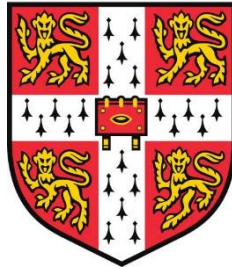


Making and Marketing a Theatre Couple
in Seventeenth-Century Italy:
Giovan Battista Andreini and Virginia Ramponi



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This thesis is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
March 2021

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my thesis has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.

Making and Marketing a Theatre Couple in Seventeenth-Century Italy:
Giovan Battista Andreini and Virginia Ramponi

The present study is the first treatment of the careers of two professional actors as a couple in early modern Italy. It examines the success achieved by Giovan Battista Andreini (1576-1654) and his wife Virginia Ramponi (1583-ca.1631) as a result of the self-representation and marketing strategies they devised and adopted. Their careers are considered as a *unicum*; two faces of a single product to be sold on the market: the professional theatre couple. This thesis presents a pair of mirrored images: it looks at specific moments of the careers of Andreini and Ramponi from both his perspective and hers, in order to define their individual contributions to the success they enjoyed together and to show that their achievements were the result of a synergy.

Against the historical background of post-Tridentine Italy, this study illustrates their literary, performative, iconographic and epistolary tactics as both a reaction to the opposition to professional performers led by Counter-Reformation clergy and a response to the promotion of professional performers led by academicians. By exploring Andreini and Ramponi's engagement with Counter-Reformation thought, their relation with cultural and political institutions, their power and artistic networks, this study offers a new perspective on the historical and cultural context of early modern Italy. In revealing the leading role of Ramponi in the company of which the Andreinis were part, and the impact of her international prestige in the reception of professional performers, it aims to enrich the scholarly discourse on the agency of women in early modern Italy. By looking at the career of the *comici* as a couple, it writes a new chapter in the social history of early modern theatre which opens up new avenues of research on professional theatre.

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L'attore, che da sempre ha posto il suo
banco di mercante sulla piazza delle emozioni,
[...] possiede una sapienza superiore, di
lunga durata'
(C. Meldolesi, 'La microsocietà degli
attori. Una storia di tre secoli e più', *Inchiesta*, 67
(1984), p. 106)

'Toutes les histoires universelles et les
recherches des causes m'ennuient [...]; il n'y a
plus que les lettres, les vies particulières et les
mémoires écrits par ceux qui font leur propre
histoire, qui m'amuse et m'inspirent quelque
curiosité'
(Madame du Deffand, *Lettres de la marquise
du Deffand à Horace Walpole*, Paris, Ponthieu et cie,
1827, p. 418)

CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS	X
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	XI
INTRODUCTION	1
1. MAKING AND MARKETING A THEATRE COUPLE	1
2. ‘SOSPESE NEL VUOTO DELLA STORIA’	7
3. STATE OF THE ART	11
4. METHODOLOGY	19
5. STRUCTURE.....	21
NOTE TO THE READER	23
ABBREVIATIONS	23
CHAPTER 1	
<i>NEGOTIUM DIABOLI, NEGOTIUM DEI: THE CONTROVERSIAL NATURE OF PROFESSIONAL</i>	
<i>THEATRE</i>	
1.1 DIACHRONY AND SYNCHRONY IN COMMEDIA DELL’ARTE.....	24
1.2 <i>COMICI</i> DELL’ARTE AND THE CHURCH	28
1.3 <i>COMICI</i> DELL’ARTE AND THE ITALIAN ACADEMIES.....	37
1.4 MARKETING COMMEDIA DELL’ARTE	47
PART I: THE DAWN OF THE COUPLE (1604)	
CHAPTER 2	
GIOVAN BATTISTA ANDREINI: TEXTS AND TARGETS.....	
2.1 GIOVAN BATTISTA ANDREINI AND THE ACCADEMIA DEGLI SPENSIERATI.....	56
2.2 <i>LA FLORINDA</i> ON THE PAGE	60
2.3 THE ACTOR AS A DEVOUT MAN	65
2.4 MARKETING STRATEGIES: BEYOND DEVOUTNESS.....	70
CHAPTER 3	
VIRGINIA RAMPONI: MIMESIS AND MYTH	
3.1 VIRGINIA RAMPONI AND THE ACCADEMIA DEGLI SPENSIERATI	78
3.2 <i>LA FLORINDA</i> ON THE STAGE	81
3.3 THE ACTRESS AS DIVINE WOMAN.....	90
3.4 MARKETING STRATEGIES: BEYOND DIVINITY	94

PART II: THE RISE OF THE COUPLE (1605-1631)

CHAPTER 4

VIRGINIA RAMPONI: LETTERS AND LEADERSHIP.....	99
4.1 'FLORINDA E SUO MARITTO': RAMPONI BETWEEN MILAN AND TURIN.....	99
4.2 'MIO SIGNORE ET BENEFFATTORE': RAMPONI AND THE GONZAGAS.....	104
4.3 'IL CARICO DI FAR LA COMPAGNIA LO DEBBA AVER IO E MIO MARITO': NEGOTIATING THE FRENCH <i>TOURNÉE</i>	110
4.4 'LA MIGLIOR COMICA DI TUTTA L'ITALIA': RAMPONI, GIOVANNI DE' MEDICI AND THE CESAREAN COURT.....	114

CHAPTER 5

GIOVAN BATTISTA ANDREINI: PORTRAYING THE PERFORMER	120
5.1 'CHIEDO DAL SERMO TUO REGOLA, E NORMA': <i>LA MADDALENA</i> , APOLOGIA OF THE COUNTER-REFORMATION.....	120
5.2 MODELS AND ANTIMODELS OF ANDREINI'S SELF-REPRESENTATION.....	127
5.3 'SPECCHIO OR DI LUCIFERO, OR DI CRISTO': MADDALENA AND THE DEBATE ON PROFESSIONAL ACTRESSES	131
5.4 MADDALENA: VIRGINIA RAMPONI	137
EPILOGUE	143
CHRONOLOGY.....	150
REFERENCES.....	154

ILLUSTRATIONS

- Fig. 1.** Unidentified artist, portrait of Giovan Battista Andreini, etching. Giovan Battista Andreini, *La Florinda* (Milan: Bordone, 1606), p. 14. Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Roma, Rome.
- Fig. 2.** Thomas de Leu, burning torch, etching. Isabella Andreini, *Rime* (Milan: Bordone e Locarni, 1605), fol. a2^v. Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna.
- Fig. 3.** Dionisio Menaggio, portrait Virginia Ramponi, collage in bird feathers. Dionisio Menaggio, *The Feather Book* (1618), p. 106. Blacker-Wood Library of Zoology and Ornithology, McGill University, Montréal.
- Fig. 4.** Gaspare Grispoldo, Mary Magdalene, etching. Giovan Battista Andreini, *La Maddalena* (Venice: Somasco, 1610), fol. 5^r. Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, Florence.
- Fig. 5.** Domenico Fetti, *Arianna e Bacco nell'isola di Nasso* (1608-1611). Oil on canvas. Banca Agricola Mantovana, Mantua.
- Fig. 6.** Domenico Fetti, *Melanconia/Meditazione* (ca. 1618). Oil on canvas. Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice.
- Fig. 7.** Domenico Fetti, *Moltiplicazione dei pani e dei pesci* (ca. 1620). Oil on canvas. Museo di Palazzo Ducale, Mantua.

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I dedicate this thesis to Maximilian, for the love he brought into this world.

INTRODUCTION

In Italy in the first half of the seventeenth century, two professional actors, Giovan Battista Andreini (1576-1654) and his wife Virginia Ramponi (1583-ca.1631), walked their path to success. In a historical context full of contradictions, when dogma and heterodoxy came face to face, Andreini and Ramponi built their rise by embracing the conflicts of their time. Their lives are therefore a privileged lens through which to look at both Commedia dell'Arte and post-Tridentine Italy.¹

The present study is the first treatment of the careers of two professional actors as a couple in early modern Italy. It examines the success achieved by Andreini and Ramponi as a result of the self-representation and marketing strategies they devised and adopted. Against the historical background of seventeenth-century Italy, this thesis investigates their literary, performative, iconographic and epistolary tactics as both a reaction to the opposition to professional performers led by Counter-Reformation clergy and a response to the promotion of professional performers led by academicians. By exploring Andreini and Ramponi's engagement with Counter-Reformation thought, their relationship with cultural and political institutions, and their power and artistic networks, this study offers a new perspective on the historical and cultural context of early modern Italy. In revealing the leading role of Ramponi in the company of which the Andreinis were part, and the impact of her international prestige on the reception of professional performers, it aims to enrich the scholarly discourse on the agency of women in early modern Italy. By looking at the career of the *comici* as a couple, it writes a new chapter in the social history of early modern theatre and opens up new avenues for research on professional theatre.

1. MAKING AND MARKETING A THEATRE COUPLE

This study takes into account works on Commedia dell'Arte produced mainly by Italian and Anglo-American scholars, and combines the philological and biographical approach of the

¹ 'Commedia dell'Arte' is a later definition of a theatrical form which was based on the use of masks and in which plays were improvised on the basis of an outline scenario. The term appeared in print for the first time in the play *Il teatro comico* by Carlo Goldoni, published in 1750. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, this form of theatre was mainly defined as 'commedia mercenaria', 'commedia degli zanni', 'commedia a soggetto', 'commedia all'improvviso' or 'commedia italiana'.

former and the socio-historical and multidisciplinary approach of the latter. At the core of this thesis is the professional theatre couple, a unit in its own right in the history of Commedia dell'Arte, but which nonetheless has not so far been the subject of scholarly investigation. Giovan Battista Andreini and Virginia Ramponi are one of several couples of *comici* active in the second half of the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth centuries: Adriano Valerini (ca.1545-ca.1593) and Vincenza Armani (ca.1530-1569), Francesco Andreini (1548-1624) and Isabella Andreini (1562-1604) – the parents of Giovan Battista – Pier Maria Cecchini (1563-1654) and Orsola Posmoni (1580-ca.1633), Girolamo Garavini (*ante* 1602-1624) and Margherita Luciani (*ante* 1602-ca.1625). The story of each of these couples directly or indirectly links or intersects with that of Andreini and Ramponi: some of these actors were their working partners, others their competitors, others again, their models.

The study of the theatre couple undertaken in this thesis does not seek to diminish the achievements of these two artists as individuals, but rather aims at showing that the roles of Andreini and Ramponi were complementary and that the result of their co-operation was greater than the sum of its parts. To this end, this thesis looks at their careers from both his perspective and hers, in order to define their individual contributions to the success they enjoyed together. Their careers are considered as a *unicum*, two faces of a single product to be sold on the market: the professional theatre couple. Beyond the wide scholarship on Commedia dell'Arte, this thesis also benefits from academic contributions on Renaissance selfhood and self-fashioning and the more recent scholarly work on so-called 'power couples'.

'Self-fashioning' is a category effectively used in historical and literary studies of early modern Europe, but not commonly employed by historians of theatre. The considerations made in this thesis draw on the investigations led by Jacob Burckhardt in the nineteenth century, and more recently by Stephen Greenblatt and John Jeffries Martin.² In his work on Renaissance identities, Jacob Burckhardt identified Italy as the birthplace of the self, of the 'spiritual individual', willing, agent, psychologically complex, as opposed to the Medieval man, who was 'conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, party, family or corporation'.³ In a revisionist, postmodern reading of Burckhardt's work, Greenblatt argued that in the Renaissance, identity was not 'freely chosen' but was rather 'a

² My theoretical framework on Renaissance selfhood has benefited from the precious advice of Paola Ugolini, to whom I would like to express my gratitude.

³ Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. Samuel G. C. Middlemore, 2 vols (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), I, p. 143.

cultural artifact'.⁴ Renaissance man had 'no moments of pure, unfettered subjectivity' and seemed to him the ideological product of the relations of power in a particular society.⁵ Martin's theory bridged and went beyond the Burckhardtian and postmodern view of the individual by introducing into the concept of self-fashioning a form of agency that is mostly absent in Greenblatt's formulation. He argued for the existence of multiple models of identity in the Renaissance,⁶ and defined the Renaissance self as 'highly textured, layered, and even divided, but [...] constantly aware of the tensions between one's interior beliefs, thoughts, and feelings and the particular ways one faced or related to the outside world'.⁷ By focusing on oppositional and dissenting voices, Martin argued that the identity of Renaissance men and women was not entirely defined by the social and political contexts in which they found themselves, but that some of them were capable of standing up against the social structures by which they were shaped and constrained, and erected 'a public façade' to disguise their beliefs.⁸ Different to Burckhardt's view, Martin believed that Renaissance men and women were not detached from social groups and networks, and that they lived in a culture that valued theatricality and emphasised the importance of self-presentation, performance, and rhetoric, acts which were not produced unconsciously by the self.⁹

Martin's emphasis on theatricality, self-presentation, performance, and rhetoric in Renaissance culture is particularly relevant to the arguments advanced in this thesis, and other parallels can be drawn between his theories and this study. In line with his revision of Burckhardt, *comici dell'Arte* were not detached from social groups and networks, but were part of a group of professional actors, bound by a collective working agreement, the *compagnia*, which influenced their professional identity. Moreover, as we shall see, the role of *comici dell'Arte* in their historical context was not unproblematic. In post-Tridentine Italy, when the clergy had a particular influence on public opinion, *comici* became the target of stark condemnation by the Church, which portrayed them as a threat to society. In this sense, professional performers can be considered among the oppositional voices, theorised by Martin, who had to build a façade to disguise their identity. The opposition of *comici*, however, in contrast with that of, for example, the heretics, pertained to their reception

⁴ Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 256.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ John J. Martin, *Myths of Renaissance Individualism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 7.

⁷ Ibid., p. 46.

⁸ John J. Martin, 'Inventing Sincerity, Refashioning Prudence: The Discovery of the Individual in Renaissance Europe', *The American Historical Review*, 102.5 (1997), 1309-42 (p. 1322).

⁹ Martin, *Myths of Renaissance Individualism*, pp. 17-18.

only: they did not produce an image of themselves as opponents, but were willing to display their alignment with the dominant paradigms of post-Tridentine society, as emerges clearly from the analysis of numerous episodes in the careers of Andreini and Ramponi. The self-fashioning of the dissenting voices theorised by Martin also implied insincerity in the construction of their public image, while the hypothesis of sincerity has been advanced with regard to Andreini's self-fashioning as a devout actor.¹⁰

My reading of the self-fashioning of Andreini and Ramponi is particularly indebted to Mario Biagioli's analysis of Galileo Galilei's self-fashioning as a courtier.¹¹ Like Martin, Biagioli puts forward an idea of self-fashioning which takes into account the influence of context but does not invalidate the agency of the individual. He approaches the study of Galileo's scientific career by analysing the socio-professional identity Galileo constructed for himself in around 1610, when he became the Grand Duke's philosopher and mathematician. In *Galileo, Courtier*, Biagioli identifies and studies 'the synchronic processes, conditions, resources, and constraints that shaped [Galileo's] everyday life and scientific activity and that – over several decades – produced the historical artifact that we now call Galileo's career',¹² emphasising how he availed himself of the resources in the surrounding environment in constructing his socio-professional identity. As in Biagioli's study, this thesis considers the careers of Andreini and Ramponi as historical artefacts and their identities as actively constructed, by taking into account the context in which they lived. As historical artefacts, as mentioned earlier, their careers are a lens through which to look at Counter-Reformation Italy.¹³ As an outcome of their self-fashioning process, their careers reveal the unusual perceptivity of these two *comici*.

In Biagioli's work, self-fashioning is intertwined with legitimisation: Galileo's activity at the Grand Duke's court is considered a contribution to the cognitive legitimisation of his science because it provided venues for the social legitimisation of its practitioners, thus boosting the epistemological status of the discipline.¹⁴ In a similar way,

¹⁰ See Bernadette Majorana, 'Lo pseudo-Segn timer e il teatro celeste: due tracce secentesche', *Teatro e storia*, 9 (1994), 357-388.

¹¹ Mario Biagioli, *Galileo, Courtier: The Practice of Science in the Culture of Absolutism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹³ Here and throughout the thesis the term 'Counter-Reformation' is used in a descriptive way, as the conventional periodisation for a specific phase of the early modern period: the second half of the sixteenth century and the early seventeenth century. The term, however, is the source of an ongoing terminology debate. For a summary of the debate, see John W. O'Malley, *Trent and All That: Renaming Catholicism in the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001). For a brief history of the term, see Amedeo Quondam, 'Foreword', in *Innovation in the Italian Counter-Reformation*, ed. by Shannon McHugh and Anna Wainwright (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2020), pp. XI-XXX (pp. XXII-XXIII).

¹⁴ Biagioli, p. 2.

this thesis argues that the participation of Andreini and Ramponi in academic and courtly environments was essential for their moral and literary legitimisation and for the validation of their profession. By building more effective strategies of self-representation, they not only acquired more prestige, but, given the commercial nature of their profession, they increased their profits, as we shall see. Following its fashioning, their identity had to be marketised: it was a product to sell within a specific context, sometimes different to that which shaped it. The sale of this image started a cycle, because it often resulted in other products – such as encomia or favourable accounts of their performance – which were then incorporated into the products of the *comici*, to further enhance their self-fashioning: poems and successful performances bolstered their own narrative of themselves and were used to re-fashion and re-market them.

Andreini and Ramponi were among the first professional actors to build and market their joint image, but their strategy as a couple has had, since then, a long-lasting history which has traversed modern times up to the twenty-first century. Professional theatre couples act as a historical precedent to celebrity couples of the last two centuries, on the one hand, and as the epigones of the power couples of classical antiquity and the Renaissance on the other. Studying their history and development fills a historiographic gap and shows that sixteenth-century Italy witnessed the transition from a political conception of the power couple to its modern conception in artistic terms. The *Cambridge Dictionary* defines the power couple as ‘two people who are married to each other, or in relationship with each other, and both have extremely successful careers, especially in politics or entertainment’.¹⁵ In Greco-Roman antiquity, there were couples in which both partners had significant personal wealth or power and promoted their partnership with the intention of benefiting from it. This was the case, for example, with Mark Antony and Cleopatra, or Augustus and Livia.¹⁶ Similarly, during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, conjugal co-rulership was not unusual: well-known cases include Isabella of Castille and Ferdinand II of Aragon,¹⁷ or, in Italy, Federico da Montefeltro and Battista Sforza, emblematised by the Montefeltro diptych.¹⁸

¹⁵ *Cambridge Dictionary*: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/it/dizionario/inglese/power-couple> [accessed on 11 November 2020].

¹⁶ On power couples in Greco-Roman antiquity see *Power Couples in Antiquity: Transversal Perspectives*, ed. by Anne Bielman Sánchez (London: Routledge, 2019).

¹⁷ See, for example, John Edwards, *Ferdinand and Isabella* (New York: Pearson, 2004).

¹⁸ See, for example, Melissa Swain, ‘Spousal Sovereignty: The Ruling Couple and its Representations in Quattrocento Italy, with Special Reference to Federico da Montefeltro (1422-1482) and Battista Sforza (ca.1446-1472)’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, New York University, 2016).

The aims and promotional strategies of Andreini and Ramponi show continuity with these early examples of power couples, and their case can also profitably be considered through the lens of celebrity studies. A recently developed branch in this field of scholarship focuses on the different types of celebrity relationships and on the production and reception of celebrity couples in Western media culture.¹⁹ This thesis applies aspects of celebrity studies to the study of early modern theatre by considering different types of professional theatre couples (e. g. married/not married, actors/actors and writers) and analysing the process of construction and reception of the public image of Andreini and Ramponi. It starts from the assumption, now well established in the field of celebrity studies, that successful actors are cultural texts, ideological ‘signs’ which say something about their socio-historical contexts.²⁰

But what did Andreini and Ramponi have in common with the stars of twentieth and twenty-first century show business? Without having the world-wide visibility of Clark Gable and Carole Lombard or Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie, they, too, enjoyed international fame. Like Pitt and Jolie, by getting together they formed ‘a composite überstar’,²¹ furthering the advancement of their individual careers. They did not have a publicist to fashion their image, yet their fashioning strategies were as complex. Their private life was not discussed in tabloids, but gossip about their lives can in fact be found in the epistolary exchanges by or about them. The modes of condemning and idealising these public *personae* have remained substantially unchanged from the seventeenth century to the present day, despite the difference in media – magazines, social networks, television, versus treatises and encomia. To be in a couple provided early modern *comici*, and still provides contemporary stars, with a way to evade social condemnation and to be granted a sort of ethical licence. For actresses, motherhood played (as it still plays today) an important role in obtaining this licence, which acts as a transformative narrative of recovery:²² like Jolie, who, in public opinion, has moved ‘from self-harming, bisexual, incestuous wild child to maternal saint as the nuclear family has stabilized her image’,²³ Ramponi, through motherhood and

¹⁹ See, for example, David P. Marshall, *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Linda R. Williams, ‘Brangelina: Celebrity, Credibility, and the Composite Überstar’, in *Shining in Shadows: Movie Stars of the 2000s*, ed. by Murray Pomerance (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012), pp. 200-19; *First Comes Love: Power Couples, Celebrity Kinship and Cultural Politics*, ed. by Shelley Cobb and Neil Ewen (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015).

²⁰ Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: BFI, 1998), p. 7.

²¹ Williams, p. 200.

²² Diane Negra, ‘Brangelina: The Fertile Valley of Celebrity’, *Velvet Light Trap*, 65 (2010), 60-61.

²³ Williams, pp. 201-202.

performed motherhood, rose above the common consideration of early modern actresses as prostitutes, and achieved acceptability.

These preliminary remarks on the parallels between early modern theatre and twenty-first century cinema are not intended to be exhaustive, but rather to show the enduring nature of the phenomenon considered in this thesis and therefore its potential for further investigation.

2. 'SOSPESE NEL VUOTO DELLA STORIA'

The microhistory of Giovan Battista Andreini and Virginia Ramponi, whilst only one element in a wider phenomenon, represents an ideal *cursus honorum* for professional actors. Through their targeted performances, strategic publications and influential networks of men and women of letters and figures of power, they changed public perception of actors in early modern Italy and managed to achieve high social status despite the unfavourable context of the Counter-Reformation. Before delving into the analysis of specific episodes in the careers of Andreini and Ramponi, it will be useful to provide some coordinates with regards to their lives and to the lives of Francesco and Isabella Andreini.

The careers of Giovan Battista and Virginia were built and developed under the material and spiritual aegis of Francesco and Isabella Andreini, 'le figure più alte ed emblematiche del teatro dei professionisti tra Cinque e Seicento'.²⁴ The biographies of Francesco and Isabella, though foundational in the history of professional actors, seem to be 'sospese nel vuoto della storia', as if they were halfway between history and myth at the very will of the two *comici*.²⁵ Born in Pistoia in 1544,²⁶ Francesco was in fact not a descendant of the noble family of the Cerrachi del Gallo, as he himself suggested in an attempt to falsify his origins, but rather the son of a certain Antonio Andreini of whom we know nothing.²⁷

²⁴ Siro Ferrone, *Attori, mercanti, corsari: la commedia dell'arte in Europa tra Cinque e Seicento* (Turin: Einaudi, 1993), p. XXIII.

²⁵ Ibid., p. XXIII. Ferrone also notes that Isabella and Francesco are in the background 'tutte le volte che i comici si troveranno davanti alla creazione o all'uso di modelli ideali di comportamento, fuori o dentro la scena, nella finzione o nella vita' (p. XXIII). On the life of Isabella Andreini see, for example, Stefano Mazzoni, 'La vita di Isabella', *Culture Teatrali*, 10 (2004), 85-105 and Siro Ferrone, *La Commedia dell'arte: attrici e attori italiani in Europa (XVI-XVIII secolo)* (Turin: Einaudi, 2014), pp. 262-263. On Francesco Andreini see, for example, Roberto Tessari, 'Francesco Andreini e la maschera del Capitano', in Francesco Andreini, *Le bravure del Capitano Spavento*, ed. by Roberto Tessari (Pisa: Giardini, 1987), pp. I-XLIV, and Siro Ferrone, *La Commedia dell'arte*, pp. 257-260. Detailed bibliographic records are also available online as part of the database Archivio Multimediale Attori Italiani (A.M.At.I.): <http://amati.fupress.net/Main.uri> [accessed on 8 July 2020].

²⁶ For documentary evidence of Francesco Andreini's birth, see Anne MacNeil, *Music and Women of the Commedia dell'Arte in the Late Sixteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 187.

²⁷ The falsification of Francesco's genealogy is perpetuated by Giovan Battista Andreini in *La Maddalena* (Venice: Somasco, 1610), p. 4, to which I shall return (Chapter 5). For a confutation of Francesco's noble

His military career is similarly suspended between history and myth: he claimed that it began when he was twenty, and that he fought against the Turks and was taken prisoner by them for eight years. These accounts, unsupported by documentary evidence, provided the actor with a strong historical basis for his character, the blustering Capitano Spavento da Valle Inferna. Isabella Andreini, who was much younger than Francesco, was born in Padua around 1562, into a family of Venetian origins. With their marriage, which took place around 1575, they started their ‘salda comunione di sentimenti e di intenti’,²⁸ forming what was probably the most successful theatre couple in the history of Commedia dell’Arte. In 1576, in Florence, Isabella gave birth to her first child, Giovan Battista, the only of their nine children to follow in the footsteps of his parents in the theatrical world. Not long after, Francesco and Isabella joined the Compagnia de’ Gelosi, to which the most important actors of the first generation of *comici* dell’Arte already belonged, among them Adriano Valerini and Vittoria Piissimi (? – *post* 1595). Francesco and Isabella spent almost their entire artistic career with the Gelosi, although on some occasions they joined the Compagnia dei Confidenti and the Compagnia degli Uniti in their *tournées*.

By the mid-1580s, they had established themselves in the panorama of professional theatre, to the point that in 1587 they obtained the protection of the Medici family for themselves and for their children. Beyond the Medici, in the course of their career, Francesco and Isabella enjoyed the favour and the protection of many influential patrons both in Italy and abroad: Vincenzo I Gonzaga in Mantua, Carlo Emanuele I of Savoy in Turin, Cardinal Cinzio Aldobrandini in Rome and the King and Queen of France, Henry IV and Maria de’ Medici. Amongst the overwhelming number and complex geography of their *tournées*, one performance stands out: the interpretation by Isabella Andreini of *La Pazzia d’Isabella* in May 1589 in Florence, on the occasion of the wedding of Ferdinando I de’ Medici to Christine of Lorraine. The performance is described in detail in the diary of Giuseppe Pavoni, a Bolognese envoy: in his words, Isabella showed ‘nel recitar questa pazzia il suo sano, e dotto intelletto, lasciando [...] tal mormorio e meraviglia negli ascoltatori, che mentre durerà il mondo, sempre sarà lodata la sua bella eloquenza e valore’.²⁹

origin, see Stefano Mazzoni, ‘Genealogia e vicende della famiglia Andreini’, in *Origini della commedia improvvisa o dell’arte*. Atti del XIX Convegno Internazionale Roma 12-14 ottobre, Anagni 15 ottobre, ed. by Maria Chiabò and Federico Doglio (Rome: Edizioni Torre d’Orfeo, 1996), pp. 107-152 (p. 109).

²⁸ Julia Lomuto and Anna Maria Evangelista, ‘Isabella Andreini’, in the A.M.At.I. online database: <http://amati.fupress.net/S100?idattore=245&idmenu=1> [accessed on 10 August 2020].

²⁹ Giuseppe Pavoni, *Diario descritto da Giuseppe Pavoni delle feste celebrate nelle solennissime nozze delli Serenissimi Sposi il Sig. Don Ferdinando Medici e la Sig. Donna Christiana di Loreno Gran Duchi di Toscana* (Bologna: Giovanni Rossi, 1589), p. 46.

Besides their activity as performers of ‘comédie, tragedie, tragicomédie, pastorali, e altri loro virtuosi trattenimenti’,³⁰ Francesco and Isabella were also engaged in writing plays, poems and collections of theatrical dialogues aimed at creating a new image of themselves as *letterati*. In 1601, Isabella published the first edition of her *Rime*.³¹ Her other works were posthumously edited and published by Francesco, whose masterpiece, *Le Bravure del Capitano Spavento*, came out in 1607.³² Their literary image was enhanced by the rich web of contacts with intellectuals and men of letters that Isabella managed to build over the years.

The diva died from complications from a miscarriage in 1604 in Lyon, on the way back to Italy after a successful *tournee* in France. The sodality between herself and her spouse, however, continued well after her death. In 1604, Francesco retired from the stage and dedicated the rest of his days to building a monument *aere perennius* for his wife by publishing her works and other encomiastic works in her praise. He died in 1624 in his estate in Castelforte, near Mantua.

At the point of Francesco Andreini’s death, the career of Giovan Battista Andreini and Virginia Ramponi had been in the ascendant for at least two decades. The information about their lives, which in many ways follow the same lines as the lives of Francesco and Isabella as we shall see, is less mythologised but equally fragmentary.³³ Little is known of the years that preceded their performance at the Accademia degli Spensierati in 1604. Giovan Battista spent his youth in Bologna, where he completed his education. In 1600, in the courtyard of Castel Sant’Angelo in Rome, together with his parents and the Gelosi, he played a role in *La Pazzia d’Isabella*. Even less information is available about the early years of Virginia Ramponi’s life. She was born in 1583, but the place of her birth is still uncertain, perhaps somewhere in Liguria.³⁴ They married probably in 1601. The lack of documents between 1601 and 1604 leaves room for hypotheses: it is likely that in around 1601 they started to perform in a company, probably the Fedeli. Before their early activity as performers, or in parallel to it, Giovan Battista must have had a literary training of some

³⁰ Archivio di Stato di Bologna, Legato, Expeditiones, n. 114, fol. 71^v, quoted in Sergio Monaldini, ‘Il teatro dei comici dell’arte a Bologna’, *Archiginnasio*, 90 (1995), 33-164 (pp. 71-72).

³¹ Isabella Andreini, *Rime* (Milan: Bordone e Locarni, 1601).

³² Francesco Andreini, *Le bravure del capitano Spavento; divise in molti ragionamenti in forma di dialogo, di Francesco Andreini da Pistoia Comico Geloso* (Venice: Giacomo Antonio Somasco, 1607).

³³ For a biographical note on Giovan Battista Andreini and Virginia Ramponi, beyond the studies mentioned in this introduction, see also the online A.M.At.I. database.

³⁴ The Ligurian origin of Ramponi is mentioned in the poetic dialogue by *il Sollevato* included in the encomiastic collection to the actress by the Accademia degli Spensierati. See *Rime in lode della signora Verginia Ramponi Andreini, comica Fedele, detta Florinda* (Florence: Volcmar Timan, 1604), p. 15, to which I shall return (Chapter 3).

sort, and Ramponi instruction as a musician, singer and *improvisatrice*.³⁵ This hypothesis would provide a background for what otherwise appears to be too prodigious a debut: their performance for the Spensierati in 1604, the beginning of their ascendancy, the starting point of this thesis.

From 1604, also as a result of the death of Isabella and the retirement of Francesco, the theatrical activity of Andreini and Ramponi became more intense. In that year, Andreini also made his debut as a writer and published three heterogeneous works: *La Florinda*, the tragedy presented at the Accademia degli Spensierati, *La Saggia Egiziana*, a philosophical dialogue, and *La Divina Visione*, a religious poem. Heterogeneity, manifest from as early on as Andreini's debut, is a characteristic of his literary work. In 1605, Andreini and Ramponi obtained the protection of the Duke of Mantua and became part of his theatre company. At that time, another group of actors, the Accesi, was already part of the company. Andreini and Ramponi entered into competition with the leader of the group, Pier Maria Cecchini and with his wife, Orsola Posmoni. In 1606, in Milan, Ramponi was praised by the Governor of the city for her talent as player and musician, which was even more remarked upon in 1608, on the occasion of the festivities for the wedding of Francesco IV Gonzaga to the Infanta Margherita of Savoy, when Ramponi performed the title role in the *Arianna* by Claudio Monteverdi and Ottavio Rinuccini. During the years which followed, her primacy as a performer was confirmed: in Turin, in 1609, she was the protagonist of a 'favola piscatoria', *Le Trasformazioni di Millefonti*; in 1611, in Casale, she interpreted *Il Rapimento di Proserpina* by Ercole Marliani and Giulio Cesare Monteverdi and *La Turca*, a comedy by Giovan Battista Andreini. In *La Turca*, she played the dual role of twins of opposite sexes, showing her virtuosity in the whirlwind of cross-dressing.

In these years, besides *La Turca*, Andreini wrote three further works: *Lo Schiavetto* (1612), a comedy whose protagonist, cross-dressed, was interpreted by Ramponi; *La Maddalena* (1610), a religious poem; and *L'Adamo* (1613), a religious play dedicated to the queen of France, Maria de' Medici, in the prospect of a French *tournee* for which Ramponi

³⁵ The *improvisatrici* were able to compose impromptu poems and pieces of music. The phenomenon of female *improvisatrici* was especially popular during the eighteenth century and was usually linked to an academic environment. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, however, a similar kind of entertainment was usually offered by women whose social status was less respectable, the *meretrices honestae* (see Section 1.2). On the *improvisatrice* Fortunata Sulgher Fantastici (1755-1824) see, for example, Eleonora Trapani, 'Fortunata Sulgher Fantastici. Vita, opere e improvvisazione' (unpublished master's thesis, Università degli Studi di Firenze, 2007); on Teresa Bandettini Landucci (1763-1837) see Susanne Winter, 'Performatività e improvvisazione: l'artista Teresa Bandettini Landucci', *Italica Wratislaviensia*, 10 (2019), 161-174. A useful online tool for investigation on the *improvisatrici* is the database Donne in Arcadia (1690-1800) <http://www.arcadia.uzh.ch/index.php> [accessed on 23 July 2020]. On the database, see Tatiana Crivelli, 'Archiviare in rete per non archiviare il caso: note sulle poetesse d'Arcadia', *Dimensioni e problemi della ricerca storica*, 1 (2010), 21-29.

led the negotiations. The *tournée* began in the summer of 1613, lasted one year and turned out to be very profitable. Andreini then published three more works: in 1617, *La Maddalena. Sacra rappresentazione*, a religious play on Mary Magdalene, in 1619, the comedy *La Venetiana*, dedicated to the painter Domenico Fetti,³⁶ and in 1620, the tragicomedy *Lelio bandito*.

In 1620, Giovan Battista Andreini began an extramarital affair with a young actress in the company, Virginia Rotari. The two remained together until Andreini's death. The scandal broke out while the company was preparing the second French *tournée*, which lasted from January 1621 until the spring of 1623, with a short return to Italy during Lent 1623. These years were the most prolific of Andreini's career. In 1622, in Paris, he published five comedies: *La Centaura*, *La Ferinda*, *Amor nello Specchio*, *La Sultana* and *Li due Leli simili*. Rotari and Ramponi appear in these comedies as co-protagonists, at the centre of Andreini's dramaturgy, which can be defined as 'un'autobiografia teatrale'.³⁷

From November 1623 to October 1625, Andreini, Ramponi, Rotari, and the rest of the company were once again located in Paris, where Andreini published three works in defence of professional theatre: *Comici martiri e penitenti* (1624, later entitled *Teatro celeste*), *Lo Specchio* (1625) and *La Ferza* (1625). Apart from Andreini's publications, we have few records of these years. From the winter of 1627 until the Carnival of 1629, the *comici* were in Vienna and Prague, engaged by Emperor Ferdinand II. In Vienna, Ramponi was praised once again, for the last time, for her talent as a singer and performer. The year of her death was probably 1631.

After Ramponi died, Andreini continued to work as an actor and a writer, but this event marked the start of his decline. Records of the remaining years of his life are increasingly scarce and his works, apart from few exceptions, were composed not as acts of creativity but rather out of need. Beside numerous Italian *tournées*, he was once again in France between 1643 and 1647, where he published another religious poem on Mary Magdalene, *Le Lagrime* (1643), dedicated to Louis XIII. On his return to Italy, he started to work on his version of Don Juan, *Il nuovo risarcito Convitato di pietra*, completed in 1651. In 1652 he published his last play on Mary Magdalene, *La Maddalena lasciva e penitente*. He died on 7 June 1654, at the Osteria del Giglio in Reggio Emilia.

3. STATE OF THE ART

³⁶ On Fetti, see *Domenico Fetti (1588/89-1623)*, ed. by Eduard A. Safarik (Milan: Electa, 1996). The relationship between Fetti and Andreini will be discussed in Chapter 5.

³⁷ Ferrone, *Attori, mercanti, corsari*, p. 257.

The aim of this thesis is threefold: to look at seventeenth-century Italy through a new lens by analysing the strategies that informed the careers of Andreini and Ramponi as a response to their social and historical context; to show the importance of their status as a couple in their success by uncovering the benefits each obtained from their synergy; to re-define the public roles performed by professional actresses by revealing a new portrait of Ramponi as the leader in the couple and in the company. To fulfil this aim, this study is rooted in a broad research context.

Comici dell'Arte and seventeenth-century Italian society form the core of two seminal volumes that constitute the work *La commedia dell'arte e la società barocca*, conceived together but completed and published separately, in the late 1960s and the beginning of the 1990s respectively. The first volume, *La Fascinazione del teatro*, is by Ferdinando Taviani; the second, *La Professione del teatro*, is by Ferruccio Marotti and Giovanna Romei.³⁸ By means of a critical analysis of a rich anthology of primary sources, these two works provide a first thorough investigation of the reception and production of the work of the *comici* dell'Arte. They belong to an inaugural phase of the investigation of Commedia dell'Arte that has produced foundational studies but has rarely crossed geographical or disciplinary borders.³⁹ In the last twenty years, works on Commedia dell'Arte, and on the context in which Commedia dell'Arte was born, have proliferated. From being a secondary subject in theatre studies because of its 'unscripted' nature, Commedia dell'Arte is now pivotal in the study of European theatre. These new works have radically changed the approach of scholars to the subject and have revealed the importance of taking into account the multimedial and transnational nature of this theatrical phenomenon.

Very recently, the Italian Counter-Reformation, the background against which the history of *comici* dell'Arte must be seen, has been the subject of studies which triggered the 'redemptive [...] journey' of this period by showing its richness in a variety of fields,

³⁸ Ferdinando Taviani, *La commedia dell'arte e la società barocca*. Vol. 1. *La fascinazione del teatro* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1969); Ferruccio Marotti and Giovanna Romei, *La commedia dell'arte e la società barocca*. Vol. 2. *La Professione del teatro* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1991).

³⁹ Among the foundational studies on Commedia dell'Arte, see, for example, Vito Pandolfi, *La commedia dell'Arte. Storia e testo*, 6 vols (Florence: Sansoni, 1957-61); Mario Apollonio, 'Prelezioni sulla commedia dell'arte', *Contributi dell'Istituto di Filologia Moderna, Serie Storia del Teatro*, 1 (1968), 144-190; Ferdinando Taviani and Mirella Schino, *Il segreto della commedia dell'Arte. La memoria delle compagnie italiane del XVI, XVII, e XVIII secolo* (Florence: Usher, 1982); Roberto Tessari, *Commedia dell'arte: la maschera e l'ombra* (Milan: Mursia, 1984); Siro Ferrone, 'Arlecchino rapito. Sulla drammaturgia italiana all'inizio del Seicento', in *Studi di Filologia e Critica offerti dagli allievi a Lanfranco Caretti* (Rome: Salerno, 1985), pp. 319-353; Cesare Molinari, *La Commedia dell'Arte* (Milan: Mondadori, 1985); Ludovico Zorzi, *L'attore, la commedia, il drammaturgo* (Turin: Einaudi, 1990). The first modern editions of comedies by professional actors were published in *Commedie dei Comici dell'Arte*, ed. by Laura Falavolti (Turin: UTET, 1982) and *Commedie dell'Arte*, ed. by Siro Ferrone, 2 vols (Milan: Mursia, 1985-86).

including theatre.⁴⁰ Within the historical context of the Italian Counter-Reformation and its innovations, this thesis pays specific attention to the relationship of Andreini and Ramponi with Italian academies and with the Church. The most recent studies on Italian academies have brought to light the place theatre had in academic life in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italy, stressing the engagement of academicians not only with amateurs but also with professional theatre. An AHRC-funded project on Italian academies resulted in the creation of the British Library Database of the Italian Academies (1525-1700),⁴¹ a useful online tool for consultation, and of the volume *The Italian Academies 1525-1700: Networks of Culture, Innovation, Dissent*, which investigates the relationship between certain academies and their political and religious context and describes their engagement with artistic and literary experiments. The essay by Virginia Cox, 'Members, Muses, Mascots: Women and Italian Academies', included in the volume, provides a reassessment of the participation of women in Italian academies and retraces the relationship of certain actresses and *virtuose*, among them Isabella Andreini and Virginia Ramponi, with these circles of intellectuals.⁴² Further investigation of theatre professionals and academies is led by Lisa Sampson in her essay 'Amateurs Meet Professionals', published in the volume *The Reinvention of Theatre in Sixteenth Century Europe*.⁴³ Sampson has considered the relationship of Adriano Valerini, Isabella Andreini and Giovan Battista Andreini with academies, with particular reference to their literary validation.

The relationship of *comici dell'Arte* and the Church has been the subject of several essays published by Bernadette Majorana from the 1990s onwards. Majorana has frequently paid attention to Giovan Battista Andreini's writings, defining him as a champion of the dialectic between theatre and Christian truth and rejecting the suggestion of any hypocrisy

⁴⁰ Virginia Cox, *The Prodigious Muse: Women's Writing in Counter-Reformation Italy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), p. XXIV. For a revision of the historiography of the Counter-Reformation period see, for example, Mary Laven, 'Encountering the Counter-Reformation', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 59.3 (2006), 706-720; Virginia Cox, *The Prodigious Muse*; Abigail Brundin, 'Re-Writing Trent, or What Happened to Italian Literature in the Wake of the First Indexes of Prohibited Books?', in *Reforming Reformation*, ed. by Thomas F. Mayer (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 197-218; *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Counter-Reformation*, ed. by Alexandra Bamji, Geert H. Janssen, and Mary Laven (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013); and *Innovation in the Italian Counter-Reformation*. In this last volume, on theatre, see Eugenio Refini, 'Reforming Drama: Theater as Spiritual Practice in the Works of Fabio Glisenti', pp. 169-189; Lisa Sampson, 'Deggio ferma tener la santa fede': Representing the Priest in Pastoral Drama in Counter-Reformation Italy', pp. 190-215; and Sarah Gwyneth Ross, 'Playing Milan: Secular Drama, Sacred Reform, and the Family Andreini', pp. 216-237.

⁴¹ See <https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/ItalianAcademies/About.aspx> [accessed on 21 January 2019].

⁴² Virginia Cox, 'Members, Muses, Mascots: Women and Italian Academies', in *The Italian Academies 1525-1700: Networks of Culture, Innovation, Dissent*, ed. by Jane E. Everson, L. Sampson and Denis V. Reidy (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 132-169.

⁴³ Lisa Sampson, 'Amateurs Meet Professionals: Theatrical Activities in Late Sixteenth-Century Italian Academies', in *The Reinvention of Theatre in Sixteenth Century Europe: Traditions, Texts and Performance* (Oxford: Legenda, 2015), pp. 187-218.

in his display of devoutness.⁴⁴ Her recent contribution, ‘Commedia dell’Arte and the Church’,⁴⁵ retraces the key stages in the polemics of clerics against professional actors and acknowledges the ambivalent position of the Church, which on the one hand issued vetoes to the performances of the *comici* and, on the other, acknowledged the attraction of theatre to the public. Majorana has also considered the role of written works by *comici* in the revaluation of their status. The relationship of Church and *comici* has also been investigated by Fabrizio Fiaschini, who has suggested applying the framework of the studies of popular religion to this subject, thus stressing the links rather than the differences between the two entities.⁴⁶

The recent contribution by Majorana is part of the volume *Commedia dell’Arte in Context*, which aims to retrace the history of this theatrical phenomenon ‘in light of its legendary past, with special focus on the theatrical practices and theoretical deliberations’ of the nineteenth century.⁴⁷ The book includes contributions by several international scholars, from Siro Ferrone to Virginia Scott, Robert Henke to Ferdinando Taviani, María del Valle Ojeda Calvo to Piermario Vescovo, and from Margaret A. Katritzky to Anne MacNeil. Their approach to the phenomenon of Commedia dell’Arte, with a multidisciplinary and a transnational perspective, draws on works edited by Robert Henke and Eric Nicholson on international exchange and mobility in early modern theatre.⁴⁸

In the debate between Church and actors, a place of (dis)honour is shared by the harsh critiques addressed by clerics to professional actresses. In her essay ‘Finzioni, imitazioni, azioni: donne e teatro’, Majorana has analysed these accusations against the background of the social status of actresses, whose behaviour was in contrast with the precepts of prescriptive literature for sixteenth- and seventeenth-century women.⁴⁹ The contrast between rules of conduct for early modern women and women’s conduct on stage

⁴⁴ See Bernadette Majorana, ‘Lo pseudo-Segneri e il teatro celeste’, p. 380. See also Majorana, ‘Un ‘gemino valor’: mestiere e virtù dei comici dell’Arte nel primo Seicento’, *Medioevo e Rinascimento*, 6.3 (1992), 173-193; Majorana, ‘Governo del corpo, governo dell’anima: Attori e spettatori nel teatro italiano del XVII secolo’, in *Disciplina dell’anima, disciplina del corpo e disciplina della società tra medioevo ed età moderna*. Annali dell’Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento, ed. by Paolo Prodi (Bologna: Il mulino, 1994), pp. 437-490.

⁴⁵ Majorana, ‘Commedia dell’Arte and the Church’, in *Commedia dell’Arte in Context*, ed. by Christopher Balme, Piermario Vescovo and Daniele Vianello (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 133-148.

⁴⁶ Fabrizio Fiaschini, ‘*Negotium diaboli*. Approcci, valutazioni e ipotesi di ricerca intorno ai rapporti tra Chiesa post-tridentina e professionismo dello spettacolo’, *Aprosiana. Rivista annuale di studi Barocchi*, 9 (2001), 309-328.

⁴⁷ Daniele Vianello, ‘Introduction. Commedia dell’Arte: History, Myth, Reception’, in *Commedia dell’Arte in Context*, pp. 1-13 (p. 1).

⁴⁸ *Transnational Exchange in Early Modern Theater*, ed. by Robert Henke and Eric Nicholson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008); *Transnational Mobilities in Early Modern Theater*, ed. by Robert Henke and Eric Nicholson (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).

⁴⁹ Bernadette Majorana, ‘Finzioni, imitazioni, azioni: donne e teatro’, in *Donna, disciplina, creanza cristiana dal XV al XVII secolo. Studi e testi a stampa*, ed. by Gabriella Zarri (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1996), pp. 121-139.

has also been pointed out by Eric Nicholson, who has examined a selection of female characters, performers and playwrights in the early modern western tradition and considered their status within the framework of women's social condition in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁵⁰ More recent works, by Richard Andrews, Rosalind Kerr, and Simona Brunetti, have investigated the advent of women on stage, and revisionist studies have recently been produced on women in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italy. The works by Virginia Cox and Diana Robin, which must be framed within the general reconsideration of the post-Tridentine period mentioned above, dispute the historiographical notion of the Counter-Reformation as intrinsically misogynistic and have shown the beneficial effects it had on the Italian tradition of women's writing.⁵¹

Richard Andrews' essay, 'Isabella Andreini and Others: Women on Stage in the Late Cinquecento', included in a collection of studies of women in Italian Renaissance culture and society,⁵² shows the fruitfulness of this subject and has inaugurated a rich season of publications by Anglophone scholars on Italian actresses. It retraces the history of the advent of women on stage and points out their status as objects of an admiring cult, providing a starting point to the monograph by Rosalind Kerr, *The Rise of the Diva on the Sixteenth-Century Commedia dell'Arte Stage*,⁵³ which, published in 2015, offers considerations on the reception of actresses and, on the basis of theories of celebrity, has examined the so-called 'it-effect' generated by such divas in their audience. Documentary and biographical studies have recently been produced by Italian scholars on early modern actresses, such as Paola Besutti's work on the notarial deeds of *comici*, which consider the status of actresses from a legal point of view,⁵⁴ the essay by Simona Brunetti, 'Esordi del professionismo attorico femminile nella commedia dell'arte',⁵⁵ which has brought to light new archival

⁵⁰ Eric Nicholson, 'The Theatre', in *A History of Women in the West*. Vol. 3. *Renaissance and Enlightenment Paradoxes*, ed. by Natalie Z. Davis and Arlette Farge (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993) (orig. *Storia delle donne in Occidente. Dal Rinascimento all'età moderna* (Rome: Laterza, 1991)), pp. 285-314.

⁵¹ See Diana Robin, *Publishing Women: Salons, the Presses, and the Counter-Reformation in Sixteenth-Century Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Virginia Cox, *Women's Writing in Italy, 1400-1650* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); Cox, *The Prodigious Muse*.

⁵² Richard Andrews, 'Isabella Andreini and Others: Women on Stage in the Late Cinquecento', in *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society*, ed. by Letizia Panizza (Oxford: Legenda, 2000), pp. 316-333. In the same volume, on Italian actresses, see also Maggie Günsberg, 'Gender Deceptions: Cross-Dressing in Italian Renaissance Comedy', pp. 334-349.

⁵³ Rosalind Kerr, *The Rise of the Diva on the Sixteenth-Century Commedia dell'Arte Stage* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015).

⁵⁴ Paola Besutti, 'Da "L'Arianna" a "La Ferinda": Giovan Battista Andreini e la "comedia musicale all'improvviso"', *Musica Disciplina*, 49 (1995), 227-276 and Besutti, 'Storie di emancipazione: Virginia Ramponi Andreini (1583-1631) dal suocero al marito', *Italica Wratislaviensis*, 10.2 (2019), 65-83.

⁵⁵ Simona Brunetti, 'Esordi del professionismo attorico femminile nella commedia dell'arte', in *Donne al lavoro: ieri, oggi domani*, ed. by Saveria Chemotti (Padua: Il Poligrafo, 2009), pp. 71-87.

material on the first performances of actresses in Italy, and Eloisa Pierucci's investigation of professional actresses active between 1560 and 1604.⁵⁶

The documents analysed in these studies have been identified through the online database of the 'Progetto Herla', founded in 1999 and sponsored by the 'Mantova Capitale Europea dello Spettacolo' foundation. This international project, which has contributed to the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge on Commedia dell'Arte, co-ordinates the identification, databasing, and interpretation of archival documents mainly related to the entertainments sponsored by the Gonzaga family, written between 1480 and 1700. So far, the database includes more than 12,000 entries.⁵⁷ The documents identified for the 'Progetto Herla' have been foundational to the investigation of the relationship between the *comici* and Italian and international courts.⁵⁸ They have also prompted a number of monographic studies of characters and interpreters of Commedia dell'Arte, like Siro Ferrone's volume on Tristano Martinelli (1557-1630), the actor known to have given the name of Arlecchino, or Harlequin, to the character of the servant (*Arlecchino: vita e avventure di Tristano Martinelli*),⁵⁹ and Alessandra Mignatti's work on the character of Zanni.⁶⁰

The archival material collected on the Herla database has also informed Fabrizio Fiaschini's monograph on Giovan Battista Andreini,⁶¹ thirteen years after Maurizio Rebaudengo's. In 1994, in the wake of studies on Commedia dell'Arte in the previous twenty years that had identified Giovan Battista Andreini as the most important playwright

⁵⁶ Eloisa Pierucci, 'Il professionismo attorico femminile tra 1560 e 1604. Censimento, biografie e tecniche di recitazione' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Università degli Studi di Firenze, 2018). For other biographical profiles of early modern professional actresses, see also Francesca Fantappiè, 'Angelina senese' alias Angela Signorini Nelli. Vita artistica di un'attrice nel Seicento italiano: dal Don Giovanni ai libertini', *Bullettino senese di Storia Patria*, 116 (2009), 212-267; Francesca Simoncini, 'Innamorate dell'arte. Gli esordi teatrali di Barbara Flaminia', in *Omaggio a Siro Ferrone*, ed. by Stefano Mazzoni (Florence: Le Lettere, 2011), pp. 106-114.

