
The present study is part of a series titled “The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe,” whose goal is to retrieve the writings of the “other voice” in contradistinction to the voice of educated men “who created Western culture.” Other Italian women who have been studied in this series are Laura Cereta, Moderata Fonte, Cecilia Ferrazzi, Tullia D’Aragona, Antonia Pulci. The premise that the voice of women writers and philosophers emerged against a backdrop of a three-thousand year history of misogyny rooted in the civilizations of western culture gives rise to the magnificent essay “The Mysoginist Tradition, 500 B.C.E. - 1500 C.E.,” which introduces this translation of selected correspondence and poetry by Franco. This important critical, historical and textual document for teachers and students targets peak moments in the historical development of Western women’s cultural accomplishments and consciousness. The contributions of Renaissance women intellectuals like Franco are thus better contextualized and understood. A diverse range of subjects such as “Greek Philosophy and Female Nature,” “Roman Law and the Female Condition,” “Christian Doctrine and Women’s Place,” “The Image of Women in Medieval Literature,” women’s roles in family and Church, “The Humanist Foundation,” “Women Patrons,” problems relating to chastity, speech, and knowledge, both trace the contours of misogyny and provide valuable assessments of the humanist texts that aided in moving forward critiques of misogynist attitudes. Jones and Rosenthal demonstrate how, by calling authors, texts, and ideas into question, the Humanist movement made possible the reexamination of the intellectual tradition from the Greeks. Thus, the movement in time proved to be a vital catalysts for extricating women—even if minimally at first—from cultural prejudice and social subordination. In the conclusion the essay notes that the pioneers of female education were not men, but rather women humanists successful through their own capacities in attaining a breadth of education equivalent to that of prominent men. Because numerous women of diverse classes were educated to the same standards as male leaders (often their fathers or brothers), they were able to raise their voice to claim their dignity as human beings, equal to men legally, morally and intellectually. And yet, Western cultural history bears witness to the fact that until 1700 and beyond, the voice of women and that of men on their behalf, remained only dimly audible. At the same time it is not possible to estimate how much of the realignment of social institutions occurring in the modern ages owes to these early voices.

The present study offers a translation of 17 of Veronica Franco’s “Familiar Letters to Various People” of the year 1580. The major segment of the text contains a very fine translation of Franco’s “Poems in Terza Rima” divided into 25 Capitoli, each preceded by a brief prose summary. The Italian is usefully given on the opposite page. A substantial bibliography of primary and secondary texts is appended at the conclusion.
The editors' introduction "The Honoured Courtesan," provides a biography and cultural context for Franco's letters and poems, where she dramatizes her connections with men friends employing her skill with sexual and rhetorical nuancing. Franco's letters shed light on her intricate biography and her many social concerns. Although much of her correspondence is concerned with legal matters (her economic situation, her wills, her Venetian Inquisition trials accusing her of practising incantations), nevertheless the chosen selections show an important portion of the wide spectrum of social connections that enriched and also complicated Franco’s personal and cultural life.

Letter 22 is of particular interest as it focuses on one of Franco’s main lifelong concerns—the condition of the woman in Venetian society. In her lucid depiction of the life, responsibilities, risks, and sacrifices of being a respected and honoured courtesan, Franco responds to a mother’s inquiry for advice by stating that only an evil mother would wish for her daughter to become a courtesan because “among all the world calamities, this is the worst.” Franco’s high regard for a good marriage was informed by her deep concern for women, whether single, unwed mothers or penitent prostitutes, whose need for shelters she repeatedly reiterated to the Venetian government. Situated just after a rich body of critical material on Franco in the past decade, Franco’s poetry and letters, translated so accurately into the idiomatic diction of today, are especially welcome. The realism, the immediacy, and concerns of the original, mirror in a telling way the feminist predicaments of today.

This study represents an important addition to the Series not only because of the expert use of English to convey the letter and spirit of the Italian original, not only because it enriches the stock of Italian Renaissance texts in translation suited to cultural studies, gender/women’s studies, and the several related fields, but also because it continues to consolidate the discourse affirming that women’s voices must be recognized as sources and origins of the maturing feminist tradition, and of the restructuring of social institutions taking place in our contemporary societies.

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Exploration of the breadth of Cosimo de’ Medici’s cultural policies is the focus of this gather of papers presented for the session, ‘Culture and Politics in Ducal Florence’ at the Renaissance Society of America Conference, Los Angeles, March 26, 1999. Collectively, its contributors move us beyond the welter of propagandistic programmes of ducal self-fashioning expressed in acres of fresco, sculptural montage, architecture and apparati. In these engaging case studies, the broader effects of ducal patronage across society are explored. Dissenting voices,