
Querelle des Femmes and Women's Right to Education

Moderata Fonte and Arcangela Tarabotti

Project Vox

The *Querelles des Femmes* or 'The Woman Question'

- The *Querelles des Femmes* is a series of debates from the 14th century to 17th century that occurred across Europe.
- The debates asked, 'What is the nature of a woman?' or, more frequently, 'Are women inferior to men?' 'Should women be educated?' 'What rights do women have?'



The Wedding Feast at Cana by unknown 16th century Venetian artist

Historical Context: Counter-Reformation



Roman Catholic Council of Trent 1596

From *Examinis Concilii Tridentini per D.D. Martinum Chemnicium scripti opus integrum : quatuor partes ... uno volumine complectens* by Martin Chemnitz

- The **Protestant Reformation** took place across Central and Western Europe.
- Those who led the Reformation were particularly outraged by the abuse of **indulgences** or a payment made to reduce the penance given to a sinner.
- In response, the Protestant Reformation rejected the authority of the Pope and many traditions of the Church.
- The **Catholic Counter-Reformation** was a response to the Protestant Reformation of the early 16th century.

Historical Context: Printing Press



16th century printing press by Tolnai
korabeli kép alapngmfcján

- In the 16th century, Venice adopted the **printing press**.
- After the success of the Protestant Reformation, Catholic leaders in Venice increased the printing of Catholic texts.
- The production of literature backing the Counter-Reformation called for Catholic values in the home. The virtuous woman was asked to be chaste, modest, obedient, and complementary to their household and husband.

Moderata Fonte

(1555-1592)

- Fonte is a well known Venetian writer. She wrote romantic and biblical sonnets, ballads, dialogues, and dramatic plays.
- Fonte is recognized today as a philosopher and feminist writer.
- In her work, Fonte argues that women have the right to an education.



Moderata Fonte (Modesta Dal Pozzo, 1555-1592). The frontispiece of *Il merito delle donne*. Venezia, Domenico Imberti, 1600.

The Worth of Women: Wherein Is Clearly Revealed Their Nobility and Superiority to Men (1600)



- *The Worth of Women* is a dialogue between seven Venetian women who discuss the abuse women face in light of the widely held belief that women are, by nature, inferior to men.
- This text is a direct response to Giuseppe Passi's 1598 anti-woman text entitled, *The Defects of Women*.

Left: Moderata Fonte (Modesta Dal Pozzo, 1555-1592). The frontispiece of *Il merito delle donne*. Venezia, Domenico Imberti, 1600.

Arcangela Tarabotti

(1604-1652)

- Tarabotti is a Venetian philosopher and feminist writer.
- Tarabotti was born unable to walk. In the eyes of her father, her condition made her unsuitable for marriage and at the age of eleven, she was sent to the Benedictine Convent of Sant'Anna.
- Tarabotti spent her life arguing against **forced monachization**: the practice of placing women, who do not have religious callings, into convents.
- Tarabotti criticized her insufficient schooling and argued that all women deserve an education.



No known image exists of Arcangela Tarabotti. This image is a portrait of a nun in Italy in the 17th century: *A Nun Saint*. Simone Pignoni. Italy, 1611-1698.

Paternal Tyranny (1654)

- *Paternal Tyranny* critiques parents who use convents to rid themselves of their unmarried daughters. In this text, Tarabotti argues that all women are deserving of education and that men are not intellectually superior to women.
- Despite her best efforts, including sending copies to France, this provocative text was not published in Tarabotti's lifetime.



The Virgin Reading. Painted by Vittorino Carpaccio. Published in Venice, 1505-1510.