⁵⁷ The online database is at <http://www.capitalespettacolo.it/default.asp> [accessed on 12 May 2018].

⁵⁸ See, for example, *I Gonzaga e l'Impero*; Simona Brunetti, 'Celebraciones y ocasiones festivas en el primer viaje de Vincenzo Gonzaga a Flandes (1599). Avances de investigación a partir del Archivo Herla', in *El legado de Borgoña. Fiesta y ceremonia cortesana en la Europa de los Austrias (1454-1648)*. VIII Seminario Internacional de Historia (Madrid, 28 noviembre-1 diciembre 2007), ed. by Krista De Jonge, Bernardo J. García García, Alicia Esteban Estríngana (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2010), pp. 241-265; Blythe Alice Raviola, 'Modelli alternativi: giostre, tornei, allegorie d'acqua a Mantova e Torino fra Cinque e Seicento', in *La Ronde. Giostre, esercizi cavallereschi e loisir in Francia e Piemonte fra Medioevo e Ottocento*. Atti del Convegno internazionale di studi (Museo storico dell'Arma di Cavalleria di Pinerolo, 15-17 giugno 2006), ed. by Franca Varallo (Florence: Olschki, 2010), pp. 63-82. On the relationship between Andreini and Ramponi and international courts, see, for example, Otto G. Schindler, 'Viaggi teatrali tra l'Inquisizione e il Sacco. Comici dell'Arte di Mantova alle corti degli Asburgo d'Austria', in *I Gonzaga e l'Impero itinerari dello spettacolo. Con una selezione di materiali dell'Archivio informatico Herla (1560-1630)*, ed. by Umberto Artioli and Cristina Grazioli (Florence: Le lettere, 2005), pp. 107-160. In the same volume, see also Cristina Grazioli, 'Le incoronazioni praguesi del 1627 e la tournée imperiale dei Fedeli (1627-1629)', pp. 451-491.

⁵⁹ Siro Ferrone, *Arlecchino: vita e avventure di Tristano Martinelli* (Rome: Laterza, 2006).

⁶⁰ Alessandra Mignatti, *La maschera e il viaggio. Sull'origine dello Zanni* (Bergamo: Moretti & Vitali, 2007).

⁶¹ Fabrizio Fiaschini, *L'incessabile agitazione: Giovan Battista Andreini tra professione teatrale, cultura letteraria e religione* (Pisa: Giardini editori e stampatori, 2007).

of the Italian seventeenth century,⁶² Rebaudengo presented a biographical profile of Andreini, considered the legacy of his parents, and explored his major dramaturgical innovations.⁶³ An original approach to Andreini was adopted by Fabrizio Fiaschini, who retraced the career of the *comico*, pointing out the religious matrix of many of his works. The most recent monograph on Andreini was published by Vittorio Tranquilli in 2010 and mainly summarised existing contributions on the *comico* and playwright, with the exception of the final section, which prompted reflections on Andreini's *Lelio Bandito* and *Il nuovo risarcito concitato di Pietra*.⁶⁴ Although an English monograph on Andreini is still lacking, the works by Sarah Gwyneth Ross are a useful reference on the Andreini family more broadly and on their relationship with the republic of letters.⁶⁵

In terms of Andreini's own works (see Chronology), only fourteen out of fifty-seven have been re-published in Italian modern editions,⁶⁶ and a bilingual edition of one his plays, *Amor nello specchio*, has been edited and translated by Jon R. Snyder and published in 2009 for the Toronto Series, *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe*.⁶⁷ The delay in the publication of modern editions and translations, mainly due to an obstinate mistrust of the literary value of texts by the *comici*, and to a long-standing negative view about literature of the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, has made it difficult to fully appreciate

⁶² Siro Ferrone, *Commedie dell'Arte*, II, p. 11.

⁶³ Maurizio Rebaudengo, *Giovan Battista Andreini tra poetica e drammaturgia* (Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1994).

⁶⁴ Vittorio Tranquilli, *La regola e la trasgressione: dalla commedia dell'arte al Don Giovanni attraverso Giovan Battista Andreini* (Rome: Aracne, 2010).

⁶⁵ Besides the essay 'Playing Milan', see, for example, Ross, 'Performing Humanism: The Andreini Family and the Republic of Letters in Counter-Reformation Italy', in *For the Sake of Learning: Essays in Honor of Anthony Grafton*, ed. by Ann M. Blair and Anja-Silvia Goeing (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. 140-156; Ross, 'Apollo in the Counter-Reformation: Giovan Battista Andreini, Literary Authority, and the Commedia dell'Arte', in *Rituals of Politics and Culture in Early Modern Europe: Essays in Honour of Edward Muir*, ed. by Mark Jurdjevic and Rolf Ström-Olsen (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2016), pp. 283-308; Ross, 'New Perspectives on Patria: The Andreini Performance of Florentine Citizenship', in *Florence in the Early Modern World: New Perspectives*, ed. by Nicholas Scott Baker and Brian J. Maxson (London: Routledge, 2019), pp. 236-255.

⁶⁶ In chronological order of publication (when two editions exist, the most recent one is listed): 'Lo Schiavetto', in Falavolti, pp. 57-213; 'Le due comedie in comedia', in *Commedie dell'Arte*, ed. by Siro Ferrone, II, pp. 9-105; 'La Ferza', in Marotti and Romei, pp. 489-534; *Amor nello specchio*, ed. by Salvatore Maira and Anna-Micaela Borracci (Rome: Bulzoni, 1997); 'Il nuovo risarcito Convitato di Pietra', in *Don Giovanni o l'estrema avventura del teatro. «Il nuovo risarcito Convitato di Pietra» di Giovan Battista Andreini*, ed. by Silvia Carandini and Luciano Mariti (Rome: Bulzoni, 2003); *La Centauro*, ed. by Guido Davico Bonino and Franco Vazzoler (Genoa: Il Melangolo, 2004); *La Maddalena lasciva e penitente*, ed. by Rossella Palmieri (Bari: Palomar, 2006); *L'Adamo*, ed. by Alessandra Ruffino (Trento: La Finestra, 2007); *La Ferinda*, ed. by Rossella Palmieri (Taranto: Lisi, 2008); 'La Saggia Egiziana', 'La Divina Visione', 'Prologo in dialogo tra Momo e la Verità', 'Teatro Celeste', in *Opere Teoriche*, ed. by Rossella Palmieri (Florence: Le Lettere, 2013). Alessandra Munari provided a modern edition of *L'Ismenia* in her doctoral thesis, 'L'Ismenia, opera reale e pastorale di Giovan Battista Andreini, «lo sfortunato fabbricatore di castelli in aria»: edizione critica e commentata' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Università degli Studi di Padova, 2018), which will shortly be published. Annamaria Azzarone is currently preparing a modern edition of the comedy *La Turca*.

⁶⁷ Giovan Battista Andreini, *Love in the Mirror: A Bilingual Edition*, ed. and trans. by Jon R. Snyder (Toronto: Iter Press and Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2009).

Andreini's theatrical language, and in particular his plurilingualism, so far explored only by Luca D'Onghia in his essay 'Aspetti della lingua comica di Giovan Battista Andreini', published in 2011.⁶⁸

While the life and works of Giovan Battista Andreini have been the subject of investigations mainly led by historians of literature and theatre, the multidisciplinary turn in Commedia dell'Arte scholarship of the last twenty years has contributed to a clearer definition of the role of Virginia Ramponi in the musical and artistic panorama of seventeenth-century Italy.⁶⁹ The musicologist Emily Wilbourne has explored the career of Virginia Ramponi with particular reference to her singing performances.⁷⁰ In her monograph, *Seventeenth-Century Opera and the Sound of Commedia dell'Arte*, she traces the roots of early opera back to the sounds of Commedia dell'Arte and refers to a number of case studies, among them Ramponi's interpretation of Monteverdi's *Arianna*.⁷¹ Her book enriches the enquiry started by Anne MacNeil in her monograph, *Music and Women of the Commedia dell'Arte in the Late Sixteenth Century* (2003), which moved between the lines of performance studies, music history, theatre history, and women's studies and retraced the activity of the leading actresses as music-makers in the Compagnia dei Gelosi, among them Isabella Andreini.⁷²

As far as the visual arts are concerned, the central place of iconography in the promotional strategies of *comici* dell'Arte has been investigated by various scholars from the 1980s onwards.⁷³ The iconographic studies of Andreini and Ramponi have been especially

⁶⁸ Luca D'Onghia, 'Aspetti della lingua comica di Giovan Battista Andreini', *La lingua italiana*, 7 (2011), 57-80. On the Neapolitan language in Andreini's comedy *Lelio bandito*, see Serena Laiena, 'Il napoletano della Ridicolosa. Riflessioni linguistiche sulla commedia diletantesca del Seicento' (unpublished master's thesis, Università degli Studi di Roma 'La Sapienza', 2016).

⁶⁹ In the wide field of musical studies on Commedia dell'Arte, beyond the studies I will mention below, see, for example, for music: Nino Pirrotta, 'Commedia dell'Arte and Opera', in *Music and Culture in Italy from the Middle Ages to the Baroque: A Collection of Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp. 343-360, and the special issue by Sergio Monaldini, 'Teatro dell'Arte, Commedia dell'Arte, Opera in Musica', *Musicalia*, 8 (2011).

⁷⁰ Emily Wilbourne, "'Isabella ringiovinita': Virginia Ramponi Andreini before 'Arianna'", *Recercare*, 19 (2007), 47-71; Wilbourne, "'Verginia Andreini, detta Florinda' tra soggettività biografica e soggettività rappresentata", *Teatro e storia*, 28 (2007), 394-406; Wilbourne, 'La Florinda: The Performance of Virginia Ramponi Andreini' (unpublished doctoral thesis, New York University, 2008).

⁷¹ Emily Wilbourne, *Seventeenth-Century Opera and the Sound of Commedia dell'Arte* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

⁷² Anne MacNeil, *Music and Women of the Commedia dell'Arte*.

⁷³ On iconography in Commedia dell'Arte see, for example, Maria Ines Aliverti, 'Per un'iconografia della commedia dell'Arte', *Teatro e Storia*, 4 (1989), 71-88; Cesare Molinari, 'Sull'iconografia come fonte della storia del teatro', *Biblioteca teatrale*, 37-38 (1996), 19-40; Siro Ferrone, *La Commedia dell'arte*, pp. 229-241; Margaret A. Katritzky, *The Art of Commedia: A Study in the Commedia dell'Arte 1560-1620 with Special Reference to the Visual Records* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006); Maria Ines Aliverti, 'An Icon for a New Woman: A Previously Unidentified Portrait of Isabella Andreini by Paolo Veronese', *Early Theatre*, 11.2 (2008), 158-180; Renzo Guardenti, 'Iconography of the Commedia dell'Arte', in *Commedia dell'Arte in Context*, pp. 208-226.

fruitful, revealing that the couple devoted special care to graphic representations,⁷⁴ and leading to the identification of the actress as a model for a number of paintings by Domenico Fetti.⁷⁵

The tentacular development in scholarship on Commedia dell'Arte, which has grown during the last twenty years, has substantially enriched the field. Yet, the parallel advancement of multiple disciplinary approaches to Commedia dell'Arte has left many interstitial spaces unexplored. The theatre couple, for example, has so far been overlooked by scholars, although its importance in the history of professional theatre has emerged on several occasions in monographic studies on *comici*.⁷⁶ Works on Andreini and Ramponi have, to date, failed to consider the fact that their careers were bound together. These individual biographical approaches to a system which was made up of groups and couples have so far misinformed our understanding of the construction of the 'historical artifact' – the career of the *comici* – and led to a neglect of systemic influences.

In the studies conducted so far, other gaps appear, which this thesis intends to fill. Recent works on Andreini, for example, have preferred a reading of his career in a religious key, thus overlooking the strategic nature of his activity. Ramponi's life in the spotlight has attracted scholarly attention, but her actions behind the scenes remain uncovered. Moreover, studies to date of female interpreters of Commedia dell'Arte have hardly ever considered their agency; the value of academic encomia as historical documents has been disregarded; the migration of arguments from writings by academicians to works by *comici* still lacks investigation. As a tool for the analysis of Counter-Reformation Italy, the themes which informed the texts by *comici* have scarcely been touched.

By looking at the lives of Andreini and Ramponi, this thesis sheds light on these areas and suggests new directions in the study of Commedia dell'Arte.

4. METHODOLOGY

The lives of the *comici* dell'Arte are always to some extent 'sospese nel vuoto della storia', given the difficulty of retracing the constant movement of actors in Italy and abroad, and

⁷⁴ See, for example, Maria Ines Aliverti, 'Una ribellione silente: ipotesi su un ritratto ignoto di Giovan Battista Andreini', in *Maestranze, artisti e apparatori per la scena dei Gonzaga (1480-1630)*. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi (Mantova, 26-28 febbraio 2015), ed. by Simona Brunetti (Bari: Edizioni di Pagina, 2016), pp. 316-335 (p. 316).

⁷⁵ Siro Ferrone, 'Pose sceniche di una famiglia d'attori', in *Domenico Fetti 1588/89-1623*, ed. by Eduard A. Safarik (Milan: Electa, 1996), pp. 51-62.

⁷⁶ See, for example, Fiaschini, *L'incessabile agitazione*, p. 26; Ross, 'Performing Humanism', pp. 142-144.

the complexity of reconstructing their performances. In our case study, these two issues are mitigated but not altogether resolved by the examination of first-hand archival material and primary sources. The rich correspondence of Andreini and Ramponi with the Gonzaga court and with other patrons allows us to follow some of their movements. Yet two facts must be taken into account. Firstly, the documentation is defective: there are gaps in the account of their lives that are yet to be filled. Secondly, the prevalence of records from the chanceries might lead to the misconception that the couple's theatrical activity was performed mainly at court. In fact, as Ferrone suggests, 'il teatro di mestiere che viene rappresentato dalla documentazione in nostro possesso è solo la parte più tutelata e organizzata di un movimento più largo e variegato'.⁷⁷ As far as the second issue is concerned – the complexity of reconstructing their performances – the numerous theatrical publications by Andreini are windows on some aspects of them. Yet, Andreini's texts are the result of a 'drammaturgia consuntiva', usually written and published *a posteriori*, after months or years of performance on stage. The construction of the texts occurred 'per accumulo', the accumulation and storage of materials collected during various performances over time. The published texts retain relics of years of performance but cannot be considered documents of specific performances, which remain ephemeral and intangible because of the very nature of theatre and of *comici's* specific mode of production, which included a high level of improvisation.

The investigation in this thesis is informed by setting into dialogue a variety of sources. Clerics, academicians, rulers, actors in post-Tridentine Italy have been interrogated in the writing of this story. Of the numerous performances and publications by and about Andreini and Ramponi, this study has privileged texts and events relevant to the analysis of their couple-strategy. The works by Andreini included in the *corpus* of this thesis, essential in defining the professional identity of the author and in fostering, in different ways, the advancement of the couple, share an original, indirect and lively re-elaboration of the socio-cultural dynamics which involved the *comici* in seventeenth-century Italy, and are innovative in their defence of the profession.⁷⁸

First-hand archival material – letters by or about Ramponi – has been surveyed to bring to light the position of the actress as the leader of the couple and of the company (Chapter 4), while encomiastic poems for Ramponi, in the absence of other records, have

⁷⁷ Siro Ferrone, *Attori, mercanti, corsari*, p. 3.

⁷⁸ The late theoretical production by Andreini suffers because it is substantially mechanical in its repetition of arguments which were common in philo-theatrical treatises, while in his comedies there is a tendency to focus on personal rather than on social dynamics.

been deployed as a tool through which to reconstruct her performance at the Accademia degli Spensierati (Chapter 3). The consistency of the self-fashioning and marketing strategies established by Andreini in the year of his academic debut has emerged from an extended critical analysis of a selection of primary sources: a play, a treatise, a dialogue, and a poem (Chapter 2). Additionally, a *corpus* of his works, all on the same subject, has been examined with the aim of showing the links between this subject, their couple-strategy, and the ongoing debate on professional theatre (Chapter 5). Treatises and encomia have been analysed as representative of the opposing views of two cultural institutions, the Church and the academies, on the same phenomenon: professional theatre (Chapter 1).

The picture which emerges from this thesis is built through a plurality of voices, some discordant, some harmonious, always revealing aspects of professional theatre thus far overlooked. By weaving together these multiple sources, this thesis not only shows the richness of this field of investigation, but writes a new history of Andreini and Ramponi, revealing the strategies behind their actions, establishing the value of the couple within the social and financial system of *comici* dell'Arte and restoring parallel profiles of two successful performers and talented 'decipherers' of their century.

5. STRUCTURE

This work is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 covers the debate on professional theatre in early modern Italy. It analyses the arguments advanced by the detractors of professional actors, in particular members of the clergy, for their social exclusion and unveils the role of the academies in the construction of a positive idea of the performers. It traces the arguments advanced by the *comici* in defence of their profession back to early academic encomia for actresses, especially those for the *diva* Vincenza Armani, and provides an analysis of the events which acted as precedents for the career path of Andreini and Ramponi.

The promotional strategies of Andreini and Ramponi are the subject of Chapters 2 to 5: subdivided into two parts, they cover a time span which extends from 1604 to 1631. The planned debut of Andreini and Ramponi as a couple at the Accademia degli Spensierati in Florence in 1604 is the focus of Chapters 2 and 3, as it marks the beginning of their rise to fame. This event is presented, as mentioned, through a double perspective, by offering a pair of mirrored yet dissimilar images. In Chapter 2, it is considered from Andreini's perspective, as his academic debut in the role of a man of letters. The complexity of his

self-representation and marketing strategies emerges from the analysis of the play presented to the Spensierati, *La Florinda*, and the works published by Andreini in the same year. The strategies established in 1604 lay the foundation for the successful career of the couple. In Chapter 3, the focus moves to Ramponi's experience of the event. This time, the reasons for her success are not linked to a personal literary production, since Ramponi did not publish any works, but must be found in indirect accounts of the performance of the actress. The academic encomia written by the Spensierati for Ramponi are presented as valuable historical documents which provide answers to so far unresolved questions about the attendance of actresses at academic gatherings.

Chapters 4 and 5 explore the successful career of Andreini and Ramponi from 1605 to 1631, the alleged year of her death, following two threads: for Ramponi, epistolary agency; for Andreini, the subject of Mary Magdalene. Through analysis of unpublished archival documents, Chapter 4 unveils Ramponi's contribution to the success and financial stability of the couple. It proves her previously unremarked pre-eminence in negotiations with the authorities and her role as a leader in the company. In Chapter 5, Andreini's publications on Mary Magdalene are considered as pursuing and enhancing the strategies established in the year of the academic debut. Mary Magdalene, like the character of Florinda in the 1604 tragedy, is considered as a literary transposition of the actress which strategically relies on a religious subtext. Through this *corpus* of works, the chapter reveals how Andreini engaged with Counter-Reformation thought. It suggests an original reading of these texts as Andreini's reflection on the oxymoronic perception of actresses.

The pages which follow propose a contribution to the understanding of the most celebrated and vilified professional category in early modern Italy, that of professional actors, fascinating in its very ambivalence. By taking a close look at the lives of Andreini and Ramponi, the present study brings to light the layered and complex nature of the strategies underlying the careers of the *comici*, thus preventing inadequate and partial classifications. Their stories are essential to the comprehension of the early modern period and mark the beginning of a narrative, that of the theatre couple, whose branches extend forward to us today.

NOTE TO THE READER

Seventeenth-century Italian primary sources have been transcribed adopting conservative criteria, following the original text as closely as possible. Some changes have been introduced, however, for ease of reading:

- a) *u* and *v* have been distinguished according to modern usage;
- b) etymological and para-etymological *hs* have been eliminated according to modern usage;
- c) ampersands have been expanded to *e*;
- d) other abbreviations have also been expanded (e.g. **p** > per, V.S. > Vostra Signoria, S.ra > Signora);
- e) some minor changes have been introduced in punctuation including the use of apostrophes to aid comprehension.

Any apparent incongruities in spelling and morphology that have been preserved are part of the original text.

ABBREVIATIONS

ASMN: Mantova, Archivio di Stato

ASF: Firenze, Archivio di Stato

Chapter 1

Negotium Diaboli, Negotium Dei:

The Controversial Nature of Professional Theatre

1.1 DIACHRONY AND SYNCHRONY IN COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE

In 1604 the actress and singer Virginia Ramponi and her husband, the playwright and actor Giovan Battista Andreini, presented the tragedy *La Florinda* at the Accademia degli Spensierati in Florence. The tragedy was written by Andreini; Ramponi performed selected passages of it for the academic audience.¹ The episode is unparalleled in the history of Commedia dell'Arte. It represents the acme of the social rise of professional actors and epitomises the agents and strategies which allowed it. Far from being improvised, this early performance of the couple of *comici* was the result of decades of attempts, struggles, claims and achievements by people who had made a living out of theatre in the complex historical context of the Italian Counter-Reformation. Before considering the events of 1604, which are the core of this thesis, it is necessary to provide an overview of the events in the history of early modern professional theatre that preceded the career path of Andreini and Ramponi and that influenced the choices they made.

The dramatic form known as Commedia dell'Arte was the product of different theatrical experiences, based in the Lombard, Roman and, most notably, Venetian-Paduan regions of Italy in the first half of the sixteenth century.² The documentation available to date is still very scarce. The core of the Commedia dell'Arte system of characters consisted of Zanni, the *maschera* of the Bergamask servant, and his typical comic counterpart, the master Pantalone, both rooted in the Veneto region.³ The first documented contract of a

¹ On the passages performed by Ramponi for the Spensierati, see Chapter 3.

² On the origin of theatrical professionalism see, for example, Ferruccio Marotti, 'Premessa', in *La commedia dell'arte e la società barocca*. Vol. 2. *La Professione del teatro*, pp. XXXI-XXXVI. See also Peter Jordan, *The Venetian Origins of the Commedia dell'Arte* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

³ The character of Pantalone was also known as Magnifico. On the interplay between Pantalone and Zanni see, for example, Mario Apollonio, 'Il duetto di Magnifico e Zanni alle origini dell'arte', in *Studi sul teatro veneto fra rinascimento ed età barocca*, ed. by Maria T. Muraro (Florence: Olschki, 1971), pp. 193-220; *Il Teatro italiano*.

professional theatre company, the contract of the ‘fraternal compagnia’, was signed, again in Veneto, in 1545.⁴ By committing the signatories to participation in the *compagnia* for an agreed period of time, to following a leader and to sharing the profits generated by their public performances, the document transformed an occasional group of actors into a trading company. According to Ester Cocco, the scholar who located and published the contract in 1915, the document sets out the main features of Commedia dell’Arte theatre: ‘il costituirsi delle compagnie, l’andare di luogo in luogo, il recitare non più occasionalmente, ma di continuo e per lucro, in una parola l’apparire dei comici di mestiere, sembra [...] proprio della Commedia dell’Arte’.⁵

The value of this document is unquestionable. Nevertheless, the history of Commedia dell’Arte as we know it, in its mythical and mesmerising features, is above all a history of actresses. It started in the mid-sixteenth century, when women began to join the *compagnie*. The first contract of which we are aware that was signed by an actress, the Roman Lucretia Senensis, is dated 1564,⁶ but women were acting on stage well before this contract was produced. In Lyon, in 1548, an Italian company performed Bibbiena’s *La Calandra* for Henri II and, according to the second-hand report of the diarist Pierre Bourdeille (ca.1540-1614), the group was made up of ‘comédiens et comédientes’.⁷ In Italy, the first recorded performance of an actress as member of a professional company was that of the Roman actress Barbara Flaminia (1540-1584), which took place in Mantua on 6 August 1562.⁸ The arrival of actresses, the first in Europe, in Italian companies was, for theatrical professionals, ‘una novità destinata a modificare sostanzialmente la loro vicenda’.⁹ Women on stage changed not only the history of *comici* dell’Arte, but the history of theatre as a

Vol. 2, Tome 3. *La Commedia del Cinquecento*, ed. by Guido Davico Bonino (Turin: Einaudi, 1978), p. XXVI; Richard Andrews, ‘Theatre’, in *The Cambridge History of Italian Literature*, ed. by Peter Brand and Lino Pertile (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 277-298 (p. 283). The Venetian buffoon Zuan Polo (ca.1454–1540) was among the first interpreters of the character of Zanni and brought him to success. On Zuan Polo see, for example, Robert Henke, *Performance and Literature in the Commedia dell’Arte* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 50-68.

⁴ The contract is transcribed in Tessari, *Commedia dell’arte*, pp. 113-114. For an English translation, see Kenneth Richards and Laura Richards, *The Commedia dell’Arte: A Documentary History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 44-46. On the first professional companies, see Siro Ferrone, *La Commedia dell’arte*, pp. 25-39.

⁵ Ester Cocco, ‘Una compagnia comica della prima metà del secolo XVI’, *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana*, 65 (1915), 55-70, quoted in Taviani and Schino, p. 183.

⁶ The contract is transcribed in Taviani and Schino, p. 182.

⁷ *Oeuvres de Brantôme*, ed. by Ludovic Lalanne (Paris: Renouard, 1867), Vol. 3, pp. 256-58. See Virginia Scott, ‘La Virtù et la Volupté. Models for the Actress in Early Modern Italy and France’, *Theatre Research International*, 23.2 (1998), 152-158.

⁸ Simona Brunetti, ‘Esordi del professionismo attorico femminile’, pp. 73-74. On the first appearances of women on the Italian stage, see also Richard Andrews, ‘Isabella Andreini and Others’, pp. 316-333, and Rosalind Kerr, *The Rise of the Diva*.

⁹ Marotti, ‘Premessa’, p. XLIII.

whole. It is now common practice to associate Commedia dell'Arte with its masks,¹⁰ and with the idea of improvisation, although this latter conceived in modern terms of spontaneous extemporaneity and therefore far from the original idea of improvisation of *comici* dell'Arte, which meant to build carefully orchestrated performances by combining the stock of jokes and physical sequences that every character knew by heart.¹¹ Masks and improvisation were at the core of the transformation of the history of Commedia dell'Arte into a myth that took place during the Romantic period and in the twentieth century,¹² a model of reception that led to the disregarding of the most important and enduring legacy of this theatrical form: the role of actresses.

The presence of female performers led to a revolution in the method of theatrical production: the centre of gravity of the performance of *comici* dell'Arte shifted from the comicality of Pantalone and Zanni to the sensuality of the Innamorate, played by the *prime donne* of the companies. But the revolution went well beyond the theatre. It was cultural, social, aesthetic, philosophical.¹³ As will be seen with Ramponi, women changed the system of the *compagnie* by playing a role in marketing, diplomacy, and validation, and they gave theatre a new place among the Arts. A diachronic distinction must therefore be made between the period before the advent of actresses on stage and the period that came afterwards, which goes hand in hand with another essential distinction linked to the history of Commedia dell'Arte and of a synchronic nature.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Commedia dell'Arte performances mainly revolved around two poles: that of the 'onorate compagnie' and that of the 'profani comici', according to the definition given by the Lateran canon Tommaso Garzoni in his *La piazza universale* (1585).¹⁴ The 'istrioni' members of the 'onorate compagnie' were a few

¹⁰ Face masks were usually worn only by the 'Vecchi' and the 'Zanni'; however, as suggested by Richard Andrews, it is better to think to all Commedia dell'Arte roles as 'masks' because 'all arte roles, whether facially masked or not, kept the same name, costume, language and other exterior characteristics from one play or scenario to the next'. See Richard Andrews, *Scripts and Scenarios. The Performance of Comedy in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 172.

¹¹ The technique of improvisation, which made it easy to multiply the number of shows in the repertoire of the companies, was probably forced into being by the illiteracy of some performers. On the improvisation of *comici* see, for example, Andrews, *Scripts and Scenarios*, pp. 175-199.

¹² On the history and myth of Commedia dell'Arte see, for example, Daniele Vianello, 'Introduction', pp. 1-13.

¹³ The Italian scholar Teresa Megale compared the revolution instigated by the presence of women on stage to the Copernican revolution. See Teresa Megale, 'Il professionismo delle attrici: stato degli studi e nuove domande', *Italica Wratislaviensia*, 10.2 (2019), 15-36 (pp. 16-17). On this matter, see also Roberto Tessari, *La Commedia dell'Arte. Genesi d'una società dello spettacolo* (Rome: Laterza, 2013), pp. 64-97, and Siro Ferrone, 'Tipologie femminili nella Commedia dell'Arte', *Il Castello di Elsinore*, 67 (2013), 63-71.

¹⁴ Tommaso Garzoni, *La piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo*, ed. by Paolo Cerchi and Beatrice Collina, 2 vols (Turin: Einaudi, 1996), II, p. 1183. Garzoni devoted three different chapters of *La piazza universale* to theatre performers; the titles of the chapters show, in essence, the complex and multifaceted nature of early modern theatre: 'De' comici e tragedi, così auttori come recitatori, cioè degli istrioni' (II, pp. 1180-1187), 'De'

distinguished actors who performed mainly in courts. Studies on Commedia dell'Arte tend to focus on them. Beyond these 'onorate compagnie', however, there were hundreds of companies of actors, usually defined by their contemporaries as *ciarlatani*, who mostly performed in the *piazza* and entertained the general public.¹⁵ Inevitably, the two groups were not entirely separate: most of the actors, even those who at some point in their career distanced themselves from the *ciarlatani*, allegedly moved between the two. Considering that the phenomenon of Commedia dell'Arte is determined by its specific mode of production,¹⁶ and that this mode of production was common to both the 'onorate compagnie' and the 'profani comici', one might wonder where the difference between the two groups lies. The Italian scholar Roberto Tessari identified the demarcation line in the comic language used by the 'onorate compagnie' and the 'profani comici': while the former relied on 'motti arguti e bellissime facezie', the latter exploited a less-elaborated comicality based on vulgar and obscene words.¹⁷ But this is not the whole picture. The *comici* were known for their ability to adapt every aspect of the performance, including the language, to the audience, which for the best companies could range from the common people to Kings and Queens.¹⁸ Obscene words were used by the 'onorate compagnie' when addressing people in the market square. The language adopted was itself part of a marketing strategy: in the ability to set up and deploy this strategy, the true difference between *comici* 'onorati' and 'profani' lies. For this reason, the strategies set up and deployed by Giovan Battista Andreini and

formatori di spettacoli in genere, e de' ceretani o ciurmatori massime' (II, pp. 1188-1197), 'De' buffoni o mimi, o istrioni' (II, pp. 1303-1307).

¹⁵ The Jesuit Giovan Domenico Ottonelli uses 'commedianti' and 'ciarlatani' to define the two groups of actors: 'i commedianti [...] fanno le loro azioni dentro le case, nelle camere o sale o stanzoni assegnati. L'altro ordine è di quelli che si nominano i ciarlatani, e questi fanno i loro trattenimenti e giuochi nelle pubbliche strade o piazze di concorso; [...] i ciarlatani diventano commedianti e si servono della commedia come di mezzo efficace per allettare al banco, donde fanno lo spaccio delle loro mercanzie e bussolotti' (Giovan Domenico Ottonelli, *Della Cristiana Moderazione del Teatro, Libro I, detto La Qualità delle Comedie. Per dichiarare, quale sia la lecita a' buoni christiani, e quale la illecita; e per distinguere la modesta dalla oscena, secondo la Dottrina di S. Tomaso, e d'altri theologi per sicurezza della coscienza* (1648), quoted in Tessari, *La Commedia dell'Arte. Genesi d'una società dello spettacolo*, p. 37). On the outdoor performances of *comici* dell'Arte see Robert Henke, 'Meeting at the Sign of the Queen: The Commedia dell'Arte, Cheap Print, and Piazza Performance', *Italian Studies*, 71.2 (2016), 171-183.

¹⁶ See above the features listed by Ester Cocco.

¹⁷ Garzoni, *La piazza universale*, II, p. 1183. See Tessari, *La Commedia dell'Arte. Genesi d'una società dello spettacolo*, p. 49.

¹⁸ A famous example is the performance of *La Pazzia d'Isabella*, held in 1589 at the Medici court. The actress Isabella Andreini, in a display of extraordinary bravura, interpreted the descent into madness of her character through the schizophrenic imitation of all the *maschere* dell'Arte. Isabella's madness was also included by the actor and *capocomico* Flaminio Scala in his collection of 50 *scenari* of Commedia dell'Arte, *Il Teatro delle Favole Rappresentative* (1611). Here, however, the madness of the protagonist, rather than a display of her bravura, is a display of verbal and physical obscenity. See *Il teatro delle favole rappresentative*, ed. by Ferruccio Marotti (Milan: Il Polifilo, 1976), pp. 385-396. For an English translation of this *scenario* see Richard Andrews, *The Commedia dell'Arte of Flaminio Scala: A translation and Analysis of 30 Scenarios* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2008), pp. 225-236.

Virginia Ramponi, which granted them a place among the *comici* ‘onorati’, are central to this study.

1.2 *COMICI DELL’ARTE* AND THE CHURCH

At the birth of Commedia dell’Arte in the sixteenth century, the theatrical landscape in Italy was mainly made up of three different types of production. There were forms of popular theatre, which had their roots in the Middle Ages, like local farces or the performances of mountebanks and jesters. There were forms of religious theatre, mainly monopolised by the Jesuits who organised performances in their colleges. And, finally, there were forms of erudite theatre, produced by courts and academies as a manifestation of their cultural primacy. The theatre of *comici* dell’Arte arose against this background and, as will appear, in time it interacted with and impacted on all these theatrical forms.

Already in its development, professional theatre drew criticism from different sections of the population. In 1545, while the ‘fraternal compagnia’ was signing its contract in Padua, in Trent, 130 kilometres away, the Roman Catholic Church was opening the ecumenical council which marked the beginning of the Counter-Reformation period.¹⁹ Strict rules on Catholic discipline and devotion were introduced by the Council of Trent and affected many aspects of the everyday life of Catholic people. They concerned pilgrimages, indulgences, sacred music, religious art, veneration of saints, relics, the Virgin Mary. The concurrence of the birth of professional theatre and the inception of the Council was among the reasons for the absence of theatrical matter from the Council’s debate. However, over the two decades in which the Council was held (1545-1563), Commedia dell’Arte progressively became fundamental to the cultural life and entertainments in Italian cities. In 1563, the clerics found themselves in need of urgent regulation of a phenomenon that had already drawn crowds. Their action against professional theatre did not follow an organised strategy, but evolved discretionally and unevenly, through autonomous treatises or chapters included in broader volumes on morality, and through preaching and homilies, from the mid-1560s.

The absence of a Tridentine regulation concerning the performances of *comici* dell’Arte was denounced in a homily delivered on 17 July 1583 by Cardinal Carlo Borromeo,

¹⁹ On the Council of Trent see, for example, Adriano Prosperi, *Il Concilio di Trento: una introduzione storica* (Turin: Einaudi, 2001) and John O’ Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council* (London: Belknap, 2013). On the social implications of the Council of Trent see, among others, Elena Bonora, *La Controriforma* (Rome: Laterza, 2001).

the first champion of Counter-Reformation action against theatre.²⁰ While warning the faithful of the dangers of lust, he deplored the theatrical performances by the ‘uomini mascherati’, which were, according to the Cardinal, more dangerous than any book on the index of prohibited texts because of the impact they could have on their audiences:

In questa città [i.e. Milan] agisce tanto liberamente quella tristemente famosa scuola di libidine ed impudicizie che frequentemente si recitano le commedie, e gli istrioni, uomini indegni quant’altri mai, mascherati, prendono nelle reti del diavolo gran numero di incauti giovani. A che sono serviti i decreti del Concilio Tridentino con i quali si presero così diligentemente provvedimenti contro i libri osceni da comandare che vengano bruciati, estirpati dalla memoria degli uomini, da comandare che venga punito con gravissime pene chiunque li legga? Ma quanto più penetra nell’anima ciò che gli occhi vedono di ciò che si può leggere in libri di quel genere! Quanto più gravemente la viva voce ferisce le menti degli adolescenti di quanto non lo faccia morta, stampata nei libri!²¹

The appeal for regulation occurs in the writings of the Cardinal and Archbishop of Bologna, Gabriele Paleotti, a friend of Borromeo.²² In 1578, he sent Pope Gregory XIII his *Scrittura contro agli spettacoli teatrali*, where in seven points he listed the damage caused by ‘queste commedie’, to encourage him to forbid theatrical performances by *comici* dell’Arte. In the first two points, Paleotti alluded to the newness of the phenomenon and proposed arguments which were to become recurrent in subsequent treatises:

Prima ragione è: perché queste commedie, da pochi anni in qua introdotte, si vede che fanno effetti in tutto contrari alla causa per la quale furono introdotte anticamente le commedie, cioè per notare i vizi ed aiutare i costumi, e piuttosto li corrompono.

Seconda. Perché questi che le rappresentano per l’ordinario sono vagabondi e di mal nome, e conducono seco donne di mala vita, quali fanno anche recitare in commedia, e questi tali, secondo le leggi, sono riputati per infami, perché lo fanno per guadagno.²³

²⁰ The first account of the measures taken by Cardinal Borromeo (1538-1584) in relation to theatre is in Giambattista Castiglione, *Sentimenti di S. Carlo Borromeo intorno agli spettacoli* (Bergamo: Lancellotti, 1759). See also Ferdinando Taviani, ‘L’azione di Carlo Borromeo’, in Taviani, *La fascinazione del teatro*, pp. 5-43.

²¹ Carlo Borromeo, *Sancti Caroli Borromei S.R.E. Cardinalis Archiepiscopi Mediolani Homiliae CXXVI* (1578), quoted in Taviani, *La fascinazione del teatro*, pp. 31-34 (p. 33). Unless otherwise indicated, quotations from treatises by detractors of Commedia dell’Arte are taken from Taviani’s anthology of primary sources on Commedia dell’Arte. For Latin texts, Taviani’s translation into Italian will be provided.

²² Gabriele Paleotti (1522-1597) was made Cardinal by Pope Pius IV in 1565. With Cardinal Borromeo, he led the action of the Church against the performances of *comici* dell’Arte during the Counter-Reformation. In Bologna, in 1582, he published the *Discorso intorno alle immagini sacre e profane* which regulated the Acts of the Church on the visual arts after the Council of Trent.

²³ Gabriele Paleotti, *Scrittura fatta per suo ordine, nella quale si pongono in vista alcune ragioni contro agli Spettacoli Teatrali* (1578), quoted in Taviani, *La fascinazione del teatro*, pp. 39-40 (p. 39).

As we shall see, the accusation of immorality was the first the *comici* had to combat in order to become ‘onorati’. Ethical critique was intertwined with social polemic: the *comici* were ‘vagabondi’ and were infamous because they performed for money. The threat to social order was twofold: firstly, money made by their performances allowed *comici* dell’Arte to move up the social ladder; secondly, they transformed theatre, hitherto a prerogative of ecclesiastical and lay élites,²⁴ into a lucrative form of entertainment in the hands of the common people.

Paleotti also denounced the impossibility of censuring these new comedies, given the absence of a script. Displaying a great awareness of the modes of production of Commedia dell’Arte, he stressed the role of improvisation in their plays:

Non basta il dire che prima si rivedano queste commedie [...] perché sempre vi aggiungono parole o motti che non sono scritti, anzi non mettono essi in iscritto se non il sommario o l’argomento, e il resto fanno tutto all’improvviso, e il volerli poi condannare per quello ha del difficile. Di poi [...] fanno nascere all’improvviso cose che non si averiano mai pensate né proibite, e in somma il rivedere queste loro cose è come un autenticare le loro pazzie, il che pare si abbia da fuggire. (p. 39)

The confusion of the clerics in the face of the new theatrical phenomenon emerges clearly from the documents of the religious authorities of the time. In his 1566 *De gubernatione rei familiaris*, Cardinal Borromeo forbade clerics from attending *comici* dell’Arte performances: ‘Nessun appartenente alla casa del vescovo osi [...] assistere a rappresentazioni, commedie ed alle altre impure azioni dei comici’.²⁵ The following year, a similar measure by the Bishop of Mantua, Gregorio Boldrini, caused significant financial loss to professional actors since the performances were usually attended by up to ‘venticinque frati in una sol volta’, as we read in a letter to an unknown member of the Mantuan court.²⁶ Contemporary records attest to the universality of this new theatrical phenomenon, which dangerously attracted people of different social status and cultural backgrounds,²⁷ even those who were supposed to disparage it, all bound by the same

²⁴ Local forms of popular theatre, like farces, are an exception to this rule.

²⁵ Carlo Borromeo, ‘De gubernatione rei familiaris. Pars secunda’ (1566), in *Acta Ecclesiae Mediolanensis* (1599), quoted in Taviani, *La fascinazione del teatro*, pp. 10-16 (p. 12).

²⁶ Antonio Ceruto, Mantua, letter to an unknown member of the Mantuan court, Mantua, 31 July 1567, ASMN, *Gonzaga*, b. 2578, fols 50-51, quoted in Brunetti, p. 77. It is interesting to mention that on 14 May 1567, Boldrini was visited in Mantua by Carlo Borromeo. The event probably influenced his approach to the theatrical matter.

²⁷ See Luigi Rogna, Mantua, letter to an unknown member of the Mantuan court, Mantua, 1 July 1567, ASMN, *Gonzaga*, b. 2577, fols 177-179: ‘È cosa incredibile, il concorso delle genti d’ogni sorte che hanno ogni dì l’un et l’altra di queste due compagnie di comici. Pensi Vostra Signoria che gli Artisti, et gli Hebrei lasciano star di

fascination. In another act written in 1573, Borromeo provided the clerics with practical guidelines to use in their preaching against professional theatre, suggesting a list of references to substantiate their arguments. Drawing on the authority of the Fathers of the Church, he created what was virtually a handbook of detractors which lasted for the entire duration of the anti-theatrical polemic:

Il predicatore detesterà ed esecrerà continuamente gli spettacoli, le rappresentazioni e cose di questo genere che traggono origine dagli usi pagani e sono contrari alle regole cristiane; dimostrerà i danni e le pubbliche calamità che da ciò derivano al popolo cristiano. Confermerà il popolo in questa convinzione per mezzo degli argomenti addotti da Tertulliano, Cipriano martire, Salviano e Crisostomo. Di questi argomenti non ne tralascerà alcuno, al fine di estirpare alle radici una così grande corruttela. Con il maggior zelo religioso possibile, tratterà di quanto siano lontane dalle regole di vita cristiana le rappresentazioni sceniche e mascherate – dalle quali come da un semenzaio escono quasi tutti i delitti e le azioni turpi – di come esse convengano con i costumi pagani e siano state inventate dalla furbizia del diavolo, e di come vadano con ogni sforzo sterminate dal popolo cristiano.²⁸

Critics lamented the incompatibility of professional theatre – regarded as a worthless and detrimental form of entertainment – with the liturgical season.²⁹ In his memorial to the Milanese people, written in 1579,³⁰ Cardinal Borromeo deplored the fact that his community was spending the time of Carnival, between Epiphany and Lent, in a corrupt way. Instead of sanctifying and devoting the ‘religiosi tempi’ to penitence, Milanese people were profaning them and dedicating them to the service of Satan.³¹

O Mondo cieco, anzi, o Milano cieco, [...] vedi quanto malamente è stata conosciuta negli anni passati la santità di questi misteriosi e religiosi tempi; ricordati quanto perniciosamente e con scandalo ancor di quelli che sono inimici della croce e di Gesù

lavorar per andar a sentirli [...]. I gentil’huomini vi stanno tutto ’l dì, et alcuni de signori ufficiali come il signor massaro, et signori magistri dell’entrate vi vengono anchora’ (quoted in Brunetti, p. 77).

²⁸ Carlo Borromeo, ‘Officium concionatoris in perpetuo reprehendendis tollendisque pravis consuetudinibus, unde peccandi seminaria extant’ (1573), in *Acta Ecclesiae Mediolanensis* (1599), quoted in Taviani, *La fascinazione del teatro*, pp. 10-16 (p. 13).

²⁹ On this matter, see Taviani, *La fascinazione del teatro*, pp. XLVIII-LV.

³⁰ Carlo Borromeo, *Memoriale di Monsignor Illustrissimo e Reverendissimo Cardinale di Santa Prassede Arcivescovo. Al suo diletto popolo della Città e Diocesi di Milano* (1579), quoted in Taviani, *La fascinazione del teatro*, pp. 24-31.

³¹ During the Counter-Reformation period, clerics no longer tolerated the excesses of the Carnival days. Their criticism became harsher with regard to Commedia dell’Arte performances. On Carnival in early modern Italy and on the attempts by the Counter-Reformation clerics to eliminate any pagan matter from this festivity see, for example, Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London: Temple Smith, 1978), pp. 178-243 and Giovanni Ciappelli, *Carnevale e Quaresima: Comportamenti Sociali e Cultura a Firenze nel Rinascimento* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1997). In 1556, aiming to contain the spread of immoral behaviour, the Jesuits introduced a new liturgical practice, the *Quarantore*, to be held during the last three days of Carnival. It was meant to distract people from Commedia dell’Arte performances and other non-liturgical activity on Carnival days. See Luigi Cajani and Silvia Saba, ‘La notte devota, luci e ombre delle quarantore’, in *La notte. Ordine, sicurezza e disciplinamento nell’età moderna*, ed. by Mario Sbriccoli (Florence: Ponte alle Grazie, 1991), pp. 67-79.

Cristo sono stati profanati e consecrati empivamente alla servitù di Satanasso, della carne, e del mondo [...]. Che cosa veramente atta a commovere ognuno, in chi risieda qualche pietà Cristiana, vedere il mondo darsi a spassi, a giuochi, a spettacoli profani, a dissolute allegrezze, quando le voci di Dio lo chiamano più particolarmente a pianto, a lagrime, a lutto, a sacco e ceneri.³²

The alleged incompatibility of theatre and religion was a main concern of the *comici* ‘onorati’, among them Giovan Battista Andreini, who addressed many of his strategies to countering the issues raised by Borromeo (Chapter 2). According to Borromeo, the ‘spettacoli profani’ played a special role among the sinful habits of the Milanese people: ‘le mascare, le comedie, i giuochi paganeschi’ were significantly juxtaposed with and treated in the same way as ‘le risse, le questioni, gli omicidi’ (p. 28). The masks in particular, synedochal representation of this new form of theatre, were at the heart of his polemic.

Maladette et essecrande maschere, oltre ogni altro rispetto, anco perché ci rapresentano la memoria dell’antica nostra rovina, la quale ci procurò il demonio, che s’immascherò da serpente. Abominevoli maschere, sotto le quali si fanno lecito gli uomini di dir parole disoneste e sporche, e di far gesti et atti pieni d’impudicizia. Scelerate maschere, oppugnatrici dell’onestà, inimiche della gravità, e rovina d’ogni custodia che dentro e di fuori deve avere l’anima d’un buon Cristiano. Vadano ormai perpetuamente in essilio, insieme con le maschere, e le commedie e le favole del mondo e gli spettacoli profani, co i quali ha questo popolo, in questo tempo particolarmente, così profanati i santi giorni delle feste, allontanandosi tanto da quel fine per il quale sono religiosamente instituiti. (p. 29)

Borromeo used a cogent, anaphoric rhetorical structure for the condemnation of the *maschere*. He refuted the difference between ‘onorate compagnie’ and ‘profani comici’, acknowledged by other clerics, and indiscriminately condemned professional actors as ‘ambasciatori del demonio’.³³

The fiercest contempt of clergymen against the theatre was directed at the chief architects of the attraction on stage, the main perpetrators of the success of the new theatrical form: professional actresses.³⁴ Their presence on stage was considered a public outrage in the face of the Counter-Reformation, the successful touring *manifesto* of the defeat

³² Carlo Borromeo, *Memoriale*, quoted in Taviani, *La fascinazione del teatro*, p. 27.

³³ Carlo Borromeo, *Homiliae*, quoted in Taviani, *La fascinazione del teatro*, pp. 32-37 (p. 33). See also Taviani’s comments on Pedro Hurtado de Mendoza’s *Scolasticae et morales disputationes* (1631), in *La fascinazione del teatro*, pp. 85-86.

³⁴ According to Bernadette Majorana, there is a perfect correspondence between the term ‘scena’ and ‘donna’ in early modern treatises against professional theatre. See Majorana, ‘Finzioni, imitazioni, azioni: donne e teatro’, p. 123.

of Tridentine moral values.³⁵ Their behaviour was contrary to that prescribed by conduct literature for women: actresses did not chastise their aspect, but exalted it; they did not lower their eyes in public, but instead stood fiercely in front of the audience; they did not remain silent, but rather were masters of eloquence.³⁶ Their bodies, their presence, and their physicality, now at the core of the performance of the *comici*, were sources of anxiety for the misogynistic clergy, their beauty manifesting, according to this clergy, their inner corruption. The philosopher and theologian Francesco Maria del Monaco (1593-1651), a Somaschan father and the confessor of Cardinal Mazarin,³⁷ declared in his treatise *In actores et spectatores comoediarum nostri temporis paraenensis* (1621) that the only honest performances were those with no actresses on stage:

Onesti sono gli spettacoli in cui non compare assolutamente nessuna donna, nessuna forma di lascivia, nessun accenno all'amore. Nessuna donna, dico, perché dovunque c'è una donna, specie se è particolarmente bella e graziosa (come sono per lo più quelle che si fanno recitare nei teatri), lì vi è sempre un incitamento alla libidine, ed ella si dimostra prontissima nel corrompere i costumi.³⁸

The same idea was expressed by the Jesuit Giovan Domenico Ottonelli (1584-1670), professor of rhetoric and rector of the colleges of Recanati and Fermo, and one of the most prolific authors of anti-theatrical treatises. In *Della Cristiana Moderatione del Teatro* (1648-1652), he condemned attendance at the performances with actresses as sinful, stressing their lasciviousness in wearing indecent doublets or even in dressing as a man on stage:

O che vista disdicevole si offerisce a gli occhi de' riguardanti, quando queste femminelle [...] compariscono in scena o in banco vestite da uomo, in un farsetto lascivo; et arcando, storcendo e vibrando il corpo con gesti e posture sconce e stravaganti, cagionano alle menti de' deboli mille libidinosi pensieri [...].³⁹

³⁵ On this see, for example, Nicola Rivero, 'Fighting Eve: Women on Stage in Early Modern Italy', *Quaderni d'italianistica*, 37.2 (2016), 23-47. For a broader perspective on the perception of actresses in Western Europe see Eric Nicholson, 'The Theatre', pp. 285-314.

³⁶ On prescriptive literature for early modern women, see *Conduct Literature for and about Women in Italy, 1470-1900: Prescribing and Describing Life*, ed. by Helena Sanson and Francesco Lucoli (Paris: Classique Garnier, 2016). For an analysis of conduct literature and actresses' behaviour see Majorana, 'Finzioni, imitazioni, azioni: donne e teatro', pp. 121-139, and Majorana, 'L'anti-cristiana. Sulle attrici professioniste della prima età moderna', *Italica Wratislaviensis*, 10.2 (2019), 85-101.

