcadia," 103–24, and Bettella, "Women and the Academies," 114–15.

72. As Graziosi remarks in "Arcadia femminile," some noblewomen had a more or less decorative role (such as the Neapolitan Beatrice Spinelli Carafa, among the first to be admitted into the Arcadia academy of Rome in 1691) and functioned as dedicatees of male-authored literary works rather than as producers of culture, for which see pp. 328 and 331; see also Cox, "Members, Muses, Mascots," 132–69. The Assicurate of Siena, an all-female academy founded in 1654 under the auspices of the Grand Duchess Vittoria della Rovere, was of course an exception to the rule. On this academy, likely

Although we do not have any indication as to the frequency or length of her actual presence, Miani enjoyed a certain amount of prestige with the local *accademia*, just as Marinella did in Venice, even if neither was recognized as a member; in both Marinella's and Miani's cases this connection might have been facilitated by family members who had membership status and who might have functioned as sponsors.<sup>73</sup> Miani's decision to dedicate her pastoral drama to a particular woman, Marietta Uberti Descalzi, was likely not a haphazard choice given that this lady's father, Ottonello Descalzi, was one of the Ricovrati co-founders.<sup>74</sup> The gesture could be interpreted as not only an astute one on the part of a female author eager to gain acclaim and support for her writing, but also as a way to pay tribute to this group of *letterati* who clearly encouraged and celebrated Miani's literary prowess, judging by the honorary compositions that prefaced both her pastoral play and her tragedy.<sup>75</sup> Equally significant were Miani's contributions to two anthologies of poetry which included members of the Ricovrati and other prominent literary figures: *Polinnia* (1609) and the *Gareggiamento poetico* (1611), to which I shall shortly return. For now, I would like to offer a brief overview of a debate held at the Accademia dei Ricovrati, some decades after Miani's time, on the topic of women's education.

### *The Ricovrati on the Education of Women*

Framed by the historical specificity of the Enlightenment, these early eighteenth-century episodes, which took place within the parameters of the Paduan *accademia*, attest to a still contentious notion—one that is documented as having been

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the first of its kind in Europe, see George McClure, *Parlour Games and the Public Life of Women in Renaissance Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 119–58.

73. The same may be said for three women whose names appear in the Index to the Ricovrati's *Giornale A*; this does seem indicative of their membership, although to what degree they participated in academic meetings is difficult to ascertain. What is known is that on September 14, 1684, Madames Roussereau, Des Houlieries de Chate, and Anne Le Fèvre d'Acier, all French women, were registered as having taken part in that particular meeting under the supervision of Count Gronsfeldt, the academy's elected Prince at that time. Maggiolo lists each one of these ladies as bona fide members and gives dates for their entry into the academy; see *I soci dell'Accademia Patavina*, 90, 102–3, 284. In 1690 the Ricovrati welcomed Maria Silvaggia Borghini into its ranks, as is testified by an entry on April 17 of that year mentioning a sonnet she penned as a token of thanks; see *Giornale A*, 151. In 1699 the Ricovrati admitted Sophie Elizabeth Chérion, a painter and miniaturist as well as translator of Horace's *Odes*; Chérion became a 'Ricovrata' that same year; see Maggiolo, *I soci dell'Accademia Patavina*, 69.

74. See *Giornale A*, in which Descalzi's name is cited alongside that of Galileo Galilei, Cesare Cremonini, and other founding members who gathered at the home of Federico Cornaro on November 25, 1599, to discuss the laws that would govern the academy (4).

75. There are only three honorary pieces prefacing *Amorosa speranza*, and the identity of their authors remains anonymous. For *Celinda*, see notes 5–19 of Finucci's edition (pp. 370–72), in which the authors of the honorary verses prefacing Miani's tragedy are identified.



openly discussed in 1675, then again in the 1690s, although it is likely that the topic was at least alluded to much earlier.<sup>76</sup>

The debate represents a watershed moment in the history of the Ricovrati's academy. It is thus pertinent not only for our understanding of the Ricovrati's relationship to women, but also for our perception of their legacy, insofar as it gives the reader an opportunity to witness first hand how a topic such as that of women's education became as important as this publication proves it to have been. Indeed, the subject was apparently the focus of a heated discussion that involved, significantly, female as well as male interlocutors.