³⁷ Francesco Maria del Monaco taught philosophy in Vicenza and theology in Pavia and became Bishop of Reims in 1649.

³⁸ Francesco Maria del Monaco, *In actores et spectatores comoediarum nostri temporis paraenensis* (1621), quoted in Taviani, *La fascinazione del teatro*, pp. 184-222 (p. 189).

³⁹ Giovan Domenico Ottonelli, *Della Cristiana Moderazione del Teatro Libro I*, quoted in Taviani, *La fascinazione del teatro*, pp. 320-403 (p. 385).

It was not only the appearance and movements of female performers which charmed the spectators. So, too, did their singing. The voice of the actress was such an attraction that it progressively transformed the dramaturgy of *comici* dell'Arte making it a prelude to melodrama:⁴⁰ until the eighteenth century, Commedia dell'Arte and musical theatre shared techniques and interpreters. Ottonelli believed that an actress's singing was an instrument of the devil: 'Che farà la donna in teatro se, oltre all'esser bella, ornata e vana, vi comparirà graziosa nel trattare e dolcissima nel canto? Farà, credo, se stessa una rete infernale, per allacciarvi dentro moltissimi peccatori'.⁴¹ But this same 'rete infernale', as we shall see in the next section, was to be transformed by the promoters of the Commedia dell'Arte into a stairway to heaven. The face of the actress, too, was a 'castitatis violatio', an invitation to commit immoral acts. Women, concluded Ottonelli, were clearly brought onto the stage by the devil himself: 'Onde io credo che sia stata invenzione e suggestione del diavolo l'introduzione comica delle donne in azzioni teatrali' (p. 367).

Another Jesuit, Pedro Hurtado de Mendoza (1578-1651), professor of philosophy and theology in Salamanca, similarly described the dissolute life of the *comici* according to stereotyped views of the time, branding actresses as 'meretrici che fanno il mestiere a pagamento':⁴²

Spesso esse sono straordinariamente belle, eleganti nel portamento e nelle vesti, di facile parola, spiritose, abili nella danza e nel canto, esperte nell'arte della recitazione. E tutto ciò trascina gli spettatori alla libidine, sicché accade che molti se ne innamorano alla follia e cercano di conquistarle con l'oro e con l'argento, facendo spese pazzesche per il loro mantenimento, per il loro vestiario e per le suppellettili. (p. 89)

Hurtado de Mendoza was not alone in highlighting the gifts showered upon the actresses,⁴³ which provide valuable information on the financial situation of actresses and on the economic and social consequences of their presence in the companies. Ottonelli, too, expressed his views on the matter in the *Della Cristiana Moderatione del Teatro*, where he

⁴⁰ On the relationship between Commedia dell'Arte and melodrama, see, for example, Anne MacNeil, *Music and Women of the Commedia dell'Arte*; Sergio Monaldini, 'Teatro dell'Arte, Commedia dell'Arte, Opera in Musica'; Emily Wilbourne, *Seventeenth-Century Opera*.

⁴¹ Ottonelli, *Della Cristiana Moderazione*, quoted in Taviani, *La fascinazione del teatro*, p. 374.

⁴² Pedro Hurtado de Mendoza, *Scholasticae et morales disputationes. De tribus virtutibus theologicis. De Spe, et Charitate. Volumen Secundum* (1631), quoted in Taviani, *La fascinazione del teatro*, pp. 86-89 (p. 88).

⁴³ See, for example, the letter written in Piacenza on 2 May 1572 by a concerned father, referred to by the initials B. S., to Cardinal Borromeo: 'Ritrovandomi un mio unico figlio, nel quale erano tutte le mie speranze riposte, m'è stato sviato e guasto da quegli uomini profani e donne ignominiose che vanno corrompendo la gioventù, onde bene spesso i maritati tolgono alle proprie mogli per darne a quelle impudiche, ed i figli rubbano le paterne sostanze' (quoted in Taviani, *La fascinazione del teatro*, pp. 20-21).

explained that actresses were an asset for both the ‘comici’ and the ‘ciarlatani’, denouncing the moral and economic threat to their audience. Actresses were praised, favoured and ‘sollecitate’ by political and cultural authorities, and jeopardised the existing social order because ‘personaggi di stima’ spent their fortunes on them, dissipating family patrimonies:

Io non posso negare che i ciarlatani et i comici non accumulino presto i loro soldi poiché sono aiutati diligentemente dalle comiche ad accumularli in molti modi nel banco e nella scena [...]. È di guadagno la donna in banco perché diletta col cantar e col sonare; e di più molte volte ricrea il popolo con vari giuochi corporali e maravigliosi, al fin de’ quali si porta intorno per mezzo degli spettatori una tazza, dimandando la mancia per la signora: né mancano molti di darla prontamente. E v’è anco di più, perché [...] le belle comiche sono sovente lodate, favorite e talvolta sollecitate fino da personaggi di stima, e quasi violentate con donativi: che senza dubbio è occasion di molto guadagno a molte [...]. Il concorso alla mercenaria comedia è maggiore quando le comiche sono più avvenenti e graziose; e quando vi è non solo che sentire, ma che mirar ancora, e mirar con gusto.⁴⁴

Actresses are described as money-machines for their activity not only on stage, but also off stage. Ottonelli equates them to prostitutes who satisfy the ‘sozze e disoneste lordure della carne’ and obtain large sums of money in return.

Buon guadagno fanno poi i comici fuor della scena per mezzo delle comiche in più modi. Prima per li regali di vitto e di vestito, che spesso fatti sono alle signore comiche. Secondo per li giuochi soliti di usarsi nelle conversazioni con le comiche. Terzo, per le grosse offerte pecuniose fatte per arrivare a godere le sozze e disoneste lordure della carne con le comiche e per le quali molti si mostrano pazzamente innamorati; e [...] per goder un brevissimo diletto spendono e spandono grossissime somme di pecunia.⁴⁵

Beyond the excesses in the tone of his discourse, Ottonelli’s words reveal that professional companies pivoted around actresses. Their function, as will be shown, went well beyond profits: actresses won the praise of men of letters and rulers; they built influential networks that had significant cultural impact; and they transformed the perception of the phenomenon of professional theatre.

The concern of Borromeo and Paleotti and their first attempts at systematising the terms of the polemic and regulating the anti-theatrical action of the Church are consistent with the fury against female performers of, among others, del Monaco, Ottonelli and Mendoza. They indulge in the description of the bodies of the actresses and of their

⁴⁴ Ottonelli, *Della Cristiana Moderazione*, quoted in Taviani, *La fascinazione del teatro*, p. 360.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 361.

movements; they remark on their extraordinary beauty and their power; they all stress the sexual excitement that the sight of an actress produces in men. They reveal, in fact, an ill-concealed fear that they too are susceptible to the charm of actresses.

Prejudices aside, critics recorded in their writings one further characteristic of professional actresses: their skills. The singing and dancing of actresses, their performance expertise, their oratory, the elegance of their gait, their ability to entertain and to amuse the audience with their monologues were uncommon qualities in women, like actresses, of low social status. Such skills were more usually seen in educated courtly ladies.⁴⁶ The talents and skills displayed by Commedia dell'Arte actresses suggest an unprecedented level of training, unlike that of women of their status and that of male actors, prompting questions around their social and cultural background. According to Taviani, professional actresses might have emerged from the context of the *meretrices honestae*, pressed to recast themselves as actresses by the moral rigour of the Counter-Reformation.⁴⁷ More recently, the link between *meretrices* and professional actresses has been supported by other scholars, among them Jane Tylus, who claimed that the frequent presence of women at the window in Flaminio Scala's *scenari* was meant to evoke, in the eyes of the audience, the figure of the courtesan, for whom the window was a location from which to attract customers.⁴⁸ In a revisionist reading of Taviani's study, Virginia Scott argued that the first professional actresses in France were not *meretrices*, but wives of actors. Scott's argument, however, does not invalidate Taviani's, since the actresses may have been trained as *meretrices* before they married.⁴⁹

Meretrices honestae, or honest courtesans, were active at the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth centuries, especially in Rome and Venice;⁵⁰ not by coincidence the locations in which the above-mentioned Commedia dell'Arte contracts of 1545 and 1564 were signed. They were courtesans who had achieved a high level of social

⁴⁶ On this matter see, for example, the description of the ideal courtly lady offered by Baldassar Castiglione in *Il libro del Cortegiano*: 'Voglio che questa donna abbia notizie di lettere, di musica, di pittura e sappia danzar e festeggiare [...]. E così sarà nel conversare, nel ridere, nel giocare, nel motteggiare, in somma in ogni cosa graziatissima; ed intertenerà accomodatamente e con motti e facezie convenienti a lei ogni persona che le occorrerà' (Castiglione, *Il libro del Cortegiano*, ed. by Giulio Carnazzi (Milan: Rizzoli, 1987), p. 213).

⁴⁷ This argument is developed in Taviani and Schino, pp. 338-339.

⁴⁸ Jane Tylus, 'Women at the Windows: *Commedia dell'Arte* and Theatrical Practice in Early Modern Italy', *Theatre Journal*, 49 (1997), 323-342 (p. 336).

⁴⁹ Scott, p. 152.

⁵⁰ On *meretrices honestae*, see Romano Canosa and Isabella Colonnello, *Storia della prostituzione in Italia dal Quattrocento alla fine del Settecento* (Rome: Sapere 2000, 1989), pp. 41-53. On the growth of the phenomenon in Florence, with particular reference to the relations between courtesans and Florentine academies, see Domenico Zanrè, *Cultural non-Conformity in Early Modern Florence* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 141-164. On the case of the well-known Venetian courtesan Veronica Franco, see Margaret F. Rosenthal, *The Honest Courtesan: Veronica Franco, Citizen and Writer in Sixteenth-Century Venice* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

acceptability by carefully investing in their own education and training. Well-versed in composing and reciting poems *all'improvviso*, music-making, singing and dancing, they were known among aristocrats and intellectuals, whose gatherings they regularly attended.⁵¹ A well-known example is the Roman courtesan Tullia d'Aragona (1510-1556), whose literary and musical talent granted her entry to some of the most exclusive intellectual circles of the peninsula, from Rome to Florence and Ferrara, to establish her own salon and to write and publish her own works.⁵² The link between honest courtesans and professional actresses might therefore provide a historical basis for the long-lasting association of female performers with prostitutes. But, as we shall see in the next section, it also offers a background to what seems to be their surprising relationship with the Italian academies, which was to allow their transformation into *dive*. The perception of actresses as evil and divine are two faces of the same coin.

1.3 COMICI DELL'ARTE AND THE ITALIAN ACADEMIES

While Borromeo, Ottonelli and others were fighting their battle against actors, an entirely different stand on theatrical professionalism was being taken by many Italian academies.⁵³ From the 1520s onwards, the early years of the growth of the academic phenomenon in Italy, theatre stood out as a primary cultural interest in numerous academies. During their gatherings, the aristocratic and learned members of these circles were accustomed to write and stage their own plays which were imbued with classical references and contributed to the revival of ancient drama in Italian and European theatre. Such was the case, among

⁵¹ On the power of courtesans' singing and on their voice as a metonym of sensuality, see Bonnie Gordon, 'The Courtesan's Singing Body as Cultural Capital in Seventeenth-Century Italy', in *The Courtesan's Arts: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, ed. by Martha Feldman and Bonnie Gordon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 182-198. For a parallel between courtesans and courtly ladies, see Zanrè, p. 142. Laurie Stras, however, points out the critical issues related to the possession of these qualities by a courtly lady: if 'her performance was inappropriately virile, or improperly manifested her knowledge', the noblewoman had to modify her brilliance in some social contexts, while the courtesan could always cultivate it. See Laurie Stras, *Women and Music in Sixteenth-Century Ferrara* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 59.

⁵² On Tullia d'Aragona see, for example, Floriana Calitti, 'Splendori e miserie della "cortigiana onesta"', in *Atlante della letteratura italiana*. Vol. 2. *Dalla Controriforma alla Restaurazione*, ed. by Sergio Luzzatto and Gabriele Pedullà (Turin: Einaudi, 2011), pp. 111-118; Julia L. Hairston, *The Poems and Letters of Tullia d'Aragona and Others* (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2014); Stras, pp. 59-62. On d'Aragona's salon, see Zanrè, pp. 146-158.

⁵³ On early modern Italian academies, see Michele Maylender, *Storia delle accademie d'Italia*, 5 vols (Bologna: Cappelli, 1926-30); Gino Benzoni, *Gli affanni della cultura. Intellettuali e poteri nell'Italia della Controriforma e barocca* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1978); Amedeo Quondam, 'L'Accademia', in *Letteratura italiana*. Vol. 1. *Il letterato e le istituzioni*, ed. by Alberto A. Rosa (Turin: Einaudi, 1982), pp. 823-898; *Italian Academies of the Sixteenth Century*, ed. by David S. Chambers and François Quiviger (London: Warburg Institute, 1995). See also *The Italian Academies 1525-1700*.

others, of the Accademia degli Intronati in Siena, the Accademia Olimpica in Vicenza and the Accademia Filarmonica in Verona.⁵⁴

The birth of theatrical professionalism, which took place two decades later, did not go unnoticed in these circles: the academicians were fascinated by the kind of entertainment offered by *comici dell'Arte* but considered them illiterate and viewed their dramaturgy with intellectual disdain. Professional actors, for their part, aspired to be included in the academic environment in order to obtain social validation,⁵⁵ and public acknowledgement of the intellectual and moral dignity of their profession. The approach of *comici dell'Arte* to the academies started with formal emulation: some of the acting companies began to mirror the forms and practices of the academies by choosing names and emblems which replicated those of the academies.⁵⁶ During the first twenty years of their activity, roughly between the mid-1540s and mid-1560s, however, the *comici* did not manage to build actual links with academies. The break into the academic world only took place when professional actresses joined the companies.

Academies were all-male circles of intellectuals: they rarely admitted women, and, if they did, their participation remained liminal, to prevent contamination of an eminently masculine space.⁵⁷ Female characters in academic theatrical performances were played by men. The advent of women in theatre companies, however, made it possible for the academicians finally to enjoy the singing and the acting of professional female performers. A number of Commedia dell'Arte actresses were welcomed in academic gatherings: they entertained the audience with singing and acting and developed a new kind of relationship

⁵⁴ On academies and theatre, see Stefano Mazzoni, 'Lo spettacolo delle accademie', in *Storia del teatro moderno e contemporaneo*. Vol. 1. *La nascita del teatro moderno. Cinquecento-Seicento*, ed. by Roberto Alonge and Guido Davico Bonino (Turin: Einaudi, 2000), pp. 869-904; Lisa Sampson, 'Amateurs Meet Professionals', pp. 187-218; *Le virtuose adunanze. La cultura accademica tra XVI e XVIII secolo*, ed. by Ilaria Bianchi and Clizia Curreri (Avellino: Edizioni Sinestesie, 2015). Lisa Sampson is currently preparing a monograph on *Theatre in the Academies of Early Modern Italy: Festivity, Learning and Cultural Transformations*. On theatre and the Intronati, see Daniele Seragnoli, *Il teatro a Siena nel Cinquecento: progetto e modello drammaturgico nell'Accademia degli Intronati* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1980) and Laura Riccò, *La «miniera» accademica. Pedagogia, editoria, palcoscenico nella Siena del Cinquecento* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2002), pp. 117-164.

⁵⁵ See Sampson, 'Amateurs Meet Professionals', p. 189.

⁵⁶ On emblems of professional companies see, for example, MacNeil, *Music and Women of the Commedia dell'Arte*, p. 1, and Roberto Tessari, 'Il testo postumo: strategie promozionali e letterarie degli attori professionisti', *Culture teatrali*, 10 (2004), 11-34 (p. 24).

⁵⁷ Virginia Cox, 'Members, Muses, Mascots', p. 132. Mixed social interactions in academies raised the issue of *decorum*. On this, see also Jane E. Everson and Lisa Sampson, 'Introduction', in *The Italian Academies 1525-1700*, pp. 1-20 (pp. 10-13). On the controversial relationship between women and the academies, see Conor Fahy, 'Women and Italian Cinquecento Literary Academies', in *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society*, ed. by Letizia Panizza (Oxford: Legenda, 2000), pp. 438-452; 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. by Paula Findlen, Wendy Wassyng Roworth and Catherine M. Sama (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), pp. 103-124.

with the academies, a relationship which has been loosely described as an ‘affiliation’.⁵⁸ The lines between professional performers and academicians, until then so sharp, became blurred.

The academic affiliation of actresses might appear surprising when considered against the background of the exclusion of women from these circles, but bearing in mind the historical continuity between honest courtesans and professional actresses, it is understandable. Honest courtesans entertained in aristocratic and intellectual salons at the end of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth, when loosely formed groups of intellectuals had yet to formally constitute academies. In the same way, some particularly talented actresses entertained in academic environments with oratory and singing in the second half of the sixteenth century.

Actresses were the “Trojan horse” of professional performers to enter the academic fortress. The connections built by the *comici dell’Arte* with Italian academies had substantial consequences for theatrical professionalism. Andreini and Ramponi, as will appear, based their marketing strategies on these connections.

Paradoxically, the process of legitimisation of the *comici dell’Arte* took place precisely thanks to actresses, the stumbling block of theatrical professionalism. More than anything, the debate about professional theatre in early modern Italy was a debate about the appropriateness of being enchanted by the charm of female performers. The academicians felt the same fascination as the clerics when confronted with the *dive*.⁵⁹ As opposed to clerics, however, intellectuals did not deny that they were attracted to the actresses. They were not constrained by the same moral rigour and they wrote literary encomia to them, creating an encomiastic counterpart which subverted the arguments of the clerics.

The encomiastic poetry genre was intimately connected to the experience of academic life: the composition and public performance of laudatory poems was common practice in Italian academies.⁶⁰ The encomia were usually addressed to members of the

⁵⁸ Cox, ‘Members, Muses, Mascots’, p. 148.

⁵⁹ In the *Grande Dizionario della Lingua Italiana*, the term *diva*, with the acceptance ‘Donna che per le sue doti o nell’impeto e nell’adorazione che nascono dalla passione amorosa, è celebrata ed esaltata al di sopra di ogni altra donna’, is recorded from Petrarch, while the modern acceptance of ‘attrice famosa e applaudita; cantante valente e ricercata’ is observed to date back to the nineteenth century. The two acceptations, however, overlap when the term is used for early-modern professional actresses. See Salvatore Battaglia, *GDLI*, vols 21 (Turin: UTET, 1961-2009), IV (1966), pp. 850-851. The effect of the performances of these *dive* on spectators was intensified because, for the first time in modern history, the audience was encountering stardom. On the effect of women on stage see, for example, Kerr, *The Rise of the Diva*, and Eric Nicholson, ‘Sexuality and Gender: The Early Modern Theatrical Body’, in *A Cultural History of Theatre in Early Modern Age*, ed. by Robert Henke (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2009), pp. 51-69.

⁶⁰ Desmoulière notes that there is a ‘rapporto stretto tra la poesia encomiastica e il fenomeno accademico’. See Paule Desmoulière, ‘La poesia funebre all’Accademia Olimpica di Vicenza’, in *The Italian Academies 1525-1700*, pp. 277-291 (p. 277).

academy, literary figures or prominent statesmen; however, some early modern actresses made their way as a new subject of academic praise. Although most of the encomiastic poems, like many other products of academic life, were oral and aural,⁶¹ some compositions were written or even printed. In the social history of Commedia dell'Arte, the passage from orality to textuality, with respect to both writing *by* actors and writing *for* actors, was consequential. It helped in building a new image of the *comici*, since it was intended to leave a trace of the greatness of professional theatre and its interpreters that contrasted with the ephemeral nature of Commedia dell'Arte performance. Through the encomia, academicians acknowledged the social function of theatre professionals, rebutting the accusations advanced by detractors. Most clerics, as has been seen, associated Commedia dell'Arte and its actresses with the world of the diabolic. Some academicians, as will be shown, associated it with the world of the divine.

The first professional actress to be praised by intellectuals and members of academies was the Venetian Vincenza Armani (ca.1530-1569),⁶² not coincidentally known as the first *diva* in the Commedia dell'Arte tradition. Armani belonged to the first generation of *comici*. She principally took the role of the Innamorata but she also performed in tragedies and pastoral plays. She was an accomplished musician: she played various instruments and was a talented singer. As other *dive* after her, she improvised and recited poems in Latin and the vernacular. The first records of her are dated 1567. In July of that year, she was in Mantua, where her *compagnia* was in competition with another whose *prima donna* was Barbara Flaminia. In 1567 and 1568, the rivalry between the two actresses monopolised the theatrical scene of the city and drew large crowds to the performances. In September 1569, Armani died in Cremona, apparently poisoned, possibly by an unrequited lover.⁶³

On her death, her colleague and lover, the actor Adriano Valerini, collected and published numerous encomia in her honour, together with his funerary oration for the *diva*. The *Oratione d'Adriano Valerini Veronese, In morte della Divina Signora Vincenza Armani, Comica Eccellentissima. Et alcune rime dell'Istesso e d'altri Auttori, in lode della medesima. Con alquante leggiadre e belle Compositioni di detta Signora Vincenza*, published in Verona probably in 1570, is a 40-

⁶¹ See for example Warren Boutcher, 'The Private and Public Sessions of the Accademia dei Ricovrati: Orality, Writing, and Print in Seventeenth-Century Padua', in *Interactions between Orality and Writing in Early Modern Italian Culture*, ed. by Luca Degl'Innocenti, Brian Richardson, Chiara Sbordoni (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 213-226 (p. 213).

⁶² On Vincenza Armani see Eloisa Pierucci, 'Vincenza Armani (Venezia, 1530 ca. – Cremona, 11 settembre 1569)', *Drammaturgia*, 15.5 (2018), 271-289.

⁶³ The assumption was made in Alessandro D'Ancona, *Origini del teatro italiano*, 2 vols (Turin: Loescher, 1891), II, pp. 461-462.

page, in-octavo volume in three sections, as the title makes clear.⁶⁴ The first consists of Valerini's oration, the second of 39 poems in praise of Armani, and the third of 5 poems written by Armani herself. There are no references in the encomia to the death of Armani, while there are many allusions to the daily life which the actress and the eulogists shared and to frequent and repeated contacts with her. The encomia in the collection were composed by Armani's admirers during her lifetime and were probably presented to her as a gift on several different occasions.⁶⁵ Armani herself might have collected the poems with the intention of publishing them, and Valerini participated in the elaboration of an editorial strategy which was ultimately never put in place because of the sudden death of the actress.

Among Armani's eulogists there were also members of the Sienese Accademia degli Intronati.⁶⁶ In one of the two sonnets dedicated by the academicians to the actress, Armani's skills and virtue are equated to those of the Gods. She is as beautiful as Venus, as learned as Minerva, her smile brings to mind the smile of the Graces and her singing, the Muses. Her talents extend to those of the male Gods: when she plays *en travesti*, if she wields a sword, she is Mars, if she gets angry, she is Jupiter, and when she gives voice, she outspeaks Mercury. The academicians conclude that it is no wonder that people adore her. The winged souls of the spectators cannot stop themselves from flying to her, because she transforms the stage into Heaven:

Costei che Citerea somiglia tanto
e nel saper sede a Minerva a lato,
e quando ride delle Grazie dato
l'è il pregio, e vince delle Muse il canto.
Se si mostra talora in viril manto
cinta la spada sembra Marte armato,
se s'adira talor par Giove irato,
e parlando, a Mercurio toglie il vanto.
Qual meraviglia or è, s'ella ha il valore
delle dive celesti e de gli dei,
s'altri vinto riman, s'altri l'adora.
E se dal proprio albergo uscendo fuore
volano l'alme ad annidarsi in lei,
poi c'apre in scena un paradiso ogn'ora.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Adriano Valerini, *Oratione d'Adriano Valerini Veronese, In morte della Divina Signora Vincenza Armani, Comica Eccellentissima. Et alcune rime dell'Istesso e d'altri Auttori, in lode della medesima. Con alquante leggiadre e belle Compositioni di detta Signora Vincenza* (Verona: Bastian delle Donne, 1570[?]).

⁶⁵ This hypothesis is further supported by a passage in Valerini's oration: he declares that he will cry for Armani's death, together with 'quei famosi cigni che, *mentre ella visse*, la cantarono' (fol. 8^v, my emphasis), probably alluding to the authors of the encomia.

⁶⁶ The authorship of these sonnets is discussed in Riccò, pp. 142-164.

⁶⁷ Valerini, *Oratione*, fol. 17^v.

The divine nature of the actress is acknowledged in another sonnet of the collection, whose author is unidentified. The poem describes the journey of a soul towards Heaven: the soul comes to contemplate God, returns to earth and recognises in Armani the *imago dei*. Given this premise, the author declares himself to be justified in his contemplation of Armani, because there is no one on earth that resembles God as much as she does:

Scorta da un bel desio, l'anima s'era
tutta in sé stessa al suo principio unita,
e da un raggio divino al ciel rapita
seco godea del maggior lume altera.
Quinci poggiando d'una in altra sfera
con la scorta d'amor tant'alto ardita
sen gio che scorre la beltà infinita
e del sommo fattor l'immagin vera.
Quinci al nido mortal tornando poi
ciò che nell'alto e luminoso seggio
vide mirando, riconobbe in voi.
Onde se gl'occhi a rimirarvi invio
avien, perché qua giù cosa non veggio,
che più di voi si rassomigli a Dio. (fol. 19^r)

Five poems in the collection are attributed to the man of letters Leone de' Sommi.⁶⁸ De' Sommi was a poet, playwright, theoretician of the theatre, *impresario* at the Court of Mantua in the mid-sixteenth century, and member of the local Accademia degli Invaghiti.⁶⁹ In his poems, de' Sommi describes Armani as possessing all the qualities of courtly ladies. She has 'bei costumi', 'onesta grazia', 'animo augusto'. She is 'sì dolce, sì affabile e modesta', 'liberale, magnanima, e cortese', 'benigna e umile'; she does not have 'vani desideri, abietti e vili'. Above all, she is honourable:

Poi che 'l vostro onor, donna, al sommo tende
e sempre verso il ciel poggiando ascende. (fol. 27^v)

[...] e al mio dir traendo il velo,
torno a cantar del bel, che adorna il seno,

⁶⁸ The authorship of the poems was attributed to de' Sommi by Ferruccio Marotti. On this matter, see Leone de' Sommi, *Quattro dialoghi in materia di rappresentazioni sceniche*, ed. by Ferruccio Marotti (Milan: Il Polifilo, 1968), p. 84.

⁶⁹ Probably due to his prominent role in the cultural life of Mantua, de' Sommi obtained the membership of the academy, although Jews were not usually admitted to academies as members. On de' Sommi, see Ahuva Belkin, *Leone de' Sommi and the performing Arts* (Tel Aviv: The Yolanda and David Katz Faculty of the Arts, Tel Aviv University, 1997) and Giorgio Pavesi, *Leone de' Sommi hebreo e il teatro della modernità* (Asola: Gilghamesh edizioni, 2015).

e de l'onor, ch'erge Vincenza al cielo. (fol. 27^v)

De' Sommi compares the feelings generated by contemplating the wonders of the Creation to those generated by contemplating Armani, and defines the love engendered by her as 'santo' (fol. 21^r). The *dolcezza* the author feels when looking at Armani is such that it surpasses even that of the soul in proximity to God:

E di tanta dolcezza il sen già sento
colmo, che più non n'ha, vicina al vero
e sommo bene. (fol. 21^r)

The rhetorical skills of the actress have the power to bring souls closer to God by prompting a mystic, heavenly pleasure in the audience:

E tanto coi discorsi ad alto sale,
che chi l'ascolta, in un stupisce e gode,
quasi rapito al ciel, d'onde ella scese
per far tutto il suo bel chiaro e palese. (fol. 25^r)

Re-stating the argument suggested by the Intronati, de' Sommi legitimates worship of Armani on the basis of her virtues and skills:

Se tale è dunque e tanto il suo valore,
qual meraviglia, se per dea l'ammira
ciascuno? E più, chi vago è d'onore
vinto, e preso riman, come la mira?
Onde infiammato dal più santo amore
felice, sol per lei gode, e respira,
nel contemplar quella divina imago,
che rende ogni desio contento e pago. (fol. 25^r)

Armani is an image of God. Therefore, the author concludes, the desire to praise her is to be considered as proper and as pious as the desire to praise God:

Ma se un cor devoto e pio
(sia quanto può dal terren pondo oppresso)
restar di render sempre laude a Dio
ben che sia nel suo dir vile e dimesso;
così non debbo io oppormi al bel desio
c'ho d'onorarvi e di lodarvi appresso
Vincenza, a par d'ogni altra donna altiera

degnà d'eterno onor, di gloria vera. (fols 23^v-24^r)

The passages shown here are the first of a rich tradition of encomiastic poems to professional actresses, of which the writings for Virginia Ramponi, as will become apparent, are eminent representatives. The actress described in these poems is the same as the one condemned in the clerics' treatises, and yet she has no connection with her. Her qualities are identical, and yet they are transfigured. She is beautiful, but her beauty is a sign of inner virtue, not of corruption. She is eloquent, but her words spread virtue not temptation. She is fascinating, but her charm is a spur to morality, not decadence. Through this woman, theatre acquires a new function: to ignite in men the will to live 'a vita lodevole' (fol. 9^v).

The new image of the actress was built by the academicians on an extensive use of Neoplatonic rhetoric. It is a Neoplatonic truth that physical beauty is a manifestation of God, 'l'orma di Dio'.⁷⁰ This beauty is inextricably linked to Goodness because the beauty of the body depends on the beauty of the soul. Neoplatonism, widely diffused in Renaissance poetry, was the perfect theoretical framework for the rehabilitation of actresses, the only instrument available to intellectuals as they re-semanticised those same bodies of performers being targeted by clerics. The use of this rhetoric in the encomia for actresses was far from being a mere adherence to stylistic conventions. It was a statement. Actresses were pursued by the Church, accused of immorality and believed to be instruments of the Devil. They had nothing to do with the literary subjects previously sung of in Neoplatonic imagery. No longer connected to the private experience of the authors, they were public personae, Innamorate by profession, whose aim was to fascinate others. The experience of their love was corrupt: it was performed, not real; it was shared, not intimate. Yet, instead of choosing to evade Neoplatonic rhetoric in their praise of this controversial subject, intellectuals unanimously chose to exploit it. They proclaimed these women the gateway to Paradise, the stairway to Heaven, the image of God. The use of Neoplatonic narrative was a conscious act for the redemption of actresses. In so doing, intellectuals took a clear stance in the debate on theatre and professional actresses, positioning themselves on the opposite side to the clerics. Encomiasts did not just defend actresses from the opinion of the detractors, but they transformed them into a new social subject whose social purpose was to bring people closer to God. In the Tridentine context, when religion was unceasingly jeopardised, intellectuals showed the benefits that actresses

⁷⁰ Castiglione, *Cortegiano*, p. 329.

could bring to the Church by stressing their power to transform human souls and to inspire a desire for God.

It is a matter of conjecture as to why intellectuals put this operation in place. They might have suggested a Neoplatonic interpretation of the figure of the actress to justify their own relationship with female performers, to legitimise their familiarity with them. Whatever the reason these encomia were produced, their effect on the social history of actors is significant. Yet it has so far been ignored by scholars, who have suggested that the remodelling of actors was first brought about in the writings by some of the greatest *comici dell'Arte*.⁷¹ In fact, before being part of the conscious process of self-fashioning put in place by the *comici*, the recasting of the figure of the professional performer was brought about by a group of intellectuals who were enthusiasts of the theatre.⁷² By praising actresses, they indirectly provided learned actors, new to the literary world, with theoretical and practical instruments with which to build their own defence. As we shall see, the strategies employed by the eulogists were then adopted by *comici dell'Arte* for their self-promotion. Actors built their mythopoeia on the basis of the rhetorical frame created by the eulogists: they appropriated the arguments of encomiasts in their theoretical treatises in defence of their profession and perpetuated their own divinisation in plays, poems and performances.

The appreciation of professional theatre by intellectuals changed the perception of the new cultural phenomenon and troubled the stance of the detractors. Clerics could no longer pretend that actresses fascinated only the 'menti de' deboli',⁷³ since respectable, learned, and authoritative members of renowned cultural institutions attested to the value of their performances. The blurring of the boundaries between the clerical and the academic worlds influenced the opinion of some ecclesiastics in favour of actresses. Many clerics were also members of academies and mainly, but not only, joined the chorus of eulogists in this capacity.⁷⁴ Among the first clerics to acknowledge the merit of professional actresses was Tommaso Garzoni, affiliated to the Accademia degli Informi in Ravenna. In 1585, in his *La piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo*, mentioned above, while referring to the 'istrioni' of his own time, Garzoni mentioned one actor, 'un Fabio Comico', and praised

⁷¹ See, for example, Fabrizio Fiaschini, *L'incessabile agitazione*, p. 112.

⁷² In this respect, see, for example, the role of the academician Gherardo Borgogni in the career of Isabella Andreini, considered in Kathryn Bosi, 'Accolades for an Actress: On Some Literary and Musical Tributes for Isabella Andreini', *Recercare*, 15 (2003), 73-117.

⁷³ Ottonelli, *Della Cristiana Moderazione del Teatro*, quoted in Taviani, *La fascinazione del teatro*, p. 385.

⁷⁴ In late sixteenth-century Italy, there was an exponential growth in the number of clerics who were also men of letters. On this matter see, for example, Carlo Dionisotti, 'La letteratura italiana nell'età del Concilio di Trento', in *Il Concilio di Trento e la riforma tridentina*. Atti del convegno storico internazionale. Trento, 2-6 settembre 1963 (Rome: Herder, 1965), pp. 318-343.

the talent of the first three *dive* in the history of Commedia dell'Arte: Vincenza Armani, Isabella Andreini, and Vittoria Piissimi (?-post 1595), confirming that actresses were more renowned and influential than their male colleagues:

La graziosa Isabella, decoro delle scene, ornamento dei teatri, spettacolo superbo non meno di virtù che di bellezze ha illustrato ancora lei questa professione, in modo che, mentre il mondo durerà, mentre staranno i secoli, mentre avran vita gli ordini e i tempi, ogni voce, ogni lingua, ogni grido risuonerà il celebre nome d'Isabella. Della dotta Vincenza non parlo, che, imitando la facondia ciceroniana, ha posto l'arte comica in concorrenza con l'oratoria e, parte con la beltà mirabile, parte con la grazia indicibile, ha eretto uno amplissimo trionfo di sé stessa al mondo spettatore, facendosi divulgare per la più eccellente comediante di nostra etade [...]. Ma sopra tutto parmi degna d'eccelsi onori quella divina Vittoria, che fa metamorfosi di sé stessa in scena, quella bella maga d'amore che alletta i cori di mille amanti con le sue parole, quella dolce sirena che ammaglia con soavi incanti l'alme de' suoi divoti spettatori, e senza dubbio merita di essere posta come un compendio dell'arte.⁷⁵

When Garzoni wrote his work, Piissimi was reaching the height of success, but her primacy was becoming threatened by the rise of Isabella Andreini. Vincenza Armani, who belonged to the previous generation of actresses, stood as a model. Each of the actresses is commended by Garzoni for a specific quality. Isabella Andreini is considered the exemplar of virtue and, through it, commanded respect for her profession. Vincenza Armani is praised as a learned and sublime orator: thanks to her, 'l'arte comica' could convincingly compete with oratory. But the author reserves his greatest praise for Vittoria Piissimi: significantly, she is eulogised for the fascination she sparks in the audience and is defined as 'bella *maga d'amore*', 'dolce *sirena*, ch'*ammaglia* con soavi *incanti* l'alme de suoi *divoti spettatori*'. By saying that Piissimi was 'dega d'eccelsi onori' precisely because she could seduce spectators, Garzoni was subverting the clerics' argument of the evil nature of the actresses' fascination.

The actresses celebrated by Garzoni, thanks to their particular qualities, were in the uppermost echelons of the hierarchy of the *microsocietà* of the *comici*, which reflected and amplified the different levels of society.⁷⁶ The appreciation that some actresses obtained from certain clerics did not dispel once and for all the prejudice of the Church against them

⁷⁵ Garzoni, *La piazza universale*, II, p. 1182.

⁷⁶ See Claudio Meldolesi, 'La microsocietà degli attori. Una storia di tre secoli e più', *Inchiesta*, 67 (1984), 102-111 (p. 104). In his essay, Meldolesi identifies within the *microsocietà* of the *comici*, 'una decina di livelli gerarchici'.

as a group. The relationship between actresses and the Church remained conflictual throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and beyond.⁷⁷

1.4 MARKETING COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE

The arguments examined so far, constructed by clerics and academicians in the debate around early modern theatre, were adopted by the *comici* dell'Arte to transform their profession and to create a new image of themselves. In a historical period when human identity was increasingly perceived as a manipulable, artful process,⁷⁸ some actors of Commedia dell'Arte, familiar, by profession, with recasting themselves as someone else,⁷⁹ aimed at portraying themselves as morally irreproachable and intellectually respectable. The first work in print by a *comico* dell'Arte is the funerary oration written by Adriano Valerini for Vincenza Armani: it consciously deals with shaping a new identity for professional performers. This time, the promotion of a new idea of the profession comes from an actor and not from an intellectual, from a producer and not from a spectator. In his oration, Valerini mourns the loss of Armani and praises her virtues and her "divine" qualities with the aim of remarking upon the skills and the unimpeachable ethics of theatre professionals. The apotheosis of Armani is the first step in the mythopoeia of *comici* dell'Arte.⁸⁰

Valerini's oration proves that professional performers appropriated the arguments of the eulogists to build their own apologia: his image of Armani relies on the Neoplatonic lexicon and narrative deployed by the eulogists in the poems attached to the oration, which were composed before Valerini's funerary text. As in the encomia, Armani's beauty is described as a tool that triggers in her spectators a pious, active desire to be united to God:

Ch'ella tra noi fu veramente un'ombra del sommo Bello, posta qua giù acciò che
l'alme scorgendo in lei l'orme dell'eterno Bene si rivolgessero, malgrado dell'oblio,
alla Memoria Prima, e tutte, di celeste zelo ardendo, desiassero di riunirsi al suo
principio.⁸¹

⁷⁷ On more recent conflicts between clerics and actors, see Claudia D. Johnson, *Church and Stage: The Theatre as Target of Religious Condemnation in Nineteenth Century America* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2008).

⁷⁸ Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, p. 2.

⁷⁹ Evidence of actors' awareness in manipulating their own identity is offered by the opening sonnet of Isabella Andreini's collection of *Rime*: 'S'alcun fia mai, che i versi miei negletti | legga, non creda a questi finti ardori, | che ne le scene immaginari amori | usa a trattar con non leali affetti, | con bugiardi non men con finti detti | delle Muse spiegai gli alti furori, | talor piangendo i falsi miei dolori, | talor cantando i falsi miei dilette' (Andreini, *Rime*, p. 1).

⁸⁰ On this, see Marotti and Romei, pp. 27-30.

⁸¹ *Oratione*, fol. 7^v.

Her singing has a similar psychagogic power: like one of the sirens of Plato's *Republic*, she produces a celestial harmonic sound that reminds the souls of their 'celeste albergo'.⁸²

Al dolce suono accompagnava poi con tanta vaghezza il canto, che ogni senso, quantunque egro fosse e dolente, rimanea lieto e contento, e l'alme, che di quella vera armonia che fanno movendosi le stelle sentivano non più udita sembianza, d'ineffabil dolcezza si struggeano, rimembrandosi del suo celeste albergo. (fol. 6^r)

In a masterful rhetorical construction, Armani's acting is considered by Valerini as an instrument of Providence. For Armani, performance means transforming souls: through her words, she censors human vices and spurs men to virtuous behaviour. Armani's eloquence becomes a means for a strategic defence of theatre:

Volse il cielo, acciò questa eloquenza si spargesse in ogni parte di quella provincia in cui gli onori del mondo, altrove spenti, si riparano, ed acciò ognuno tanta divinità godesse, ammirasse e studiasse d'imitarla, che la Signora Vincenza, forse per purgar de' vizii la corrotta gente, si desse al recitar comedie in scena, dove de gli uomini come in uno specchio rappresentando il vivere, e d'essi riprendendo i perditi costumi e gli errori, a vita lodevole gli infiammasse. (fol. 9^v)

To further support this new, moralised image of theatre professionals, Valerini stresses Armani's devoutness. He declares that she was 'religiosissima, di fede, di devozione e di carità ripiena'; he defines her as a 'nova terrena angioletta' (fol. 4^r); and, in retelling the circumstances of her death, he writes that 'prese gli ordini sacri, maggior cura avendo di dar i rimedii alla nobile e miglior parte che all'imperfetta e caduca' (fol. 11^v). This is the portrait of a Tridentine actress. The syntagma was no longer an oxymoron because the actress fashioned by Valerini made theatre compatible with religion and religion part of theatre.

The moral self-fashioning strategies of *comici dell'Arte*, as we shall see, continued to follow the two lines of the divinity and the devoutness of the performers established by Valerini for Armani: the first was based on Neoplatonic arguments, the second consisted in showing the religious zeal of the actors. Theatre professionals aimed to disprove one by one the accusations of the clerics by showing that their theatre did not corrupt the customs

⁸² 'On the top of each circle stands a siren, which is carried round with it and utters a note of constant pitch, and the eight notes together make up a single scale' (Plato, *Republic*, trans. by Henry D. P. Lee, Rev. edition (London: Penguin, 2007), p. 597 [accessed online on 21 October 2020: <https://r2.vlreader.com/Reader?ean=9780141917696>]). On the association of the platonic image of the heavenly sirens with female singers, see Elena Laura Calogero, "'Sweet Alluring Harmony": Heavenly and Earthly Sirens in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Literary and Visual Culture', in *Music of the Sirens*, ed. by Linda P. Austern and Inna Naroditskaya (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), pp. 140-175 (pp. 141-142).

of the spectators but rather improved them, that it was not unworthy but transformative, that it did not profane the time of the liturgy but rather re-sacralised it by bringing people closer to God.

Beyond their moral self-fashioning, *comici* dell'Arte built their literary image, having understood that the activity of publishing was important in obtaining intellectual recognition and in spreading their image as honourable men and women. Their literary production, although heterogenous in its forms, always implied a more or less explicit defence of their activity as performers. Bernadette Majorana noted that by the act of writing 'the *comici* put themselves in the hands of the press – some by reflecting on the value of writing and performing techniques, some by examining the social implications of *commedia dell'arte*', whereas others, among them Giovan Battista Andreini, pursued 'the possibility of walking the Christian path of perfection as actors'.⁸³

The literary status of the *comici*, as mentioned, was further validated by their contact with the academies: some learned actors obtained acknowledgment of their value by corresponding with intellectuals, exchanging writings with them and promoting their own works among them. Such was the case with Valerini. The funerary oration he published for Armani was intended to support his literary claim among intellectuals, in particular those who appreciated the *diva*. He also made several approaches to the academy of his home town, the Accademia Filarmonica in Verona, known to be interested in theatre: in 1583 he sent the academicians a manuscript copy of a still unpublished tragedy by the Count Federico Asinari, which was probably already in circulation among actors, and in 1586 he praised the academy in his own work *Le bellezze di Verona*.⁸⁴ In exchange, his 'stil purgato e colto' was praised in a poem which is part of a manuscript verse anthology held in the State Archive of Verona. The anthology contains sonnets by Valerini and by many *letterati*, including several Filarmonici.⁸⁵

Valerini's footsteps were more successfully followed by Isabella Andreini, mother of Giovan Battista. In 1601, she was awarded membership of the Accademia degli Intenti

⁸³ Majorana, 'Commedia dell'Arte and the Church', p. 134.

⁸⁴ Adriano Valerini, *Le Bellezze di Verona, nuovo ragionamento d'Adriano Valerini veronese; nel quale con brevità si tratta di tutte le cose notabili della città* (Verona: Girolamo Discepoli, 1586). On Valerini's literary claim, see also Ferdinando Taviani, 'La Commedia dell'Arte e Gesù Bambino (Intorno all'*Afrodite* di Adriano Valerini)', in *Origini della commedia improvvisa o dell'arte*. Atti del XIX Convegno Internazionale Roma 12-14 ottobre, Anagni 15 ottobre, ed. by Maria Chiabò and Federico Doglio (Rome: Edizioni Torre d'Orfeo, 1996), pp. 49-84.

⁸⁵ Archivio di Stato, Verona, Fondo Dionisi-Piomarta, ms 637, *Rime* dedicated to Alberto Lavezzola. The anthology is mentioned in Sampson, 'Amateurs Meet Professionals', p. 198. For further details on the manuscript, see Marco Materassi, *Il Primo Lauro. Madrigali in onore di Laura Peperara. Ms 220 dell'Accademia Filarmonica di Verona [1580]* (Treviso: Diastema Fiori Musicali, 1999), p. VII. On manuscript circulation and exchange, see Brian Richardson, *Manuscript Culture in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

in Pavia, becoming the first Commedia dell'Arte performer to be officially accepted as member of an academy. This goal was achieved mainly thanks to the influential literary and social connections that Andreini had built from 1570s onwards, and was probably reinforced by the publication of her *Rime* (1601), dedicated to Cardinal Cinzio Aldobrandini, himself a member of the Intenti.⁸⁶ This membership was the acknowledgment of only one of her academic networks. Thanks to her skills as a writer and performer, Andreini built a solid web of links with members of the Accademia degli Illustrati in Casale, the Milanese Accademia degli Inquieti, the Accademia dei Filarmonici, the Vicentine Accademia Olimpica and the Florentine Accademia degli Spensierati, where Giovan Battista Andreini himself was to make his literary debut.⁸⁷ Her literary merits even led her as far as a second place in a poetry competition won by Tasso.⁸⁸

The case of Valerini and Armani leads us to one further crucial factor in the strategies of professional performers. When confronted with *comici* dell'Arte, as mentioned in the introduction, 'self' is not always the right entity to consider. The pivotal role of women in the success of theatre professionals led, on some occasions, to the creation of a "couple-system". When the two actors had been anointed by the holy sacrament of marriage, the professional theatre couple stood as a moral unit. It was an entertainment unit because the relationship between actor and actress blurred the lines between fiction and reality when performing on stage. It was a social unit because the man and the woman brought together their individual contacts to create a wider network of intellectuals and statesmen for their benefit and their joint advancement. It was a powerful *noeud* within the company, able to stand in contrast to the frequent internal rivalries and jealousies between the actors.

In some of the most famous *comici* couples, the woman was the *prima donna*, the celebrated *diva*, and the man a performer, usually with literary ambitions. They worked in tandem. The finances of the couple, which relied on the profits of the *tournées*, were substantially increased by the gifts the female performer received from her admirers.

⁸⁶ See Sampson, 'Amateurs Meet Professionals', p. 200 and Cox, 'Member, Muses, Mascots', pp. 133-145.

⁸⁷ Isabella Andreini's links with contemporary academies are of such an extent that they merit a study of their own. Beyond the works mentioned above (n. 86), some notes on her connections are in Bosi, 'Accolades for an Actress'.

⁸⁸ Giovan Battista Andreini describes the episode in *La Ferza*: 'Ma se della felice memoria della mia studiosa madre non io, ma altri parlar volesse, non direbbe che 'n Roma fu non solo dipinta, ma coronata d'alloro in simulacro colorato fra 'l Tasso e il Petrarca, alor che doppo una mensa fattale dell'Illustrissimo e Reverendissimo Cardinal Cinzio Aldobrandini dov'erano pur presenti sei cardinali sapientissimi, il Tasso, il Cavalier de' Pazzi e l'Ongaro e altri poeti preclari, sonettando e scrivendo improvvisi, la stessa, doppo il Tasso, ne portò il primo vanto?' (Andreini, 'La Ferza', in Marotti and Romei, p. 521). The episode is analysed in Ferdinando Taviani, 'Bella d'Asia. Torquato Tasso, gli attori e l'immortalità', *Paragone. Letteratura*, 35 (1984), 3-76.

Because of her influence on the public, the actress was in charge of social matters and, thanks to her performing skills, created links with the academies, links which were sometimes exploited by the man in order to obtain literary validation. Sometimes, the female performer was central to the iconographic strategies of the couple: the *diva* modelled for painters and was portrayed in images available for purchase.⁸⁹ The man contributed to the advancement of the couple through his writing and defence of the work of the performers. He sometimes mythologised his partner in his publications and actively participated in the creation of the *diva*, contributing through his contacts to the spreading of her fame. On stage, he was a collaborative partner, willing to give more visibility to her talent; off stage, he defended the interests of the couple and willingly responded to the calls for performances made by his partner's admirers.

Valerini and Armani, as a couple, are the first example of such a strategy. By praising the deeds and the talent of Vincenza Armani, Adriano Valerini set a successful precedent in the history of Commedia dell'Arte. On this basis, Francesco and Isabella Andreini elaborated their own marketing strategy, upon which their son Giovan Battista capitalised, as will be shown in the following chapters.

Isabella and Francesco Andreini were the main contributors to the narrative of the *comici* as learned and honourable people. To rebut the accusation of promiscuity made against actors, they showed themselves as a respectable married couple, deeply in love and, with their nine children, willing to accomplish the Christian duty of child-bearing. Their narrative was built on the divinity and devoutness of the performers, and on their literary status, the axes examined above.

Before 1604, the year of Isabella's death, Francesco Andreini distinguished himself through the invention and interpretation of the character of Capitan Spavento da Valle Inferna, and in his activity as *capocomico*, able to build profitable relationships with influential patrons and friendly relationships with his colleagues. After 1604, although he disbanded the Gelosi company, he did not abandon the profession, becoming pivotal in the dynamics of the *comici*. He was often consulted about the management of the *compagnie*, he intervened to settle conflicts, and closely followed the career of his son Giovan Battista, frequently joining him and Ramponi on their *tournées*. As he had committed himself to the advancement of his wife's career before 1604, so too he committed himself to the

⁸⁹ Between 1607 and 1608, Isabella Andreini, with her husband and son, was portrayed by the painter Bernardino Poccetti in one of the lunettes in the major cloister of the Basilica della Santissima Annunziata in Florence (Ferrone, 'Pose sceniche di una famiglia d'attori', pp. 51-58). At the beginning of her career, Virginia Ramponi was portrayed by Cristofano Allori, known as Bronzino and, later on, was the model for some paintings by Domenico Fetti, to which I shall return in Chapter 5.

advancement of her memory *in mortem*, by transforming Isabella, through his editorial activity, into a myth.

In life, Isabella contributed to the success of the couple through her memorable performances and her prestigious connections, but also, different to Armani and Ramponi, through her literary activity.⁹⁰ Isabella was probably the first woman to write a pastoral play, *La Mirtilla*,⁹¹ and she wrote more than five hundred poems, including sonnets, madrigals and eclogues, some of which were published in her collection of *Rime* in 1601. She was praised by the poet and academician Gherardo Borgogni, who introduced her into literary circles,⁹² then by a range of intellectuals, including Torquato Tasso, Gabriello Chiabrera and Giovan Battista Marino.⁹³ She was outstandingly famous, even more so after her death. In Lyon in 1604, the French organised a state funeral and coined a commemorative medal for her. The site of her grave became a place of pilgrimage.⁹⁴ After her death, her memory, cherished by her husband and her son, granted Francesco and Giovan Battista visibility and appreciation for decades to come.

No myth in the history of Commedia dell'Arte was built and fostered with the same care and dedication as Isabella's. In 1605, Francesco Andreini published a second edition of the *Rime* that Isabella was preparing during the last years of her life.⁹⁵ In order to eternalise

⁹⁰ Five poems included in the third section of Valerini's *Oratione* are under Armani's name; however, her authorship is still questioned. See Pierucci, 'Vincenza Armani', p. 287.

⁹¹ *La Mirtilla* was published in 1588; however, it seems to have been in the repertoire of the Gelosi since at least 1584, when a performance of the pastoral by the company was recorded in Savona. See Franco Vazzoler, 'Chiabrera fra dilettanti e professionisti dello spettacolo', in *La scelta della misura. Gabriello Chiabrera: l'altro fuoco del barocco italiano*. Atti del Convegno di Studi su Gabriello Chiabrera nel 350° anniversario della morte, Savona, 3-6 novembre 1988, ed. by Fulvio Bianchi and Paolo Russo (Genoa: Costa e Nolan, 1993), pp. 429-466 (p. 432).

⁹² Borgogni acted as a guarantor for Andreini's literary debut by posing her first poetic composition under his aegis. As a member of the *Accademia degli Intenti*, he probably played a major role in her acceptance in the academy.

⁹³ On Isabella Andreini and Tasso, see Ferdinando Taviani, 'Bella d'Asia'; on the relationship between Andreini and Chiabrera, see Franco Vazzoler, 'Chiabrera fra dilettanti e professionisti dello spettacolo'. For further information on Andreini and Marino and for a review of his verse for the actress, see Stefano Santosuosso, 'Le egloghe boscherecce di Isabella Andreini nelle opere di Giovan Battista Marino', *Studi Secenteschi*, 54 (2013), 49-57. On the musical encomia for Andreini, see Bosi, 'Accolades for an actress'. The correspondence between Isabella Andreini and the Dutch humanist Erycius Puteanus has been examined by Anne MacNeil in 'Music and the Life and Work of Isabella Andreini: Humanistic Attitudes toward Music, Poetry and Theatre during the Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Chicago, 1994), and by Chiara Cedrati, 'Isabella Andreini: la vicenda editoriale delle *Rime*', *ACME-Annali della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia dell'Università degli Studi di Milano*, 60.2 (2007), 115-142.

⁹⁴ See Kerr, *The Rise of the Diva*, p. 130. An account of the last moments of the life of Isabella Andreini is provided by Giovan Battista in *La Ferza*: 'non solo il pubblico di quelle graziosissime dame lionesi la assistevano, ma dagli istessi religiosi cappuccini, non che la confortavano, ma che da lei erano confortati, che se anima alcuna era drittamente per ardor di cuore, per vivacità di spirito salita a Dio, questa era quell'una' (Andreini, 'La Ferza', in Marotti and Romei, p. 508).

⁹⁵ Isabella Andreini expressed her intention to publish a second edition of the *Rime* in a letter written to the humanist Erycius Puteanus on 6 March 1601. See Cedrati, 'Isabella Andreini: la vicenda editoriale delle *Rime*', p. 132.

her myth, he collected and added to this edition ‘alcune composizioni, che Toscana, e latinamente sono state fatte nella morte di lei’.⁹⁶ The twenty-seven poems, seventeen in Latin and ten in Italian, are a monument to her extraordinary life and attest to her success among intellectuals. They are preceded by two epitaphs ‘sopra la sepoltura della signora Isabella Andreini in Lione’,⁹⁷ written in Latin by Francesco Andreini. Two years later, in 1607, he led a similar operation by publishing under Isabella’s name a collection of fictional epistolary exchanges based on theatrical texts: *Lettere*.⁹⁸ This volume, too, opened with a collection of Latin and Italian poems dedicated to the *diva*. The memory of his wife and of the deeds of the Gelosi company was also kept alive by Andreini in his own work. In 1607, he collected the best lines of his character and published *Le bravure del Capitano Spavento*, which became a best-seller and gained him recognition as a writer. In the letter to readers of the *Bravure*, he did not neglect the opportunity to praise his wife Isabella once again and to list her literary works:

Durò, quella famosa e non mai abbastanza lodata compagnia dei comici Gelosi, molti e molti anni, mostrando ai comici venturi il vero modo di comporre e di recitar commedie, tragicommedie, tragedie, pastorali, intermedii apparenti e altre invenzioni rappresentative, come giornalmente si veggono nell’arringo delle scene. Finito che fu quel termine e venuto meno il vivere d’Isabella, mia diletissima consorte, la quale fu lume e splendore di quella virtuosa e onorata compagnia, fui da molti amici miei consigliato a scrivere alcuna cosa e donarla alla stampa, per lasciar qualche memoria di me, e per seguitare l’onorato grido della moglie mia, la quale aveva lasciato al mondo, con tanta sua gloria e con tanto suo onore, il suo bellissimo *Canzoniero*, la sua bellissima *Mirtilla Favola Boscareccia*, e il compendio delle sue bellissime *Lettere*.⁹⁹

Francesco Andreini continued to follow ‘l’onorato grido della moglie’ by writing and publishing two pastoral plays in Venice, in 1611: *L’ingannata Proserpina* and *L’alterezza di Narciso*.¹⁰⁰ In the same year, he wrote a sonnet and the letter to readers which open *Il teatro delle favole rappresentative* by Flaminio Scala, and in 1612 he published a collection of dialogues,

⁹⁶ Girolamo Bordoni and Pietromartire Locarni, ‘Dedicatoria a Cinzio Aldobrandini’, in Isabella Andreini, *Rime di Isabella Andreini Comica Gelosa, Accademica Intenta detta l’Accesa* (Milan: Bordone e Locarni, 1605), a4^v. For an English translation of a selection of Andreini’s *Rime*, see *Selected Poems of Isabella Andreini*, ed. by Anne MacNeil, transl. by James Wyatt Cook (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2005).

⁹⁷ Isabella Andreini, *Rime*, no pagination.

⁹⁸ Isabella Andreini, *Lettere d’Isabella Andreini padovana, comica gelosa, et academica intenta nominata l’Accesa* (Venice: Marc’Antonio Zaltieri, 1607).

⁹⁹ Francesco Andreini, ‘Francesco Andreini da Pistoia detto il Capitano Spavento, Comico Geloso, ai lettori’, in *Le bravure del capitano Spavento*, no pagination.

¹⁰⁰ Francesco Andreini, *L’ingannata Proserpina: opera rappresentativa e scenica* (Venice: Giacomo Somasco, 1611) and Francesco Andreini, *L’alterezza di Narciso opera scenica rappresentativa* (Venice: Giacomo Somasco, 1611).

the *Ragionamenti fantastici*.¹⁰¹ In parallel with his own works, he sustained the editorial operation for Isabella, which finally came to an end in 1617 with the publication of her *Fragmenti d'alcune scritture*; a text, like the *Ragionamenti*, heavily based on theatrical dialogues. In the letter to readers which introduces the volume, Francesco Andreini declared that he wrote part of the text and published it with the sole intention of enhancing the glory of his wife: 'Con le mie sono annesse alcune poche scritture avanzate alla felice memoria d'Isabella Comica e Accademica Intenta, mia moglie; delle quali m'è parso servirmene a gloria sua, per non lasciarle in poter della fortuna'.¹⁰² Francesco's deferential attitude, atypical for a male author in the early-modern Italian context,¹⁰³ was in fact not unusual in the couple-system of *comici* dell'Arte, which confirms the substantial social innovation of professional actors compared to their own time.

The decision taken by Francesco Andreini to conclude his performing activity and to initiate a celebratory, editorial career on the death of Isabella is evidence of the primacy of the couple over the individual in the marketing strategies of professional performers. Instead of pursuing acting without the star of his company, and with a serious risk of failure, Francesco continued to work in tandem, putting his knowledge and theatrical experience into the service of the myth of Isabella. He was aware that by placing himself in the background and contributing to the glory of the *diva*, he would enhance the fame of the couple to his benefit and to the benefit of the whole profession.

The positive effects of this choice were felt primarily by Giovan Battista Andreini and by his wife, Virginia Ramponi. With these promotional strategies as a precedent, their careers were designed from the outset as a product, carefully prepared for sale on the market. Such were the premises for an unprecedented level of fame in the history of Commedia dell'Arte; even though, ultimately, Andreini mistakenly chose a different path after Ramponi's death, paving the way for his own decline.

¹⁰¹ Francesco Andreini, *Ragionamenti fantastici di Francesco Andreini da Pistoia comico geloso, detto il capitano Spavento, posti in forma di dialoghi rappresentativi* (Venice: Giacomo Somasco, 1612).

¹⁰² Isabella Andreini, *Fragmenti di alcune scritture della signora Isabella Andreini comica gelosa & academica intenta raccolti da Francesco Andreini comico geloso, detto il Capitano Spavento* (Venice: Giovan Battista Combi, 1617), p. 9.

¹⁰³ Ross, 'Performing Humanism', p. 151.

Part I

The Dawn of the Couple (1604)

Chapter 2

Giovan Battista Andreini: Texts and Targets

2.1 GIOVAN BATTISTA ANDREINI AND THE ACCADEMIA DEGLI SPENSIERATI

In 1604, most probably in March, upon receipt of the tragedy *La Florinda* by Giovan Battista Andreini,¹ the members of the Accademia degli Spensierati in Florence examined the play and, in accordance with academic practice, sent it back to the author ‘rivista e censurata’. In early modern Italy, the submission of a manuscript for appraisal to an academy was customary among men of letters. The revision and approval of a work by a cultural institution of this kind represented an intellectual investiture for its author. It meant that the academy guaranteed the merit of the writer and his work, and encouraged its publication. The Spensierati went further: on returning *La Florinda* to Andreini, they presented him with a collection of poems in praise of his work, which he then strategically placed at the beginning of the first edition of the play, printed in 1604.²

No other *comico* dell’Arte before or after him made his literary debut in an academy, let alone with a tragedy. No other work by the *comici* dell’Arte was *rivista* and *censurata* by academicians. None of their writings had been launched on the world with an introductory collection of laudatory poems composed by intellectuals.

Every move in Andreini’s career in 1604 was a display of his self-fashioning and marketing talent. Every step was the result of careful planning, from the *mise en scène* of the

¹ The *terminus ante quem* is 7 April 1604, the date of the dedicatory letter that opens the *Rime in lode* in praise of Ramponi who, as mentioned earlier, performed some passages of the tragedy for the academicians. In the letter, the academician known as *l’Agitato* (Vincenzo Panciatichi), wrote that he was told by the ‘Sonnacchioso, principe de la [...] spensierata Accademia’ to send ‘come uno de’ Censori di quella, [...] al signor Giovan Battista, [...] la Florinda sua Tragedia, da questi Signori Accademici rivista e censurata’ (*Rime in lode*, p. 3).

² *L’Agitato* wrote that he was told to ‘rimandare [...] i Sonetti d’alcuni d’essi, i quali a voi e a lui saranno testimoni veracissimi de la bellezza di detta tragedia e di quello che i medesimi nostri Accademici ne sentono’ (*Rime in lode*, p. 3). There are no remaining copies of the *princeps* of *La Florinda*. The information that the sonnets were printed in the *princeps* is provided by Andreini himself in the preface to *La Saggia Egiziana. Dialogo spettante alla lode dell’arte scenica, di Gio. Battista Andreini Fiorentino, Comico Fedele. Con un trattato sopra la stessa arte, cavato da san Tomaso, et da altri santi* (Florence: Volcmar Timan Germano, 1604), pp. 3-4. The analysis conducted in this chapter is based on the second edition of *La Florinda* (Milan: Bordone, 1606).

play to the selection of its audience, from the choice of the form to the choice of the subject of his literary works. In every act, he profited from the experience of his predecessors and laid the foundations for his success. The events of 1604 deserve and repay further examination.

The academy chosen by Andreini for his debut had been founded in Florence by Francesco Vinta *ante* 1600, the year of the first documented printed publications by the academy.³ Vinta belonged to one of the most influential Florentine families, which had close links to the Medici family.⁴ The relations between some academicians and the Medici, however, did not impair the independence of the Spensierati academy, which remained a private cultural circle and built its own identity by additionally including members who were critical of the court.⁵ The gatherings of the Spensierati academy most probably took place in a villa in an idyllic and bucolic setting north-east of Florence, towards Fiesole, a location chosen by the Spensierato Vincenzo Panciatichi as the setting of his pastoral play *Amorosi affanni*, written in 1605. In the dedicatory letter to Carlo Emanuele I of Savoy, the author wrote:

La favola, come ella leggendo vedrà, si rappresenta nel luogo detto Camerata, nei colli di Fiesole, da me per miglior suono e vaghezza nominato Ninfeo, quasi a imitazione (cagione della amenità sua) di quel monte di Macedonia così dagli antichi detto; e ho preso questo luogo sì per essere delizioso e benissimo posto, come ancora per esser frequentato dai primi gentiluomini di Fiorenza nel villeggiarvi gran tempo della primavera e della state, avendovi sontuosissimi palazzi e leggiadrissimi giardini, parte dei quali da me in quest'opera son nominati: come Barbacani del Signor Cavalier Vinta, Belvedere del Signor Giovan Battista Strozzi, la Luna del Signor Francesco Guadagni, la Stella del Signor Vincenzo Alessandri, il Sole del Signor Giovanni Niccolini, quella Villa del Fonte descritta nell'atto secondo del Signor Luca degli Albizzi, e altre che per brevità tralascio, nelle quali continuamente si fanno adunanze di poeti, musici, e di mille nobilissimi ingegni.⁶

The classical patina given by the Greek name ('nominato Ninfeo, quasi a imitazione [...] di quel monte di Macedonia così dagli antichi detto') is laid over specific toponyms familiar to the author ('nel luogo detto Camerata, nei colli di Fiesole'). Panciatichi is well aware of

³ For an overview of early modern Florentine academies see, for example, Jean Boutier and Maria Pia Paoli, 'Letterati cittadini e principi filosofi. I milieux intellettuali fiorentini tra Cinque e Settecento', in *Rome, Naples, Florence. Une histoire comparée des milieux intellectuels italiens (XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles)*, ed. by Jean Boutier, Brigitte Marin, and Antonella Romano (Rome: Collection de l'Ecole Française de Rome, 2005), pp. 331-403.

⁴ Belisario Vinta, Francesco's uncle, was Secretary of State for Ferdinando I de' Medici, Christina of Lorraine and Cosimo II de' Medici, until his death in 1613.

⁵ This was the case for the satiric poet Alessandro Allegri (1560-1620).

⁶ Vincenzo Panciatichi, *Gli amorosi affanni. Favola pastorale* (Venice: Ciotti, 1606).

the beauty of the area and declares that it was popular among the Florentine *gentiluomini* who stayed there in spring and summer. Panciatichi and the other Spensierati may have had their gatherings in one of the villas of these gentlemen, probably in the ‘Barbacani del Signor Cavalier Vinta’.⁷ If that was the case, the setting of *Amorosi affanni* represented a homage to the intellectual networks built on this system of villas, to which the author belonged.

The Spensierati came from a wide variety of places: beside the Florentine intellectuals, there were Venetians, citizens of Bologna and a large group of Ligurians, a sign that many of the academicians led an itinerant life.⁸ The Spensierati, too, came from different backgrounds: there was a group of monks in the academy of the Vallumbrosan order, a Benedictine congregation founded in the eleventh century, named after the village of Vallombrosa, thirty kilometres from Florence, where the motherhouse of the order was located.⁹ The presence of a group of clerics in the academy gave the Spensierati a particular intellectual format, which synthesised Neoplatonism and the Counter-Reformation, the two opposing paradigms in the debate on professional theatre analysed in Chapter 1. These unusual conditions were favourable to Andreini’s approach to the academy.

Some of the Vallumbrosan members of the Spensierati knew the Andreini family before Giovan Battista’s academic debut. In 1602, a collection of sacred and encomiastic poems written by the Spensierato monk, poet and theologian Crisostomo Talenti was published in Bergamo by Comin Ventura. Talenti dedicated one of his sonnets to Isabella Andreini, comparing her singing to that of the mythical singer Orpheus and stating the superiority of her *canto*. As opposed to the Thracian singer, who led only one soul out of hell, Andreini’s singing, described through the lens of Neoplatonism, stole thousands of souls from hell and showed them the way to heaven.¹⁰

⁷ Fiaschini, *L’incessabile agitazione*, p. 35.

⁸ The philosopher, jurist and priest Giovanni Soranzo had Venetian origins, although he spent his life moving between Florence, Genoa and Milan. The poet Cesare Rinaldi came from Bologna, while the doctor, jurist and theologian Pietro Andrea Canoniero, the writer Pier Girolamo Gentile Ricci and the poet Giovanni Andrea Rovetti were Ligurians. For a more detailed account of the composition of the academy, and for further biographic information on the academicians, see Fiaschini, *L’incessabile agitazione*, pp. 21-49.

⁹ Ippolito Cerboni, Cesare Mainardi, Crisostomo Talenti and Orazio Morandi were the four members of the academy who allegedly belonged to the order.

¹⁰ ‘Narra, Isabella, chi le carte face | di menzogne soggetto, che a’ suoi carmi | diè vita, e senso, e moto a piante, a marmi | finto valor di favoloso Trace: | ma nel suo falso il ver, ch’altri si tace | del tuo celeste canto accennar parmi, | l’alta cui forza oggi a le toghe, a l’armi | dà spirto, e voce, e suon, come a te piace. | E s’ei, colei, Cerbero fatto umile, | e pio reso Pluton, trasse d’Averno, | che pur fè co’l mirar sua grazia umile, | toglì ogni or to mill’alme al crudo inferno | e là l’indirizza il tuo leggiadro stile, | ov’hanno lungi da lui riposo eterno’ (Crisostomo Talenti, *Rime* (Bergamo: Comin Ventura, 1602), p. 43). Talenti wrote also a poem *in memoriam* of Isabella after her death. The poem is part of a collection entitled *Il coro d’Elicon*, published in Bergamo in 1609.

In 1601 and 1602, the first two of a series of six anthologies of dedicatory letters were published in Bergamo by Comin Ventura.¹¹ The two collections included letters by Isabella Andreini, Crisostomo Talenti, Torquato Tasso and Gherardo Borgogni. The contacts of Borgogni and Tasso with Andreini have been considered in Chapter 1. Isabella Andreini's network extended to Talenti, too. Talenti spent a period of his monastic life in Pavia, where he probably came into contact with the Accademia degli Intenti of which Borgogni and Andreini were members. Another member of the Intenti was the Vallumbrosan monk and Spensierato Ippolito Cerboni. In 1605, a year after Isabella Andreini's death, Cerboni published *Delle Muse, Erato overo gli Scherzi* in Pavia, another collection of sacred and encomiastic poems which included verses dedicated to Andreini. Another poem by Cerboni to Isabella was part of the introductory encomiastic collection added by Francesco Andreini to the posthumous edition of Isabella's *Rime* in 1605. Pietro Paolo Andreini, Giovan Battista's brother, was also a member of the Vallumbrosan order from the year 1595.¹² He does not appear to have been a member of the Spensierati, but he might of course have been a link between Giovan Battista and the academy.¹³

Beyond that, the academy was known for the artistic eclecticism which made it a hub for musicians and painters. The academicians, in line with recent developments in Florentine taste, cultivated their interest in music, composing poems to be set to music and encouraging artistic experiments with music and poetry.¹⁴ Panciatichi, as we saw earlier, had stressed the frequent 'adunanze di poeti, musici, e di mille nobilissimi ingegni'. The emblem of the Spensierati academy was a *scacciapensieri*, an old musical instrument, signalling the priority given to music in the academic circle. Theatre, too, had a place of honour among the Spensierati and many academicians were known as playwrights.¹⁵ They wrote mainly tragedies – consistent with the academic tradition – and pastoral plays, which often included musical inserts.¹⁶

¹¹ *Il primo libro di lettere dedicatorie di diversi* (Bergamo: Comin Ventura, 1601); *Il secondo libro di lettere dedicatorie di diversi* (Bergamo: Comin Ventura, 1602).

¹² On Pietro Paolo Andreini, see Torello Sala, *Dizionario storico biografico di scrittori, letterati ed artisti dell'Ordine di Vallombrosa*, 2 vols (Florence: Istituto Gualandi Sordomuti, 1929), I, pp. 22-23, and *Comici dell'Arte: Corrispondenze*, ed. by Claudia Burattelli, Domenica Landolfi and Anna Zinanni, 2 vols (Florence: Le Lettere, 1993), I, p. 95, n. 1.

¹³ Pietro Paolo Andreini's relation with the academy remains unclear, because in some of the publications attributed to him, he appears with the name 'Sonnacchioso accademico Spensierato', which is nonetheless the same academic name as Crisostomo Talenti. See Fiaschini, *L'incessabile agitazione*, p. 42.

¹⁴ On the Spensierati's 'propensione melica', see Fiaschini, *L'incessabile agitazione*, pp. 35-37.

¹⁵ Francesco Vinta wrote *Il rapimento di Clorinda*, a pastoral play, and *La regina Ildia*, a tragedy. Giovanni Soranzo was the author of a pastoral play, *Il ballo del Fiore*, and a religious play, *Il Battista*. Vincenzo Panciatichi wrote tragedies and pastoral plays.

¹⁶ On the features of pastoral drama, see, for example, Lisa Sampson, *Pastoral Drama in Early Modern Italy: The Making of a New Genre* (London: Legenda, 2006).

The composition of the Spensierati group, their links with the Andreini family and their theatrical and musical interests were all invaluable to Giovan Battista Andreini. Their enthusiasm for the arts and for artistic experiment means they were welcoming and profitable to a professional actor. Within the academy, Andreini came into contact with poets, musicians and painters. Their works were employed by him as part of his promotional strategies and influenced the development of his own dramaturgy.¹⁷ The composition of the Spensierati group also offered Andreini sympathetic surroundings in which to meet intellectuals and clerics, who could provide him with the intellectual and moral validation, respectively, for which he so longed. On the one hand, the Spensierati functioned as a catalyst for the extreme post-Tridentine positions, creating an arena of fertile dialogue in the microcosm of the academy; on the other hand, the personal contacts of the Vallumbrosans with the Andreini family assured the favourable disposition of the clerics in the Spensierati towards Andreini. We do not know whether Isabella herself recommended that Giovan Battista present his work to the Spensierati, but what is certain is that her relationships played a major role in the literary debut of her son. The Spensierati were at the intersection of the religious and intellectual networks of the family, and acted as the stage on which the transition from the first to the second generation of the Andreinis was performed. The elder handed over their legacy to the younger and bowed out. The younger accepted the legacy of the elder and moved centre stage.

2.2 *LA FLORINDA* ON THE PAGE

If the Spensierati met Andreini's needs, Andreini, in turn, responded to the Spensierati's requirements by writing a tragedy, a form which reflected academic standards and therefore showed his will to conform to the aristocratic and intellectual society of his time and to widen their approval by means of literary production.¹⁸ The tragedy *La Florinda* is an anomaly in the *corpus* of writings by *comici* dell'Arte,¹⁹ and in Andreini's theatrical *corpus*, which is made up of comedies and religious plays, with the sole exception of the hybrid,

¹⁷ In the academy the Andreinis met, for example, the painter Cristofano Allori, known as Bronzino, who made a now-lost portrait of Andreini's wife, Virginia Ramponi. We know of his portrait from Giovan Battista Marino, since he refers to the painting in his *Galeria Poetica*: 'Bronzin, mentre ritraggi | questo Fior di beltà, beltà gentile, | che co' detti e co' raggi | degli occhi vaghi e del facondo stile, | spetra i duri pensier, doma i selvaggi, | se non ardi d'amore, | hai ben di bronzo il core' (Giovan Battista Marino, *Galeria Poetica*, ed. by Marzio Pieri (Padua: Liviana, 1979), p. 239).

¹⁸ See Mauro Sarnelli, *Col discreto pennel d'alta eloquenza. «Meraviglioso» e classico nella tragedia (e tragicommedia) italiana del Cinque-Seicento* (Rome: Aracne, 1999), p. 28.

¹⁹ One of the few exceptions is Adriano Valerini's tragedy *L'Afrodite* (Verona: Sebastiano & Giovanni dalle Donne, 1578).

tripartite *La Centaura*.²⁰ By presenting this play to the academicians, Andreini made clear that this literary form could be mastered by a *comico*, that he could stand comparison with intellectuals. The plot of the tragedy, the references to Seneca, the use of hendecasyllables and septenaries, the traditional language are among the formal features deployed by Andreini to substantiate his claim as a man of letters.²¹ For the composition of his first play, Andreini also relied on the works by his mother, in particular her *egloghe boscherecce* – a *corpus* of nine poems included in the *Rime* (1601) – as a recent study on the intertextuality between Isabella's and Giovan Battista's works has pointed out.²² Beyond these literary debts, the play presents innovative features: as a playwright used to entertaining an audience, Andreini was aware of the Baroque crisis of theatrical genres, and responded to it by revitalising the tragic plot with elements that traditionally belonged to pastoral plays.²³ He includes nymphs, a shepherd and a hunter, and the dialogues are often set in, or refer to, a *locus amoenus*.²⁴ The choice of a pastoral hybridisation of *La Florinda* was finely calculated: the genre was familiar to the Spensierati's experience of the theatre, and incorporated dance, music and song, in line with their known preferences.

It was not only the form but also the plot of the tragedy, imbued with moral warnings and advice, that was aimed at obtaining the approval of the Spensierati. The subsequent developments of Andreini's dramaturgy permit consideration of *La Florinda* as a preliminary to his religious plays, as we shall see in Chapter 5.

In *La Florinda*, the story revolves around the concept of marriage, and sees the protagonist, Ircano, guilty of having seduced Flerida by promising to marry her and then abandoning her in favour of Florinda. Florinda gives birth to their son, Eginio, while Flerida commits suicide. An oracle, misinterpreting Ircano's dream, predicts that, as a consequence of Flerida's curse, he will be killed by his own son. Ircano, therefore, commands Eginio's death, but Florinda, having understood his intention, runs away with her son. The tragedy

²⁰ The first act of *La Centaura* is a comedy, the second a pastoral, the third a tragedy.

²¹ For a breakdown of the formal features of the play, which were intended to show Andreini's merit as *letterato*, see Sarnelli, pp. 26-36. These features are substantially different from those of the plays by Andreini that follow.

²² Stefano Santosuosso, 'L'ardimento filiale, celeste precetto d'onorar la madre»: la continuità familiare da Isabella a Giovan Battista Andreini', in *Genealogias. Re-Writing the Canon: Women Writing in XVI-XVII Century Italy* (Quares: ArCiBel, 2018), pp. 175-191.

²³ On pastoral features of *La Florinda*, see Franco Vazzoler, 'I comici dell'arte e la tragedia: sulla *Florinda* di Giovambattista Andreini', *Filologia e critica*, 2 (2011), 187-204 (pp. 191-193). See also Emanuela Chichiriccò, '«Col mezo di così fatto innesto». L'esordio pastorale di G. B. Andreini tra *La Saggia Egiziana* e *La Florinda*', in *La tradizione della favola pastorale in Italia. Modelli e percorsi*. Atti del Convegno Genova, 29 novembre-30 dicembre (Bologna: Archetipolibri, 2013), pp. 331-348 and Sarnelli, pp. 34-35.

²⁴ The idyllic setting is a leitmotiv of Andreini's 1604 works. See Fabrizio Fiaschini, 'Fuori dalla selva. Note sugli esordi di Giovan Battista Andreini', *Comunicazioni sociali*, 22.2/3 (2000), 447-486 (pp. 448-449), and Chichiriccò, p. 334.

is set six years after these events, which are recounted, through a doubled perspective, by Ircano to his loyal knight Gismondo and by Florinda to the old shepherd Alfeo. Six years later, Florinda's brother, Filandro, finds her and, on the one hand, convinces her to return with her son to Ircano, and on the other, convinces the contrite Ircano to take her back. After the reconciliation between Florinda and Ircano, the third act seems to lead to a happy ending, with the marriage of the couple, until Filandro brings the news that Eginio was secretly sent away on a ship by Ircano. After moments of uncertainty about Eginio's fate, Florinda is then made aware that her son has been killed by Ircano. The death of Eginio triggers a finale with a chain of murders and suicides: Florinda kills herself, Filandro kills Ircano, and then commits suicide himself. In the end: 'tutto è lagrime e doglia | [...] tutto è pompa di morte'.²⁵

In *La Florinda*, the action of the play is not triggered by fate, as it is in classical tragedies, but by fault:

GISMONDO Il fallo fu (ahi mi si squarcia il seno)
 l'aver con falsa fè rapito il fiore
 di sua verginità tanto gradita
 a Flerida sdegnosa, a cui promise
 di seco unirsi in marital legame. (V. 6. p. 188)

La Florinda is a 'tragedia dell'errore umano',²⁶ Ircano's error: his disregard for the sacrament of marriage is the cause of the dreadful events that follow. The aim of Andreini's defence and promotion of matrimony in his tragedy was twofold: it was a 'patente etica' intended to rebut the accusation of promiscuity made against actors,²⁷ and it was a doctrinal licence, intended to show Andreini's alignment with the ideology of the Counter-Reformation. In the Council of Trent, the vital importance of the holy sacraments, matrimony among them, was reaffirmed; by supporting it in his play, Andreini manifested himself as a devout man, aware of the doctrinal dispositions of the Catholic Church.

The philo-matrimonial ideology of the tragedy is echoed in the constant appeals to married love: beyond the references to the 'leggittimi nodi' (III. 1. p. 92) and the 'nodo indissolubile' (III. 8. p. 114), Andreini also entrusts this moral message to the chorus of

²⁵ Giovan Battista Andreini, *La Florinda. Tragedia* (Milan: Bordone, 1606), V. 5. p. 184.

²⁶ Vazzoler, 'I comici dell'arte e la tragedia', p. 200.

²⁷ Chichiricò defines the strategy of public support of wedlock by *comici* as a 'patente etica': 'Un Eros onesto, ordinato e regolato dal nodo nuziale [è] patente etica necessaria ai comici professionisti per affrancarsi dalle accuse di corruzione e dissolutezza' (Chichiricò, p. 348).

nymphs.²⁸ The second scene of the third act opens with a quatrain of septenaries closed by a rhyming couplet. The quatrain is a distinct unit, metrically and typographically different from the lines which follows:²⁹

CORO DI NINFE Arda ciascun d'amore
 d'amor onesto, e santo
 poi ch'altra accesa face
 non reca amor verace. (III. 2. p. 94)³⁰

The lines are a take-home message for the spectators: the distinct poetic, the rhyme and the singing all emphasise the message they convey.

In *La Florinda*, religious rituals and devotion are an important part of the daily routine of the characters. The references to 'tempio' and 'prieghi' are overdone, especially in Act I:

FLORINDA Quai sterpi, dumi o sassi
 mi contendono i passi
 [...]
 sì ch'io non vada al gran delubro santo
 per consolare in Dio l'alma traffitta? (I. 3. p. 28)³¹

ALFEO Me n'uscii poi doglioso ed anelante
 per girne al tempio a porger preghi. (I. 4. p. 31)

FLORINDA [...] e vada
 al tempio omai, per impetrar dal cielo
 qualche ristoro all'affannata mente. (I. 4. p. 46)

FLORINDA Vientene meco al tempio
 ove offrirem devoti
 tra fiamme di sospir lagrime e voti. (I. 5. p. 47)

LEARCO E poi che a mezzo dì nel sacro tempio

²⁸ Roberto Gigliucci uses the expression 'ideologia filomatrimoniale' with reference to Isabella Andreini's *Mirtilla* (Gigliucci, *Giù verso l'alto: luoghi e dintorni tassiani* (Manziana: Vecchiarelli, 2004), p. 29). In her article on *La Florinda*, Chichiriccò noted how Giovan Battista Andreini's tragedy deviated from the models of Tasso and Guarini, and followed his mother's dramaturgical example (see Chichiriccò, pp. 347-348).

²⁹ The tragedy is written in blank hendecasyllables and septenaries. The quatrain is printed in italics.

³⁰ Scene 2 of Act III is misnumbered scene 7.

³¹ This passage is recited by Florinda in her first appearance on stage.

dopo la caccia il tuo gran rege intende
offrir gran teschio di cinghial feroce. (I. 6. p. 48)

It is no coincidence that Andreini frequently alludes to prayers and pilgrimages to holy sites, which were particularly encouraged by the post-Tridentine Church. These allusions, too, were part of his strategy of manifest compliance with Catholic principles, as was his criticism of the misinterpretation of oracles by ‘mal accorti saggi’ (V. 6. p. 189), which reflected Counter-Reformation caution towards interpretation of the divine word.³² Even the pastoral formula of the escape from the court to a *locus amoenus* at the end of the play is cast in religious terms.³³ In the last scene of *La Florinda*, Gismondo encourages the nymphs to flee the court:

GISMONDO Deh fuggite fuggite,
Scozia lasciate e le deserte arene:
[...]
però che nulla in questo afflitto regno
è rimasto di buon, tutto è macchiato. (V. 6. p. 185)

and concludes:

GISMONDO Ma sorte più benigna a voi conceda
più fortunato rege,
che a guisa di pastor più saggio e forte
umil difenda voi smarrita greggia
da spaventosi ed affamati lupi
che in volto uman produce oggi la terra. (V. 6. p. 185)

Gismondo defines a virtuous king as a good shepherd, capable of defending the lost flock. The use of an ecclesiastical lexicon leads to a metaphorical interpretation of these lines. Here, Andreini seems to praise the action taken by the Church and its leaders (‘pastor’) to defend Catholic people (‘smarrita greggia’) from the advance of Protestantism (‘spaventosi ed affamati lupi’).

The form and content of Andreini’s tragedy facilitated the enthusiastic response of the Spensierati to *La Florinda*. The ‘corona d’altissimi sonetti’, as Andreini defines the poems written by the academicians in praise of his work, was the outcome of his calculated literary

³² Vazzoler, ‘I comici dell’arte e la tragedia’, p. 198.

³³ The contrast between life in courts or cities and life in an idyllic *locus amoenus* is in all the works published by Andreini in 1604. However, *La Florinda* ends with an escape from the court, while *La Saggia Egiziana* and *La Divina Visione* end with a return to the city/courtly life.

debut, which, however, had not foreseen an inconvenience. As we learn from the dedication to Antonio de' Medici that opens *La Saggia Egiziana*, his next work, the *princeps* of *La Florinda* had been printed with numerous errors. Andreini could not let such poor publication interfere with the literary image he had laboriously built and therefore decided to burn the *princeps* and the sonnets by the Spensierati printed in it. His iron strategy left no room for compromise:

Poscia ch'io stimava, prima d'ogni altra mia fatica, su'l Teatro del Mondo, agli occhi de' mortali, dovesse di sé far lagrimosa ed infausta scena *La Florinda* mia tragedia, dall'Illustrissima Accademia dei Signori Spensierati di Fiorenza, con somma diligenza revistami; anzi, mercé indicibile di così dotto, famoso e pellegrino stuolo fregiatemela d'una eterna corona d'altissimi sonetti; i quali pur lampeggiavano stampati in essa; luminosa la mia opaca *Florinda* rendendo qual diafano corpo che dai dorati lampi del sol percosso, anch'egli lucido e vago risplende, colpa solo di male accorto stampatore il quale, per esser io lontano, mi stampò così malamente il quarto ed il quinto atto ch'io, tutto ardendo e avampando di sdegno, necessitato fui, allo sdegno cedendo, arderne il numero di cinquecento; e 'n vero ch'accertar non saprei se 'l fuoco del mio petto oppure il fuoco materiale incenerì la mia *Florinda*, tanto cieco lo sdegno mi rendeva.³⁴

Andreini's plan emerges clearly as he retraces the steps of his literary debut in this passage. He is aware of how a good editorial strategy works; he considers that publishing his play is like performing on a world stage; he directly mentions the Spensierati's approval and, immediately after, their encomia; finally, he declares he could not contain his anger against an incompetent printer who so filled his literary work with errors that he had to burn all the copies.

This is not just the portrait of an actor. It is the portrait of an intellectual who knew from the beginning how to fashion and sell himself.

2.3 THE ACTOR AS A DEVOUT MAN

In 1604, after burning the *princeps* of his tragedy, Andreini published twin volumes:³⁵ *La Saggia Egiziana*, a dialogue in eleven hundred verses, printed together with a *Trattato sopra l'arte comica, cavato dalle opere di S. Tommaso, e da altri Santi*, and *La Divina Visione in soggetto del*

³⁴ Giovan Battista Andreini, 'La Saggia Egiziana', in *Opere Teoriche*, ed. by Palmieri, pp. 60-117 (p. 74).

³⁵ The volumes are typographically very similar: they were both printed in Florence by Volcmar Timan, they are both in-octavo, they have the same frontispiece and similar frames for the pages which follow. See Fiaschini, 'Fuori dalla selva', pp. 447-486. Milan is mistakenly considered as the place of publication of *La Divina Visione* in Ross, 'Playing Milan', p. 225.

Beato Carlo Borromeo, a poem of 64 octaves.³⁶ The former is a theoretical reflection on theatre, the latter is a eulogy to Cardinal Borromeo, the harshest critic of professional theatre, as seen in Chapter 1. *La Florinda*, *La Saggia Egiziana* and *La Divina Visione*, the three works of his debut, are all written in verse to further support his claim to literary status. They reflect the three lines of production that Andreini followed for the rest of his career: theatrical texts, theoretical treatises and religious works, all contributing to manifest Andreini's programmatic awareness as early as 1604.

In line with other Italian Renaissance dialogues, *La Saggia Egiziana* features a woman as the primary speaker. The old Egyptian woman, however, as opposed to the protagonist of the so-called 'quasi-documentary' Renaissance dialogues, is not a historically identifiable figure, but a mythical one:³⁷ the depositary of philosophical wisdom, she converses with Ergasto, previously an enthusiastic spectator of comedies but who now despises them. From his first appearance, Ergasto harshly condemns the corruption and ungodliness of the world, which have led him to escape from Florence and take refuge in an idyllic *locus amoenus*. There, he meets the Egyptian woman whose rhetorical skills dismantle his arguments against city life and theatre, and eventually turn him into a 'sprezzatore delle selve e fido amante | delle città quanto odiatore innanti' (1070-1071, p. 116). By dramatising anti- and philo-theatrical arguments, this poetic dialogue is a Bildungsroman of the ideal actor and a masterpiece of self-representation. Andreini shared the philo-theatrical ideas of the Egyptian, yet he conceived Ergasto as his mouthpiece,³⁸ so that, by pretending to have the same doubts as Ergasto, he could show the process of persuasion and review the arguments on the virtuousness of theatre and comedies.

Andreini attached to this publication the *Trattato sopra l'arte comica*, which he attributed to an uncle of his. The treatise, written in Latin with occasional comments in Italian, brings together a selection of passages by St Thomas, St Anthony and other religious authorities in support of theatre.³⁹ Andreini declares that 'per esser cosa egregia e santa lo

³⁶ Giovan Battista Andreini, *La Divina Visione, in soggetto del Beato Carlo Borromeo, cardinale di Santa Prassede e arcivescovo di Milano* (Florence: Volcmar Timan, 1604).

³⁷ See Virginia Cox, 'The Female Voice in Italian Renaissance Dialogue', *MLN*, 128.1 (2013), 53-78.

³⁸ The scholar Siro Ferrone argued that Ergasto may also be a projection of Francesco Andreini, since 1604 was the year of his retirement from the stage. See Siro Ferrone, *Attori, mercanti, corsari*, p. 260.

³⁹ Despite Andreini's attribution of the work to a theologian uncle of his, the genesis of the work is far more complex. Its original nucleus was written in 1578 by Bernardo Pino da Cagli, secretary of the Cardinal Giulio della Rovere. The treatise was published together with the *Erofilomachia* by Sforza Oddi (*L'erofilomachia, ouero Il duello d'amore, & d'amicitia. Comedia nuova, Dell'eccellentiss. dottor di leggi M. Sforza d'Oddo gentil'huomo perugino. Aggiuntoui in questa nuoua editione un discorso di m. Bernardino Pino da Cagli, intorno al componimento della comedia de' nostri tempi* (Venice: Giovan Battista Sessa, 1578)). Another version of the treatise was published by Cecchini in 1601. After Andreini's 1604 publication, the treatise was republished several times. According to Siro Ferrone and Fabrizio Fiaschini, both Cecchini's and Andreini's versions of the treatise might derive from the same 'archetipo ideativo', presumably by Francesco Andreini. The editorial vicissitudes of the *Trattato* are

inserii con questo mio dialogo, a guisa di quello accorto agricoltore che rende feconda quella pianta che già era sterile col mezo di così fatto innesto' (p. 74). *La Saggia Egiziana* would be sterile without the religious treatise, whose function, through the words of saints and theologians, is to validate – metaphorically, to make fertile – the ideas expressed in the dialogue. Andreini tactically acknowledges the insufficiency of his work *per se*, but clarifies that it is valuable by virtue of the treatise attached. A close analysis of the Egyptian's *peroratio* shows that most of her arguments are 'stolen' from religious authorities.

In justifying the necessity of amusement and laughter to the human soul, the Egyptian declares, as a validation, that the argument was advanced by an 'alta sirena'.⁴⁰ The reference is to spiritual *auctores* whose words are reported in the treatise:

Odi celeste suon d'alta sirena,
 ch'esser il riso all'egro stato umano
 afferma necessario e così dice.
 E di necessitate a nostra vita
 stabilire alcun degno, amico spasso;
 onde perciò la di costoro impresa
 il sollazzevol riso che cotanto
 al diletto mortal giova e conface,
 inlecita non è, mentre il bel lampo
 di modestia e virtù lampeggia in quella. (536-545, p. 96)

The passage is the re-writing in verse of one of the thoughts repeatedly expressed in Latin by the 'preallegati dottori', translated and summarised by the author of the treatise as follows:

Ora per intelligenza maggiore di quanto si è detto di sopra di mente di San Tommaso e di tutti i preallegati dottori, si deve supporre in prima per cosa verissima che lo spasso, o trattenimento, è necessario alla conversazione umana; percioché, come il corpo affaticandosi ha bisogno di reficiamento, così l'anima affaticandosi nell'intendere e speculare, ha bisogno di riposo e quiete; e questo riposo e quiete non consiste in altro che nello spasso e trattenimento che piglia l'uomo delle parole burlesvoli e fatti sollazzevoli, che invitano provocano l'uomo a riso e allegria. (p. 72)

retraced in Siro Ferrone, *Attori, mercanti, corsari*, pp. 197-200 and Fabrizio Fiaschini, 'Ludus est necessarius'. Pier Maria Cecchini e la 'somma teologica' dei comici dell'arte', in *Omaggio a Siro Ferrone*, ed. by Stefano Mazzoni (Florence: Le Lettere, 2011), pp. 115-136 (pp. 122-126).

⁴⁰ On the value of laughter, see, for example, the seminal essay by Jacques Le Goff, 'Rire au Moyen Âge', *Cahiers du centre de recherches historiques*, 3 (1989), 1-14. See also Alfonso Di Nola, 'Riso e oscenità', in Id., *Antropologia religiosa. Introduzione al problema e campioni di ricerca* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1974), pp. 15-90 and Daniel Ménager, *La Renaissance et le rire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1995).

The idea that the human soul has a need for rest and amusement in *La Saggia Egiziana* is introduced by the metaphor of the archer. If the archer pulls the bowstring taut for too long, he will miss his target. Rest is needed for human souls just as it is for the bowstring:

E tralascio il ridir, che quale al corpo
la quiete è grata, sì avvicenda all'alma
sovente il consolarsi ancora è d'uopo.
Onde già disse divo spirito e almo:
meraviglia non è se 'l folle arciero
tenendo l'arco ognora a forza teso
lo stral scoccando, non saetti e punga
cedendo stanco pria che al segno arrivi. (493-500, p. 94)

The metaphor is taken from an anecdote from the life of Saint John the Evangelist recounted in the Latin treatise:

Legitur enim in *Collationibus Patrum* quod Beatus Ioannes Evangelista cum quidam scandalizarentur quod eum cum suis discipulis ludentem invenerant, dicitur mandasse uni eorum, qui arcum gerebat, ut sagitta traheret. Quod cum pluries fecisse quaesivit Ioannes, utrum hoc continue facere posset, qui respondit, quod si hoc continue faceret arcus frangeretur. Unde Beatus Ioannes subintulit quod similiter animus hominis frangeretur si numquam a sua intentione relaxaretur. (p. 62)⁴¹

In another passage of the theoretical dialogue, the Egyptian explains when it is proper to laugh. It is permissible to laugh at something vulgar if the 'bruttezza' is not excessive ('vizio rio', 'difforme', 'schifo'):

Ver'è che i vili e i più bassi imita
e ch'in un surge da bruttezza il riso;
ma devi intender tu: non ogni sorte
di vizio rio e di difforme e schifo,
ma di quella bruttezza da cui nasce
dolce cagion di riso. (670-675, p. 101)

The rule in the treatise is attributed to Saint Paul:

⁴¹ In *Collationibus Patrum* we can read that some people were shocked when they found Saint John the Evangelist engaged in play with his disciples. Therefore, Saint John commanded one of them, who had a bow, to shoot an arrow. After the disciple had shot the arrow many times, Saint John asked him whether he could do it continuously. The disciple replied that he could not, otherwise the bow would break. Hence, Saint John replied that the soul becomes broken in the same way, if it doesn't rest' (My translation).

In prima, di non usar nella commedia parole sporche, le quali di sua natura sieno peccato mortale, perché non tutte le parole sporche sono peccato mortale, come si cava da San Paolo [...]. Secondo, bisogna fuggir i fatti sporchi, li quali di sua natura sono peccato mortale. (p. 72)

The arguments put forward by Andreini in *La Saggia Egiziana* for the defence of theatre are therefore not entirely and exclusively those of the author. They were part of a pre-existing ideal handbook of philo-theatrical arguments traditionally taken from the Scriptures and from the writings of the Fathers of the Church.

Immediately after *La Saggia Egiziana*, in December 1604 Andreini published *La Divina Visione*. Unlike *La Saggia Egiziana*, which explicitly promoted the idea of theatre as a virtuous form of entertainment, *La Divina Visione* availed of the devoutness shown by Andreini to defend the morality of professional theatre. The strategic use of devoutness by *comici* dell'Arte has already been considered in Chapter 1; however, unlike other *comici*, Andreini had a deep knowledge of liturgy, ritual, doctrine and local cults, which gave substance to his religious writing. The religious argument in this poem is not an instrumental 'innesto' but is substantial: the poem is a tribute to Cardinal Carlo Borromeo. The choice of subject is a response, again, to a careful strategy, since Cardinal Borromeo had been beatified two years earlier, in 1602. In dedicating his work to him, Andreini presented himself, on the one hand, as a pious man, conscious of the latest movements in the Catholic Church; and, on the other, he put in place a tactical appropriation. By eulogising one of the most obstinate critics of *comici* dell'Arte, Andreini disrupted the reception of the debate on professional theatre, negated any disagreement between actors and the Cardinal, and put in place a deceptive rewriting of the events reviewed in Chapter 1.⁴²

La Divina Visione is the account of a vision – the vision of heaven – and of a dispute between God and Satan over the souls of the Milanese people, resolved by the intercession of Carlo Borromeo, who fights Satan and saves Milan. The souls he saves in Andreini's verse are those the Cardinal had warned of the dangers of professional theatre in his homilies. After an invocation for poetic inspiration that rejects the pagan Muses and turns

⁴² The instrumentalisation of the figure of Cardinal Borromeo was not new to *comici* dell'Arte. It was founded on the calculated misinterpretation by professional actors of an episode which happened in July 1583 and involved Borromeo and the Gelosi company. On that occasion, Borromeo allowed the company to stage plays in Milan, but only to avoid a conflict with the Governor of the city, who was in favour of the performance. Borromeo, however, set out two conditions: he wanted to read and censure the *scenari* before the performance, and he wanted assurance from the Governor that the *comici* would no longer perform in the city in the future. Valerini was sent by the Gelosi to negotiate with the Milanese Curia with regard to the *scenari* on their behalf. He managed to obtain the approval of the religious institution. Predictably, Valerini's victory became steadily part of the mythopoeia of the *comici*. On this matter, see Taviani and Schino, pp. 381-389.

to the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, Andreini relates an account of falling asleep in a *locus amoenus* and his subsequent vision:

Vidi confusa mole in un momento
disporsi al verbo del Maestro eterno;
vidi ne' suoi confini ogni elemento
oprar col suo contrario amore interno.
Vidi vestirsi il mondo e farsi intento
ogni animal terreno al suo governo,
e vidi in chiaro ciel di stelle adorno
seguir la luna il sol, la notte il giorno.⁴³

Andreini contemplates the Creation and sees God 'minacciante in fera mostra' surrounded by angels. This Counter-Reformation 're del Paradiso' (Octave 10.3-4, p. 124), angry because of the sins of the world, is in the process of judging Milan, which resembles the Dantean Florence:

D'ampia città cui già doppie mura
(s'a la fama si crede) Ercole cinse
s'udian le gravi colpe e l'empia e dura
mente ch'a mille error la risospinse.
Ella immersa negli agi e nell'impura
crapula ognor ne' vizi il freno scinse;
che dove grata al suo Fattor dovea
mostrarsi, del suo don fu ingrata e rea. (Octave 12, p. 125)

God decides to send the Milanese souls to hell ('or cadan di Milan le posse | e soggiaccia infelice al nostro impero') (Octave 14.5-6, p. 126), but the Virgin Mary intervenes to prevent the damnation of the city, recalling the positive Milanese examples of Saint Ambrose and Carlo Borromeo ('nel pregarlo | ch'accennasse mi parve Ambrogio e Carlo') (Octave 24.7-8, p. 130). The intervention of the Virgin Mary is followed by that of Carlo Borromeo himself, whose prayer to God in favour of Milan saves the city. At the end of the poem, Andreini is woken by a shepherd, and travels with him, as a perfect Counter-Reformation pilgrim, to Milan and to the burial site of Borromeo.

2.4 MARKETING STRATEGIES: BEYOND DEVOUTNESS

⁴³ 'La Divina Visione', in *Opere teoriche*, pp. 119-145 (Octave 7, pp. 122-123).

In *La Saggia Egiziana* and *La Divina Visione*, Andreini instrumentalised more than religious matter. He capitalised on the glorious memory of his parents and on the influence of his notable academic connections.

In August 1604, the loss of his mother, the retirement from stage of his father, and the disbandment of the Compagnia dei Gelosi paved the way for Giovan Battista's rise. He used the publication of *La Saggia Egiziana* to declare his intention to continue their legacy. In one passage of the text, Andreini defines the literary frame in which he intends to place himself. First, the wise Egyptian woman eulogises classical playwrights:

Chi fu giamai di maggior lode onusto
fra gli antichi e moderni incliti al mondo
di Seneca moral? Chi più sublime
di Sofocle, d'Euripide e Menandro?
Di qual lode Terenzio orna la fronte
correndo al par nell'onorato aringo? (703-708, pp. 102-103)

Then, she refers to more recent authors and cites Dante and ten Renaissance intellectuals who, in their plays and treatises, made an important contribution to theatrical production and theorisation in early modern Italy, including in her catalogue Isabella Andreini and Adriano Valerini:

L'Ariosto famoso e l'Aretino,
Torquato Tasso e il buon Giraldi, il Caro
lo Sforza d'Oddi, il Cremonin facondo
il leggiadro Guarini, il Bracciolino,
di Partenope il Porta e in un la dotta
Isabella Gelosa e Adriano. (717-722, p. 103)

Andreini places his mother and Valerini in his personal theatrical pantheon and makes no distinction between sixteenth-century men of letters and *comici* dell'Arte. By considering professional performers as successors of Renaissance playwrights, Andreini shows awareness of the shift from author-led to actor-led dramaturgy, but he refutes substantial differences between the two groups.⁴⁴ There is, of course, a coefficient of mythopoesis to be taken into account when considering Andreini's declarations. However, his words prompt questions on the validity of present-day reception of early modern theatre and invite

⁴⁴ On the interplay between Commedia dell'Arte and 'its parent', *commedia erudita*, see Andrews, *Scripts and Scenarios*, pp. 169-185.

the thought that the categories so sharply defined in current historiography might have been more blurred in the sixteenth century.