As Rebecca Messbarger observes, "a new critical age demanded that old questions, customs, and beliefs be reevaluated and put to the test of reason and disinterested scientific analysis . . . the woman question was primary among these."<sup>77</sup> The publication itself possesses the contours of a chronicle, and as such provides the modern reader with a rare encounter of (quasi-) historical value even if it may have been embellished prior to print: it consists of an introduction authored by the academy's Prince, Antonio Vallisneri (who also played the role of judge in this debate), followed by six speeches, one of which is authored by a woman, Aretafila Savini de' Rossi. It concludes with an oration in Latin "pro studiis mulierum," in favor of women's education, authored by the nine-year-old female prodigy, Maria Gaetana Agnesi. The compositions are testimony of at least one meeting that took place in the early part of the eighteenth century and was then published under the title *Discorsi accademici di vari autori viventi intorno agli studi delle donne* (Padua: Giovanni Manfrè, 1729). The *Discorsi* are dedicated to Elisabetta Cornaro Foscarini, a descendant of the renowned Elena Cornaro, and focus on whether or not women should be allowed to engage in university studies. As was the tradition in academic circles, the topic was argued *in utramque partem*, that is, according to all sides of the debate.<sup>78</sup> Giovanni Antonio Volpi, the Ricovrato arguing against the education of women, makes clear from the beginning that his discourse is directed at the "vulgo donnesco" and not at the women in his presence, those women who, like Cornaro, attended the academy's gatherings and contributed to its discussions, perhaps even to its publications (29). Not surprisingly, then, Volpi pits the "vulgo donnesco" against the few so-called "donne virili" (virile women) and "erudite zittelle" (learned spinsters), adding that marriage is incompatible with the love of knowledge ("amor di sapere," 36). Following scripture, this Ricovrato proposes that (most) women are created to be in charge of the

76. In 1675, Giovan Tommaso di Colloredo, a Ricovrato, expands on the social constraints placed on women's education, on the one hand, and the positive role of their presence in society and in its academies in particular, on the other; see *Giornale A*, 333–34, and Graziosi, "Revisiting Arcadia," 106.

77. I cite from Messbarger's introduction to the Ricovrati's debate in the text's English translation, *The Contest for Knowledge: Debates over Women's Learning in Eighteenth-Century Italy*, ed. and trans. Rebecca Messbarger and Paula Findlen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 76.

78. Benzoni, "I Ricovrati nel '600," 54.

household and are therefore not suited to handle anything other than “la conocchia e l’ago” (the distaff and needle, *ibid.*), a stereotypical stance used by detractors to argue against women’s advancement. As a consequence, admitting women into the university and its world would be tantamount to promoting chaos and disorder in society (39).

What is unusual about this publication is that the detractor’s argument is supplemented by footnotes at the bottom of each page authored by the learned noblewoman, Aretafila Savini de’ Rossi, a native of Siena residing in Florence, a member of the all-female Sienese Academy of the Assicurate and a member of the Roman Academy of Arcadia.<sup>79</sup> She is the recipient of Volpi’s *discorso* and is asked to give her comments in the form of a defense on behalf of her sex. Her criticism consists of amendments, outright rebuttals, confutations, sarcastic rhetorical questions aimed at weakening Volpi’s argument, corrections, and exclamatory remarks meant to detract from or question the plausibility of Volpi’s statements—and, overall, the footnotes read like a veritable voiceover which has the effect of pulling the reader in different directions while Volpi strives to make his case.<sup>80</sup> In addition, the publication offers us her own full-length response to Volpi’s *discorso*, followed immediately by Vallisneri’s confession that he cannot form a decisive opinion on account of lingering doubts on both sides of the issue.<sup>81</sup> In the end, however, Vallisneri does make a distinction, as Volpi does, between those women *naturally* inclined to learning (and in whom learning should be honed rather than arrested) and those not so inclined. Volpi is forced to admit as much in his second and last intervention, once his argument is thoroughly debunked by those speakers in favor of women’s learning, Savini de’ Rossi among them. Two of Savini de’ Rossi’s most memorable and persuasive points are that there is no correlation between the pursuit of knowledge and the loss of honor on a woman’s part, just as there is no correlation between the promotion of “disorder” and “chaos” and the pursuit of learning. Both theories are at the core of Volpi’s argument against women’s education, although both remain unfounded. In her *apologia* Savini de’

79. Savini de’ Rossi (b. 1687) was a poet, painter, and the author of comedies and novellas now no longer extant. She became a member of the Roman Academy of Arcadia in 1712, and was also a member of the Florentine Academy of Design (on the Assicurate, see note 72). On Savini de’ Rossi, see Messbarger, *Contest for Knowledge*, 102–7; Savini de’ Rossi’s intervention in this debate earned her wide and long-lasting acclaim (Messbarger, 103). That this learned lady was a native of Siena was not without significance; for Siena’s particularly liberal stance with regard to women’s learning see Collier, “The Sienese Accademia degli Intronati,” and Eisenbichler, *The Sword and the Pen*.

80. For instance, at 30n5, Volpi’s “usanza” (custom) is corrected and turned into “abuso” (abuse) by Savini de’ Rossi.

81. As Paula Findlen notes, Vallisneri’s choice to sponsor and moderate this particular debate was likely tied to the fact that during that same period he was engaged in a collaborative relationship with the learned Milanese noblewoman, Clelia Borromeo; see Messbarger and Findlen, *Contest for Knowledge*, 118–19.