A few lines later, Andreini declares his company, the Fedeli, to be the heirs of the Gelosi:

Ond'oggi ancora il mondo
 risuona de' Gelosi il nome eterno,
 che fra palme, e onor spiegaro a l'aura
 virtuoso vessil cui seguon lieti
 (emuli professor) quei che Fedeli
 Comici appella l'uno e l'altro polo.⁴⁵

Equally instrumentalised by Andreini was the endorsement by the Accademia degli Spensierati. *La Saggia Egiziana* and *La Divina Visione*, unlike *La Florinda*, were not presented to the academy for official approval; however, in these works, too, Andreini makes frequent, indirect allusions to the academic *placet* he had obtained. The table below illustrates how he variously used the Spensierati as a calling card in his early works:

	Year pub.	Place pub.	Setting	Dedicatee	Reference
<i>La Saggia Egiziana</i>	1604	Florence	Florence	Don Antonio de' Medici	<u>Spensierati</u>
<i>La Divina Visione</i>	1604	Florence	Milan	<u>Spensierati</u>	Federico Borromeo; Count of Fuentes
<i>La Florinda</i> (2nd) ⁴⁶	1606	Milan	Scotland	Count of Fuentes	<u>Spensierati</u>

La Saggia Egiziana is entirely Florentine: it was published in Florence; the story is set in Florence; it is dedicated to a member of the Florentine court, Don Antonio de' Medici.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ This quotation is from Giovan Battista Andreini, *La Saggia Egiziana* (Florence: Volmar Timan Germano, 1604), p. 33. The critical edition by Rossella Palmieri in this passage omits 'a l'aura' (see 'La Saggia Egiziana' in *Opere teoricke*, p. 105, l. 770).

⁴⁶ In this chapter, I focus on the works written in 1604. The second edition of *La Florinda*, although printed in 1606, has been included in the table, in absence of the *princeps*. In 1606, Andreini also published *Il Pianto d'Apollon*, a funerary collection of poems for her mother, Isabella. Some of the Spensierati contributed to the volume; however, for the reasons mentioned above, the collection is not included in the table.

⁴⁷ The dedication to Don Antonio de' Medici is part of Andreini's marketing strategy: Don Antonio was in charge of organising festivities in Florence. He was also responsible for the organisation of the Mantuan festivities in 1608, as the Italian scholar Corrado Casini has shown. See Casini, 'Il viaggio di Don Antonio de'

Consistently, it mentions the Accademia degli Spensierati. There are two references to the academy. The first (ll. 305-345) is an explicit encomium of the circle and its members, whose works are cited by Andreini. The second (ll. 1007-1026) includes the Spensierati in a list of other Italian academies:

Or questi mimi, pantomimi ed altri
che seguon l'orme lor distorte e strane
appelli il mondo istrioni infami;
i quai muti giocando e senza legge
destano il riso e delle luci solo
oggetto son; ma chi con dotto stile
e con dolce eloquenza alto favella
e dell'alma e degli occhi oggetto fora,
scenico professor detto a gran senno.
Or dunque riedi ai gran teatri primi,
torna, deh torna, qual balen volante
torci omai, torci alle cittadi il piede,
ove i Cruscanti per gran fama eterni
gli Spensierati gloriosi e almi,
gl'Intronati facondi, al mondo rari,
Filarmonici, Olimpici ed Intenti
Avveduti, Filomati, Gelati
Fecondi, Innominati ed i Sepolti
con mille schiere e mille altrui diranno
quanti sieno di lor gl'incliti pregi. (1007-1026, pp. 114-115)

The wise Egyptian uses two main arguments to lead the defence of theatre; the conventional distinction between vile and honourable *comici* – which she respectively defines as ‘mimi’ and ‘scenici professor d’alta eloquenza’ –, and an appeal to academies as guarantors of the merit of honourable professional actors. Ergasto should return to attend performances because the ‘pregi’ of the ‘scenici professor’ are recognised by ‘mille e mille schiere’ of academicians. Andreini was well aware of the significance of the encomiastic production by academicians in prompting a shift in the cultural reception of the *comici*. He furthers the process started by Valerini, who in the *Oratione* referred to the Intronati’s appreciation of Armani; but, different to Valerini, who referred to these encomia as exceptional,⁴⁸ Andreini considers academic praise of professional actors as customary. The comment on the

Medici a Mantova per le feste del 1608. Precedenza, etichetta e cerimoniale nelle corti italiane all’inizio del XVII secolo’, *Medioevo e Rinascimento*, 11 (1997), 253-280.

⁴⁸ ‘Recitava questa signora, come forse udito avete, in tre stili differenti, in Comedia, in Tragedia e in Pastorale, osservando il decoro di ciascuno tanto drittamente che l’Accademia de gli Intronati di Siena, in cui fiorisse il culto delle Scene, disse più volte che questa Donna riusciva meglio assai parlando improvviso che i più consummati autori scrivendo pensatamente’ (Valerini, *Oratione*, fol. 7^v).

encomia of the intellectuals is also indirectly self-referential: it alludes to the ‘corona d’altissimi sonetti’ written by the Spensierati in praise of *La Florinda*, and to their collection of encomiastic poems for Virginia Ramponi, which will be discussed in the next chapter. In the passage, Andreini makes a precise list of academies particularly inclined to the reception and the promotion of professional actors, thus providing us with a source for the investigation of the relationship between actors and academies in early modern Italy.

The publication of *La Divina Visione* records a transition. At that stage, Andreini had not been officially hired by the Duke of Mantua and intended to move from Florence to Milan.⁴⁹ The final pilgrimage to the site of Carlo Borromeo’s burial can be considered a transfiguration of this move into a religious key. Milan, an exemplary diocese during the Counter-Reformation, was the ideal place in which to sell the image of Andreini as a devout man. The poem, designed to attract the attention of a Milanese audience, was therefore set in Milan, but was published in Florence, where Andreini was already in contact with Volcmar Timan, the publisher of *La Saggia Egiziana*. As shown in the table above, the Spensierati are again a calling card in *La Divina Visione*. Here, however, from being a passing reference, they are promoted to dedicatees of the text. It was, again, a strategic move: in Milan, Andreini’s merit was still unknown; therefore, he needed influential guarantors for the circulation of his work. The long simile which opens the dedication compares the intention of a helmsman at the sight of an ample sail to that of the readers at the sight of the name of the Spensierati at the beginning of his work, making clear his awareness of the instrumental function of the mention:

Poscia che i saggi lettori, in questa mia poca fatica vedendo grandissima lettera (che invero tale esser dovrebbe, riguardando il molto merito di quelli ai quali viene scritta), stimerebbero poi tanto più grosso il vascello e forte; ma avvicinato poscia l’occhio al vero, colmando le labbra di riso, scorgerebbero come l’intento solo del nocchiero fu di raccorre tutto il vento in ampia vela, più che di solcare in lieve e superba magione il poetico mare, tessendo in 64 ottave una lettera d’infinite carte. (p. 119)

Behind the trope of poetic *deminutio*, Andreini acknowledges that the Spensierati are the ‘ampia vela’, the banner that the author could wave over his Milanese debut. Andreini then

⁴⁹ Andreini’s search for patrons is explicit in *La Saggia Egiziana* ll. 869-872: ‘Forz’è pur che i gran duci e i regi invitti | scorgendo in lei [the comedy] quanto ha di bel sua fronte | l’accolghino festosi, insieme dando | fermo stipendio ai professori’ (869-872, p. 109). On Andreini’s transition from Florence to Milan see, for example, Fiaschini, ‘Fuori dalla selva’, p. 464 and *L’incessabile agitazione*, p. 55.

evokes the honour he received of a public reading of *La Florinda* in the Florentine academy,⁵⁰ and charges the academicians with defending his latest work:

Onde, colmo d'allegrezza in sì caro e sicuro porto disalborando, a voi, cortesissimi Signori, la cura lascio, come corsari valorosi e forti, di difendere questo piccolo legno dall'insidie degli scellerati ladroni, distruggitori delle fatiche altrui. (p. 119)

Beyond the Spensierati's *placet*, another tactical move prepared the ground for Andreini's arrival in the city. In *La Divina Visione*, before the fictional pilgrimage to the burial site of Carlo Borromeo, Andreini inserted an encomiastic section addressed to Federico Borromeo, Cardinal of Milan, and to Pedro Enríquez de Acevedo, Count of Fuentes, Spanish Governor of the city and addressee, in 1601, of an encomiastic sonnet by Isabella Andreini.⁵¹ Borromeo and the Count of Fuentes were the spiritual and temporal authorities of Milan in 1604. It was their attention that Andreini was hoping to attract; they were the two real targets of the poem. The *captatio benevolentiae* to these suitable patrons unfolds in the octaves which follow:

E perché sian le lodi tue più note
Ed anco altrui la tua memoria giove,
vuol che l'alme d'Insubria tue devote
abbian il pastor che 'l nome tuo rinove.
Questi fia Federico in cui men vote
che 'n te voglie di gratia il ciel non piove;
questi mirando poi nel tuo bel seno
farà contenti i tuoi fedeli appieno.

[...]

E perché Astrea più ferma e stabil sede
ivi fondare sicuramente possa
prode guerriero a mostrar lui già riede
di forte man qual sia mirabil possa,
fonte di Pace, di Giustizia e Fede
ei fia per me dal grande Ibero mossa,
ei che Pietro dirassi in pietra ferma
seco fermar saprà l'Insubria inferma. (Octave 44 and Octave 46, p. 138)

⁵⁰ 'il quale [the dedication of the work], in parte, verrà a significare a così dotto stuolo quanto io le viva obligato della grazia ch'io da lui ricevei, quando in publica Accademia fu letta la mia *Florinda* tragedia' ('La Divina Visione' in *Opere teoricke*, p. 119).

⁵¹ Isabella Andreini, *Rime* (Milan: Bordone e Locarni, 1601), p. 18.

La Florinda (1606), published in Milan, validates the tactical nature of *La Divina Visione* and certifies Andreini's successful access to the Milanese environment.⁵² In the dedicatory letter that precedes the second edition of the tragedy, Andreini declares himself to be an 'eterno ammiratore' of the Count of Fuentes.⁵³ The Count of Fuentes had been promoted from reference to dedicatee: the target at which Andreini had tilted in the previous work had been hit. Inevitably, this edition, too, has a link with the Spensierati. Three introductory sonnets written by the academicians, probably part of the 'corona d'altissimi sonetti' of the 1604 edition, are included in the volume. Moreover, the 1606 edition of *La Florinda* opens with an engraving which represents Giovan Battista Andreini as an elegant and pensive man of letters, wearing the distinctive *scacciapensieri* of the Spensierati (Fig. 1).⁵⁴ It replicates the pattern of the engraving in the posthumous edition of Isabella Andreini's *Rime* in 1605, which had been edited by Francesco Andreini. In place of a portrait, the *Rime* presented Isabella's academic name, 'L'Accesa', and a symbolic representation of a burning torch with the motto 'elevat ardor' (Fig. 2).



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

The allusion, both in the case of the *scacciapensieri* and the burning torch, is to academic membership. As opposed to that of his mother, Giovan Battista's membership of

⁵² The tragedy was published by Bordone and Locarni, the publishers of the memorial volume for Isabella Andreini, *Il pianto d'Apollo*. On the influence of Isabella Andreini's legacy on Giovan Battista's Milanese debut, see Fiaschini, *L'incessabile agitazione*, pp. 55-62, and Ross, 'Playing Milan'.

⁵³ Andreini, *La Florinda*, p. 3.

⁵⁴ For a more detailed account of Andreini's portrait, see Stefano Mazzoni, 'Genealogia e vicende della famiglia Andreini', pp. 130-131.

the Spensierati has no foundation.⁵⁵ The absence of a motto and an academic name, let alone the lack of documentary evidence, leads to a discarding of this hypothesis. However, the fact that four centuries later the matter is still the subject of academic debate proves, once again, the effectiveness of Andreini's self-fashioning strategies.

In 1604, Andreini started manoeuvring his way through the criticism of Counter-Reformation clerics, the scepticism of early modern intellectuals, the ambivalence of political authorities, the disrepute of 'comici vili'. The complex strategies he elaborated were his response to this complex picture and helped him in tracing his way to success. But he did not do everything on his own. Which brings us to Virginia Ramponi.

⁵⁵ On Giovan Battista Andreini's hypothetical membership of the *Accademia degli Spensierati*, see Sampson, 'Amateurs Meet Professionals', pp. 201-203.

Chapter 3

Virginia Ramponi: Mimesis and Myth

3.1 VIRGINIA RAMPONI AND THE ACCADEMIA DEGLI SPENSIERATI

When returning *La Florinda* to Giovan Battista Andreini after revision, as we saw earlier, the Spensierati decided to address a collection of encomiastic poems to Virginia Ramponi. The circumstances of the gift are recounted by Vincenzo Panciatichi in the introductory letter to the collection:

Essendomi stato comandato dal Sonnacchioso, principe de la nostra spensierata Accademia, che io, come uno de' censori di quella, devessi rimandare al signor Giovan Battista, vostro consorte, la Florinda sua tragedia, da questi signori Accademici rivista e censurata, e con quella, i sonetti d'alcuni d'essi, i quali a voi e a lui saranno testimoni veracissimi della bellezza di detta tragedia e di quello che i medesimi nostri Accademici ne sentono; e insieme, avendomi eglino fatto libero dono d'alcune loro poesie sopra i vostri nobili costumi e la vostra singolar virtù composte, mi è parso cosa ragionevole, per farvi conoscere quanto sia grande il desiderio che ho di mostrarmi obligato al merito vostro, mandarvele stampate, acciò commodamente possiate farne parte in diversi luoghi, a quelli che di sentire i vostri pregi si diletano.¹

The debut of the professional theatre couple at the Accademia degli Spensierati was a double act. Their success was intertwined, and yet it was distinct. They came into contact with the academy together, but each in a different capacity. Andreini met the Spensierati as a man of letters seeking intellectual validation; Ramponi as an actress and singer aiming for artistic validation. Their different goals were achieved jointly. Andreini's studied dramaturgical structure gave Ramponi the opportunity to display her talents within the cultural institution. Ramponi's exceptional performance of passages of *La Florinda* enhanced the value of Andreini's text in the eyes of the academicians. The connection and

¹ *Rime in lode*, pp. 3-4.

distinctness of their debut is reflected in the encomiastic resolution of the Spensierati, as declared by Panciatichi. Rather than commending Ramponi's performing talent in the 'corona d'altissimi sonetti' composed in praise of Andreini's tragedy, the academicians purposely composed a different collection, entirely and exclusively dedicated to her: the *Rime in lode*.

Ramponi's exordium at the Accademia degli Spensierati, like Andreini's literary debut, was quite out of the ordinary. No other professional actress before or after Ramponi had an academy as one of her first stages. No other professional performer was launched on the world with a volume of laudatory poems composed by academicians.

The *Rime in lode* is a later outcome of the process of encomiastic production for professional actresses which started with the publication of the poems for Vincenza Armani considered in Chapter 1. The collection, however, displays new features. The composition of a single poem or a group of poems dedicated to actresses by members of an academy became frequent towards the end of the sixteenth century. These poems, if published, were usually part of miscellaneous collections of assorted encomia by different authors, academicians and non-academicians. Some poems were part of a collection addressed to the same person – the poems for Armani, for example –; some were included in a collection addressed by the same author or authors to different people – the *Rime* by Crisostomo Talenti, for example, which comprised a sonnet for Isabella Andreini. Encomiastic collections composed only by academicians and addressed to only one person, known as literary 'templi', were almost always written *in memoriam*.² It was most unusual for an academy to pay the tribute of a whole collection to someone who was still alive, let alone an actress.³ The poems for Armani, attached to Valerini's oration, included also, but not exclusively, poems by academicians and were published *in memoriam* (1570). Even Isabella Andreini, although she was a member of the Intenti, did not receive an entire collection of poems by members of an academy in her honour and, even for her, collections of *Rime* were only published *post-mortem*. The first was attached to the 1605 posthumous edition of her *Rime* by her husband.⁴ The second was collected and published in her son's memorial

² Diana Robin, *Publishing Women*, p. 108. On the genre 'tempio', see Monica Bianco, 'Il Tempio in onore: parabola di un genere antologico cinquecentesco', in *Miscellanea di studi in onore di Giovanni Da Pozzo*, ed. by Donatella Rasi (Padua: Antenore, 2004), pp. 163-189; Maiko Favaro, 'Duttilità di una metafora. Note sui "templi" letterari profani del Cinquecento', in *Le carte e i discepoli. Studi in onore di Claudio Griggio*, ed. by Fabiana Savorgnan di Brazzà, and others (Udine: Forum Editrice Universitaria, 2016), pp. 201-209.

³ On this matter, see Desmoulière, pp. 277-291.

⁴ The first edition of Isabella Andreini's *Rime* (1601) includes only one encomiastic sonnet for Isabella written in Latin by the humanist Erycius Puteanus. No encomiastic sonnets are included in the 1603 edition of the *Rime*.

volume, *Il pianto d'Apollo*, in 1606.⁵ The 'templi' to Armani and Andreini were collated and published by the *comici* themselves as part of their own mythopoeia.

The *Rime in lode* broke with these conventions. It was entirely composed and collected by the academicians themselves. It was printed by them and offered directly to Ramponi as 'a libero dono'. It was a 'tempio' which celebrated a woman; not a learned woman but a professional actress, who was not only still alive but at the beginning of her career. The intention was explicitly promotional.

Beyond their value as literary documents, these poems are also valuable historical documents which enrich the discourse on the controversial relationship between women and academies in early modern Italy, providing answers to thus far unresolved questions. What were the terms of actresses' attendance at academic gatherings? What did female performers do within the academies? How did they come to impress the academicians? These questions remain open in the case of Isabella Andreini and the Accademia degli Intenti, for example. In exploring the hypothesis of Andreini's attendance at the Pavese academy during her stay in the city in the spring and winter of 1601, Lisa Sampson has pointed out the difficulty of solving the problem of *decorum* linked to the academic participation of a woman, writing that 'if Andreini actually attended academic gatherings during her stays' in Pavia, and 'performed or improvised verse or dramatic works there, or contributed to debates and lectures, one wonders how she did this, unless chaperoned'.⁶ This problem does not apply to the double act of Ramponi and Andreini at the Spensierati. The presence of Ramponi among the academicians could not raise issues of *decorum* since she was chaperoned by her husband. Moreover, by asking for artistic rather than literary recognition, Ramponi overcame the intellectual diffidence of the academicians towards women and fostered the Spensierati's welcome to their gatherings and their commitment to an official, collective ratification.⁷ The relationship of Virginia Ramponi with the Accademia degli Spensierati did not imply her membership, but was of the kind that cemented her presence in the academy. Analysis of the *Rime in lode* suggests that Ramponi regularly attended academic gatherings in 1604 during her stay in Florence.⁸ The collection

⁵ Giovan Battista Andreini, *Il pianto d'Apollo. Rime funebri in morte d'Isabella Andreini comica Gelosa, ed Accademica intenta detta l'Accesa* (Milan: Bordone e Locarno, 1606).

⁶ Sampson, 'Amateurs Meet Professionals', p. 200.

⁷ Unlike Ramponi, Isabella Andreini did not manage to obtain a collective ratification from the Filarmonici. As noted by Virginia Cox, 'the example of the Veronese Accademia Filarmonica's response to an approach from Isabella Andreini [shows] that academies had a fine-grained sense of how a lower-level academic imprimatur might be granted by means of "private" sonnets from academy members, without the academy's having to commit itself to an "official", collective ratification' ('Members, Muses, Mascots', p. 148).

⁸ There is no evidence of her contact with the Spensierati after 1604.

is the only available source of information on the sort of entertainment she offered to the academicians. It allows us to build up a picture of otherwise evanescent events, usually lost in the transient, intangible moment of the performance.

The composition and the interests of the *Spensierati* must have played a role in gaining Ramponi a favourable reception: the taste of the academicians for music made them the ideal audience to fully appreciate and promote her singing, and the Ligurian origin of some members was an advantage for the actress who, according to the poem written by *il Sollevato* and included in the *Rime in lode*, was Ligurian herself.⁹ Further reasons for praise were linked to the character interpreted by Ramponi for the academicians, Florinda, a character tailored for that performance by Andreini. Ramponi entered the Accademia degli Spensierati as an actress. She went out as a *diva*. The next pages will set out how.

3.2 LA FLORINDA ON THE STAGE

La Florinda was conceived by Andreini as a response in content and form to the requirements of the academic circle in which it was presented. The same is true of the performance of Virginia Ramponi. The character interpreted by Ramponi, Florinda, and the formal features necessary to this interpretation were determined by the marketing strategies of the professional theatre couple. Therefore, Ramponi's staging of *La Florinda*, like Andreini's first publications, reveals that the couple's career agenda was clear as early as 1604.

This tragedy was the first of a series of plays which, in accordance with the precept of mimesis, aimed at transfiguring through dramaturgy the public perception of Ramponi and, in turn, Andreini's own image. Mimesis – the assumption that the role played on stage had the power of determining the deep nature of the interpreter and his/her behaviour off stage – was foundational for both Jesuit pedagogy through theatre and for the critique to professional actors,¹⁰ and was cleverly deployed by Andreini and Ramponi to fashion and interpret their characters (see also Chapter 5). According to this principle, the transformative power of edifying theatre extended from the habitus of actors to that of

⁹ In the dialogue, the character of Flora considers Florinda one of her glories. Therefore, Liguria protests and says: 'Non fia che vada altera | Fiorenza di colei, che nel mio seno | trasse l'origin vera | per far il secol nostro almo e sereno. | In lei quanto è di bello a me s'ascriva: | chiaro sol, nobil volto e fiamma viva' (*Rime in lode*, p. 15).

¹⁰ See, for example, Anne-Sophie Gallo, 'Jesuit Theatre', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Jesuits*, ed. by Ines G. Županov (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 575-597, and Giovanna Zanolighi, 'Il teatro nella pedagogia gesuitica: una "scuola di virtù"', in *I gesuiti e la Ratio studiorum*, ed. by Manfred Hinz, Roberto Righi, and Danilo Zardin (Rome: Bulzoni, 2004), pp. 159-190.

spectators; therefore, by promoting virtue, Andreini and Ramponi assumed a social function.¹¹

In the tragedy, Ramponi plays the character of the Countess Florinda who, as we saw in Chapter 2, falls in love with the King of Scotland, Ircano; and, loved in return and sure of his promise to marry her, lies with him:

FLORINDA Alfine entrambi
nel gran campo d'amor giunti all'arringo
timidi, desiosi, ed anelanti
scambievolmente d'amor vittoria e palma
amorosi guerrier godemmo insieme:
ond'io li diedi ed ei raccolse quanto
(o rimembranza, che trafiggi l'alma)
fregia d'eterno fior pudica donna.¹²

Florinda gives birth to Eginio, but, having become aware of Ircano's intention to kill their son, she abandons her courtly life and escapes into the woods to save him. Six years after these events, far from her experience as a lady of the court, Florinda must endure the hardships of an itinerant life.

Florinda is a character designed to meet the favour of Counter-Reformation moralists. There are three recurring themes in her discourse: the importance of virtue and honour, her boundless love for her child and her will to sacrifice herself for him, and the rigours of an itinerant life. In post-Tridentine Italy, this content guaranteed moral approval. Andreini's intention, however, was not simply to shape a Tridentine character, but to shape this character as the Tridentine alter ego of a professional actress. Each of the three themes of Florinda's discourse was recurrent in the narrative developed by encomiasts and *comici dell'Arte* for professional actresses. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the honour of Vincenza Armani was repeatedly stressed in de' Sommi's poems for the *diva*, and Garzoni considered Isabella Andreini an exemplar of virtue. Like these actresses, Florinda promoted the concepts of virtue and honour:

FLORINDA Pensai che donna senz'onor diventi
e beffata, e spregiata, e che l'additi
ognun per cosa vil. (I. 4. p. 38)

¹¹ See Majorana, 'Commedia dell'Arte and the Church', pp. 140-143.

¹² Andreini, *La Florinda*, I. 4. p. 39.

The display of honourability by an actress on stage had the advantage of being a deterrent to men's desire, according to the theory later exposed by Andreini in the treatise *La Ferza*: 'se 'n proskenio questa recitatrice rimiri, [...] udendo a quella celebrare l'onore, detestare il disonore, [...] in te stesso ritirato ti raccapricci e [...] quella volontà libidinosa in virtuosa si converte'.¹³

The *topos* of the caring mother, too, was often exploited to grant actresses moral approval, as mentioned earlier (Chapter 1). By devoting her life to the care of Eginio, Florinda puts her own motherhood centre stage. Another way to obtain approval for *comici* was to re-semanticise their itinerance. The life of professional actors, always travelling and on the move, was targeted by clerics as 'mala vita';¹⁴ however, by denouncing the dangers of their 'moto perpetuo',¹⁵ actors showed their perseverance, notwithstanding the troubles of travel, as a sign of their dedication to the profession. Isabella, for example, was considered a sort of martyr to duty, having left for her French *tournee* with the Gelosi despite being in the final term of her pregnancy, and dying following complications in childbirth.

Giovan Battista Andreini took this narrative further by designating, in his works, the itinerant life of professional actors as a form of atonement, a religious *peregrinatio*.¹⁶ The process started with *La Florinda*. The dangers faced in her nomadic life by the protagonist of Andreini's tragedy, dangers which made up for her extramarital surrender to Ircano, were similar to those faced by the actresses:

FLORINDA Timida trassi il mal sicuro piede:
così senza bramar facella o scorta,
al notturno cammino il passo offersi
[...]
e già sei volte l'ondegianti biade
col curvo ferro il mietitore ha tronca,
che di Scozzia infeconda, e monti, e campi
calchiamo, e l'aspro duolo al cor molesto
ogn'or più cresce (I. 4. p. 43)

¹³ Andreini, 'La Ferza', in Marotti and Romei, p. 502.

¹⁴ Paleotti, *Scrittura*, quoted in Taviani, *La fascinazione del teatro*, p. 39.

¹⁵ Flaminio Scala, Florence, to Giovanni de' Medici, Venice, 22 December 1618, ASF, *Mediceo*, f. 5150, c. 615r, transcribed in *Comici dell'Arte: Corrispondenze*, I, p. 518.

¹⁶ Fiaschini stresses Andreini's intention to transfigure his professional itinerance into devout peregrination in order to build himself as an actor-saint. However, Fiaschini's theory is limited to Andreini's religious works, while it can be prolifically applied to other writings, as this analysis shows. See Fiaschini, *L'incessabile agitazione*, pp. 133-170.

The lines echo the words written by Andreini in *La Ferza*. We see in the treatise that which Fiaschini has defined as a ‘valorizzazione ascetica degli spostamenti delle attrici, descritti [...] come segni di devozione’.¹⁷ The actress takes the place of Florinda:

Chi più di queste, del mondo erranti viatrici, travagliate saranno? Queste ogn’ora, ogni momento, con una continua e discomoda agitazione solcano i fiumi, s’espungono ai mari, poggiano ai monti, or rapidi, or procellosi ed or precipitosi. Or quante volte e quante credi tu (o viatore) che mirino il terrore e la morte in faccia? Quante preghiere ti fai credere ch’al cielo inviino delle più belle e delle più vivaci in perigli così gravi? Quante fiate s’espungano per le foreste or all’alba, or al meriggio, or alla sera, or alla notte, or serena ed or oscura, a cadute gravi non solo, ma a svaligi di ladroni imperversati?¹⁸

By functioning as a literary transposition of the actress, *La Florinda* therefore inaugurates the line of Andreini’s production which leads to his works on Mary Magdalene, to which I shall return in Chapter 5.

Ramponi’s acting performance at the Spensierati Academy – reconstructed through a systematic collation of passages of Andreini’s tragedy with the *Rime in lode* – responded to academic needs of a formal nature, too. Ramponi probably played only a handful of solo scenes from *La Florinda*, given that the number of actors involved in the performance and the complexity of the scenery make it unlikely that it was fully staged during an academic gathering. This hypothesis is consistent with the way the play is constructed: the tragedy is made up of autonomous sections, like laments, easily extractable. Ramponi’s part was limited to some scenes of this play, but her performance for the Spensierati, as the *Rime in lode* reveal, was not limited to the tragedy alone. The actress went beyond the presentation of Andreini’s text, and interpreted for the academicians roles other than that of Florinda.

The eighteen-page, in-quarto volume of the *Rime in lode* contains five encomiastic poems and the introductory letter by Vincenzo Panciatichi. The poems are signed by the authors with their academic names only – *il Percosso*, *l’Agitato*, *l’Allettato*, *lo Svegliato* and *il Sollevato* –¹⁹ labelling the encomia as part of academic practice: within the academic context, the acting talent of Ramponi was rewarded with the writing talent of the members of the circle.²⁰

¹⁷ Fiaschini, *L’incessabile agitazione*, p. 168.

¹⁸ Andreini, ‘La Ferza’, in Marotti and Romei, p. 506.

¹⁹ *Il Percosso* and *l’Agitato* are the academic names of Francesco Vinta, ‘Principe’ of the academy, and Vincenzo Panciatichi respectively. The identity of the other authors is hard to reconstruct.

²⁰ The same applies to the ‘corona d’altissimi sonetti’ composed for Andreini.

In the *Rime in lode*, there are many references to the performance of the actress in the role of a tragic heroine in love. In these passages, the authors stress Ramponi's ability to instill a true sentiment of sympathy and compassion in the audience at the misfortunes of the character she interpreted, or a true sentiment of love, in accordance with her discourse.²¹

Ella destò in altrui,
Quando le piacque, i propri affetti sui,
che s'in vasto teatro unqua si dolse,
pianse gente infinita il suo duol finto. (p. 9)

Se veste oscuro manto
o pur coturno tragico e regale,
trae da mill'occhi il pianto,
cui meraviglia e or pietade assale
e i cori in tante guise alletta e punge,
ch'al finto pianto il vero aggiunge. (p. 17)

S'in bel teatro, sovra ricca e vaga
scena, movesti a ragionar d'amore,
chi tosto non senti rapirsi il core
e l'anima farsi di seguirti vaga? (p. 11)²²

These passages, if referring to *La Florinda*, do not provide specific information on which scenes of the tragedy were performed by Ramponi. Further details on her performance come from the many allusions by the academicians to Ramponi's singing, sometimes accompanied by musical instruments that she probably played herself:

E sia pur quando sovra nobil cetra
al dolce suon de la divina voce
un petto di diaspro, un cor feroce,
punto di bel diletto ancor si spetra.
Né mai 'n lieve magion nocchiero ardito,
calcando in mar la fluttuosa arena
udio così canora alma sirena
sciorre in bel canto lusinghiero invito.
Anzi, s'in grembo al sonno in dolce oblio
avvien che quella il sole agli occhi adombri,
tu l'anima n'involi e i petti ingombri

²¹ The contrast between the fictitious nature of the sentiments of the interpreter and the reality of the sentiments instilled by the interpreter in the audience is a *topos* in the poems by or for actresses. See, for example, the opening sonnet of Isabella Andreini's *Rime* (Chapter 1, n. 79).

²² Page 11 is misnumbered 10.

di grazia, di speranza e di desio. (p. 11)

Se parla, o canta, o ride
[...]
se con dolce armonia
spiega le voci, or placide, or tremanti,
amor sue forze oblia
e le fanno tenor le sfere erranti;
corre Psiche a mirar l'amate forme,
se ben al dolce canto amor non dorme. (p. 17)

The description of the actress's singing follows the Neoplatonic model set for Armani: unlike the singing of the mythological creature, which leads the listeners to sweet oblivion, Ramponi's singing, endowed with psychagogic power, fires the hearts of the spectators with grace, hope and positive desire.²³ These lines are compatible with the interpretation of the tragic character of Andreini's play. Some of Florinda's monologues in the work were probably sung – although none of them are in italics, the font usually adopted for lines sung in the tragedy – as 'the heightened rhythms of the interrupted, exclamatory lines push the sound of Florinda's laments away from regular speech along the spectrum toward music', even though 'there is no direct evidence to support the case'.²⁴ If Ramponi's singing, mentioned by the Spensierati in the *Rime in lode*, refers to her performance of *La Florinda* and not to a singing act for the academicians unrelated to the tragedy, the poems provide the missing evidence of the musical nature of Florinda's monologues and allow the formulation of a more definite hypothesis about the passages of the play staged in the academy.²⁵ Ramponi might have interpreted Florinda's lament in Act I Scene 3,²⁶ and in Act II Scene 1, both of which have the potential to be set to music.²⁷ This performance would be consistent with the wish of the Andreinis to comply with the taste of the Spensierati for

²³ In its Manichean acceptance, the figure of the siren was particularly suitable for representing the actress for both detractors and promoters. On this matter see, for example, the three sonnets that form part of the poetic exchange by the Accademici Filarmonici on Virginia Ramponi, included in the Codex Morbio I held in the Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense in Milan. The sonnets are transcribed in Serena Laiena, 'Meretrices ergo Dive: Academic Encomia and the Metamorphosis of Early Modern Actresses', *The Italianist*, 41.1, forthcoming.

²⁴ Wilbourne, *Seventeenth-Century Opera*, p. 61.

²⁵ On the relation between textual and oral culture in early modern Italy see 'Oral Culture in Early Modern Italy: Performance, Language, Religion', ed. by Stefano Dall'Aglia, and others, *The Italianist*, 34.3 (2014), and *Voices and Texts in Early Modern Italian Society*, ed. by Brian Richardson (London: Routledge, 2017).

²⁶ See Wilbourne, *Seventeenth-Century Opera*, pp. 60-61.

²⁷ Further allusions to Florinda's singing in the tragedy can be found in Filandro's lines: 'Ma di silvestre Dio cura pietosa | il bel corpo vesti di bianche penne | e poi le diè di tortora la forma | che d'esser mesta ancor mastra nel canto; | così qual Progne o Filomena a l'aure | sovente ambo spiegaro | le doglie e 'l pianto amaro' (II. 6. P. 74).

music, and would provide a precedent for her performance of Monteverdi's *Arianna* in 1608.²⁸

The picture of Ramponi's performance becomes more complex in looking at other passages of the collection. In his poem, *l'Agitato* refers to a range of situations, maybe scenes, in which Ramponi was involved:

Se la fronte ti cinge elmo lucente,
se terso brando arma la bella mano,
rassembri del gran nume emul sovrano,
forza e valor di bellicosa gente.
S'innalzandoti poi sovra le stelle
dimostri come Dio s'ammanta solo
delle proprie sue glorie, e 'l santo stuolo
si fa beato rimirando in quelle. (p. 11)

The first quatrain refers to Ramponi's performance in the role of a warrior, a role which is not required by Andreini's tragedy, while the second quatrain might allude to the interpretation of a character in a scene of a religious play or to an exhibition of eloquence on religious matters, both alien to *La Florinda*. It can be argued that *l'Agitato* illustrated an ideal gallery of Ramponi's possible roles, but he might also have recorded in his verse many performances by Ramponi at the Accademia degli Spensierati.²⁹ The second hypothesis appears more likely, as it is substantiated by the writings of other Spensierati. One of the two sonnets written by the Spensierato Giovanni Soranzo for Ramponi in 1604, not included in the *Rime in lode* but published in his own collection of *Rime*,³⁰ is entitled 'A Florinda guerriera'. From 1604 onwards, Florinda became the name by which Ramponi was widely known as actress, which is why Soranzo's use of the name 'Florinda' must not be mistakenly interpreted as an allusion to the role of the tragic heroine:

²⁸ On the circumstances of this performance, see Section 4.1. On Virginia Ramponi's interpretation of Arianna see, for example, Wilbourne, *Seventeenth-Century Opera*, pp. 51-91. On *L'Arianna*, see also Paolo Fabbri, *Monteverdi* (Turin: EDT musica, 1985), pp. 124-148; Paola Besutti, 'Da "L'Arianna" a "La Ferinda"'; Silvia Carandini and Luciano Mariti, *Don Giovanni o l'estrema avventura del teatro. Il nuovo risarcito Convitato di Pietra di Giovan Battista Andreini. Studi e edizione critica* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2003), pp. 150-157; Paola Besutti, 'Il matrimonio dell'infanta Margherita: le feste a Mantova', in *Politica e cultura nell'età di Carlo Emanuele I: Torino, Parigi, Madrid. Convegno internazionale di studi*, Torino, 21-24 febbraio 1995, ed. by Mariarosa Masoero, Sergio Mamino and Claudio Rosso (Florence: Olschki, 1999), pp. 491-506.

²⁹ The hypothesis of multiple performances is supported by Cox in discussing the relationship of Ramponi with the Spensierati (see 'Member, Muses, Mascots', p. 150). The same assumption is made by Wilbourne in 'La Florinda: The Performance of Virginia Ramponi Andreini', pp. 191-192.

³⁰ Giovanni Soranzo, *Delle Rime Fiorentine di Giovanni Soranzo detto l'Appagato Accademico Spensierato* (Florence: Volcmar Timan, 1604). The sonnets dedicated to Ramponi are *A Florinda guerriera* (p. 99) and *Deb, Florinda graziosa* (p. 226). The collection includes a sonnet dedicated to Giovan Battista Andreini, *Mentre l'aurora tua* (p. 95).

Or che un destrier maneggi o mia Florinda,
 e che sì bene arresti anco la lancia,
 mi vien da veritiero grido esposto:
 convien che 'l riso al fin dal cor recinda,
 veggendo in te l'Amazoni di Francia
 ritratte quai le pinse l'Ariosto.³¹

The consistency between *l'Agitato's* description and that of Soranzo strengthens the argument that Ramponi played the role of a warrior in a performance at the Accademia degli Spensierati. The same consistency occurs between *l'Agitato's* mention of Ramponi's "religious" performance and *il Sollevato's* verse for the actress. In a passage from his poetic dialogue, *il Sollevato* writes:

S'in teatro amoroso
 ell'ardio salir di cielo in cielo,
 s'aprio quel che nascoso
 Natura tien fra inaccessibil velo. (*Rime in lode*, p. 16)

Ramponi's metaphorical ascent to heaven is described also by another academician: *lo Svegliato*. In his poem, the author refers to the revelation by the actress of the 'intelligenze alme e divine':

E s'in nobil teatro i bei zaffiri
 del ciel varcando in voci pellegrine,
 scopri l'intelligenze alme e divine,
 mille spande 'l mio core alti sospiri. (p. 14)

The conformity of the descriptions suggests that Ramponi played the parts of warrior and that she performed a religious act for her academic audience.³²

The list of roles that *il Sollevato* associates with Ramponi is longer. In his poetic dialogue, praise for the actress is voiced by the characters of Liguria, Flora and Minerva. Liguria refers to Ramponi's interpretation of the role of a nymph and a fisherwoman, and Flora describes Ramponi as a hunter. These characters are compatible with the interpretation of scenes from pastoral dramas in their traditional and piscatorial form, which seems to point to Ramponi's performance of scenes of pastoral plays possibly written by

³¹ Soranzo, *Delle Rime Fiorentine*, p. 99.

³² Further hypotheses on the religious act are advanced in Section 3.3.

the academicians. Liguria's mention of Ramponi wearing a toga, the typical garment of orators, might not allude to a theatrical performance but rather to an academic demonstration of her eloquence, in accordance with her known ability to perform poems and discourses *all'improvviso*. Minerva's lines portray Ramponi as the interpreter of a tragic role, probably that of Florinda. The last two sestets by Liguria and Minerva use Neoplatonic terminology to describe Ramponi while singing and playing the part of a Goddess:

LIGURIA Se parla, o canta, o ride,
 se in ninfa si trasforma, o in pescatrice
 insegna, avviva, ancide,
 e dal bosco e dal mar grandezze elice,
 e se veste la toga, ond'altri impari,
 scopre d'alta virtù, profondi mari.

MINERVA Se veste oscuro manto
 o pur coturno tragico e regale,
 trae da mill'occhi il pianto,
 cui meraviglia e or pietade assale
 e i cori in tante guise alletta e punge,
 ch'al finto pianto il vero pianto aggiunge.

FLORA Se cruda e vezzosetta
 cacciatrice si mostra e l'arco tende
 con leggiadra vendetta
 Amor in lei s'annida e l'alme incende,
 e mentre biasma amor ritrosa e vaga,
 con sue proprie saette i cori impiaga.

LIGURIA Se con dolce armonia
 spiega le voci, or placide, or tremanti,
 Amor sue forze oblia
 e le fanno tenor le sfere erranti;
 corre Psiche a mirar l'amate forme,
 se ben al dolce canto amor non dorme.

MINERVA Se Dea si noma e finge
 sono i bei detti tuoi gemme celesti;
 il ciel figura e pinge
 col pennel della voce, onde si desti
 sopito cor, e in contemplando il vero
 sollevato s'innalzi al sommo impero. (pp. 17-18)

It is not possible to say with certainty whether Ramponi performed all these roles before the academicians; nevertheless, it is likely that she performed at least some of these parts

for the Spensierati. The fact that scenes and parts were staged in the academy which went beyond Andreini's tragedy proves, once again, that the careers of the two were intertwined and distinct, and that as early as 1604, Ramponi's *repertoire* was already extensive and extended beyond Andreini's texts, which seems to indicate that Ramponi had received training prior to this date.

3.3 THE ACTRESS AS DIVINE WOMAN

The significance of the Spensierati's collection of the *Rime in lode* is not limited to the reconstruction of Ramponi's academic performances. Through the poems, it is possible to follow the entire process of conception, formation, and dissemination of the new portrait of her. The *Rime in lode*, like the 'corona d'altissimi sonetti' written by the academicians for Andreini's tragedy, were the outcome of a calculated debut. In the light of the declaration made by Andreini in *La Saggia Egiziana* of the validating role of academic encomia, it is clear that the couple aimed at the academy as a catalyst for Ramponi's rise, too. The Spensierati did not disappoint expectations.

When writing in praise of the actress, the academicians had a variety of precedents to take into account. Vincenza Armani and many other *dive* had trodden the boards before Ramponi in early modern Italy; a few of them had received academic praise. The analogies between these encomia and those considered in Chapter 1 are many: for the Spensierati, too, the Neoplatonic framework stood at the core of their encomia and fostered their process of re-semanticisation of the actress. In these poems, the rhetorical tool is more overtly deployed, the instrumentalisation of Neoplatonism is sharper because, unlike Armani's eulogists, the Spensierati are not dealing with the poetic re-writing of a new social subject, but they are coming to terms with the enhancement of the qualities of a subject already known, which had not ceased to attract the criticism of a segment of the population. Superficially heterogeneous, especially on the formal side,³³ the poems are substantially consistent. They are a variation on the theme of the Neoplatonic correspondence of beauty and virtue.³⁴

³³ The poems have different forms: a hymn, a poem in hendecasyllables, two sonnets, and a poetic dialogue in septenaries and hendecasyllables.

³⁴ As noted by Majorana, by the beginning of the seventeenth century, *comici dell'Arte* had started to suggest in their writings a reconciliation of the concepts of skill and virtue, which were usually set apart by men of the Church: 'For the comici, skill and technical prowess represented not moral failings but, on the contrary, demonstrations of human qualities and social competence. Skill referred to virtue in the double meaning of moral and technical virtue' (Majorana, 'Commedia dell'Arte and the Church', p. 147).

In his hymn for the actress, *il Percosso* asks the Muses to lend him their words in order to sing the qualities of such a unique woman. Ramponi is, according to the author, a beautiful soul wrapped in a *bella spoglia*, a repository of heavenly virtues:

E voi suore del Sole
su l'auree corde, altissime parole
apprestatene omai, ch'io vi preparo
anima bella, in bella spoglia avvolta
di sublime cantar soggetto raro
in cui vive del ciel virtute accolta;
quindi s'incideran de' vostri carmi
per sì chiara memoria eterni marmi. (p. 7)

In the sonnet by *l'Allettato*, Ramponi's virtue, again counter-attraction to her beauty, is unravelled and described in terms of purity of thoughts and desires:

Ma senza rimirar machina altera,
opra di fabro eterno, ecco la bella
Florinda, ch'ogni bello in sé raccoglie.
Questa ha più dolce e vaga primavera
e più chiaro splendor d'alcuna stella
e più chiari del sol pensieri e voglie. (p. 13)

The coexistence of beauty and goodness in Ramponi is described in more problematic terms in the sonnet by *lo Svegliato*. The poem, Petrarchan in form and content, opens with canonical praise of the eyes of the actress, her face, her hair, her chest, followed by the eulogy of the virtue of her performance. Ramponi's beauty and virtue are then polarised and described as two chains 'all'altrui libertà', in a construction reminiscent of Petrarch's *Secretum*. The poet admits the dangerous nature of the beauty of the actress, which might lead to spiritual death, but also acknowledges the salvific function of the second chain, her virtue. Unlike the chain which tied Petrarch to Laura and distanced him from God, the chain of virtue which ties the academician to Ramponi is divine:³⁵

Se del bel guardo i folgoranti giri,
se la pompa del viso e l'aureo crine
avvien ch'io miri, e del tuo sen le brine
mille sente 'l mio cor dolci martiri.

³⁵ Similarly, the singing of Laura, defined by Petrarch 'del ciel sirena' (RVF 167), had the effect of keeping the listener's soul from leaving his body, while the singing of actresses, like that of Platonic Sirens, brought the souls closer to God.

E s'in nobil teatro i bei zaffiri
 del ciel varcando in voci pellegrine,
 scopri l'intelligenze alme e divine,
 mille spande 'l mio core alti sospiri.
 Sì trae da te Florinda, Amor possente
 all'altrui libertà doppia catena
 di beltà frale e di virtute ordita,
 e se quella del corpo altri sovente
 conduce a morte per soverchia pena,
 questa celeste lo ritorna in vita. (p. 14)

In another poem in the collection, eloquently entitled by *l'Agitato* 'La bellezza scompagnata dalla virtù esser cosa fragilissima', praise of the actress's virtue is linked to acknowledgment of its transformative power. Virtue turns souls into mirrors of heaven where the world can admire a glimpse of celestial light, thereby making us more like God. The virtue of Ramponi, too, transforms the academicians, who can do nothing but adore her:³⁶

Solo quella beltà quaggiù s'eterna
 che contro al trapassar d'ore fugaci
 arma il cor di virtù, né tra fallaci
 e caduchi pensier la mente interna.
 Questa di tal valor gli animi accende
 che quasi spegli ov'entro al ciel si mira,
 in quegli il mondo stupefatto ammira
 come gran parte del divin risplende.
 Poi che al sovrano architettor del cielo
 null'altro n'avvicina o rende in parte
 più simili di questa, che diparte
 mortale ingegno da mortale stelo.
 Quind'è che gran stupor, gran meraviglia
 mirando la virtù di bella donna,
 in ogni sesso, in ogni età s'indonna,
 e quasi d'adorarla ogn'un consiglia.
 Qual miracol sarà dunque se 'l mondo
 s'inchina a te quasi a beltà celeste. (p. 10)³⁷

Il Pervosso expresses the same concept in educational rather than empirical terms, by presenting Ramponi as a teacher of philosophical knowledge:

³⁶ See, for example, the words by the Intronati for Armani (Section 1.3): 'Qual meraviglia or è [...] | s'altri vinto riman, s'altri l'adora'.

³⁷ Page 10 is misnumbered 11.

Quanto già mai della severa Atene
 le sagge scole altrui mostraro in parte,
 e come dal mortale al sommo bene
 facile sì, ma tralasciata via,
 per le sembianze umane il cor s'invia,
 [...]
 ella scopria con disusato affetto. (pp. 7-8)

The phenomenology of the transformative power of Ramponi developed by *il Percosso* includes praise of Ramponi's eloquence, which does not incite people's desires but rather tempers them with reason, so that souls, purged of earthly passions, can easily ascend to God. The mitigation of the passions was a nod to Tridentine morality:

Ma con soave metro alto parlando,
 tenea con leve freno
 l'accesa brama alla ragione in seno
 e de' soverchi desiderî umani
 sì fatte quete le tempeste orrende,
 rendea gli erti sentieri umili e piani
 per cui l'anima a Dio rapida ascende,
 né 'l tebano Anfione, o 'l tracio Orfeo
 più di Florinda lusingando feo. (p. 8)

Tridentine arguments are also called into question in the poem by *l'Agitato*, but unlike *il Percosso*, who engages with questions of discipline, *l'Agitato* alludes to doctrinal matters. The lines by *l'Agitato*, surprisingly, seem to suggest that during one of her academic performances, Ramponi discoursed on theological subjects, to the wonder of her learned spectators, and asserted that free will played an important part in the process of human salvation. Free will was at the core of one of the main Tridentine doctrinal decrees, the validity of both faith and works in salvation, as opposed to Lutheran justification *per solam fidem*:

S'innalzandoti poi sovra le stelle
 dimostri come Dio s'ammanta solo
 delle proprie sue glorie, e 'l santo stuolo
 si fa beato rimirando in quelle,
 se come ei lascia a noi libero il freno
 onde del nostro ben, del nostro male
 noi medesmi siam fabri, e non fatale
 punto ne danna a le miserie in seno,
 allor nova Minerva in altrui desti
 insolito stupor di tua virtute

e le più dotte lingue ancor son mute
mentre altissime cause manifesti. (pp. 10-11)

The report by *l'Agitato* is a revelation. The assertion of doctrinal truths by a professional actress before an academic audience was incompatible with Catholic dictates. In Saint Paul's letter to Timothy, for example, it is said that: 'during instruction, a woman should be quiet and respectful. I give no permission for a woman to teach or to have authority over a man. A woman ought to be quiet' (1 Tim 2,11-12). The lines by *l'Agitato* cast new light on early modern actresses and reveal that there is still much to know about these professional performers. It has not been possible to identify the source of Ramponi's doctrinal speech; however, in the light of Andreini's familiarity with religious matters, determined in the analysis of his works of 1604, it could be argued that he participated in the construction of the speech made by his wife.

The Spensierati's description of Ramponi transcends the Neoplatonic framework and reaches a stage which was unprecedented in academic encomia for actresses. In their poems, Ramponi is not only beautiful, virtuous, divine. She is a theologian. She is a propagator of Tridentine ideals. She asserts doctrinal truths. Through her performance, she achieves the same goal as clerics, the same clerics who condemned the *comici*.

3.4 MARKETING STRATEGIES: BEYOND DIVINITY

Like that of Andreini, Ramponi's career benefited from the performance in the Accademia degli Spensierati and from the unprecedented and enthusiastic reception in that circle. Different to Andreini, though, Ramponi's public image as a new, ideal professional actress could not be conveyed through her own literary products: the academicians' poems were her primary means of promotion.

The Spensierati were aware of their role in the reception of the performer, as stated in many passages of the collection. In a metapoetic construction, *il Sollevato* made the goddess Flora declare herself proud of the Spensierati's homage to Ramponi: 'e pur la gloria mia se i figli miei, | dotta prole dell'Arno, inchinan lei' (p. 16). In the introductory letter to the *Rime in lode*, Panciatichi went further and stated that the aim of the collection was to spread awareness of Ramponi's talents: 'acciò commodamente possiate farne parte in diversi luoghi a quelli che di sentire i vostri pregi si diletmano' (p. 4). Awareness of her virtue, according to Panciatichi, would inspire everyone with a desire to honour and serve her:

‘come [la virtù vostra] desta meraviglia in ciascheduno, così accende in tutti nobil desio d’onorarvi e servirvi’ (p. 4).

The image of Ramponi as a divine actress that the Spensierati built in the pages of their collection was a sign of the double approval of clerics and intellectuals: the *Rime in lode* was Ramponi’s artistic and ethical licence, saleable in intellectual and religious contexts. Milan was certainly among the ‘diversi luoghi’ where the Andreini couple intended to spread the news of Ramponi’s talents. The documentary sources show that the Milanese reception of Ramponi in 1606 was extremely positive: she obtained the favour of the Governor of Milan, the Count of Fuentes, for whom she performed privately on many occasions (see Chapter 4).³⁸ In compliance with their joint strategy, the target Andreini was aiming at in publishing *La Divina Visione* became one of the most passionate admirers of Ramponi during the couple’s sojourn in the city.

The stay in Milan turned out to be profitable for the Andreinis: Ramponi’s skills earned her not only praise but also a significant gift from the Governor. Many of the gifts made by patrons or by dedicatees to Giovan Battista Andreini and his wife are listed in a notarial deed which certifies the emancipation of Giovan Battista from his father, Francesco. For every recorded gift, the name of the donor, the reason for the donation and the monetary value are specified. The fifth item in the list was ‘3 licenze concesse [...] di poter fare un lotto’.³⁹ It had been received from the Count of Fuentes and was estimated at 850 *scudi*. On this occasion, Ramponi added substantially to her family assets: these licences were part of the financial compensation delivered by her private performances for the Count of Fuentes.

Ramponi’s success in the Milanese environment is corroborated by the presence of her portrait in the *Feather Book* by Dionisio Menaggio (Fig. 3), the Count’s gardener and a keen observer of his times (p. 106). The book includes a series of 156 pictures, made almost entirely from bird feathers, which depict birds, hunters, tradesmen, musicians, and Commedia dell’Arte characters.⁴⁰

³⁸ On this matter, see Emily Wilbourne, “Isabella ringiovinita”, p. 51.

³⁹ ASMN, *Notarile*, notaio Giulio Cesare Pallini, 31 January 1620, “Emancipatio Jo. Bapte Andreini”, *Nota allegata all’atto*, transcribed in Besutti, ‘Da “L’Arianna” a “La Ferinda”’, pp. 272-274.

⁴⁰ The volume is held at the Blacker-Wood Library of Zoology and Ornithology at McGill University in Montreal. Further information can be found in Claudia Burattelli, ‘I comici dell’arte nelle tavole in piume d’uccello di Dioniso Menaggio (1618)’, *Biblioteca teatrale*, 37 (1996), 197-212, and in Cesare Molinari, *La Commedia dell’Arte*, pp. 151-160.



Fig. 3

In honour of the Count, the Andreinis decided to give their eldest and only child the name Pietro Enrico, and the Count probably became godfather to the child.⁴¹ It was not unusual to use children as part of an encomiastic strategy among professional actors: Tristano Martinelli, too, asked the Queen of France, Maria de' Medici, to baptise his child.⁴²

The impact of the *Rime in lode* went well beyond Milan, and the praise of Ramponi's singing was probably a calling-card which led to her selection as interpreter of Monteverdi's *Arianna* in 1608. The encomia of the Spensierati may also have eased the process of

⁴¹ See Roberta G. Arcaini, 'I comici dell'arte a Milano: accoglienza, sospetti, riconoscimenti', in *La scena della Gloria: drammaturgia e spettacolo a Milano in età spagnola*, ed. by Annamaria Cascetta and Roberta Carpani (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1995), pp. 268-276 (p. 290). The same claim is made in Francesco Bartoli, *Notizie istoriche de' comici italiani che fiorirono intorno all'anno MDL fino a' giorni presenti* (Padua: Conzatti, 1782), p. 15.

⁴² Tristano Martinelli was born in 1557. He began touring, together with his older brother Drusiano, as early as 1576. He died in Mantua, in 1630. On Martinelli, see Siro Ferrone, *Arlecchino*. Armand Baschet noted that a shift in the epithet used by Martinelli for the Queen followed the baptism of his son: 'La Reine, pour avoir été marraine d'un enfant d'Arlequin, appelait Arlequin «mon compère», et Arlequin, ne laissant rien perdre, appelait la Reine «ma commère». C'était leur protocole dans les messages qu'ils échangeaient.' (Baschet, *Les Comédiens italiens à la cour de France sous Charles IX, Henri III, Henri IV et Louis XIII : d'après les lettres royales, la correspondance originale des comédiens, les registres de la trésorerie de l'épargne et autres documents* (Paris : E. Plon, 1882), p. 13).

Ramponi's participation in other academic environments, which fostered other laudatory compositions dedicated to her.⁴³

Two parallel and analogous processes took place in 1604 in the Accademia degli Spensierati: the first, led by Giovan Battista Andreini, built a new image of him as a *letterato* and a devout man; the second, led by Virginia Ramponi, presented her as a virtuous performer almost approaching divinity. The processes combined in a unitary marketing strategy aimed at the advancement of the theatre couple. Two factors made the difference and allowed them to emerge as early as 1604 from the background of the Counter-Reformation. A professional theatre couple was able to understand the needs of their times and to act accordingly. A cultural institution, an academy, was willing to use its authority to validate the activity of professional performers. In 1604, a new chapter opened in the social history of theatre.

⁴³ Ramponi's participation in other academic environments is discussed in Laiena, '*Meretrices ergo Dine*'.

Part II

The Rise of the Couple (1605-1631)

Chapter 4

Virginia Ramponi: Letters and Leadership

4.1 'FLORINDA E SUO MARITTO': RAMPONI BETWEEN MILAN AND TURIN

The double act at the Accademia degli Spensierati started the unbroken rise to fame of Ramponi and Andreini. For more than 20 years, they achieved success in Italy and abroad. Their career was a carousel of *tournées*, performances, praise, publications, and artistic collaborations, brought about by the strategic employment of their talent and their image. But what exactly was Ramponi's part in this rise?

Between 1605 and 1631, most of the demands for *tournées* and performances by the Andreinis and the company they were part of hinged on Virginia Ramponi: she was not only a talented actress, but also a powerful leader and an influential mediator. Based on the analysis of chancery drafts and autograph letters written by *comici* dell'Arte and the patrons who engaged them, held mainly, but not only, at the Archivio di Stato in Mantua,¹ this chapter defines the agency of Ramponi in seventeenth-century Italy.

In September 1606, as mentioned, Andreini and Ramponi were in Milan, working to build a strong and profitable relationship with the Governor of the city, the Count of Fuentes. To this aim, Andreini relied mainly on his writing, Ramponi on her performances (Chapters 2 and 3). In Milan, the Andreinis were not on their own: in autumn 1605, Vincenzo I Gonzaga, the Duke of Mantua, answered Andreini's appeal for a patron, made in *La Saggia Egiziana* (ll. 869-872), and welcomed him and Ramponi into the Ducal company, already made up of some of the greatest *comici* dell'Arte, such as Pier Maria Cecchini and his wife Orsola Posmoni. The Milanese sojourn of 1606 was therefore part of the first *tournee* of the Andreini couple with the Ducal company. Ramponi and Andreini

¹ The correspondence of some of the *comici* dell'Arte has been catalogued for the 'Progetto Herla'. The catalogue is accessible online at http://www.capitalespettacolo.it/ita/ric_gen.asp. The letters by Giovan Battista Andreini, Nicolò Barbieri, Pier Maria Cecchini, Silvio Fiorillo, Tristano Martinelli and Flaminio Scala are published in *Comici dell'Arte: Corrispondenze*.

were meant to leave the city after a few weeks and move to Bologna together with the *compagnia*, but the profits they were making and the networks they were building in Milan made them reluctant to resume the tour.²

In two letters written on 11 September 1606, Pier Maria Cecchini, leader of the company at that time, denounced the insubordination of Andreini and Ramponi to their Mantuan patrons, revealing that their intention to stay in Milan was due to their desire to please the Count of Fuentes. The first letter was addressed to the secretary of the Duke of Mantua, Annibale Chieppio:

Illustrissimo mio signor colendissimo

Mando il presente lator a posta a Sua Altezza serenissima per fargli saper per l'inclusa le raggioni, et ricorro a Vostra Signoria illustrissima aciò veghi come sempre habbi causa di dolermi. Signore, queste sono persone avezze andar con comedenti, non con comedianti: vogliono comandare, gridare, andare et star quanto gli piace, ma io, ch'io sono constumato con gli primi comici che sono statti al mio tempo, non posso, né mi par ch'io deba, sopportar tante impertinenzze. Dico (se ben è tardi) di Lelio et Florinda, che Dio ne guardi a tutti gli pari miei d'esser con loro.³

The second letter by Cecchini was sent to the Duke of Mantua, Vincenzo I Gonzaga himself:

Serenissimo signore

Le strataggeme et persecuciones che mi vengono dalla Florinda et suo marito, et i mali trattamenti loro, sono così grandi che mi hano ormai ridotto a rovina et a precipicio.

Mi fano parlare ch'io resti questo verno a Milano, et perché non mi par giusto, et ch'io niego di restargli, mi ha il detto marito di Florinda tiratto a termine di far quistione, il che succedeva se Iddio non gli metteva la mano.

[...]

Ma intanto comprendi l'Altezza Sua che non potiamo star insieme, ché le cose sono così gravi, et gli portamenti loro di maniera che non lo posso dire, per esservi dentro cose che se non a bocca le posso far saper a Sua Altezza: basta che comple anco al medesimo signor conte di Fuentes che stiano qui.⁴

After this denunciation, Andreini was fired by the Duke himself, and then reinstated in the company a few days later, on condition that he indemnified the other *comici* for the financial

² See Section 3.4.

³ Pier Maria Cecchini, Milan, to Annibale Chieppio, Mantua, 11 September 1606, ASMN, *Gonzaga*, b. 1730, no pagination, transcribed in *Comici dell'Arte: Corrispondenze*, I, pp. 221-222.

⁴ Pier Maria Cecchini, Milan, to Vincenzo I Gonzaga, Mantua, 11 September 1606, ASMN, *Gonzaga*, b. 1730, no pagination, transcribed in *Comici dell'Arte: Corrispondenze*, I, p. 222.

loss caused by their stay in Milan.⁵ In the letter to the Duke of Mantua by Cecchini, Andreini is never named: the author refers to him as ‘maritto’ di Florinda. Two years after their performance at the Spensierati, Andreini’s role was determined by that of his wife.

In the years which followed, Ramponi’s fame continued to grow. In May 1608, in Mantua, weeks of festivity were organised for the wedding of Francesco IV Gonzaga, son of Vincenzo I, to the Infanta Margherita of Savoy, the daughter of Carlo Emanuele I, Duke of Savoy and Catalina Micaela, Infanta of Spain. It was the most important dynastic match and social event in Italy that year, an occasion for the Gonzagas to show off their splendour and an occasion, too, for artists to attract the attention of an international audience. Ramponi achieved this goal thanks also to an unfortunate circumstance. Caterina Martinelli, a famous singer trained by Claudio Monteverdi, and who had been to play the title role in *Arianna* by Monteverdi and Rinuccini,⁶ died suddenly just a few weeks before the performance, aged only eighteen. Monteverdi had to look for another singer for the role, and his choice was Ramponi. On 14 March 1608, Carlo Rossi, a member of the Gonzaga court, wrote to the Duke of Mantua:

La *Arianna*, che per la morte della povera Caterina era morta, è ravivata, perché havendo volsuto questa sera Madama sentire la Florinda, che ne haveva imparata la parte la più difficile, la dice di maniera che ne è stata stupita, talché sarà mirabile.⁷

On the following day, the Duke of Mantua received another account of Ramponi’s interpretation, by Antonio Costantini, a member of the Accademia Olimpica and close to the Gonzaga family:

Sua Altezza si affatica in far mettere all’ordine la commedia cantata, et era disperatissima dopo la morte della povera signora Catherina, [...]. Finalmente Iddio ha inspirato in far prova se la Florinda fusse habile a far questa parte, la quale in sei giorni l’ha benissimo a mente, et la canta con tanta gratia et con tanta maniera et affetto che ha fatto meravigliar Madama, il Rinuccini et tutti questi signori che l’hanno udita.⁸

⁵ The information is retrieved from a letter written by Andreini himself: ‘Havendo quello imbrogliator di Frittellino imbrogliato così bene appresso l’Altezza serenissima di Mantova ch’egli s’è indotto a licenziarmi’ (Giovanni Battista Andreini, Milan, to Silvio Andreasi, Mantua, 20 September 1606, ASMN, *Gonzaga*, b. 1730, no pagination, transcribed in *Comici dell’Arte: Corrispondenze*, I, p. 77). See also Annibale Chieppio, Mantua, to [Lelio] Belloni, Milan, 25 September 1606, ASMN, *Gonzaga*, b. 2704, fasc. 4, lett. 69.

⁶ References to Ramponi’s performance of *Arianna* have been detailed previously (Chapter 3, n. 28).

⁷ Carlo Rossi, Mantua, to Vincenzo Gonzaga, Mantua, 14 March 1608, ASMN, *Gonzaga*, b. 2712, fasc. 20, lett. 8, quoted in *Comici dell’Arte: Corrispondenze*, I, p. 268, n. 75.

⁸ Antonio Costantini, Mantua, to Vincenzo Gonzaga, Mantua, 15 March 1608, ASMN, *Gonzaga*, b. 2712, fasc. 4, lett. 7, quoted in *Comici dell’Arte: Corrispondenze*, I, p. 268, n. 75.

As opposed to singers, whose training was primarily musical, Ramponi conjugated musical skill and performing talent, thus being able to break onto the opera scene with great *éclat*. Ramponi probably had an influence on the composition of the melodrama itself, and the *Lamento*, the most famous musical piece of the *Arianna*, was presumably composed after Martinelli's death and designed precisely to exhibit Ramponi's singing skills.⁹ For this performance, too, as for her private performance for the Count of Fuentes in 1606, Ramponi received a gift of great value from her patrons – 'una colonna [sic] con medaglia di valore di scudi n° 210' –¹⁰ that increased the financial resources of the couple.

Ramponi's performance was talked of for years. In June 1609, the Duke of Nemours, cousin of the Duke Carlo Emanuele I of Savoy, requested her presence in Turin. At that time, the court was a hub for literature and arts: the poets Giovan Battista Marino and Alessandro Tassoni, and the painters Ambrogio Figino and Federico Zuccari, among others, benefited from the patronage of Carlo Emanuele.¹¹ A group of *comici dell'Arte*, Cecchini and his wife among them, had been in Turin since May to entertain the court,¹² and at the beginning of June another small group of *comici* was sent by Vincenzo Gonzaga to Turin, but the Duke of Nemours was still not satisfied. A letter written by the Count Alessandro da Rho to a member of the Mantuan court makes clear the Duke's wish to see Ramponi at court, given her extraordinary reputation. She is mistakenly called 'Clorinda', instead of 'Florinda': 'che signora Clorinda vengi per questi pochi giorni, avendo grandissima voglia il signor Duca di sentirla per la nova li hanno dato li Serenissimi Principi quando furono a Mantova'.¹³ The presence of the actress was solicited in another letter written on the same day by the Count Alessandro da Rho to the Duke of Mantua himself: '[il signor Duca di Nemours] scrive di comandar subito alla signora Clorinda e suo marito

⁹ Tim Carter, 'Lamenting Ariadne?', *Early Music*, 27.3 (1999), 395-405.

¹⁰ This item and the other gifts received by Ramponi as financial compensation for her performances, considered in this chapter, are listed in the notarial deed mentioned above (Chapter 3, n. 39). See Besutti, 'Storie di emancipazione', pp. 66-74.

¹¹ On the patronage of Carlo Emanuele I of Savoy see, for example, Andreina Griseri, Anna Maria Bava and Alberto Basso, 'La corte e le arti', in *Storia di Torino*. Vol. 3. *Dalla dominazione francese alla ricomposizione dello Stato (1536-1630)*, ed. by Giuseppe Ricuperati (Turin: Einaudi, 1998), pp. 293-351; *Politica e cultura nell'età di Carlo Emanuele I*; Anna Maria Bava, 'Carlo Emanuele I di Savoia: la rete dei rapporti internazionali', in *Geografia del collezionismo: Italia e Francia tra 16° e il 18° secolo*. Atti delle Giornate di studio dedicate a Giuliano Briganti: Roma, 19-21 settembre 1996, ed. by Olivier Bonfait, and others (Rome: École Française de Rome, 2001), pp. 145-161; Anna Maria Bava, 'Artisti alla corte di Carlo Emanuele I negli anni di Caterina', in *L'infanta: Caterina d'Austria, duchessa di Savoia (1567-1597)*, ed. by Blythe A. Raviola and Franca Varallo (Rome: Carocci, 2013), pp. 295-306; Laura Facchin, 'Pittori veneti nello Stato sabaudo tra XVI e XVIII secolo: una prima panoramica', *Cheiron*, 2 (2018), 117-173.

¹² On this matter, see *Comici dell'Arte: Corrispondenze*, I, p. 232, n. 1.

¹³ Alessandro da Rho, Turin, to an unknown member of the Mantuan court, Mantua, 21 June 1609, ASMN, *Gonzaga*, b. 735, no pagination. Transcriptions of the letters are mine unless otherwise stated.

che vengino ancor loro per queste otto o dieci comedie, avendo desiderio grandissimo il signor Duca e serenissimi Prencipi di sentirla'.¹⁴ The Duke of Mantua agreed to Nemours' request and on 24 June sent a letter to the Andreinis, commanding the departure of the couple to Turin. At this stage, it was unquestionable that Ramponi was pre-eminent in the couple and that the two *comici* were engaged by Nemours only thanks to her talent. Andreini seems to be considered no more than an appendage to his wife, and, interestingly, he is not even mentioned in the first letter by Alessandro da Rho. Andreini chaperoned Ramponi in the Accademia degli Spensierati in 1604 and thereafter, tellingly, Ramponi chaperoned Andreini in the Italian courts. Indeed, when sending his request to the Andreini couple, the Duke of Mantua himself acknowledged Ramponi's primacy and chose her as his interlocutor. In the letter, written by a secretary, the actress is significantly defined as 'Madama Florinda mia carissima'. However, sometime later, the text was amended, and the final version of the letter was addressed to Giovan Battista:

~~Madama Florinda~~ Messer Giovan Battista **mio** Carissima

Io son pregato dal signor Duca di Savoia e dal Duca di Nemours a mandar ordini a lei, a vostro ~~marito~~ moglie e agli altri compagni che vi trasferiate a Torino dove quelle Altezze desiderano oltremodo di sentirvi e in particolare vostra moglie con promessa di non trattenervi per più di quindici giorni. Mi sarà caro che ubbidrate prontamente incaminandovi a quella volta dove ~~ho già scritto per questo~~ scrivo per questo medesimo corriere acciò riceviate ogni buon trattamento e possiate partirvi secondo vi tornerà comodo passati li quindici di, ~~e per~~ e in tutto quello vi possa occorrere fate capo al Conte Alessandro da Rho che voglio credere pigliarà la vostra protezione. Sarà questa commune a vostra **moglie** e agli altri compagni e di cuore mi vi raccomando.¹⁵

It is possible that the Duke was advised to change the addressee of the letter on a point of decorum, as its tone revealed a familiarity between him and Ramponi. Nevertheless, the document presents Ramponi as the leader in negotiations with patrons. Her skills were necessary for the success of the couple, to the point that even though changing the addressee, the Duke still clarified that 'quelle Altezze' wanted to hear 'in particolare' Florinda.

The wish of the princes was fulfilled and that summer in Turin, Ramponi was the protagonist of a piscatorial drama, *Le trasformazioni di Millefonti*, written by Duke Carlo

¹⁴ Alessandro da Rho, Turin, to the Duke of Mantua, Mantua, 21 June 1609, ASMN, *Gonzaga*, b. 735, no pagination.

¹⁵ Vincenzo I Gonzaga, Mantua, to Giovan Battista Andreini, Milan, 24 June 1609, ASMN, *Gonzaga*, b. 2270, no pagination. In bold letters or words overwritten, in apex words added.

Emanuele I of Savoy and the poet Ludovico San Martino d'Agliè, and staged on 24 August 1609.¹⁶ Accounts of the performance suggest that it was written to exhibit the talent of the protagonist. In the report sent by Sir Ascanio Sandri to Margherita of Savoy,¹⁷ the author tells of a 'festa che fa Sua Altezza a mille fonti [...] dove sarà un Balletto di Sirene che nell'acqua nuotando danzarano, e una piscatoria cantata in musica dove Florinda acquista non pocca riputatione cantando e recitando con bellissima maniera'.¹⁸ With another successful performance, Ramponi did not disappoint the expectations of her Turinese patrons and repaid the insistence with which they requested her.

4.2 'MIO SIGNORE ET BENEFFATTORE': RAMPONI AND THE GONZAGAS

During the stay in Turin, the confrontations between the Andreinis and the Cecchinis became progressively more inflamed, to the point that Ramponi and Andreini reached out to Cardinal Ferdinando Gonzaga, son of the Duke of Mantua, hoping for his intervention in their favour. Significantly, on this occasion the letter to the Cardinal was written by Ramponi, who led the conversation with clear awareness of the esteem in which Gonzaga held her. This letter is the first autograph we know of from Ramponi to the Cardinal, but her words lead to the assumption that the correspondence between the two was more prolific:

Ill.mo mio Sig.re

Ricordevole degli obblighi ch'io tengo con V.S. Ill.ma vengo con questa mia a farle riverenza, così fa Gio. Battista suo servo, ambidue con ogni affetto pregandola a tenerne vivi nella memoria sua. Saprà poi V. S. Ill.ma come io ho gettato a terra ogni trofeo eretto dalla S.ra Flaminia [Orsola Posmoni], e tanto se l'è slungato il naso, quanto lo haveva superbo alzato. Ella è odiata da tutto Torino per la sua alterigia e frenesia nell'amor di Cintio, invero con grandissimo suo obrobrio. Udrà V. S. sopra di questo cento ottave e quaranta sonetti del Cavalier Marino, l'udrà sicuro, poi ch'io faccio mia cura acciò che le capitino alle mani. Mi farà favore di parlar di costei con questo S.re Ambasciatore, che udrà cose scelleratissime. Tutti li compagni sclamano della temerità sua e di Frittellino [Piermaria Cecchini], et già l'hareino impiantata s'io non giungeva a Torino. [...] Per tanto, caro il mio Sig.re, procuri con l'Altezza Sereniss.ma del suo Signor Padre, ch'io al partir di Torino (durando questi suoi

¹⁶ On *Le trasformazioni di Millefonti*, see, for example, Gualtiero Rizzi, 'Un inedito di Carlo Emanuele I di Savoia: l'«Invenzione» di *Le trasformazioni di Millefonti*', *Studi piemontesi*, 1 (1972), 130-40 and Anna Maria Luisetti, «Le trasformazioni di Millefonti» di Ludovico San Martino d'Agliè', in *Politica e cultura nell'età di Carlo Emanuele I*, pp. 155-164.

¹⁷ Ascanio Sandri was a courtier of the Savoy. In 1614, he became Gentleman of the Bedchamber of Carlo Emanuele of Savoy.

¹⁸ Ascanio Sandri, Turin, to Margherita of Savoy, Mantua, 17 August 1609, ASMN, *Gonzaga*, b. 735, no pagination.

capricci) ch'io la possa lasciare [...]; per vita sua, per l'amor che mi porta, procuri che non potendo più soffrirla, ch'io con gli altri compagni possa impiantarla, che vedrà che nessuno starà seco, poi che è da tutti odiata [...]. Et per fine, raccomandandole D. Pietro Paolo mio cognato, le bacio la sua generosa mano, non mai stanca di giovare a Florinda: così fa Gio. Batt., servo suo, et da N. S. le auguriamo il colmo dei suoi altissimi pensieri.¹⁹

The letter marks a change of status in Ramponi's public role: she asked for favours in the name of the affection the Cardinal felt for her and she mentioned the generosity of the patron, probably alluding to previous favours she had received from him and drawing on their special relationship of which we are aware from other letters.²⁰ She proudly declared that she was the leader of the company by mentioning that her charisma had prevented the break-up of the group. To further substantiate her request for the dismissal of the Cecchinis, Ramponi referred to numerous poems, 'cento ottave e quaranta sonetti', still unidentified, written by the well-known poet Giovan Battista Marino who at that time was at the Turinese court, which attacked her rival, Flaminia alias Orsola Posmoni, wife of Cecchini.²¹ It is likely that the composition of the satirical poems by Marino was intended to please Ramponi, to whom the poet dedicated verses in *La Galeria* (1620) and in *Adone* (1623), and possibly also a poem included in *La Lira* (1614).²² Ramponi, for her part, might have purposely

¹⁹ Virginia Ramponi, Turin, to Ferdinando Gonzaga, Rome (?), 4 August 1609, ASMN, *Autografi*, b. 10, c. 57. The transcription of this letter is available online as part of the database of the Archivio Multimediale Attori Italiani (A.M.At.I.). See <http://amati.fupress.net/S1010?genere=1&idcollegato=2522&contesto=1> [Accessed on 8 July 2020].

²⁰ See, for instance, the letter written by Andreini to Carlo II Gonzaga Nevers in 1650, a few years before his death. The letter refers in particular to Ramponi's status after her performance of *Arianna* in 1608: 'In cotesto così fatto tempo, di lunga e gradita servitù, Florinda di Lelio prima consorte, fu fatta degna di cantar l'*Arianna* in penuria di musiche (e siasi ciò lecito dire) con tanta ammirazione, che 'l serenissimo Ferdinando, allora cardinale, disse al serenissimo suo Vincenzo padre, che più non era dovuto che Florinda calcasse i teatri; così nobile azzione per la serenissima Casa con tanto applauso fatta' (Giovan Battista Andreini, Due Castelli (?), to Carlo II Gonzaga Nevers, Mantua, 7 April 1650 (?), ASMN, *Gonzaga*, b. 2370, c. 336, transcribed in *Comici dell'Arte: Corrispondenze*, I, p. 166).

²¹ Scholars in the field, among them Siro Ferrone and Fabrizio Fiaschini, have misinterpreted the passage, believing that the poems mentioned by Ramponi had been written by Marino in her praise. Claudia Burattelli amended the error by comparing the passage with a letter sent by Giovan Battista Andreini to Vincenzo I Gonzaga ten days later: '[Flaminia] non solo è discortese con i compagni, ma con i cavalieri di Torino [...]; onde sdegnati questi signori hanno fatto che 'l cavalier Marino ha fatte diverse composizioni sopra di lei' (Giovan Battista Andreini, Turin, to Vincenzo I Gonzaga, Mantua, 14 August 1609, ASMN, *Autografi*, b. 10, c. 23^{r-v}, transcribed in *Comici dell'Arte: Corrispondenze*, I, p. 91).

²² The position chosen by Marino for the poem dedicated to Ramponi in *Galeria Poetica* quoted above (Chapter 2, n. 17) is particularly interesting. The poem is included in the section *Ritratti - Donne*. This section is made up by three subsections: 'Belle Caste e Magnanime', 'Belle Impudiche e Scelerate', and 'Bellicose e Virtuose'. Marino positioned the poem in the last of the three sections, significantly after the poems dedicated to Vittoria Colonna and Isabella Andreini. This is another sign of the prestige that actresses enjoyed in early modern Italy. In *L'Adone*, Marino referred to Ramponi's performance of the *Arianna*: 'E 'n tal guise Florinda udisti, o Manto, | là ne' teatri de' tuoi regi tetti, | d'Arianna spiegar gli aspri martiri | e trar da mille cor mille sospiri' (Giovan Battista Marino, *Adone*, ed. by Emilio Russo, 2 vols (Milan: BUR, 2013), I, pp. 718-719). The sonnet 'A dio, Florida bella, il cor piagato', included in *La Lira*, might refer to Ramponi. It has the same features of the 'Addii' for actresses (Giovan Battista Marino, *La Lira*, ed. by Maurizio Slawinski, 2 vols (Turin: RES,

mentioned Marino in her letter to Gonzaga as a favour to the poet, who at that time was trying to gain the attention of the Mantuan patrons.²³

In the last few lines of the letter, Ramponi intercedes for her husband by recommending her brother-in-law, the Vallumbrosan monk Pietro Paolo Andreini, mentioned earlier (Chapter 2), to Cardinal Gonzaga. On this occasion, Ramponi performed a mediating role on behalf of her husband, a role which was unusual for a woman, let alone a wife. Similarly, when entering the Milanese circles, Giovan Battista had used the memory of his mother Isabella, a matriarchal figure, to perform an authorising role.²⁴ In the former case, however, Giovan Battista Andreini was still the agent, although he relied on the name of his mother, whereas, in the case of this particular letter, the agency shifted from Andreini to Ramponi. Only eight days after Ramponi's letter, another missive was sent to Ferdinando Gonzaga, this time written by Andreini. He complained about the Cecchinis in a different tone from Ramponi. From the first lines, the disparity in the relations between Andreini and the Cardinal, and Ramponi and the Cardinal emerges clearly:

Illustrissimo et reverendissimo mio particolar signore
S'io rimiro la bassezza mia, et la grandezza di Vostra Signoria illustrissima, non ha dubbio ch'io scrivo con la penna d'Iccaro; ma s'io guardo poi all'affetto della benivolenza che mi porta et alla servitù che seco tengo, temerità sarebbe a non pigliar la penna e vergar questa carta, per dimostrare in qualche modo che pur sono riconoscitore di quelle grazie che da Vostra Signoria illustrissima più volte alla nostra povera casa sono state concesse. A lei dunque suplichevoli se ne vengono Verginia et Giovan Battista, per ottener grazia di potersi levare (e mi perdoni) da quel temerario di Frittellino e da quella pur troppo avvelenata furia di Flaminia [...].²⁵

The long, elaborate preamble is a sign of formality which is absent from Ramponi's words. The letters by Andreini and Ramponi to the Cardinal were different in phrasing and in effects. A few months later, on 20 March 1610, Andreini wrote to Ferdinando Gonzaga and asked him to grant leave for his brother Pietro Paolo 'per stare fuori dalla religione' (that is, to absent himself from his convent for a short period) in order to raise the last two

2007), I, p. 108). These poems were dedicated to professional performers on their departure from a city during a *tournee*. 'A dio, Florida bella, il cor piagato' was set to music by Monteverdi and published in 1614 in his *Sesto libro dei madrigali*, which includes the *Lamento di Arianna*, performed by Ramponi in 1608.

²³ In order to obtain the favour of the Gonzaga, Marino had already addressed a letter to the Cardinal on 22 November 1608, attaching one of his compositions in praise of the Duke of Savoy. The information is retrieved from Archilet: see <http://www.archilet.it/Lettera.aspx?IdLettera=335> [Accessed on 6 June 2020]. In 1612, after the imprisonment of Marino, who had been accused of composing satirical poems about Carlo Emanuele I of Savoy, Ferdinando Gonzaga interceded for his liberation.

²⁴ See, for example, Sarah Gwyneth Ross, 'Apollo in the Counter-Reformation', p. 283.

²⁵ Giovan Battista Andreini, Turin, to Ferdinando Gonzaga, Mantua, 13 August 1609, ASMN, *Autografi*, b. 10, cc. 21^r-22^r, transcribed in *Comici dell'Arte: Corrispondenze*, I, p. 88.

of the nine children of Francesco and Isabella, Giacinto and Caterina.²⁶ Andreini repeated the request in another letter sent to the Cardinal on 31 July 1610, but was again unsuccessful. The task of interceding for Pietro Paolo Andreini with the Cardinal was therefore taken on by Ramponi. On 21 August 1610, she sent a letter to the Cardinal from Venice, drawing his attention to her husband's letter:

Illustrissimo mio signore e benefattore,
 Voglio vedere pure se col mutare penna possa io trovare appò Vostra Signoria Illustrissima miglior ventura. Prima io le me ricordo per quella serva obligatissima che sempre le fui, e l'altra vengo a supplicarla della licenza dello star fuori della religione Don Pietro Paolo Andreini Vallombrosano, e questo per governo di duo miei cognatini, e del Padre vecchio; so che questo è poco a Vostra Signoria Illustrissima, ma sa ella ch'è a me assaissimo. Or, perché si ricordi, in grazia, di farmi questa grazia, il presente sarà mio sollecitatore, assicurandola che mi fa una grazia segnalatissima e per vita sua non manchi, e ricordi che i poveri chiedono, e i grandi concedono. Nostro Signore la felicità, come altro non le prego, con Giovan Battista tanto suo umilissimo servo.²⁷

There is no preamble. Intimate with the addressee, Ramponi gets straight to the point. She is aware of her power in negotiation with the Cardinal: in the first line, Ramponi provocatively asks whether by writing directly to her 'benefattore' she might obtain a more favourable outcome than her husband. She uses the first-person address side by side with the appositive formula 'Vostra Signoria', and she cannot conceal the satisfaction she has in her special relationship with Gonzaga: 'possa *io* trovare appò *Vostra Signoria Illustrissima* miglior ventura'. She is the only one who, she believes, can be more successful with the Cardinal. After Ramponi's intervention, the matter was not raised again in the Andreinis' correspondence because she had persuaded Gonzaga to fulfil the request.

In the following year, Ramponi consolidated her success. She performed in the melodrama *Il rapimento di Proserpina*, written by the *letterato* and soon-to-be court secretary Ercole Marliani and set to music by Giulio Cesare Monteverdi.²⁸ The play was part of the birthday offerings by Francesco IV Gonzaga to Margherita of Savoy, and was staged in

²⁶ On Giacinto and Caterina Andreini see *Comici dell'Arte: Corrispondenze*, I, p. 96, n. 4 and n. 5.

²⁷ Virginia Ramponi, Venice, to Ferdinando Gonzaga, Rome (?), 21 August 1610, ASMN, *Gonzaga*, b. 1542, c. 562. Part of the letter is transcribed in Enrico Bevilacqua, 'Giambattista Andreini e la Compagnia dei "Fedeli"', *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, 23 (1894), 76-155 (p. 126).

²⁸ On the career of Ercole Marliani, see Claudia Burattelli, *Spettacoli di corte a Mantova tra Cinque e Seicento* (Florence: Le Lettere, 1999), pp. 120-124. On *Il rapimento di Proserpina*, see Isabella Data, 'Il "Rapimento di Proserpina" di Giulio Cesare Monteverdi e le Feste a Casale nel 1611', in *Claudio Monteverdi: Studi e prospettive*. Atti del convegno, Mantova, 21-24 ottobre 1993, ed. by Paola Besutti, Teresa M. Gialdroni and Rodolfo Baroncini (Florence: Olschki, 1998), pp. 333-346 and Tim Carter, 'Monteverdi, Early Opera and a Question of Genre: The Case of Andromeda (1620)', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 137.1 (2012), 1-34 (pp. 5-10).

Casale Monferrato, where Francesco IV and his consort had moved in 1609. On this occasion, Ramponi played the character of Cerere, thus interpreting a lament for the loss of her daughter, Proserpina.²⁹ An anonymous account of the festivities for the princess' birthday records that, as in 1608, Ramponi's performance moved her audience to tears: 'Venne la famosa Signora Florinda, idea del bel dire, gloria de' comici, pompa de' teatri e così efficace spiegatrice degli affetti dell'animo che col pietoso canto mosse altri al pianto'.³⁰ And, as in 1608, the interpretation gained her a special reward in terms of valuables from the Gonzagas: 'gioie, oro, veste e danari per scudi n° 250'.³¹

It was perhaps in the wake of these performances that Cardinal Gonzaga requested her presence in Rome. The request provoked a diplomatic incident because Vincenzo I Gonzaga had already promised a performance by the actress in Milan to the Constable of Castile, Juan Fernández de Velasco, Fuentes' successor as Governor of the city. On 19 March 1611, the Duke of Mantua had to break his promise: 'Se ben la Florinda con la sua compagnia di comici doveva venire costà a recitare in conformità della grazia fattale da Vostra Eccellenza, nondimeno essendo desiderata a Roma in particolare dal Cardinale mio figlio, ha preso pensiero di passarsene colà'.³² In the letter, the Duke defined the company he patronised as 'compagnia di Florinda', acknowledging a dynamic to which Ramponi alluded in the Turinese correspondence of 1609: she was the head of the company, it was she that the *comici* followed, it was her fame that gave status to the ensemble, in accordance with what Ferrone has defined 'un'inversione di tendenza nella nomenclatura teatrale'.³³

In Rome, Cardinal Gonzaga intended to demonstrate Ramponi's talent to one of the main patrons and art collectors in early modern Italy, Cardinal Scipione Caffarelli-Borghese. On 19 March 1611, Count Alessandro Rangoni sent a letter to Cardinal Gonzaga in which he declared that Borghese was happy to welcome the *comici* and especially Ramponi because her talent, praised by Gonzaga, was certified 'con testimonio tanto nobile':

L'Illustrissimo signor Cardinale Borghese, col quale ho passato l'uffizio impostomi da Vostra Signoria Illustrissima e Reverendissima, le fa riverenza e, come quello che volentieri abbraccia ogn'occasione di servirla, esibisce tutta l'opera sua a favore delli comedianti da lei raccomandati, sì per la virtù della signora Florinda, auttenticata

²⁹ The hypothesis is advanced by Tim Carter, 'Monteverdi, Early Opera and a Question of Genre', p. 9.

³⁰ *Breve descrizione delle feste fatte dal Serenissimo Sig. Principe di Mantova nel giorno Natale della Serenissima Infanta Margherita* (Casale Monferrato: Goffi, 1611), partly transcribed in Angelo Solerti, *Gli albori del melodramma*, 3 vols (Milan: Sandron, 1904), I, pp. 157-161 (p. 158).

³¹ See Besutti, 'Storie di emancipazione', pp. 66-74.

³² Duke of Mantua, Mantua, to Constable of Castile, Milan, 19 March 1611, ASMN, *Gonzaga*, b. 2275, no pagination.

³³ Ferrone argued: 'Non sono più gli "insiemi" a valorizzare le attrici, ma sono le attrici che valorizzano le compagnie' (Ferrone, *La Commedia dell'arte*, p. 146).

con testimonio tanto nobile, ma principalmente per dichiarare in qualsivoglia cosa la dovuta stima che fa delli commandamenti di Vostra Signoria Illustrissima e la prontissima sua divotione verso di lei. Ben gli spiace che Vostra Signoria persista nel solito pensiero di non concedere le comedie al pubblico, ma solo nelle case di privati; tuttavia, quando saranno qui, non resisterà Vostra Signoria Illustrissima di provarsi di nuovo per ottener anco simile licenza, che, quando in ciò non conseguisse altro, sodisfarà almeno all'obbligo che tiene d'ubbidir sempre a lei.³⁴

Cardinal Gonzaga was clearly committed to the advancement of the career of Ramponi but also to theatrical life in Rome. It is worth remembering that in 1588, Pope Sixtus V had issued a ban against women performing in the Papal State,³⁵ and twenty years later Ramponi was invited to perform in Rome, more specifically to give a private performance, arranged by Gonzaga, despite the opposing, progressive opinion of Borghese, who wanted 'le comedie' to be public.

Towards the end of that year, Ramponi obtained another important engagement, when Matthias II, King of Austria, Hungary and Bohemia expressed a wish to the Duke of Mantua to see her perform in Vienna on the occasion of his wedding to the Archduchess Anna of Tyrol. Gonzaga's letter of invitation on behalf of Matthias II, this too written by a secretary, contains many amendments:

Facendomi istanza ~~la Maestà del~~ la Maestà del Re Matthias ~~ch'io voglia~~ a volergli inviare a Vienna una ~~delle mie~~ compagnia di miei comici per ~~servirsene in~~ occasione delle prossime sue nozze, avevo pensato che ci andaste Voi ~~con la vostra~~ con vostra compagnia, sì come intenderà dal Capitano Rinoceronte,³⁶ con cui ho congruamente discusso ~~in~~ di questo proposito ~~partire~~. Riceverò perciò a gran piacere da Voi, che vi disponiate per farmi cosa gradita ~~ad andare~~ a far questo viaggio, mentre resto

³⁴ Alessandro Rangoni, Rome, to Ferdinando Gonzaga, Rome, 19 March 1611, ASMN, *Gonzaga*, b. 998, fasc. 6.3, cc. 707-708.

³⁵ The measure led to an increase in the market for *castrati*. On this matter see, for example, Valeria Finucci, *The Manly Masquerade: Masculinity, Paternity, and Castration in the Italian Renaissance* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 225-280.

³⁶ Capitan Rinoceronte was the Ferrarese actor Girolamo Garavini, active in the company of the Duke of Mantua at least since 1602. At his death, in 1624, he became part of the mythopoeia of *comici dell'Arte*. He started to be considered as a saint: 'O non è egli noto a' comici tutti quante elemosine ed astinenze faceva? Non si sa egli [...] che più erano l'ore della notte che spendeva in pianti e 'n discipline, che quelle che riposando dormiva? Nell'iventariar le sue vestimenta forse non si trovò [...] di piastre di ferro pungente un largo ed aspro cilicio che, e recitando, e quasi i giorni tutti della settimana portando, non dirò il martirizava, ma sì ben divotamente sosteneva?'. The last moments of Garavini's life resemble those of Armani's described by Valerini (see Section 1.4): 'La divozion poi nel suo morire, non ne parlo, poichè non so dar nome di morte a chi si diparti da i vivi con così vivace e divoto modo, il santissimo Sacramento ricevendo, l'ultimo addio dicendo'. The praise of his deeds was linked to that of the deeds of his wife, the actress Margherita Luciani, 'onestissima e divotissima [...] sua moglie [...], data tutta alle divozioni eguali a quelle del consorte, quanto virtuosa visse altrettanto divota se ne morì' (Andreini, 'La Ferza', in Marotti and Romei, pp. 507-508).

raccommandandomivi, e rimettendomi a quel che mi riferirà di più il medesimo
Capitano Rinoceronte, con pregare da Dio felicità...³⁷

Vincenzo I Gonzaga gave special consideration to his correspondence with Ramponi. He chose his words with care, being careful not to question Ramponi's authority, and he transferred agency in the matter from himself to the actress by eschewing the first person, transforming 'ch'io voglia' into 'a volergli' and changing 'una delle mie compagnie' into 'una compagnia di miei comici', with the awareness that 'la compagnia' was 'di Florinda', although the *comici* were patronised by him. He amended some sentences to restrict the role of Capitan Rinoceronte, alias Girolamo Garavini, in the matter, and made the request sound like an invitation, not a command: 'avevo pensato ci andaste Voi', 'per farmi cosa gradita'. There is no trace of Andreini in the letter. He has vanished from the picture. Only Florinda remains. Ultimately, Andreini and Ramponi did not leave for Vienna in November 1611 because Ramponi was about to give birth to her second child.³⁸ However, either miscarriage or the untimely death of the new-born must have occurred, since there is no further mention of the child in the correspondence of the *comici*.

4.3 'IL CARICO DI FAR LA COMPAGNIA LO DEBBA AVER IO E MIO MARITO': NEGOTIATING THE FRENCH *TOURNÉE*

In December 1611, negotiations began for the first French *tournée* of the *comici* of the Duke of Mantua. The talks were initially led by Tristano Martinelli. On 3 December 1611, he wrote a letter to Ferdinando Gonzaga, then in Paris, to inform him that Maria de' Medici, Queen of France, had requested 'una compagnia de comici' to travel to Paris. Martinelli gave the Cardinal precise instructions on how to fulfil the Queen's desire and repeatedly stressed the need to entrust him with the leadership of the company (my emphasis):

Illustrissimo signor compadre

[...] Vostra Signoria Illustrissima saprà che Sua Maestà per sua grancia, mi à scritto una letera che *io debba venire in Francia con una compagnia de comici buona* che saranno ben trattati, dove io gli ò dato risposta per un gentillomo che era qui con il signor ambasciatore di Sua Maestà, et l'avisai come l'aveva a fare per avere una buona compagnia in Francia [...]. Bisogna che subito Sua Maestà scrivi due lettere, una a Sua Altezza serenissima, che debba mettere insieme una buona compagnia per questa

³⁷ Vincenzo I Gonzaga, Mantua, to Virginia Ramponi, Bologna (?), 2 November 1611, ASMN, *Gonzaga*, b. 2277, no pagination.

³⁸ On this matter, see Giovan Battista Andreini, Bologna, to Vincenzo I Gonzaga, Mantua, 16 November 1611, ASMN, *Gonzaga*, b. 1170, no pagination, transcribed in *Comici dell'Arte: Corrispondenze*, I, p. 101.

Pasqua *et fare che io l'abia da condurre a Parigi, et che sua Altezza me lo comanda lui*, et poi scrivermene un'altra a me, che dica che li comici verano in Francia a servire Sua Maestà [...]; et anco Vostra Signoria illustrissima *ne pol scrivere un'altra che mi venga a me, che dica il medemo*, et far animo a costoro acio che vengano quanto prima [...]. O anco una sua che va alla signora Florinda, la quale è a Bologna: io ce lla mandarò o porterò. Non sarebbe male che Vostra Signoria illustrissima gli scrivesse una letera anco a lei in questo particolare, asortandola che se la viene in Franza che beata lei et, oltra al buon guadagno che si farà in generale, che ce ne sarà in particolare [...], et in tutte le lettere che se gli scriverà che *li dica che abiano da venire con me, acio che sapieno che Sua Maestà mi vol me*.³⁹

Martinelli is a wheeler-dealer. He directs the operations which follow the Queen of France's request, but he is also aware that his control of the situation is uncertain. His reiterated claim to be leader of the company reveals his concern that the role was assigned to Ramponi. The actor knew that he could not form a company to go to France without Ramponi, the best actress on the market. Conscious of the special bond between her and Cardinal Gonzaga, he resorted to the Cardinal to persuade her to agree to join a company under Martinelli's guidance. His fear was justified. On 14 December 1611, Ramponi wrote to Gonzaga (my emphasis):

Illustrissimo mio Signore

Che sempre il mio Illustrissimo Signore sia stato pronto al giovarmi, ormai tanto l'ho conosciuto, che non occorreria altra certezza, come quella d'aver ricevuto lettere sue, nelle quali di mio beneficio si tratta. Per tanto s'è così, faccia Sua Signoria Illustrissima quello che di me più le agrada, ma averta (per grazia) due cose: *l'una che il carico di far la Compagnia lo debba aver io e mio marito, per non perdere l'ordine che in queste parti abbiamo di farle – come al presente io ho la meglio Compagnia che reciti, dov'è pur Arlecchino – perché l'aver Arlecchino mendicata l'auttorità di far lui la Compagnia, non piace ad alcuno*. E quando lui far la dovesse, alcun Comico seco non anderebbe, sapendo che è troppo interessato, che molto bene hanno i comici inteso le lettere che, già foriere chiedenti, sono d'Arlecchino a molti principi andate. *Sì che farà di bisogno (piacendole) far che in nome di Sua Maestà sia fatta comissione a Lelio e Florinda di far la Compagnia*. L'altra sarà di far sì che le Comedie si recitino nella stanza di Borbon, facendola accomodare, poiché per Sua Maestà è più commoda e più d'utile ai comici. E qui supplicandola a tener memoria di me, che tanto serva obligatissima le sono, le fo con mio marito umilissima riverenza.⁴⁰

³⁹ Tristano Martinelli, Mantua, to Ferdinando Gonzaga, Paris, 3 December 1611, ASMN, Autografi, b. 10, c. 160^{r-v}, transcribed in *Comici dell'Arte: Corrispondenze*, I, p. 375.

⁴⁰ Virginia Ramponi, Bologna, to Ferdinando Gonzaga, Paris, 14 December 1611, ASMN, Autografi, b. 10, c. 60. The transcription of this letter is available online as part of the database of the Archivio Multimediale Attori Italiani (A.M.At.I.). See http://amati.fupress.net/media//scritti/VirginiaRamponi_let_14121611.pdf [Accessed on 8 July 2020].

Ramponi set conditions. With the two oxymoronic formulas, ‘averta (per grazia)’ and ‘farà di bisogno (piacendole)’, she warned the Cardinal that she would have not gone to France unless the leadership of the company was assigned to her and her husband. She proudly declared that she was already the leader of the company, the best in Italy, unveiled Martinelli’s plots and accused him of pleading to be made leader. But this power, Ramponi implicitly said, could not be obtained by request. She was the one who had the trust of the other members and the only leader they would follow.

Negotiations for the French *tournee* lasted longer than expected and the *comici* only left for France in September 1613.⁴¹ The delay was caused by the death in 1612 of Vincenzo I Gonzaga and his son, Francesco IV. In a stroke of good fortune, the title of Duke of Mantua then passed to the Andreinis’ ‘benefattore’, the second-born, Cardinal Gonzaga. On 15 August 1612, a few months before he became Duke, Cardinal Gonzaga received another letter from Ramponi on the French matter, in which she thanked him for the words he had written in her favour to the Queen, calling him ‘parteggiano’ of herself and her husband. In preparation for the departure, she asked him for a letter of recommendation addressed to Maria de’ Medici:

Illustrissimo Signore mio

Nel campo di Francia, seminato dalle parole sue, e tutte in favor mio, è nato alfine il frutto. Oggi è giunto ad Arlecchino una lettera delle Cristianissima, sottoscritta di suo pugno, che chiama me, lui et una buona trupa. E perché meglio vegga il tutto, in questa mia sarà una coppia di quella. Questo è il tempo adunque nel quale dovrà essere da Vostra Signoria Illustrissima favorita Florinda e Lelio, de’ quali così parteggiano s’è dimostrato. Risolvo di andare, poichè le parole sue mi sollecitano al cammino. Favoriscami pertanto di una sua, che data mi sia da chi darà a lei questa mia, diretta alla Cristianissima Regina, raccomandandomi in quella maniera che a Vostra Signoria Illustrissima più piacerà che, di quanto sarà recevitrice Florinda e Lelio, da Dio e da lei sarà che riconoschino, et al ritorno (piacendo a Nostro Signore) creda che col venirla a ringraziare a Roma crederò in Roma di far il mio nido, sapendo che sotto una aquila e serenissima porporata non potrà il mio nido se non esser diffuso. E qui, sperando di ottenere assai più che non so chiedere, la supplico di subita risposta, per lo presente, al quale fo un regalo, perché la risposta di Vostra Signoria Illustrissima mi porti. Et qui ricordandoleme quella serva che sempre le fui, con mio marito le mi inchino.⁴²

⁴¹ For a summary of the negotiations for the French *tournee*, see, for example, Taviani and Schino, pp. 103-104.

⁴² Virginia Ramponi, Milan, to Ferdinando Gonzaga, Rome (?), 15 August 1612, ASMN, *Autografi*, b. 10, c. 62^{r-v}. The transcription of this letter is available online as part of the database of the Archivio Multimediale Attori Italiani (A.M.At.I.). See http://amati.fupress.net/media//scritti/VirginiaRamponi_let_15081612.pdf [Accessed on 8 July 2020].

Ramponi had won her battle over Martinelli, at least for the moment, because, notwithstanding the kind words of Ferdinando Gonzaga, it seems that in 1613 the company left under the guidance of Arlecchino.⁴³ In exchange for the letter of recommendation, the actress artfully promised to visit the Cardinal on her return from France. The lexicon she used was enthralling: in Rome, she was going to nest under the wing of a purple eagle.

A few months later, in November 1612, when the Andreinis were in Florence during their Italian tour, and waiting to go to France, they once again sought help from Cardinal Gonzaga. The matter again concerned Giovan Battista's brother, Pietro Paolo, who was aiming at obtaining the Piovania of San Pietro in Bossolo in Florence and was hoping that the Cardinal could intercede in his favour. The request, made by Giovan Battista Andreini in a letter to Cardinal Gonzaga on 16 November, was strategically formulated first in the name of Florinda, and then in his own name: 'Florinda et io con ogni affetto maggiore la supplichiamo a far sì che don Pietro Paolo Andreini mio fratello, et monaco vallebrosano, ottenga (il che sarà molto agevole) la grazia che qui annessa si ritrova'.⁴⁴ As in 1610, Andreini's request to the Cardinal fell on deaf ears, encouraging Ramponi to once more take the matter into her own hands and write to the Cardinal:

Due poste sono mio consorte scrisse a Vostra Signoria Illustrissima informandola d'un negozio in servizio di Don Pietropaolo suo fratello e mio cognato, del che sino ad ora non ne tiene avviso alcuno. Ora, per il desiderio che io con lui tengo di far sì che sortisca questo per mezo di Vostra Signoria Illustrissima (che so non le sarà difficile volendo), ho preso questa licenza di inviarle questa mia, con offerirle al solito umilissima serva, e insieme pregarnela a voler compiacere mio consorte e me della solita sua benevolenza, acciò mio cognato rimanga consolato.⁴⁵

Ramponi's mediation was effective: on 29 January 1613, Pietro Paolo Andreini wrote to the Cardinal, by then Duke of Mantua, thanking him for his willingness to help. In the letter, he acknowledged the role of Ramponi in the matter: 'Da le lettere di Vostra Altezza Serenissima e Pregiatissima scritte a Florinda mia cognata, ho compreso il desiderio che tiene di compiacere lei, mio fratello e di giovare a me'.⁴⁶ But Ramponi's influence extended well beyond the Gonzaga family.

⁴³ See *Comici dell'Arte: Corrispondenze*, I, p. 67.

⁴⁴ Giovan Battista Andreini, Florence, to Ferdinando Gonzaga, Rome, 16 November 1612, ASMN, *Gonzaga*, b. 1128, no pagination, transcribed in *Comici dell'Arte: Corrispondenze*, I, p. 105.

⁴⁵ Virginia Ramponi, Florence, to Ferdinando Gonzaga, Rome, 8 December 1612, ASMN, *Gonzaga*, b. 1128, c. 405.

⁴⁶ Pietro Paolo Andreini, Florence, to Ferdinando Gonzaga, Mantua, 29 January 1613, ASMN, *Gonzaga*, b. 1129, c. 23.

4.4 'LA MIGLIOR COMICA DI TUTTA L'ITALIA': RAMPONI, GIOVANNI DE' MEDICI AND THE CESAREAN COURT

The network of Ramponi's benefactors included patrons living inside and outside the borders of the Italian peninsula. Performances like that of the *Arianna* in 1608, *Le trasformazioni di Millefonti* in 1609, and *Il ratto di Proserpina* in 1611, as well as the success she gained during the French *tournées* triggered an escalation in her engagements. She built a solid connection with Giovanni de' Medici, the illegitimate son of Cosimo I de' Medici, diplomat, military commander and patron of the Compagnia de' Confidenti, which included Flaminio Scala (1552-1624), author of the monumental collection of *scenari*, *Il teatro delle favole rappresentative* and manager of the Confidenti between 1614 and 1621, and Nicolò Barbieri (1576-1641), member of the Gelosi company from 1601 until their disbandment, and then part of the Confidenti from 1612 until 1621.⁴⁷ Scala and Barbieri were responsible, with the Andreinis, for building the mythopoeia of the *comici dell'Arte*. In March 1616, Giovanni de' Medici interceded in favour of Ramponi and asked Cardinal Capponi, papal legate of Bologna, to allow her company leave to perform in the city.⁴⁸ In September 1618, Andreini asked Giovanni de' Medici a favour in the name of 'la molta confidenza che la povera casa Andreini tiene con l'eccellenza sua', probably alluding to the link his father had with the Florentine Maecenas, dedicatee of *La seconda parte delle bravure del Capitano Spavento*,⁴⁹ but also to the special relationship that bound Giovanni de' Medici to Ramponi.⁵⁰ The relationship is confirmed in a letter sent to Giovanni de' Medici, by then in Venice, on 19 November 1618, in which the author thanks him for his commitment to granting the *comici* leave to perform in the city during Carnival 1619 and requests permission to obtain 'la stanza de' Signori Troni' for their performances.⁵¹ The letter is handwritten by Andreini, signed by Ramponi:

⁴⁷ For a biographical note on Scala, see Andrews, *The Commedia dell'arte of Flaminio Scala*, pp. IX-X. On Nicolò Barbieri see Niccolò Barbieri, *La supplica, discorso famigliare a quelli che trattano de' comici. Con studio critico*, ed. by Ferdinando Taviani (Milan: Il Polifilo, 1971), pp. XIII-XXI.

⁴⁸ On this occasion, the intercession of Giovanni de' Medici was ineffective, since the Cardinal, deceived by Cecchini, had already given him the leave to perform. On this matter, see Cardinal Capponi, Bologna, to Giovanni de' Medici, Venice, 21 March 1616, ASF, *Mediceo*, f. 5139, c. 56 and Flaminio Scala, Florence, to Giovanni de' Medici, Venice, 5 November 1616, ASF, *Mediceo*, f. 5150, c. 452^{r-v}, transcribed in *Comici dell'Arte: Corrispondenze*, I, pp. 458-459.

⁴⁹ Francesco Andreini, *La seconda parte delle bravure del capitano Spavento, di Francesco Andreini da Pistoia Comico Geloso. Divisa in quaranta ragionamenti. Dedicata all'illustriss. et excell. sig. d. Giovanni Medici l'anno 1617* (Venice: Somasco, 1618).

⁵⁰ Giovan Battista Andreini, Milan, to Giovanni de' Medici, Venice, 7 September 1618, ASF, *Mediceo*, f. 5143, c. 370^r, transcribed in *Comici dell'Arte: Corrispondenze*, I, p. 111.

⁵¹ The 'stanza de' Signori Troni' was to become the 'San Cassiano' theatre, the first public opera house, in 1637.

Illustrissimo et eccellentissimo signore,
Sua altezza Serenissima di Mantova ha fatto sapere alla sua compagnia di comici come Sua Eccellenza farà ogni possibile perché venga per questo carnevale a Venezia; pertanto la stessa compagnia supplica con ogni riverenza l'Eccellenza Sua a far sì che sappia la certezza, che quella sapendo non procurerà altra cosa, non la procurando meno certa che in grazia di Sua Eccellenza s'otterrà ogni difficil cosa; et ottenendosi, farà grazia ancora che s'habbia la stanza de' signori Troni. Et qui facendole riverenza, in nome non solo mio, ma di mio suocero e di mio marito, di Vostra Eccellenza umilissimi servitori, le auguro da Nostro Signore il colmo d'ogni bene.⁵²

The same is true of another letter, sent on 4 December 1618, also handwritten by Andreini and signed by Ramponi, in which the author reveals the uncertainty about the possibility of spending Carnival in Venice, nonetheless stating full confidence in the commitment of Giovanni de' Medici:

Illustrissimo et eccellentissimo signore
Il tempo è così trascorso aspettando di recitare a Vinezia, ch'io vo dubbitando di rimaner senza città per questo carnevale; nondimeno m'è così caro il favor di Vostra Eccellenza che così caldamente s'addopra in questo affare, ch'io non sentirò la noia di questa così fatta perdita. Ottengasi la licenza, se si può, e poi l'Eccellenza Vostra faccia recitar la compagnia dove più le aggrada.⁵³

Andreini most probably did not sign the letter himself because he knew that Ramponi had more influence than him with Giovanni de' Medici, hence more power of negotiation. Ultimately, the Andreinis did not make it to Venice that year but Giovanni de' Medici awarded them an even greater gift, that is, he gave them his permission to join the *Confidenti* for a French *tournée* in 1620.⁵⁴

The *tournée* was a troubled one: the company was in turmoil after the news had broken of Andreini's extramarital affair with the other Virginia, the young actress Rotari. The Cecchinis, eternal rivals of Andreini and Ramponi, seized the opportunity to discredit him in the eyes of the Duke of Mantua by writing a letter of complaint, as they had done in 1606.⁵⁵ Francesco Andreini, by then in his seventies, had to intervene personally to ease the

⁵² Giovan Battista Andreini and Virginia Ramponi, Bologna, to Giovanni de' Medici, Venice, 19 November 1618, ASF, *Mediceo*, f. 5143, c. 410^{r-v}, transcribed in *Comici dell'Arte: Corrispondenze*, I, p. 112.

⁵³ Giovan Battista Andreini and Virginia Ramponi, Bologna, to Giovanni de' Medici, Venice, 4 December 1618, ASF, *Mediceo*, f. 5143, c. 424^{r-v}, transcribed in *Comici dell'Arte: Corrispondenze*, I, p. 114.

⁵⁴ See Giovan Battista Andreini, Ferrara, to Giovanni de' Medici, Venice, 29 January 1619, ASF, *Mediceo*, f. 5141, c. 763^{r-v}, transcribed in *Comici dell'Arte: Corrispondenze*, I, p. 115.

⁵⁵ Pier Maria Cecchini, Milan, to Ferdinando Gonzaga, Mantua, 15 July 1620, ASMN, *Gonzaga*, b. 1751, cc. 837^r-838^r, in *Comici dell'Arte: Corrispondenze*, I, pp. 282-283.

conflicts and silence the scandal, to the point that he decided to join Andreini, Ramponi, Rotari, and the rest of the company for the French *tournée* in 1620. Apart from the complexity of the inner dynamics of the couple and of the company, the years from 1620 to 1625, which the pair spent mostly in France, were the most creative of Andreini's life, resulting in fifteen publications, among them the theoretical treatise *La Ferza*, where he significantly acknowledged the cultural and professional role of actresses and the potential of their agency.⁵⁶ While Andreini was reaping his success in print, Ramponi was achieving it on stage, as the protagonist, side by side with her husband's lover, of some of the most innovative plays by Andreini. The metatheatrical *Le due comedie in comedia*, the combination of genres of *La Centaura*, the cutting-edge staging of the love between two women in *Amor nello specchio* are some among the many original features of these plays which, for the psychological depth of their characters, have been defined 'drammi intimi', precursors, a century earlier, of the *drame bourgeois*.⁵⁷

The significant reduction in the volume of correspondence of the Andreinis between 1620 and 1630 – about half that of the previous ten years – makes it difficult to detect whether there was a change in Ramponi's agency after Andreini had started his affair with Virginia Rotari.⁵⁸ The documents linked to the sojourn of the Andreinis in Prague and Vienna for the Imperial *tournée* (1627-1629), however, seem to rule out the hypothesis, confirming the leading position of Ramponi, who benefited from the favour of Emperor Ferdinand II and Empress Eleonora Gonzaga, daughter of Vincenzo I. Most of the information on the Imperial performances of the Fedeli comes from the correspondence between the Archduchesses Cecilia Renata and Maria Anna of Austria and their younger brother Leopold Wilhelm, who stayed in Vienna between September 1627 and Lent 1628, while the rest of the Court moved to Prague. During their stay in Prague, the members of the Imperial court were entertained by many different performers: Jesuits, buffoons, opera singers, acrobats, *Englische Komödianten* and *comici dell'Arte*. The direct comparison with most of the forms of entertainment available at that time in Europe made the talent of the Italian actors stand out.⁵⁹ In a letter to Leopold Wilhelm on 5 January 1628, the Archduchess Maria Anna describes the superiority of the Fedeli over other performers:

⁵⁶ 'Ma se daddovero non son nate le recitanti alle porpore, a i coturni, a questi domini, almeno scherzando in teatro ti scopron quello che di reale saprebbon fare *in throno maiestatis sedendo*' (Andreini, 'La Ferza', in Marotti and Romei, pp. 503-506).

⁵⁷ See Ferrone, *Attori, mercanti, corsari*, pp. 253-262.

⁵⁸ Among the factors which might have influenced the amount of documentary evidence produced in these years is the fact that the Andreinis' longer stays in the same places implied less need for negotiations.

⁵⁹ See Cristina Grazioli, 'Le incoronazioni praguesi del 1627', pp. 451-491 (p. 453). In this volume, see also Otto G. Schindler, 'Viaggi teatrali tra l'Inquisizione e il Sacco', pp. 107-160.

Dopo cena gli inglesi daranno una commedia [...] da quel che sento sono proprio senza gusto e non si possono confrontare con gli Italiani [...]. I comici italiani sono proprio bravi e si capiscono benissimo, capisco tutte le parole, piacciono così tanto all'Imperatore che ora non esce quasi più per andare a caccia. E quando non usciamo abbiamo ogni giorno una commedia esclusi venerdì e sabato e quando c'è il vespro. E anche a me piacciono così tanto, che se dovessi scegliere tra andare fuori tutto il giorno a cavalcare e andare alla commedia, rimarrei certo a casa e andrei alla commedia [...]. Delle donne Florinda è la miglior comica di tutta l'Italia ed è molto ammirata.⁶⁰

Andreini spread the news of the success he and Ramponi were enjoying in a letter to the Mantuan secretary Ercole Marliani: 'Le nostre commedie piacciono fuor del segno del bene [...]. L'imperatrice [...] porta grande affezione alla Florinda et a me'.⁶¹

During this *tournee*, the Andreinis published a volume: *Il congedo, o Ver l'addio di Florinda comica*. Scholars have occasionally mentioned *Il congedo*, neglecting, however, to point out the primacy of Ramponi in this publication.⁶² The 95-page, in-octavo, encomiastic volume was printed in Vienna in 1629, on the occasion of the departure of the Andreinis from the Caesarean court, and contains prologues and epilogues performed by the Andreinis during the *tournee*, and a collection of poems, the 'Germaniche Lodi', in praise of the Emperor, the Empress, and other members of the court. Even though the texts are attributable to Andreini, only the name 'Florinda Comica' appears on the frontispiece, and the dedicatory letter to the Empress Eleonora Gonzaga which opens the volume is signed only by Ramponi. Besides, the majority of the dramatic passages collected in the volume are occasional encomiastic prologues or epilogues performed by Ramponi at court. This particular editorial choice by the Andreinis must have been strategic and is understandable only in the frame of a special appreciation of Ramponi at the Caesarean court. From being a mediator on behalf of her husband, with this volume Ramponi became the guarantor of the value of Andreini's work, the eye-catcher that assured a readership of the encomiastic

⁶⁰ The letter is translated in Grazioli, 'Le incoronazioni praguesi', p. 459. Two aspects of the Imperial *tournee* of the Fedeli, which are mentioned in this correspondence, merit further investigation: the comprehensibility of the *comici* abroad and their almost inexhaustible repertoire, which made them able to entertain the same audience with 200 or 300 performances in less than two years.

⁶¹ Giovan Battista Andreini, Prague, to Ercole Marliani, Mantua, 4 December 1627, ASMN, *Gonzaga*, b. 494, lett. 32, transcribed in *Comici dell'Arte: Corrispondenze*, I, p. 142. Further documentary evidence on the success enjoyed by the Andreinis during their Imperial *tournee* is in Grazioli, 'Le incoronazioni praguesi del 1627', pp. 463-491.

⁶² *Il congedo, o Ver l'addio di Florinda comica & humilissima serua della sereniss. & augustiss. Casa Gonzaga impartendo dalla cesarea, real seruitù di Ferdinando d'Austria e di Eleonora Gonzaga alla stessa sovrana imperatrice da Florinda dedicato* (Vienna: Typis Casparis ab Rath, 1629). My thanks to Alessandra Munari for having kindly sent me a scan copy of the volume. The *congedo* is mentioned, for example, in Sarah Gwyneth Ross, 'New Perspectives on Patria', p. 238.

composition. *Il congedo* can sadly be considered Ramponi's own *congedo* from the world. After the Andreinis left Vienna, Ramponi disappears from the correspondence until the announcement of her death in a letter written in 1632 by Andreini to his new patron, Carlo I Gonzaga-Nevers:⁶³

Provo nell'anima il nuovo irraccontabile svaligio di quanto si compiacque la morte
di levarmi di custodito e di caro.⁶⁴

Negotiator, mediator, calling-card, leader. Ramponi's power is corroborated by two more figures. Of the fifty-seven surviving letters written by Andreini between 1606 and 1631,⁶⁵ forty-eight mention Ramponi once or, more often, more than once, of which three are co-signed by the couple; and four were written by Andreini and signed by Ramponi.⁶⁶ She is absent from only five letters. Andreini refers to her almost invariably as 'Florinda',⁶⁷ often in the syntagma 'Florinda e io', which reveals at the same time the autonomy and the pre-eminence of her fame. The mentions are usually in the opening and at the close of the letters, where Andreini, together with Ramponi, greets the addressees. Apart from reinforcing the narrative of the couple, it is this strategic use of Ramponi's name that made the letters most likely to be favourably received. The references to her are more frequent in cases where the recipient was closer to Ramponi.⁶⁸ Moreover, between 1604 and 1631, the name of Andreini occurs in 161 letters catalogued in the online Herla Archive. Ramponi's name occurs in 177.

The investigation conducted in this chapter plants the seeds of a discourse which goes well beyond the making and the marketing of theatre couples, and reveals the potential of looking at first-hand archival material to uncover the thus far disregarded agency of actresses in early modern Italy. Ramponi is one among many *dive* whose achievements are

⁶³ After the return of the Andreinis from the Imperial *tournee* and before Ramponi's death, between 1629 and 1631, her name is mentioned in only one letter: Giovan Battista Andreini, Mantua, to Girolamo Parma, Venice, 16 September 1629, ASMN, *Gonzaga*, b. 2785, c. 258^{r-v}, transcribed in *Comici dell'Arte: Corrispondenze*, I, p. 148.

⁶⁴ Giovan Battista Andreini, Modena, to Carlo I Gonzaga Nevers, Mantua, 1 March 1632, ASMN, *Gonzaga*, b. 1298, no pagination, transcribed in *Comici dell'Arte: Corrispondenze*, I, p. 151.

⁶⁵ The letters have been collected in *Comici dell'Arte: Corrispondenze*. Ramponi's death is the *terminus ante quem*. Letter 54 has been excluded from the count because it was written by Andreini on behalf of Virginia Rotari.

⁶⁶ Beyond the two letters for Giovanni de' Medici mentioned above, two letters addressed to Ferdinando Gonzaga are written by Andreini and signed by Ramponi (see Giovan Battista Andreini and Virginia Ramponi, Bologna, to Ferdinando Gonzaga, Paris, 19 December 1611, ASMN, *Gonzaga*, b. 1170, no pagination, transcribed in *Comici dell'Arte: Corrispondenze*, I, p. 101, and Giovan Battista Andreini and Virginia Ramponi, Florence, to Ferdinando Gonzaga, Rome, 20 October 1612, ASMN, *Gonzaga*, b. 1128, no pagination).

⁶⁷ The only exception is the first recorded letter by Andreini, where he refers to Ramponi as 'mia moglie' (Giovan Battista Andreini, Milan, to Silvio Andreasi, Mantua, 20 September 1606, ASMN, *Gonzaga*, b. 1730, no pagination, transcribed in *Comici dell'Arte: Corrispondenze*, I, p. 77).

⁶⁸ The letters by Andreini addressed to Ferdinando Gonzaga, for example, usually have more than one reference to Ramponi.

still unknown, whose voice is still unheard. Yet Vincenza Armani, Barbara Flaminia, Orsola Posmoni and many others were the first professional female performers in Europe, the first women to be part of a system of collective labour, the first women workers to achieve economic independence, the first women to hold managerial and leading positions in a mixed social system, the first to receive equal pay. Their pioneering experiences would fill a gap in scholarly treatment of post-Tridentine society, redrawing the boundaries of women's agency. This matter, beyond the scope of this dissertation, is fertile ground for future research.

Chapter 5

Giovan Battista Andreini: Portraying the Performer

5.1 'CHIEDO DAL SERMO TUO REGOLA, E NORMA': *LA MADDALENA*, APOLOGIA OF THE COUNTER-REFORMATION

In the *silva* of Andreini's works, a consistent and long-lasting line of production stands out: his three poems and three plays on the figure of Mary Magdalene. The works, published between 1610 and 1652, are a compendium of Andreini's theory and practice of professional theatre and of the strategies that led the couple to success. Through these works, they promoted themselves in literature, drama, music, and iconography, they combined performative and literary talent, image and words, they presented themselves as devout and divine and confronted Counter-Reformation clerics. This *corpus* therefore epitomises the cases made in this dissertation and acts as a counterpart to Ramponi's letters. In these texts, which can be considered a *continuum* of the Florentine experience, the author re-enacted and refined the strategies devised in the year of the Florentine debut explored in Chapters 2 and 3. The character of Mary Magdalene, like that of Florinda, designed to be interpreted by Ramponi, was conceived by Andreini as an alter ego of the professional actress. Moreover, in this *corpus*, Andreini re-worked in literary terms the debate on *comici* dell'Arte and showed how Neoplatonic re-semanticisation of actresses entered the works of the *comici*. These plays and poems complete the circle of the arguments developed in Chapter 1. Finally, the plays are a compromise between Commedia dell'Arte and Jesuit theatre, bringing together the lowly elements of the former and the religious subjects of the latter.¹ In these works, Andreini challenged early modern theatrical conventions by

¹ The juxtaposition is evident, for example, in the system of characters of the 1617 play: holy and noble figures like Maddalena and her siblings, Marta and Lazzaro, interact with humble and comic ones, like Maddalena's servant, Mordacai, built on the *maschera* of Harlequin and probably interpreted by Tristano Martinelli, and the blustering lover Sansone, built on the *maschera* of the captain and probably interpreted by Girolamo Garavini. See Silvia Carandini, 'Prefazione', in *La Maddalena lasciva e penitente*, pp. 9-19 (p. 15).

proposing a model of educational theatre other than the Jesuit one.² His reconciliation of theatrical professionalism and Counter-Reformation orthodoxy resulted in what Silvia Carandini defined as ‘un impossibile, alternativo carnevale santificato’.³

The first of the six works by Andreini on Mary Magdalene, published in 1610, in Venice, was a poem, *La Maddalena*, which was published again two years later in Florence.⁴ The second, published in 1617, in Mantua, was a religious play, *La Maddalena. Sacra rappresentazione*, written at the request of Queen Maria de’ Medici of France.⁵ In 1628, a new version of the 1610 poem, *La Maddalena. Composizione sacra*, was published in Prague during the imperial *tournee* of the Andreini couple.⁶ In the following year, another version of the 1617 play, *La Maddalena. Composizione rappresentativa*, was published in Vienna.⁷ In 1643, in Paris, Andreini published another poem, *Le lagrime. Divoto componimento a contemplazione della vita della penitente e piangente della gran Protettrice della Francia Maria Maddalena*.⁸ Finally, in 1652, in Milan, two years before his death, he published the play *La Maddalena lasciva e penitente. Azione drammatica e divota*.⁹

² The relationship between Andreini’s works on Mary Magdalene and Jesuit educational plays is examined in Silvia Carandini, “Inchiostri, sudori e lacrime”. Il teatro sacro di Giovan Battista Andreini Comico dell’Arte’, in *I Gesuiti e i Primordi del Teatro Barocco in Europa*. Convegno di studi: Roma, 26-29 ottobre 1994, Anagni, 30 ottobre 1994, ed. by Maria Chiabò and Federico Doglio (Viterbo: Centro studi sul teatro medioevale e rinascimentale, 1995), pp. 441-456. Despite the fact that Andreini’s religious plays were undermining Jesuits’ dominance in the field of religious theatre, the Jesuits themselves allowed the public performance of Andreini’s *Maddalena*, he recalls, in the dedicatory letter of the 1629 edition: ‘fu che ’n virtù della gentilezza de’ Reverendi di San Domenico in Bologna, e de’ Padri Gesuiti in Piacenza [*La Maddalena*] fu de’ Theatri resa meritevole’ (Andreini, ‘A chi legge’, in *La Maddalena. Composizione rappresentativa*, quoted in Cristina Grazioli, ‘L’edizione viennese de *La Maddalena composizione rappresentativa* (1629) di Giovan Battista Andreini (1576-1654)’, in *I Gonzaga e l’Impero itinerari dello spettacolo*, pp. 493-507 (p. 501)).

³ Carandini, “Inchiostri, sudori e lacrime”, p. 456.

⁴ *La Maddalena di Gio. Battista Andreini fiorentino e la Divina Visione in soggetto del B. Carlo Borromeo dello Stesso* (Venice: Somasco, 1610), henceforth Lma.

⁵ *La Maddalena. Sacra rappresentazione* (Mantua: Osanna, 1617), henceforth LMb.

⁶ *La Maddalena. Composizione sacra* (Prague: Sigismundus Leva, 1628), henceforth LMc.

⁷ *La Maddalena. Composizione rappresentativa* (Vienna: Typis Casparis ab Rath, 1629), henceforth LMd.

⁸ *Le Lagrime. Divoto componimento, a contemplazione della vita penitente e piangente della gran Protettrice della Francia Maria Maddalena* (Paris: Noel Charles, 1643), henceforth Lme.

⁹ *La Maddalena lasciva e penitente, azione drammatica, e divota* (Milan: Giovan Battista e Giulio Cesare Malatesta, 1652), henceforth LMf. On *La Maddalena lasciva e penitente*, see, for example, Silvia Fabrizio-Costa, ‘Un comico dell’arte e il gran spettacolo della santità: G. B. Andreini e la Maddalena lasciva e penitente (1652)’, in *Feste Musicali. Divagazione monteverdiana prima*. 15 settembre-2 ottobre 1993 (Bologna: Associazione culturale feste musicali, 1993), pp. 47-54, and Rossella Palmieri, ‘Giovan Battista Andreini, la Maddalena, e il ‘tempo barocco’, in *La Maddalena lasciva e penitente*, pp. 21-44.

	Form	Year pub.	Place pub.	Abbreviation
<i>La Maddalena</i>	poem	1610	Venice	LMa
<i>La Maddalena. Sacra rappresentazione</i>	play	1617	Mantua	LMb
<i>La Maddalena. Composizione sacra</i>	poem	1628	Prague	LMc
<i>La Maddalena. Composizione rappresentativa</i>	play	1629	Vienna	LMd
<i>Le Lagrime. Divoto componimento</i>	poem	1643	Paris	LMe
<i>La Maddalena lasciva e penitente</i>	play	1652	Milan	LMf

Having set as chronological scope of this investigation the period between 1604 and 1631, the main focus of this chapter will be on the four early works, and, more specifically, on the poem of 1610 and the play of 1617, of which the Prague-published poem and the Viennese play are reprintings, with minimal textual variants. An exception is the paratext, which varies substantially from one edition to another, and will therefore be included in this analysis.

The almost obsessive recurrence of the theme of Mary Magdalene in Andreini's *oeuvre* is explained partly by the literary and artistic fortunes of the character in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,¹⁰ framed by the Counter-Reformation revival of the cult of the saints. Female figures, alongside Mary Magdalene – the Virgin, Judith, Saint Cecilia, Saint Catherine among them – came to assume the title role in dramatic and narrative works.¹¹

¹⁰ On the figure of Maddalena in Andreini's works, see, for example Silvia Fabrizio-Costa, 'Les Pleurs et la Grâce: La Maddalena de G. Andreini', in *Théâtre en Toscane: la comédie (Xie, XVIIe et XVIII siècles)*, ed. by Michel Plaisance (St Denis: Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 1991), pp. 113-156; Cristina Grazioli, 'La figura di Maddalena: uno strumento di redenzione per l'attrice dell'Arte', in *Donne in-fedeli. Testi, modelli, interpretazioni della religiosità femminile*. Atti del convegno, Padova 19-10 novembre 2004, ed. by Anna Burlini Calapaj and Saveria Chemotti (Padua: Il Poligrafo, 2005), pp. 173-187; Fiaschini, *L'incessabile agitazione*, pp. 93-130. On the fortune of the figure of Maddalena during the Counter-Reformation, see Margaret Arnold, *The Magdalene in the Reformation* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018). On Maddalena in early modern Italian literature see, for example, Salvatore Ussia, 'Il tema letterario della Maddalena nell'età della Controriforma', in *Il Sacro Parnaso. Il Lauro e la Croce* (Catanzaro: Pullano, 1993), pp. 107-139; Ada Testaferri, 'Maria Maddalena peccatrice convertita: un modello del femminile barocco', *Rivista di studi italiani*, 1 (1994), 1-13; Quinto Marini, 'Maria Maddalena peccatrice santa tra narrazione e scena. Un percorso cinque-seicentesco', in *Sacro e/o profano nel teatro fra Rinascimento ed età dei lumi*. Atti del Convegno di Studi, Bari, 7-10 febbraio 2007, ed. by Stella Castellaneta and Francesco S. Minervini (Bari: Cacucci, 2009), pp. 97-128.

¹¹ On female models of sanctity in early modern Italy see, for example, Gabriella Zarri, *Le sante vive: profezie di corte e devozione femminile tra '400 e '500* (Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1990); *Donne e fede: santità e vita religiosa in Italia*, ed. by Giulia Barone, Lucetta Scaraffia, and Gabriella Zarri (Rome: Laterza, 1994). On female saints in early modern Italian literature, see Virginia Cox, 'Re-Thinking Counter-Reformation Literature', in *Innovation in the Italian Counter-Reformation*, pp. 15-55.

Mary Magdalene was sung in verse by Gabriello Chiabrera and Giovan Battista Marino,¹² and memorable portraits of the saint were produced by Titian, Rubens, Gentileschi, Caravaggio and Fetti.¹³ To this list hagiographic accounts by Tommaso Garzoni and Serafino Razzi must be added, as too the novel by the Genovese writer Anton Giulio Brignole Sale, and religious plays by Castellano Castellani, Riccardo Riccardi and Benedetto Cinquanta.¹⁴ Further reasons for Andreini's recurrent choice of Mary Magdalene, however, lie beyond the fortunes of the theme.

Consistent with other religious publications by Andreini, the primary intention of these works is to exhibit his devoutness. Between 1610 and 1652, the word 'devoto' diachronically moves from being used within the text and in the paratext to appearing in the titles of his works. The poem of 1610 is defined as a 'pia compositione' (LMA fol. 3^r) and 'devoto sudore di fronte onorata' (LMA fol. 5^r) in the introductory letter, while the poem of 1643 is defined 'divoto componimento' in its title. The same is true of the play: 'sacra rappresentazione' in 1617 becomes 'azione drammatica e devota' in 1652.¹⁵

The first edition of Andreini's religious poem was published together with the second edition of *La Divina Visione*, his eulogy to Cardinal Borromeo which, as we saw earlier (Chapter 2), had been published for the first time in 1604. Andreini strategically chose to re-publish it in 1610, the year of Borromeo's canonisation. In the dedicatory letter of *La Maddalena* of 1610, written by an unidentified Giovan Maria Pietro Belli who acts as a spokesperson of the author,¹⁶ the mention of Andreini's eulogy to Borromeo is complemented by allusions to two others of his religious works, which at that time were

¹² Besides dedicating verses to Maddalena in his *Canzoni sacre* (Genoa: Bartoli, 1587), Chiabrera wrote the poem *La Conversione di S. Maddalena* (Florence: Giunti, 1598). Marino produced many compositions on the saint and on portraits of the saint, collected respectively in *La Lira*, I, p. 219, 220, 227, II, p. 250, 259, and *Galeria Poetica*, pp. 70-74.

¹³ Titian, *La Maddalena penitente*, ca. 1533 (Florence, Galleria Palatina); Caravaggio, *Maddalena penitente*, ca. 1595 (Rome, Galleria Doria Pamphili); Orazio Gentileschi, *La Maddalena penitente nella grotta*, ca. 1615 (Lucca, Pinacoteca Nazionale); Rubens, *Cristo e i pentiti*, ca. 1617 (Munich, Alte Pinacothek); Domenico Fetti, *Meditazione/Melanconia*, ca. 1618 (Venice, Gallerie dell'Accademia).

¹⁴ Tommaso Garzoni, *Le vite delle donne illustri della scrittura sacra* (Venice: Imberti, 1586); Serafino Razzi, *Vita e laudi di Santa Maria Maddalena* (Florence: Sermartelli, 1587); Anton Giulio Brignole Sale, *Maria Maddalena peccatrice e convertita* (Venice: Turini, 1640); Castellano Castellani, 'La rappresentazione d'uno stupendo miracolo di Santa Maria Maddalena' and 'La rappresentazione della conversione di Santa Maria Maddalena', in *Il primo libro di rappresentazioni et feste di diversi santi e sante* (Florence: Giunti, 1555); Riccardo Riccardi, *Conversione di Santa Maria Maddalena, ridotta in tragedia* (Florence: Giunti, 1609); Benedetto Cinquanta, *Maddalena convertita* (Milan: Malatesta, 1616). More plays composed on Maddalena during the first half of the seventeenth century are listed by Leone Allacci in his *Drammaturgia divisa in sette indici* (Rome: Mascardi, 1666), passim.

¹⁵ On the 'azione devota', see Annamaria Cascetta, 'La «spiritual tragedia» e l'«azione devota». Gli ambienti e le forme', in *La scena della Gloria*, pp. 115-219.

¹⁶ There are no documents that facilitate the identification of Giovan Maria Pietro Belli. According to Fabrizio Fiaschini, Pietro Belli or, more likely, Pietrobelli, might have been a priest, because his name is often preceded by the title 'don' (Fiaschini, *L'incessabile agitazione*, p. 93, n. 2). In this dedicatory letter, Pietro Belli recalls the achievements of the Andreini family. As noted by Claudia Burattelli (*Comici dell'Arte: Corrispondenze*, I, p. 97, n. 2), the majority of his assertions on the family have subsequently been confirmed by notarial documents.

still in progress: 'So eziandio che lo stesso s'affatica di ridurre in tre canti la vita di Santa Tecla vergine e martire, e m'è noto insieme che compone (se non l'ha finita) una rappresentazione in cinque atti, intitolata l'Adamo'.¹⁷ These four works, *La Divina Visione*, *La Maddalena*, *L'Adamo* and *La Tecla vergine e martire*, together with the *sacra rappresentazione* of 1617, make up Andreini's religious production between 1604 and 1623. His heterogenous *oeuvre* allowed him to refer, depending on the case, to the appropriate set of works, in order to emphasise a specific aspect of his activity as a writer. Andreini makes Pietro Belli mention these four works in the opening letter of *La Maddalena* because, on this occasion, he wanted to present himself as a religious writer more than as a *comico dell'Arte*.

The religious zeal of the author is conveyed not merely through the choice of a sacred subject and through inevitable textual and paratextual references to his own spirituality, but also through the plots of these works, which are intended to promote some of the Tridentine doctrinal decrees, as was already the case with *Florinda* (Chapter 2). Andreini's accounts of the life of the saint reflect the canonical structure of the legend of Mary Magdalene, despite some ellipses and digressions.¹⁸ After a customary proem, the poem of 1610 dives into an extensive narration of the dissolute life of Mary Magdalene 'peccatrice', which is interrupted by the report of her encounter with Christ. The metamorphosis of the sinner at the sight of the Saviour and her conversion is described in its physical and psychological effects, through Mary Magdalene's discourses and actions. The life she led, described in the first part of the poem, is reviewed by the protagonist with scorn and the material objects she possessed are despised and disclaimed. Mary Magdalene wears a sackcloth and goes to the house of Simon the Pharisee where, as narrated in the episode in the Gospels, she washes Christ's feet with her tears and asks for his mercy.¹⁹ She starts a new life: the third and last canto of the poem recounts her perilous sea journey to France and her preaching in Marseille and Aix-en-Provence.²⁰ The poem closes with the

¹⁷ The works Pietro Belli refers to were published by Andreini in 1613 and 1623: *L'Adamo. Sacra rappresentazione* (Milan: Bordone, 1613), *La Tecla vergine e martire. Poema sacro* (Venice: Guerigli, 1623).

¹⁸ In the tradition of Western Christianity, starting from Pope Gregory I, the figure of Mary Magdalene was born out of the conflation of three distinct female figures in the Gospels: Mary of Magdala, from whom Jesus expelled the seven demons, Mary of Bethany, Marta's sister, and the anonymous sinner who washed Christ's feet. Hagiographic accounts, then, related Mary Magdalene's vicissitudes as *apostola apostolorum*, her preaching and her ascetic life in Sainte Baume. On this matter see, for example, Lilia Sebastiani, *Tra/Sfigurazione: il personaggio evangelico di Maria di Magdala e il mito della peccatrice redenta nella tradizione occidentale* (Brescia: Queriniana, 1992).

¹⁹ See Lk 7, 36-50 and Jn 12, 1-8. In the house of Simon the Pharisee, the sinner pours perfume on Jesus' head, according to the Gospels of Mark and Matthew. See Mk 14,3-9 and Mt 26,6-13.

²⁰ On the uncommonness of female preaching in Christian tradition see, for example, *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity*, ed. by Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), and, in particular, on the preaching of Mary Magdalene see, in the same volume, Katherine Ludwig Jansen, 'Maria Magdalena: Apostolorum Apostola', pp. 55-96.

description of her hermitage in Sainte Baume, where she dies, and with the account of the assumption of her soul into Heaven.

The plot of the play of 1617 stems from an episode which is usually secondary in the accounts of the life of the saint and is significantly expanded by Andreini: the narration of a dream she had before her encounter with Christ. In the first part of the play, the prevalent emotion is the anguish this vision causes the saint: the account of her suffering is punctuated by the description of the attempts of her maids to soothe her and by comic episodes relating to the courtship of her lovers. Together with her maids, Mary Magdalene hatches plots at the expense of the suitors. Nevertheless, the anguish of the protagonist persists under this playful veneer, and lasts until her meeting with Christ. The encounter triggers the conversion: Mary Magdalene decides to change her life and, here too, gives up all the things she previously possessed. The play ends with the ecstasy of the saint and her premonition of the passion of Christ and of her hermitage.

The majority of the 360 octaves of the poem recount the episode of the conversion of Mary Magdalene,²¹ including the sermon addressed by Christ to the crowds which is developed as a catechismal lesson,²² and reviews the main principles of the Christian religion, from the Creation to the prophecy of the death and resurrection of Christ.²³ This section of the poem was clearly written by Andreini in recognition of the regulations of the Council of Trent aimed at enhancing the practice of catechesis in Catholic life. Another reference to Tridentine resolutions is encompassed by the episode of the conversion, which is subdivided into three phases, reflecting the phases of the auricular confession: *contritio*, *confessio* and *satisfactio*.²⁴ Confession was laid down by the Council of Trent as a foundation of the Catholic faith, an indispensable instrument for the forgiveness of sins.²⁵ Andreini makes the allusion to confession even more evident by employing formulas typical of the sacramental praxis, like the anaphoric expression 'Perdon Signor', a *mea culpa* repeated by Mary Magdalene from octave 25 to 34 of Canto II:

Perdon Signor, se frettolosa il piede
Troppo a te mossi di mie colpe greve;
Saper devea che mal si presta fede
Che molti falli aduni ora sì breve. (II. 25.1-4 fol. 34^r)

²¹ See LMa I. Octaves 30-123 fols 13^v-29^r and II. Octaves 5-45 fols 30^v-37^v.

²² Fiaschini, *L'incessabile agitazione*, p. 109.

²³ See LMa I. Octaves 77-88 fols 21^v-23^v.

²⁴ The subdivision was noted by Fiaschini, who identifies the moment of the *contritio* in I. Octave 114, that of the *confessio* in II. Octaves 25-34 and that of *satisfactio* in II. Octaves 89-93. See *L'incessabile agitazione*, p. 109.

²⁵ On auricular confession, see Adriano Prosperi, *Tribunali della coscienza* (Turin: Einaudi, 1996).

[...]

Perdon Signor, se peccatrice immonda
Baldanzosa sen venne al Redentore;
Saper devea che d'umiltade abbonda
L'Angelo istesso innanzi a te Signore. (II. 26.1-4 fol. 34^r)

Equally allusive to the praxis of the confession is Mary Magdalene's request for absolution, 'Tu ch'hai del perdonar costume solo | Dimmi: Va' in pace, alcuno error non hai' (LMa II. 35.4, fol. 35^v), echoed later by the words of Jesus: 'Tien le mie voci, e non peccar: va' in pace | 'Ti fe' salva la tua fe' santa e verace' (LMa II. 42.7-8 fol. 36^v).

In the *sacra rappresentazione* of 1617, Andreini reiterates his compliance with Counter-Reformation principles when he puts on stage the troubled awakening of Mary Magdalene after her confused dream. In the first act of the play, the protagonist recounts her nocturnal vision to her maids: she envisaged the sun, symbol of Christ, and heard an appeal to change her sinful ways. The dream, though, is dismissed as meaningless by the maids and, in a later scene, by Mary Magdalene herself.²⁶ The misinterpretation of Mary Magdalene's prophetic dream recalls the misinterpretation of oracles by 'mal accorti saggi' in *La Florinda*,²⁷ and seems to allude again to the necessity of the mediation of clerics in the interpretation of God's word, as stated in the Council of Trent.

The definitive commendation by Andreini of the work of the Council is formulated towards the end of the first canto of the poem of 1610. Here, the sinner asks the Lord to give her precepts and regulations by which she might change her life:

Tu detta le parole, e gli atti forma,
ch'io per me stile avrei basso, e negletto;
chiedo dal sermo tuo regola, e norma
per accusar l'antico mio difetto. (LMa I. 109.3-6 fol. 27^r)

This passage, too, echoes *La Florinda*. In the tragedy, Gismondo wished for the nymphs to have a 'fortunato rege', a wise and strong 'pastor' to defend the lost flock – metaphors aside, Tridentine regulators and Catholic people (Chapter 2). Mary Magdalene's need for a 'regola e norma' seems here to coincide with the need for regulations in the lives of Catholic people, a need which was eventually met by the Council of Trent.

²⁶ LMa I. 4. p. 31 and III. 5. p. 117.

²⁷ This matter is discussed in Chapter 2.

As with the works of 1604, Andreini's strategies in these works went beyond the display of his devoutness. The claim of his worth as a man of letters here is no less compelling than in the works of his literary debut. The dedicatory letter by Pietro Belli to Bartolomeo del Calice offers a range of examples of Andreini's fashioning strategies, starting from his choice of dedicatee. Bartolomeo del Calice, alias Bartolomeo Bontempelli, was a rich Venetian merchant. After making his fortune, he tailored his public image of benefactor through substantial donations to the city and to religious institutions, and became an example of a 'gloriosa mercatura'. By dedicating the poem to him, Andreini built an implicit parallel between his own career and that of del Calice,²⁸ because trading, like acting, was perceived as an immoral business, but Andreini and del Calice were honourable examples for their professions.

Andreini's literary claim, six years after his debut, was still corroborated by the same means: in his letter, Pietro Belli alludes to the 'onore e premio' achieved by the author at the Accademia degli Spensierati (LMa, fol. 3^v), and presents him to del Calice, by emphasising the *studium*, the zeal, 'il sudor della fronte' Andreini dedicated to the activity of writing:

L'auttore è dunque il signor Giovan Battista Andreini Fiorentino, dal quale ho ricevuto così caro dono in dono, poiché lo stesso, lontanissimo da ogni mondano mercenario guiderdone, si va procacciando col sudor della fronte, i premi celesti. (LMa, fols 2^v-3^r)

Literary merit and devotion are intertwined in the words of Pietro Belli: Andreini's zeal, the author of the letter writes, aims at rewards in Heaven. In distancing Andreini from any 'mercenario guiderdone', Pietro Belli makes an interesting lexical choice, given that 'commedia mercenaria' was a common definition of Commedia dell'Arte during the seventeenth century. The author was in fact distancing Andreini from other *comici* dell'Arte, re-proposing the distinction between 'onorate compagnie' and 'profani comici', between 'commedianti' and 'ciarlatani',²⁹ or between 'scenici professor d'alta eloquenza' and 'mimi', according to Andreini's own definition in *La Saggia Egiziana* (Chapter 2). The idea is

²⁸ On Bartolomeo Bontempelli and the analogies with Andreini, see Fiaschini, *L'incessabile agitazione*, pp. 95-100.

²⁹ This is the terminology used to identify the two categories by Tommaso Garzoni and Gian Domanico Ottonelli (see Chapter 1).

reiterated a few lines later, where Andreini's theatrical journeys, as opposed to the wanderings of other *comici*, are considered as an instrument which spreads awareness of his talent as an actor and of his honour as a man:

L'ore del viver suo giovenili spende con tanto onorato e religioso profitto, rendendomi certo che se questo va peregrinando per lo mondo con l'esercizio delle comedie, che non ci va ad altro fine se non perché molte parti intendino il suo valore circa la virtù sovra i teatri pubblici e l'onorato e accostumato vivere nel privato delle camere.³⁰ (LMa fol. 3^v)

Towards the end of the letter, Pietro Belli states that the author of the poem 'non è un puro comico errante, ma uno che non ha altro fine che di virtù, e di mercar gloria' (LMa fol. 4^v), making the distinction even more plain.

The polemic against 'comici vili' is further developed in other works on Mary Magdalene. The recurrence of this theme authorises a reading of the *corpus* as a reflection on the theatrical profession. The contrast between the two groups of *comici*, central to the theoretical treatises of the 1620s, is also the backbone of the letter to readers written by Andreini at the beginning of the 1629 edition of the play. Among the reasons for the composition of the work, he mentions his wish to detach himself from 'una certa setta di comici vili':

Scrissila [...] per differenziarmi (la gloria de' buoni salvando) da una certa setta di comici vili, che 'nfelici al natale, miserabili ne' costumi, insoffribili ne' teatri, più per fame che per fama le infelici arti e l'infelici case abbandonando, Sardanapali di bettole, e Orfei di tavole, sono ragione con le laidezze loro, di danneggiare la gloria di quelli che, più olio che vino consumando, cercano di mostrarsi conoscitori, e non abusatori, di quelle grazie che dai teatri derivano.³¹

Unlike the 'comici poeti' (p. 503), to which Andreini himself belongs, the 'comici vili' are 'dissapidi', 'stolidi', 'statue di brutto gesso', 'all'orecchio glocidanti rane, o crocitantanti corbi', 'piche', 'pappagalli' (p. 504), 'scimmie imitatrici' (p. 506), not to mention their poor acting skills, especially in the stage role of the Innamorato, one which Andreini had interpreted very frequently in his career:

Ma quello che più accresce la maraviglia (lasciando questi ridicoli in disparte) è di taluno che non conoscendo quanti requisiti e difficili ricerchi la parte de lo

³⁰ The providential nature of the exercise of the theatrical profession had already been stated by Valerini with reference to Armani (See Section 1.4).

³¹ Andreini, 'A chi legge', quoted in Grazioli, 'L'edizione viennese', p. 502.

'nnamorado, privo di dottrina, disgraziato dalle fasce, penurioso ne' concetti, stridulente nel suono, barbaro nella lingua, dispettoso nel sembiante, elegge per sua parte cotanto difficile [...]. E sì come per divenir poeta laureato altro ci vuol che veste e porpora, così per essere comico famoso, altro chi [*sic*] vuol, ch'assestarsi tilato, et arricciarsi effeminato. (p. 504)

Andreini constructs his image as an actor by opposing himself, his skills, his talents to those of the 'comici vili', who, taken as a group, can be seen as a 'threatening other', which, according to the governing conditions of self-fashioning, must be 'discovered or invented in order to be attacked and destroyed'.³²

The creation of anti-models prepares the ground for Andreini's eulogy of his models: his parents. The discourse on honourable and infamous *comici* in the letter to readers of the play of 1629 ends with a tribute to the major representatives of his profession, among them Adriano Valerini, Vittoria Piissimi and, of course, his mother Isabella, 'della quale', Andreini declares, 'passerò come del mio genitore con silenzio, poichè tanto il mondo ne favella' (p. 506). These motives, and in particular the praise of Isabella's eternal fame, had already been the subject of several works, including the treatise *La Ferza*, written by Andreini in 1625. The direct and indirect allusions to Isabella and Francesco in these works, like those in the writings of 1604, aim at legitimising Andreini's own honourable status by recalling the honourable status of his parents. By linking the critique of *comici vili* to the eulogy of his parents and by insistently placing his work under the aegis 'de' grand'Avi suoi', Andreini presented a detailed professional profile of himself that took into account the accusations against actors but left no room for criticism of his own activity.

In the dedicatory letter of the edition of 1610, Pietro Belli cites a passage from the Gospel (Mt 7, 18) to found the value of Andreini on that of Isabella and Francesco:

Non potest arbor bona malos fructus facere, quinci anch'egli non poteva degenerare da quelle piante felici e feconde, una delle quali fu la morta immortale signora Isabella Comica Gelosa e Accademica Intenta, e l'altra il Signor Francesco suo consorte Comico Geloso, celebri in vero per virtù e per nascita. (LMa, fols 3^v-4^r)³³

Pietro Belli also recalls that four of the children of Isabella and Francesco chose a religious life, 'tre figliuole monache velate' and a son, 'Sacerdote dell'Ordine di Vallombrosa' (LMa,

³² Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, p. 9.

³³ Regarding the genealogy of the Andreinis – their fame 'per nascita' – Pietro Belli considers Francesco Andreini as a descendent of the aristocratic family of the 'Cerrachi di Pistoia hora detti del Gallo' (fol. 4^r). See Mazzoni, 'Genealogia e vicende della famiglia Andreini', pp. 107-152.

fol. 4^v),³⁴ placing the information at the start of Andreini's religious poem to reaffirm the virtue and the devoutness of the family.

In the poems and in the plays, the allusions to Mary Magdalene's pious parents are recurrent.³⁵ They are instrumental: Andreini's morality is validated by the virtue of Isabella and Francesco, just as Mary Magdalene's is validated by the virtue of her parents. In Octave 30 of the 1610 poem, to make the parallel even more clear, Andreini repeats the words of the Gospel used by Pietro Belli in the dedicatory letter and applies them to Mary Magdalene. The author wonders how it was that the same parents gave birth to children as different as the sinner Mary Magdalene and the pious Marta and Lazzaro: 'Com'esser può ch'arbor sì buona i frutti | faccia diversi?' (LMa I. 30.1-2 fol. 13^v), and goes on in the octave which follows: 'Or dunque il regio ammanto | così degli avi tuoi lordo si rende?' (LMa I. 31.1-2 fol. 14^v). The same point is made several times in the religious play:

MARTA Esortala dell'alma alla salute,
 e de' grand'avi suoi a premer l'orme,
 né traviar dai genitori illustri. (LMb I. 1. p. 11)

MARTA Movati almeno a generosi affari
 de' tuoi grand'avi il sangue,
 de' genitori il vanto,
 di cui figlia io pur sono, Lazzaro insieme. (LMb II. 5. p. 70)

MASSIMINO De l'immortalità figlio immortale
 o d'Eucaria, e di Siro
 piante già sì felici
 fortunato rampollo. (LMb IV. 1. pp. 132-133)

MADDALENA So che molto v'offesi,
 ed oscurai non poco,
 e d'Eucaria, e di Siro
 miei sovran genitori l'opre sovrane. (LMb IV. 4. p. 157)

In Act I, Scene 1, referring to the behaviour of Mary Magdalene, the pious Massimino declares:

³⁴ The 'tre figliuole monache' of Francesco and Isabella Andreini were suor Osanna and suor Claridiana, nuns of the Monastery of the Poor Clares in Migliaretto, near Mantua, and suor Fulvia, nun in the convent of S. Maria Presentazione, near Mantua. See *Comici dell'Arte: Corrispondenze*, I, p. 96 and pp. 138-139.

³⁵ According to the *Legenda Aurea* by Jacopo da Voragine, a Medieval text which enjoyed great fortune, Mary Magdalene was the daughter of Siro and Eucharica: 'Maria Magdalena a Magdalo castro cognominata clarissimis est orta natalibus, utpote ex regia stirpe descenditibus: cuius pater Syrus, mater vero Eucharica nuncupata est' (Jacobus a Voragine, *Legenda aurea: vulgo historia Lombardica dicta ad optimorum librorum fidem*, ed. by Johann G. T. Grässe (Leipzig: Impensis Librarie Arnoldianae, 1850), p. 408).

MASSIMINO E pur d'Eucaria è figlia
 aquila a sì gran lampi,
 onde Lazaro e Marta
 s'abbagliar sì felici,
 il retaggio materno a i rai provando. (LMb I. 1. pp. 9-10)

The emphasis on the maternal legacy, in particular, is a clear allusion to Andreini's reliance in his own career on his mother's celebrity and contacts. After more than a decade, Andreini is still in the long shadow of his 'sovrani genitori'.

5.3 'SPECCHIO OR DI LUCIFERO, OR DI CRISTO': MADDALENA AND THE DEBATE ON PROFESSIONAL ACTRESSES

As discussed so far, Andreini did not change his self-fashioning strategies after 1604. Yet, he perfected his ways to promote Ramponi by adopting more subtle and pervasive tactics, based on text and iconography.

The history of Mary Magdalene as recounted by Andreini is a metaphor for the history of professional performers, and the conversion which the saint undergoes is an allusion to the conversion of the theatrical professionalism, socially rehabilitated by a group of comici *virtuosi*.³⁶ More specifically, Andreini's Mary Magdalene is an alter ego of the professional actress. The sensuality of this character has no parallel in other seventeenth-century literary representations of the sinner, and is determined by its affinity to actresses. Like early modern *dive*, Mary Magdalene is desired and praised, and her gestures and her game of seduction resemble those of the *meretrices honestae* with which early modern actresses were associated. The 1610 poem and the 1617 play, indeed, linger over the description of the dissolute life of the saint before her conversion. In the first canto of the poem, she is pictured surrounded by a crowd of lovers:

Là fra turbe d'amanti e di desiri
 Maddalena movea superba il piede,
 quasi pavon, che gli aurei occhiuti giri
 spiega allor più, che caldo amor lo fiede;
 né così bella mai l'aurora, od Iri

³⁶ See, for example, Michael Zampelli, 'Giovanni Battista Andreini's *Maddalena* of 1617: Staging the Redemption of the Theatrical Profession', in *From Rome to Eternity: Catholicism and the Arts in Italy, ca. 1550–1650*, ed. by Pamela M. Jones and Thomas Worcester (Boston: Brill, 2002), pp. 63–85, and Fiaschini, *L'incessabile agitazione*, pp. 93–132.

scintillò vaga ne l'eterea sede,
come costei, che in un bella, e lasciva,
piagava ogn'alma, ed ogni cor feriva. (LMa I. 7. fol. 10^r)

The detailed physical description of Mary Magdalene stretches over nine octaves and unfolds the so called 'canone vivo', a variation on the Petrarchan canon, which was introduced to describe early modern actresses.³⁷ It starts with a canonical mention of her 'crin d'oro' and of her eyes, which resemble 'due luminose stelle' (LMa I. 8.1-2 fol. 10^r), and continues with a meticulous account of her ornaments and clothes. The static beauty of the Petrarchan Laura becomes dynamic through notation of the movements of the body of the new poetic subject:

Di varia seta ed or gonne conteste
pur la miri vestir succinta e leve;
e mentre ondeggia al moto ogn'aurea veste
crede l'occhio la gamba avorio o neve;
tenero è 'l piede, onde convien, che 'l veste
nobil coturno di ricamo greve;
il cinto è d'oro ed or velami tanti,
ch'al tergo, al braccio van per l'aure erranti. (LMa I. 13 fol. 11^r)

The actresses' admirers were ready to annihilate their own personae for the *dive*; in the same way, Mary Magdalene's lovers are ready to become merely a flower in her hair or a pedestal for her feet:

Quanti esser braman ape onde succhiando
vadan da rosea guancia il mele intanto,
chi vorrebb'esser fior sua chioma ornando,
e chi base al suo piede, echo al suo canto,
chi specchio farsi al vago volto, al petto
e chi al bel fianco suo morbido letto. (LMa I. 17.3-8, fol. 23^v)

Actresses received expensive gifts from their admirers, who frequently visited them in their 'albergo' and were stricken by the departure of the *dive* from their cities.³⁸ Similarly, Mary

³⁷ See Fiaschini, 'Il canone vivo. La bellezza delle attrici tra Cinque e Seicento', in *L'impero dei sensi: da Euripide a Oshima*, ed. by Roberto Alonge (Bari: Edizioni di pagina, 2009), pp. 82-98.

³⁸ See the *Replica seconda* written by Leone de' Sommi in praise of the actress Vincenza Armani: 'Quindi è che a gara i più bei spirti eletti | fanno all'Albergo suo ricorso ogni ora' (de' Sommi, 'Replica seconda', in *Oratione*, fols 25^v-26^r). On the departure of performers from the cities, see the vast production of 'addii' for Commedia dell'Arte actresses. Six previously unpublished 'addii' for Ramponi, part of the Codex Morbio I held in the Biblioteca Braidense in Milan, are transcribed in Laiena, 'Meretrices ergo Dive'.

Magdalene's lovers shower her with letters, jewels, and portraits of themselves,³⁹ and are drawn to her palace, where they 'ben ama[no] entrar, ma non sa[nno] far partita' (LMa I. 19.4 fol. 24^r). Even the skills of Mary Magdalene resemble those of professional performers: she sings, plays instruments, 'move in vaga danza il piede' (LMa I. 23.7 fol. 12^v).

A section in the play of 1617 makes more explicit the link of Mary Magdalene with the theatrical profession. In Act V, Scene 5, Maddalena's maids bring two golden baskets on stage, which evoke the crates where actors kept their stage costumes, laden with their lady's dresses. In a metatheatrical reading of the scene, the clothes, left by Mary Magdalene for her maids, seem to be a gift made by the *prima donna* to the younger actresses of the company, an encouragement to take on her legacy.⁴⁰ While searching through the dresses, the skirts, the golden accessories, to their surprise, the maids find sackcloth and cilices:

MASSIMINO Ma che veggio? Oh mie figlie,
 deh qui l'occhio fisate
 in povertà superba
 in questi ultimi doni
 ch'eran di bel tesor ispidi basi.
 [...]
 Che far deggiam di queste
 poverissime vesti,
 e di cinto nodoso
 di grossa e lunga fune?
 Oh che tesoro in aspra conca or veggio. (LMb V. 5. p. 195)

The penitential clothing under the rich and golden fabrics alludes to the expiatory nature, until then hidden, of the theatrical profession. Andreini's display of this clothing on stage represents an evolution: at first concealed under other clothes, the sackcloths are now brought to light in the play and exhibited to the audience to show publicly the transformation which has taken place in professional theatre. They are a sign of spiritual renewal, metaphorically initiated by the *prima donna*, Ramponi: an example of virtue for the other actresses of the company.

Andreini also suggests the existence of a theatrical subtext in his works on Mary Magdalene through the lexical choices he makes. After the conversion of the sinner, Maddalena goes to Jesus to ask for his mercy. According to the narrator, God himself would have been the first spectator of the event: 'Che di tal fatto spettator giocondo | sarà Dio

³⁹ See LMa II. 91-92 fol. 45^r.

⁴⁰ Fiaschini, *L'incessabile agitazione*, p. 123.

stesso, ammiratore il mondo' (LMa I. 122.7-8 fol. 19^v). A few octaves later, the world is both scene and spectator of Mary Magdalene's washing of Christ's feet:

Quando mai ne la scena ampia del Mondo
fu veduta azzion sì grande, e pia?
Perché tutto non cape oggi qui il mondo,
spettator d'inaudita cortesia? (LMa II. 18.1-4 fol. 32^v)

In the frame of these parallels between the work on Mary Magdalene and professional theatre, one particular reading has so far been overlooked: the vicissitudes of the saint's life are organised by Andreini according to a structure that comprises a before and an after. The long opening account of Mary Magdalene's dissolute life before her conversion is balanced by the extended description of the events after it both in the poem and in the play. The conversion itself is striking for its suddenness: there is no hesitation, no transition. Before and after, Maddalena is the same woman: she has the same body, although with significant changes in her aspect, and exercises the same fascination over others, although with a different purpose. The fact that the conversion lies at the centre of the structure of these works should not detract from the dualistic configuration of the texts. These moments, and in particular, Andreini's detailed description of the life of Maddalena as a sinner, are not just a spectacular tool to win public favour,⁴¹ but are significant in themselves. The dualistic structure leads to an interpretation of Andreini's works on Mary Magdalene as his literary re-elaboration of the debate on professional actresses and as a critique of relativism in assessing their morality.

As a sinner, Maddalena is described by Andreini with a lexicon manifestly based on that used by the detractors in their anti-theatrical treatises. The analogy is remarkable, especially in the sections of the poem and of the play in which the protagonist looks back at her previous life. In the poem of 1610, while confessing her sins to Christ, Maddalena portrays herself as a lascivious, vain, beautiful woman, a dangerous temptress. Her lust and her seductiveness emerge clearly when, in her confession, she spares no details of her sexual life and of the way she seduced men:

Perdon Signor, di tanti odori, e tanti
preziosi licori, ove sovente
in compagnia de' più lascivi amanti

⁴¹ See De Capitani, 'Le Maddalene di Giovan Battista Andreini (1617, 1652)', in *Le donne della Bibbia, la Bibbia delle donne: teatro, letteratura e vita*. Atti del 15° Convegno internazionale, Verona 16-17 ottobre 2009, ed. by Rosanna Gorris Camos (Fasano: Schena, 2012), pp. 335-350 (p. 345).

ignuda giacqui a la stagione ardente;
perdona se nuda tor mi tenni i vanti
ai più fini alabastri ancor possente;
perdon quando credei che la natura
me sol fesse del bel legge e misura. (LMa II. 31. fol. 35^r)

Perdon Signor, quando in notturno ballo
calamita fui d'occhi, error de' cori;
e quando là godea senza intervallo
mille amanti stancare, e mille amori. (LMa II. 32.1-4 fol. 35^r)

Perdon Signor, quando tra fonti e fiori
io presi a inghirlandar garzon lascivo,
or tessendoli al crin silvestri onori,
o spruzzandoli il sen col fresco rivo;
perdon quando al meriggio i gravi ardori
con l'amator di libertà già privo
schivando, il braccio el sen nudo scopersi,
ed a lui pronta ogni diletto offersi. (LMa II. 33. fol. 35^r)

Maddalena defines herself as a 'profane priestess' while confessing her sacrilegious wish to be worshipped in place of God at the temple:

Perdon, s'al tempio andai con voglia insana
non d'adorar, ma d'essere adorata,
ove sacerdotessa ancor profana
mille cori piagai di strali armata. (LMa II. 28.1-4 fol. 34^v)

In the poem, even the reaction of those attending the supper in the house of Simon the Pharisee recalls the reaction of the clerics to the presence of professional actresses: they cannot avoid the impulse to 'Alzar le mani ed inarcar le ciglia' (LMa II. 5.3 fol. 28^v).

Maddalena's review of her past in the religious play is even more effective. The list of clerics' epithets for actresses are brought together here to compose a sort of blasphemous version of the *Litaniae Lauretanae*, approved only thirty years earlier, in 1587, by Pope Sixtus V.⁴²

MADDALENA La seguace d'amanti,
la fugace d'onori,
la superba, la vana,
[...]
quella vaga di schiere,

⁴² The *Litaniae Lauretanae* were approved with the Bull *Reddituri*.

quella avara de l'oro,
 quella pania de' cori,
 quella rete de l'alme,
 quella peste d'Amore,
 l'ingannatrice Sirena,
 la Cerasta, la iena,
 la furia, al fin l'Arpia. (LMb IV. 3. p. 147)

Andreini's *La Maddalena* of 1617 can be seen as a 'dramma del corpo',⁴³ because in this play, more than in any other by Andreini, the body acts as a catalyst for theatrical actions. Here, however, the body changes its function. Like the actress who emerges from the encomia by intellectuals, after her conversion Mary Magdalene loses neither her beauty nor her Eros: they are now re-semanticised and addressed to the spiritual world. As a consequence, the 'dramma del corpo' becomes the drama of perception and relativism, as stressed by the many oxymoronic expressions used by Andreini to define the protagonist. She is the 'peccatrice Santa',⁴⁴ she is 'già peccatrice, or diva' (LMa I. Octave 5.1 fol. 9^v), she is 'specchio or di Lucifero, or di Cristo', 'dannata e beata', 'diabolica gli angeli spaventando, angelica demoni fugando',⁴⁵ she is 'tanto or sacra quanto già profana | donna' (LMa III. 80.1-2 fol. 65^v). After her conversion, she is paradoxically addressed by her lovers as 'l'empia Maddalena' (LMb II. 4. p. 144), because her faith prevents them from achieving their love prize. The 'chiaroscuro antitetico' of the character is more explicitly used by Andreini to allude to the relativism in assessing actresses' morality when the author compares Maddalena to a mirror which manifests Hell or Heaven depending on the way it is facing:⁴⁶ 'Maddalena, specchio alla torbida face d'Inferno opposto, o come tetro, ma da l'empireo sole percosso, o quanto di celeste splendore lo stesso sole vince, e abbaglia'.⁴⁷ In the same way, according to the perspective from which actresses were observed, they turned the minds of the spectators either to Satan or to God.

In Andreini's works on Mary Magdalene, as in Valerini's oration for Armani, the defence of actresses hinged on the Neoplatonic lexicon and narrative developed by eulogists in their writings. More than Maddalena's conversion, Andreini wants to present Maddalena, like the actress, as a means to conversion, who arouses in those who surround her a desire

⁴³ Luciano Mariti, 'Valore e coscienza del teatro in età barocca', in *I Capricci di Proteo: percorsi e linguaggi del barocco*. Atti del Convegno internazionale di Lecce, 23-26 ottobre 2000, ed. by Maria Luisa Doglio (Rome: Salerno, 2002), pp. 419-455 (p. 453).

⁴⁴ LMb, dedicatory letter to Pico della Mirandola, no pagination.

⁴⁵ Andreini, 'A chi legge', quoted in Grazioli, 'L'edizione viennese', p. 501.

⁴⁶ The expression is used to define Mary Magdalene in Giovanni Getto, *Il Barocco letterario in Italia* (Milan: Mondadori, 2000), p. 77.

⁴⁷ Andreini, 'A chi legge', quoted in Grazioli, 'L'edizione viennese', p. 501.

for God. The converted Maddalena still wins people's souls, but now she wins them to Christ: 'A quel tacito impor tutt'è fastosa, | d'aver per Cristo a vincer alme, e cori' (LMa II. 50.5-6 fol. 38^r). Before her departure to France, her mission is proclaimed more clearly:

Questa è colei, che d'alto foco accensa
fa che d'amor l'aer d'intorno avampi;
quasi specchio, che 'n sé la luce immensa
del sole accoglie, e fuor ne vibra i lampi;
già di là parte con gran cura intensa
di far, che Cristo in ogni cor si stampi;
e ne l'incendio di celesti ardori
tragga (fenice in Dio) l'ore migliori. (LMa II. 121 fol. 50^r)

It is her 'performance' of her new way of life that transforms the souls and leads her lovers to imitate her. In Act V, Scene 2, the lover David exhorts his former rivals to change their lives as Maddalena changed hers, and to follow her example:

DAVID S'ambi vaghi già un tempo
fummo di sue divise,
di suoi fior, di sue piume,
e perc'oggi non lice
s'ella cangia vestir, cangiar noi mente,
anzi dal capo al piè tutta imitarla? (LMb V. 2. pp. 172-173)

The exhortation is echoed by the choir of angels in the closing scene of Act V, a take-home message for the spectators: 'Vanne tu, cangia vita | la peccatrice imita' (LMb V. 10. p. 227). In a similar way, in the poem, the narrator notes with wonder the effects that the vision of the converted Maddalena provokes in her 'rio stuolo amante':

O meraviglia, quel rio stuolo amante,
che pria franco seguilla, or ciò vedendo
paventa in ricalcar l'umili, e sante
orme di lei, che van Giesù seguendo. (LMa II. 53.1-4 fol. 38^v)

Through her gestures, her *actio*, her oratory Maddalena, like an actress, transforms souls and leads them to virtuous behaviour.

5.4 MADDALENA: VIRGINIA RAMPONI

Andreini's re-writing of the theatrical debate in the works on Mary Magdalene and the couple-strategy related to this production are understandable in their entirety only by taking into account the process of identification of Maddalena with Ramponi. Virginia Ramponi *is* Andreini's Maddalena. She is Maddalena because, as discussed, she remains the interpreter of the character until the end of her life. One of the first performances of the *sacra rappresentazione* is recorded in Mantua in 1617 on the occasion of the marriage of Ferdinando Gonzaga, Ramponi's particular benefactor, to Caterina de' Medici. According to Andreini's notarial deed mentioned above, this performance and possibly others held during the festivities, yielded the couple the exorbitant sum of 1800 *ducati*.⁴⁸ One of the last performances of the play was probably held in Salzburg in June 1628 during the Imperial *tournée* of the Fedeli.⁴⁹

Ramponi is Maddalena also because the *sacra rappresentazione* of 1617 was tailored for her and conceived as a display of her musical talent. The play, accompanied by music by Angelo Monteverdi, Salomone de' Rossi, Muzio Effrem and Alessandro Guivizzani, is a transitional form between a religious drama and a melodrama.⁵⁰ The *sacra rappresentazione* has to be considered in continuity with *La Florinda*: with the tragedy, it shares the musical experimentalism of Florentine tradition, as in the concurrence of music and tears within the play, which reinforces the principle formulated in Florentine circles that the purpose of music was to 'muover gli affetti'.⁵¹ Music and tears were linked, for example, in the laments, a genre in which, as we saw earlier, Ramponi had excelled in her performance of *La Florinda* in 1604, of *Arianna* in 1608 and of *Il Rapimento di Proserpina* in 1611.

But Ramponi is also, metaphorically, the converted Maddalena, the extraordinary woman who wins souls to Christ. Like the Holy sinner, she is an example both to the audience and to her fellow actresses, as noted also by Fiaschini's reading of Maddalena's bequest of dresses to her maids. By building this character for Ramponi, Andreini intended that she be perceived not only as a divine actress but as a divine figure. This goal was permanently achieved in one more move, the masterpiece of the couple-strategy.

⁴⁸ See Besutti, 'Storie di emancipazione', pp. 66-74.

⁴⁹ The hypothesis is presented by Cristina Grazioli on the basis of her analysis of archival documents related to the imperial *tournée* of the Fedeli. See 'L'edizione viennese', p. 496. Among the documents, there is the travel report of the journey of the Grand Duke of Tuscany from Florence to Prague written by the *virtuosa* Margherita Costa. Costa recounts that in Salzburg a *Maddalena peccatrice* was performed. This *Maddalena* might have been a new dramatised version by Andreini of the vicissitudes of the saint, obtained through the re-elaboration of his previous works, as was customary for *comici*. The attribution of this *Maddalena* to Andreini would also clarify the reason for his publication of two *Maddalene* during the imperial *tournée*.

⁵⁰ On this matter, see Paolo Fabbri, *Monteverdi*, pp. 211-212. The music written for the play was published in the volume *Musiche de alcuni eccellentissimi musici. Composte per la Maddalena Sacra Rappresentazione di Gio. Battista Andreini, fiorentino* (Venice: Stampa del Gardano, 1617).

⁵¹ See Fabrizio-Costa, 'Les Pleurs et la Grâce', p. 123.

In the first edition of the poem *La Maddalena*, after the dedicatory letter by Pietro Belli and before the letter to Mary Magdalene by Andreini, there is an engraving by Gaspare Grispoldo (Fig. 4), which shows Mary Magdalene with an angel at her side, holding an open book, contemplating Christ on the cross, and with her left hand on her breast, in a conventional gesture of penitence.



Fig. 4

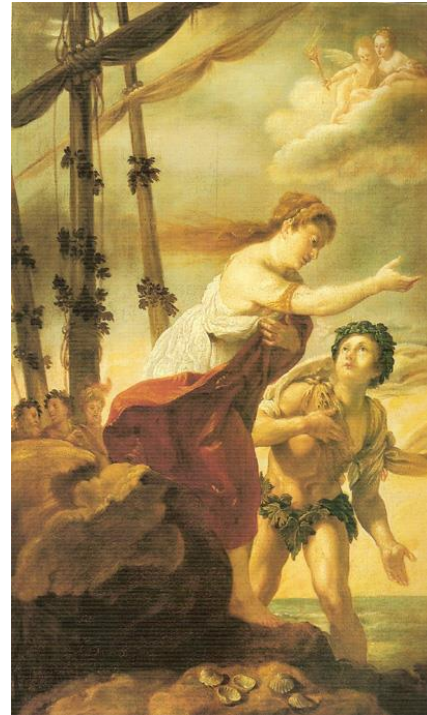


Fig. 5

The drawing for the engraving was eventually attributed to the painter Domenico Fetti, the dedicatee of Andreini's comedy *La Venetiana* (1619), on the basis of the similarity between this figure and the figure of Arianna, portrayed by Fetti in his *Arianna e Bacco nell'isola di Nasso*, dated between 1608 and 1611 (Fig. 5).⁵² At that time, Fetti was active in Rome and gravitating around the court of Cardinal Ferdinando Gonzaga, the purchaser of the painting.⁵³ The model for Arianna is very likely to have been Virginia Ramponi, the interpreter of Monteverdi's *Arianna* in 1608 who enjoyed the special favour of the Cardinal (Chapter 4). If she was the model for Arianna, she was also the model of the Maddalena

⁵² The attribution was made by Siro Ferrone. See Ferrone, 'Pose sceniche di una famiglia d'attori', in *Domenico Fetti 1588/89-1623*, p. 56. On the dating of the painting, in the same volume, see also Eduard A. Safarik, 'Tristitia', pp. 97-108 (p. 102), and Id., "'La Maddalena'" di Giovan Battista Andreini', pp. 236-238.

⁵³ On the relationship between the Andreinis and Fetti, see also Gaetano Cozzi, 'Tra un comico-drammaturgo e un pittore del Seicento: Giovan Battista Andreini e Domenico Fetti', *Bollettino dell'Istituto di Storia della Società e dello Stato Veneziano*, 1 (1959), 193-205; Ferrone, *Attori, mercanti, corsari*, pp. 243-247; Raffaella Morselli, *Il flauto delle stelle. Una sera di giugno dell'anno 1623 alla corte dei Gonzaga* (Mantua: Tre Lune, 1999).

engraved in the first edition of the poem. The engraving and the painting show continuity not only in the features of the protagonist of the scene, but also in the motive of the crying, dear to Fetti. Probably the Andreinis and Fetti had met while attending the Roman circle of Cardinal Gonzaga. Andreini was aware of the implications of commissioning the drawing from Fetti: the presence of a portrait of his wife at the beginning of the poem signalled the identification of Ramponi with Maddalena and suggested a theatrical interpretation of the vicissitudes of the life of the saint. Andreini was, too, providing a renowned painter with a model for a subject which was popular in early modern Italy, making Ramponi the archetype for Fetti's future representations of Mary Magdalene.⁵⁴ Indeed, when in around 1618 Fetti was to paint his famous *Meditazione/Melanconia* (Fig. 6), which is based on the type of the Maddalena *penitente*, he returned to his renowned model, Ramponi.⁵⁵ And he probably turned again to Ramponi for the model of the melancholic woman dressed in green on the right hand side of the large canvas *La moltiplicazione dei pani e dei pesci* (ca. 1620) (Fig. 7), displayed in the Palazzo Ducale of Mantua.



⁵⁴ Ferrone, *Attori, mercanti, corsari*, p. 245.

⁵⁵ To further substantiate the identification of Fetti's *Meditazione/Melanconia* with the actress, Fiaschini considers the yellow ribbon which runs on the back of this figure as allusive to the yellow veil the courtesans had to wear in many Italian cities, reinforcing the link between actresses and *meretrices honestae*. See Fiaschini, *L'incessabile agitazione*, p. 114. For the analogies between the figure of Melancholy and the type of the Maddalena *penitente*, see *Saturno e la melanconia: studi di storia della filosofia naturale, religione e arte*, ed. by Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl (Turin: Einaudi, 1983), pp. 361-364.

Fig. 6



Fig. 7

Andreini's relationship with Fetti was not uncommon in the frame of the history of professional performers: the most prominent actors formed partnerships with painters and engravers in order to create and disseminate, including on the visual level, a respectable image of themselves.⁵⁶ Giovan Battista Andreini, in particular, as mentioned, devoted special care to graphic representations: he wanted the engraved portraits of himself at the beginning of his works to reflect his actual appearance at that moment. The portraits, for Andreini, were 'una testimonianza personale e biografica'.⁵⁷ It is reasonable to suppose that the engraving of Ramponi in *La Maddalena* of 1610 was conceived as a biographical testimonial which intentionally blurred the distinction between what was real and what was ideal. By virtue of their joint strategy, the beautiful interpreter was transformed into a 'muliebre emblema del Barocco'.⁵⁸

It appears no coincidence, therefore, that in one of the works of this very *corpus* – the epitome of their strategies – Andreini entrusts Maddalena/Ramponi with these words, beyond the metaphor, a manifesto of their career:

MADDALENA È la virtute un campo,
 noi siam le piante, i semi;
 qui scorrendo uniti
 il semini, il coltivi, e qui gl'inesti
 fai de l'altrui virtute, onde non solo

⁵⁶ On the partnerships between *comici* dell'Arte and painters see, for example, Maria Ines Aliverti, 'Una ribellione silente', p. 316.

⁵⁷ Aliverti, 'Una ribellione silente', p. 318.

⁵⁸ Carandini, "Inchiostri, sudori e lacrime", p. 448.

di suo fior, di suo frutto
ogni arbore festeggia:
ma del frutto acquistato
con dolce inesto da l'amica pianta. (LMb II. 5. p. 75)

Like two trees, grown in the field of virtue, they melded each other's skill as a graft on the trunk of their own career and enjoyed the ripe fruits they produced together. They were well aware that these results could not be achieved individually and that it was only together that they could maintain them. The story of their career, retraced in these chapters, confirms the effectiveness of planning and building their professional life in tandem. Indeed, upon the death of Ramponi, the spell was broken.

EPILOGUE

At some point in 1630 or 1631, Virginia Ramponi died. No documents mention the exact date or the circumstances of her death. No state funeral was organised for her. No orations or encomia were posthumously published in her honour. After a life of acclamation, the death of the *diva* passed in silence. The construct of the couple, so carefully shaped over six decades and two generations, eventually crumbled.

Poems in praise of Ramponi had been gathered by Andreini while she was alive, yet they were left unpublished. In the Biblioteca Braidense in Milan, there is a collection of handwritten *rime* catalogued under the title ‘Poesie di diversi in lode dei comici Giovan Battista Andreini, detto Lelio, e la moglie Virginia, nata Ramponi, detta Florinda’.¹ The collection is *de facto* for Ramponi rather than for both of them: forty-nine of the fifty-two poems are addressed to her. They are preceded by one poem written for Giovan Battista Andreini, and followed by two poems ‘per la morte di Scappino comico’, the actor Francesco Gabrielli (1588-1636), who occasionally joined Andreini and Ramponi during their *tournées*.² The poems are written in different hands, on individual sheets of different dimensions and must have been sent by their authors to Andreini and Ramponi on different occasions. The collection covers a period of approximately three decades, from 1606 to 1636.³ The binding of the collection is much more recent than its contents. The purpose of the poems dedicated to Ramponi is suggested by the only dated document in the collection, a cover letter, written on 27 October 1606 and addressed to Giovan Battista Andreini by Venanzio Galvagni, a Benedictine monk active between Milan and Padua. The letter is at the top of folio 10^r and introduces the ten subsequent poems composed for Ramponi by Galvagni:

Gentilissimo e virtuoso mio signore osservandissimo,

¹ In the catalogue of the Biblioteca Braidense compiled by Lodovico Frati, the collection is described as follows: ‘Num. 3 del cat. Cartaceo, di dimens. diverse (massima mill 313 X 210), carte 53 numerate recentemente. Miscellaneo, di più mani, del sec. XVII. Legatura recente. – Num. D’Invent. 100929. – Acquistato per L. 15,50’. See Lodovico Frati, *I codici Morbio della R. Biblioteca di Brera* (Forlì: Bordandini, 1897), p. 10.

² On Francesco Gabrielli, see Luigi Rasi, *I comici italiani. Biografia, bibliografia, iconografia*, 2 vols (Florence: Bocca, 1897), II, pp. 960-961.

³ The *terminus post quem* is the year of Gabrielli’s death.

Gli mando i miei rozzi componimenti ricercatimi [...]. V'aggiungo doi sonetti, a ciò Vostra Signoria a questi e a quelli si degni di supplire con l'elevato ingegno e valor suo dove mancheranno.⁴

The poems, we understand, had been 'ricercati', requested, by Giovan Battista Andreini who, at this stage, was probably thinking of publishing an encomiastic collection for Ramponi. The latest datable poems for Ramponi were written in around 1623,⁵ so we must assume that the project was carried out by Andreini at least until that date. On some of the *folii* included in the collection, however, there are occasional sarcastic comments about the poems, attributable to Andreini.⁶ At the bottom right of *folio* 5^r the syntagma 'ma goffo certissimo' is added to the word 'D'Incerto', that is, 'Anonymous', to deride its author. The sonnet on folio 8^r is followed by a caustic 'oibò', in response to the over-sentimental tone of the piece of writing. The poem on folio 29^r praises the singing talent of Ramponi with these words:

Ma mentre accompagnava l'armonia,
la man stringendo al sen, co' affetto immenso,
spremeva l'alme e, se ben dritto io penso,
gli angioli istessi a un tempo anche ferà.

Next to 'spremeva', 'i coion' is added,⁷ to form a syntagma which aims at disparaging the poem. The negative opinion of these writings, which Andreini probably expressed through these ungrateful comments, is still not a valid excuse to justify the failure to publish the collection. Among the authors of the poems there were many academicians,⁸ whose praise would have merited display, in line with the consolidated strategy of the couple examined in this thesis.

The lack of laudatory publications by Andreini for Ramponi, either while she was still alive or after her death, shows that in 1631, or even earlier, he abandoned the couple-

⁴ Codex Morbio I, Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense, Milan, fol. 10^r.

⁵ On the dating of the poems, see Francesca Barbieri, 'Poesie in lode dell'attrice Virginia Ramponi. Edizione e commento del manoscritto Morbio I della Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense' (unpublished master's thesis, Università degli Studi di Pavia, 2007). In her dissertation, Barbieri provides transcriptions and a critical edition of the collection. Some of the results of her research project are published in Barbieri, 'Virginia Ramponi, in arte Florinda, tra scena e poesia. Il codice Morbio I della Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense', *Comunicazioni Sociali*, 1 (2012), 24-49. On the Codex Morbio, see also Fiaschini, *L'inevitabile agitazione*, pp. 160-163.

⁶ Form, dimension, and inclination of ascenders make this writing compatible with Andreini's. Thanks are owed to Marianna Liguori for helping me with this evaluation.

⁷ This word is not in cursive writing; therefore, its attribution is uncertain. However, in the light of the evaluation above and of the analogy of this comment with previous ones, it is likely that this comment is also Andreini's.

⁸ See Serena Laiena, 'Meretrices ergo Dive', and Barbieri, 'Poesie in lode dell'attrice Virginia Ramponi'.

strategy. The choices made by Andreini at Ramponi's death were altogether opposed to those of his father. Commenting on Francesco's resolutions in *La Ferza*, Andreini wrote: 'Dico che seppe la sua cara compagnia così affettuosamente amare che, quasi tortorella alor ch'ha perduta la compagna, perdutala in Lione, non mai più volle poggiar di teatro su 'l verde e lieto ramo', and added that he himself had been 'da così grande innamorato esempio fatto savio'.⁹ But Giovan Battista did not retire from his career as actor, he did not disband the company, he did not devote the rest of his life to the celebration of the talent of his wife.

The reasons why Andreini neglected the couple-strategy and left the memory of his wife uncherished can only be speculated upon. The decision was probably related to the deterioration of the relationship between Andreini and Ramponi, perhaps caused by Andreini's extramarital affair with the actress Virginia Rotari, whom he married after Ramponi's death.¹⁰ Another reason might have been the professional jealousy that Andreini may have developed towards his wife: if this were true, the comments on the sonnets in the collection mentioned above might also be read as Andreini's dissent regarding Ramponi's qualities. Whatever the case may have been, the missed mythopoeia of Ramponi ultimately turned out to be detrimental for Andreini too.

The extent of the detriment is hard to evaluate, mainly because Ramponi's death overlapped with unfortunate historical events: on 26 December 1627 Vincenzo II, the last heir of the Gonzaga family, died, opening the way to the wars for the Mantuan succession. The rulers of Spain and Savoy and Emperor Ferdinand II fought against France and Venice to obtain control over Mantua and the Monferrato region. The conflicts were ferocious: on 18 July 1630, Mantua was sacked; Andreini's property too suffered raids. The wars ended on 13 October 1630 with the Treaty of Ratisbonne, which confirmed Carlo I Gonzaga Nevers, the claimant supported by France and Venice, as Duke of Mantua and Marquis of Monferrato. The intertwining of personal and historical tragic events emerges from Andreini's letter to the new Mantuan ruler in 1632:

⁹ Andreini, 'La Ferza', in Marotti and Romei, p. 509.

¹⁰ The year of Andreini's marriage to Rotari is uncertain. The *terminus post quem* is, of course, Ramponi's death, the *terminus ante quem* is 1652. In the opening of the Milanese edition of *La Maddalena lasciva e penitente* (1652), there are poems dedicated to the interpreters of the play in a performance in Milan that year, Eularia Coris (Maddalena), and Virginia Rotari (Marta). The latter is referred to as Andreini's wife. Moreover, in a letter written by Pietro Enrico Andreini, son of Giovan Battista and Virginia Ramponi, to the Duke of Mantua on 30 October 1654, the author writes that the news of his father's death was given to him by 'la signora Virginia detta Lidia, ultima moglie del detto defunto e matrigna dell'esponente' (Plea of Pietro Enrico Andreini to the Duke of Mantova, 30 October 1654, attached to ASMN, *Notarile*, notaio Bartolini Lodovico, 5 January 1655, bb. 1648-1654).

Provai già, serenissimo signore (colpa di guerra), nel corpo il miserabile saccheggio di quanto io possedeva in terra. Et hora provo nell'anima il nuovo irraccontabile svaligio di quanto si compiacque la morte di levarmi di custodito e di caro.¹¹

A fortiori, given the turbulent political situation, it would have been wise for Andreini to cease his performing activity and to devote himself to publishing. Yet, he kept touring in Italy and abroad, together with Rotari and sometimes in the company of his old enemies, the Cecchinis.

Andreini's life as a performer after 1630 appears to be stable, and yet breaks with the past are evident when examining his literary activity. Between 1631 and 1654, the year of his death, Andreini's encomiastic publications rocketed in number.¹² In the same years, he prepared, and addressed to influential rulers, manuscript copies of several of his works, which he delivered in person: in 1642, the manuscript of the poem *L'Olivastro* was given to the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Ferdinando II; in March 1647, a manuscript copy of the play *La Ferinda* was dedicated to Cardinal Mazarin; in 1651, the first manuscript version of *Il Convitato di Pietra* was presented to Carlo Pio of Savoy and a second manuscript version of the text, *Il nuovo risarcito Convitato di Pietra* was given to Leopoldo de' Medici.¹³ These targeted works, which show Andreini's research for patrons, are symptoms of a critical financial status.¹⁴

Andreini's numerous appeals to rulers during the last two decades of his life remained unheard. The last three surviving letters by the *comico*, written between 1650 and 1652 and addressed to Carlo II Gonzaga Nevers, are desperate pleas. He asks for Gonzaga's support in the name of the success he had, by now only a shadow of the man he used to be.¹⁵ The letter which follows, dated 7 April 1650, four years before his death, summarises the last part of his career:

¹¹ Giovan Battista Andreini, Modena, to Carlo I Gonzaga Nevers, Mantua, 1 March 1632, ASMN, *Gonzaga*, b. 1298, no pagination, transcribed in *Comici dell'Arte: Corrispondenze*, I, p. 151.

¹² In 1635, Andreini published the poem *L'Arno festeggiante* in praise of the Grand Duke of Tuscany Ferdinando II; in 1643 he published *L'Ossequio*, for Queen Anna of France; the encomiastic works *Il Vincente* and *Il Guerriero*, dedicated to the prince of Condé, and *Le Vittorie* for the Count d'Harcourt were published in 1644.

¹³ In Andreini's correspondence of this period, gifts of other encomiastic poems, 'madrigaletti' and copies of his works are mentioned. See *Comici dell'Arte: Corrispondenze*, I, pp. 152-169.

¹⁴ In 1635, Andreini was even forced to pawn his stage costumes: 'Saprà [...] l'Altezza Vostra Serenissima che l'anno passato m'andò così sinistro, che [...] feci denari sopra i migliori miei vestimenti'. Giovan Battista Andreini, Vicenza, to Carlo I Gonzaga Nevers, Mantua, 12 April 1636, ASMN, *Gonzaga*, b. 1568 fol. 313r, transcribed in *Comici dell'Arte: Corrispondenze*, I, pp. 159-160.

¹⁵ 'Solo Lelio, ricco di promissioni, povero d'effetti si ritrova [...]. Questi comici [...] furono ricompensati, né servirono se non accidentalmente, e io pur a tal servitù consumai gioventù, vecchiaia, e robba per lo saccheggio' (Giovan Battista Andreini, Ferrara, to Carlo II Gonzaga Nevers, Mantua, 7 April 1650, ASMN, *Gonzaga*, b. 1274, no pagination, transcribed in *Comici dell'Arte: Corrispondenze*, I, pp. 164-165); 'Destisi intanto la pietade (che mai non dorme nell'Altezza Vostra serenissima) a pro di Lelio, che 40 anni ha mantenuto comedie a' serenissimi Gonzaghi' (Giovan Battista Andreini, Florence, to Carlo II Gonzaga Nevers, Mantua,

Serenissima Altezza

Le poche parole, serenissima Altezza, cagionano oscurità; pertanto degnisi di porger benigno orecchio alle susseguenti cose. Lelio, per lungo tempo servitore della serenissima Casa di Vostra Altezza serenissima, nel corso degli anni suoi, corse con la sua casa Andreini felicissime fortune, sotto così felicissimo dominio. Servirono i suoi vecchi genitori il serenissimo Guglielmo e 'l serenissimo suo figlio Vincenzo [...]. Successe a cotal serenissimo servizio Lelio d'Isabella figlio, il quale, dal serenissimo primo Vincenzo sino all'ultimo Vincenzo suo figlio, le compagnie, con Florinda, a questo serenissimo servizio fece, durante la sua servitù sin al serenissimo Carlo d'immortal memoria. In cotesto così fatto tempo, di lunga e gradita servitù, Florinda di Lelio prima consorte, fu fatta degna di cantar l'*Arianna* in penuria di musiche (e siasi ciò lecito dire) con tanta ammirazione, che 'l serenissimo Ferdinando, allora cardinale, disse al serenissimo suo Vincenzo padre, che più non era dovuto che Florinda calcasse i theatri; così nobile azione per la serenissima Casa con tanto applauso fatta [...]. Hora Lelio solo vi rimane, tra lunga servitù, tra prolissi svaligi di guerre, il poco ricompensato (benché poco o nulla per sé stesso meriti) [...]. Supplica d'alcun altro salutare soccorso, onde viver possa, e prestare all'Altezza Vostra serenissima ogni suo impiego in tutto ciò che 'l conoscesse buono, per grato mostrarsi a cotanto beneficio.

Di Vostra Altezza serenissima

Humilissimo suddito e servitore

Lelio Comico Fedele¹⁶

In reviewing his professional parabola at the end of his life, Andreini presented himself as 'Lelio d'Isabella figlio' and as Ramponi's husband, thus imploring Gonzaga to grant him help in the name of Isabella and Francesco and in the name of Ramponi. The success and the honours obtained by 'Florinda, di Lelio prima consorte', neglected for twenty years, are instrumentally recalled in this letter. The *diva* is in the spotlight again; the couple, long forgotten, comes alive one more time. Yet, Andreini is now alone: 'Hora solo Lelio vi rimane'. With sorrow and awareness of his defectiveness, he can do nothing other than evoke the mighty ghosts of his past.

The story of Andreini and Ramponi captures a moment of transition. In the 1650s, the glory from which the *comici* had benefited in Italy for almost a century was fading, their golden age in its gloaming. In the second half of the seventeenth century in Italy, the favour of the audience was being re-directed towards melodrama. The coexistence of the two theatrical forms, not only possible but even beneficial for the *comici* in the first half of the

19 March 1652, ASMN, *Gonzaga*, b. 1135, no pagination, transcribed in *Comici dell'Arte: Corrispondenze*, I, pp. 168-169).

¹⁶ Giovan Battista Andreini, Due Castelli (?), to Carlo II Gonzaga Nevers, Mantua, 7 April 1650 (?), ASMN, *Gonzaga*, b. 2370, fol. 336^{r-v}, transcribed in *Comici dell'Arte: Corrispondenze*, I, pp. 166-167.

century, as had been the case with Ramponi, for example, became detrimental afterwards. Financial investments, theatre halls and season programmes in the peninsula were almost entirely devoted to music drama, more appealing than Commedia dell'Arte as a result of its technical innovations and its ideological conformity to the views of the upper classes. Opera was a sophisticated form of entertainment able to neutralise any staged content; therefore, as opposed to Commedia dell'Arte, it found no obstacles to its rise.¹⁷

Many professional actors recast themselves as opera singers on the basis of their transferable skills, while others moved beyond the Italian borders. France remained one of the favourite destinations for the *comici*. In the second half of the seventeenth century, the Neapolitan actor, singer, musician and dancer Tiberio Fiorillo, known as Scaramouche, and Domenico Biancolelli, the heir of Martinelli's mask, became the new heroes of the French artistic epopee.¹⁸ But Italian troupes also moved to England, and to Central and Eastern Europe, where they found new patrons for their art in the courts of the *Ancien Régime*.¹⁹

The double act of Ramponi and Andreini was a swan song, the final and finest theatrical product of the first half of the century. In a whirlwind of forms, themes, genres, and experiments, Andreini's absorptive theatre condensed the quintessence of his time. Ramponi, for her part, with her polytropic performance, gave life, breath and charm to his works. Together, they silenced their critics, building a double career which responded to a unitary strategy. Whether Andreini was a sincere acolyte is a question that remains open, although his skills as performer and rhetorician and the strategy behind his display of the devoutness examined in this thesis make it hard to fully believe in his religious outburst.²⁰

These performers lived both in symmetry and asymmetry with their time, concurrently mirrors of the century and precursors of innovation. They experienced a status of liminality which is peculiar to the micro-society of actors, and gives a remarkable documentary value to the biographies of theatre performers, a resource so far overlooked by historians.²¹

¹⁷ Ludovico Zorzi, *Il teatro e la città. Saggi sulla scena italiana* (Turin: Einaudi, 1977), p. 256.

¹⁸ On Tiberio Fiorillo see, for example, Siro Ferrone, *La Commedia dell'arte*, pp. 181-184 and pp. 287-290. On Domenico Biancolelli see, for example, Delia Gambelli, *Arlecchino a Parigi*, 2 vols (Rome: Bulzoni, 1993). Detailed bibliographic records on Fiorillo and Biancolelli are also available in the online A.M.At.I. database.

¹⁹ See Robert Henke, 'Border-Crossing in the *Commedia dell'Arte*', in *Transnational Exchange in Early Modern Theater*, pp. 19-34, and *Commedia dell'Arte in Context*, pp. 65-129.

²⁰ Sarah Ross, too, argues that the conversion narrative as an interpretative paradigm for Andreini is problematic and considers the 'retention of an impish spirit, a delight in exaggerations that entertain while edifying, even in devotional settings' as 'another aspect of innovation in the seventeenth-century *commedia dell'arte*'. See Ross, 'Playing Milan', pp. 225-226.

²¹ Claudio Meldolesi argued that the professional actor lives an 'asimmetria rispetto ai livelli di cultura del suo tempo' and denounced the 'omissione delle fonti attoriche dal catalogo della storia generale' in his essay, 'La microsocietà degli attori', p. 103.

In light of the historical value of the experience of the *comici*, the present study points at new directions: the agency of professional actresses, for example, equal to, and sometimes even greater than, that of their male colleagues, deserves further investigation as a surprising and pioneering social phenomenon, especially when considered against the background of early modern conduct prescriptivism for women. The value of the strategy of Andreini and Ramponi as a couple, and the afterlife of the couple-strategy in the entertainment industry, merits examination as part of the wider legacy of *comici dell'Arte* today. But these are matters for further and future studies.

This thesis intended to present a new path for the study of theatre, which, by looking at the career of actors in context, aims to fruitfully connect theatre, history and society. A path, we hope, that will be walked by many in the future.

CHRONOLOGY¹

GIOVAN BATTISTA ANDREINI

VIRGINIA RAMPONI

1576 Born in Florence		1583 Born in Liguria (?)
1600 Performs in Rome with the Gelosi		
	1601 Marriage (?)	
	1604 Attend gatherings of the Accademia degli Spensierati, Florence	
Presents <i>La Florinda</i> at the Spensierati Publishes <i>La Florinda</i> , <i>La Saggia Egiziana</i> , <i>La Divina Visione</i>		Performs passages of <i>La Florinda</i> and of other plays at the Spensierati
	1605 Membership of the company patronised by the Duke of Mantua	
	1606 Performances in Milan	
Publishes <i>Il Pianto d'Apollo</i>		Performs privately for the Governor of Milan
	1607 Performances in Mantua and Bologna	
	1608 Performances in Mantua and Bologna	

¹ This chronology, which is not intended to be exhaustive, reports the major movements and events in the career of Andreini and Ramponi traced on the basis of archival material. This reconstruction also benefits from the biographical notes on the actors included in the A.M.At.I. database.

Perform at the festivities for the wedding of Francesco IV Gonzaga and Margherita of Savoy

Performs the title role in the melodrama *Arianna*

1609

Performances in Parma, Milan, Turin

Birth of their son Pietro Enrico

Performs in *Le Trasformazioni di Millefonti* in Turin

1610

Performances in Mantua, Venice, Ferrara

Publishes the poem *La Maddalena*

1611

Performances in Casale Monferrato, Genoa, Parma, Rome (?), Bologna

Publishes the comedy *La Turca*

Performs in Andreini's *La Turca* and in the melodrama *Il Rapimento di Proserpina* in Casale

1612

Performances in Ferrara, Milan, Florence

Publishes *Prologo in dialogo fra Momo e la Verità* and the comedy *Lo Schiavetto*

1613

Performances in Ferrara, Milan, Turin, Chambéry, Lyon, Paris

Publishes the religious play *L'Adamo*

Negotiates to obtain the leadership of the French *tournée*

1614-1616

Performances in Paris, Mantua, Milan

1617

Performances in Mantua, Ferrara

Publishes *L'Ersilio Pastore*, *La Fama Consolatrice* and the religious play *La Maddalena*

Performs in *La Maddalena* for the wedding of Ferdinando Gonzaga with Caterina de' Medici

1618

Performances in Mantua, Milan, Bologna

Publishes *Le Composizioni funebri in morte della Serenissima Margherita Gonzaga*

1619

Performances in Ferrara, Brescia, Verona, Venice

Publishes *La Venetiana* dedicated to Domenico Fetti

1620

Performances in Mantua, Venice, Milan, Turin

Publishes *Il Mincio ubbidiente*, *Intermedio* [...] *nella celebrazione del real sostegno del Mincio*, and the tragicomedy *Il Lelio bandito*
Starts an affair with Virginia Rotari

1621

Performances in Paris

Publishes the comedy *La Campanazza* under the name 'Giovanni Rivani'

1622

Performances in Paris, Mantua, Paris

Publishes five plays in Paris: *La Centaura*, *La Ferinda*, *Amor nello specchio*, *La Sultana*, and *Li duo Leli simili* Performs side by side to her husband's lover, Virginia Rotari, as co-protagonist of Andreini's new plays

1623

Performances in Paris, Venice, Turin

Publishes the comedy *Le due comedie in comedia*, the religious poem *La Tecla vergine e martire*, the *Prologo per recitare nel Teatro di Luigi Giustiniano*, and *Prologo* for the King of France Louis XIII and the Princess Cristina di Borbone.

1624-1626

Performances in Paris, Mantua, Cremona

Publishes *Comici martiri e penitenti* which was transformed into *Il Teatro Celeste* in 1625, *Lo Specchio*, *La Ferza*, and *L'inchino per la novella servitù della nuova compagnia de' Comici*.

1627-1629

Performances in Venice, Prague, Vienna

Publish *Il congedo, o Ver l'addio di Florinda comica*

Publishes a new version of both the poem and the play on Mary Magdalene

Is defined by the Archduchess Maria Anna 'La miglior comica di tutta l'Italia'

1630-1631

Publishes the poem *Il Conflitto*, *L'Himeneo* and the religious poem *Il Penitente alla Santissima Vergine del Rosario*

Dies, the place and the exact date are unknown

1632

Is in Modena and Bologna

Publishes the tragicomedy *La Rosella*

1633-1634

Performances in Mantua and Parma

Publishes the religious poem *Le cinque rose del giardino di Berico* and the comedy *Li duo baci*

1635-1636

Performances in Venice and Florence

Publishes the encomiastic poem *L'Arno festeggiante*

1638-1639

Publishes the plays *La Rosa* and *L'Ismenia*

1640-41

Is in Perugia, Lucca, Pisa, and Bologna

Writes *Il Litigio*, delivers in person the manuscript of the poem *L'Olivastro* to the Grand Duke of Tuscany Ferdinando II in Florence

1643-1647

Performances in Paris

Publishes the encomiastic works *L'Ossequio*, for the Queen Anna, *Il Vincente* and *Il Guerriero*, dedicated to the prince of Condé, and *Le Vittorie* for the Count d'Harcourt. Publishes *Lilla piangente* and another religious poem on Mary Magdalene, *Le Lagrime*, dedicated to King Luigi XIII. Delivers to Cardinal Mazarin a manuscript copy of the play *La Ferinda*

1648-1652

Is in Udine, Ferrara, and Florence

Publishes the religious work *Il Cristo sofferente*. Writes *Il Convitato di Pietra* and gives one manuscript copy to Carlo Pio of Savoy and a second manuscript version of the text, *Il nuovo risarcito Convitato di Pietra* to Leopoldo de' Medici

Participates in the *mise en scène* of *La Maddalena lasciva e penitente*, his last dramatisation of the story of Mary Magdalene, and publishes the play in 1652

1654

Dies at the Osteria del Giglio in Reggio Emilia

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