

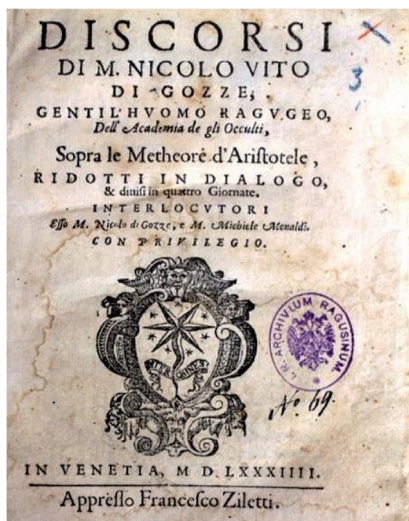
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***Don't You Now See the Excellence of Our Sex?* Maria Gondola and Defence of Women's Rights in 16th Century Dubrovnik**

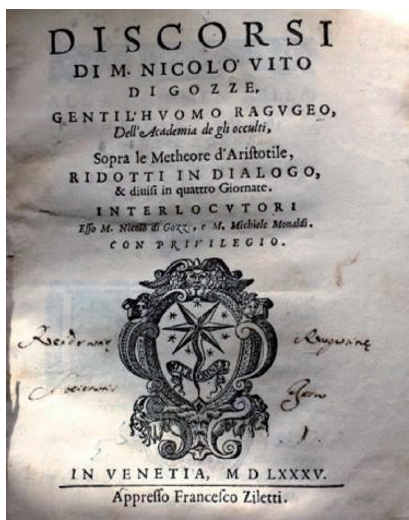
ABSTRACT: Bakić Jelena, *Don't You Now See the Excellence of Our Sex? Maria Gondola and Defence of Women's Rights in 16th Century Dubrovnik*. "Poznańskie Studia Slawistyczne" 11. Poznań 2015. Publishing House of the Poznań Society for the Advancement of the Arts and Sciences, pp. 233–248. ISSN 2084-3011.

During the 16th century in Dubrovnik (Ragusa), the female voice was rarely heard in public, and women (especially those of higher ranks) were mainly confined to a life within the household. However, a special voice belonged to Marija Gundulić (Maria Gondola), who wrote in Italian about the "defence of the female sex" and discussed female spirit and mind, female nature, and intellect in a dedicatory text to the book *Discorsi di M. Nicolò Vito di Gozze, gentil'huomo ragugeo, Dell'Academia de gli occulti, sopra le Metheore d'Aristotele, Ridotti in dialogo & divisi in quattro giornate*, by Nikola Gučetić (Nicolò Vito di Gozze) (Venice, 1584/1585). In this paper, I focus on two versions of the text of the dedication. Written in defence of the honour of the woman poet Cvijeta Zuzorić (Fiore/a Zuzzori) and women in general, Gondola criticizes the false morality and hypocrisy of Dubrovnik society, and as such, the first version of this book was censored. The book was published again one year later in 1585, with a revised dedication – one and a half pages shorter. The importance of this work is twofold. In the first place, it is the only written (or at least preserved) work by Gondola. Moreover, it represents the first female voice in defence of women's rights at the east shore of the Adriatic. Comparing the two versions of the book's dedication, this paper will attempt to answer questions regarding the importance of women's authorship, and the important influence of power and censorship in the 16th century Dubrovnik.

KEYWORDS: Marija Gundulić (Maria Gondola); Cvijeta Zuzorić (Fiore Zuzzori); Dubrovnik (Ragusa); the 16th century; dedicatory epistle; female authorship



The frontispiece of the first edition of *Discorsi Gozze*, 1584



The frontispiece of *Discorsi Gozze*, 1585

“Don’t you now see the excellence of our sex?”¹ is the question Maria Gondola² asked in the dedicatory text to the two editions of the book *Discorsi di M. Nicolò Vito di Gozze, gentil’huomo Ragugeo, Dell’Academia de gli occulti, Sopra*

¹ All translations from Italian to English are mine, unless otherwise specified. Due to the limited words number, the original Italian version is not provided.

In this article, I will use the Italian version of all names (only in abstract I use both versions), as the Italian/Roman was the form they used to sign their work written in Italian, and also assigned to them as interlocutors. Moreover, the Ragusan administration in 16th century was Roman and in all archival documents I consulted, to the Slavic names and surnames officially were given Italianized forms. To use both versions of their names was the result of Roman-Slavic symbiosis, but also it was an important mark of social distinction. The Italian/Roman versions I will use are: Maria Gondola (Marija Gundulić), Nicolò Vito di Gozze (Nikola Vitov Gučetić) Fiora/e Zuzzori (Cvijeta Zuzorić), Esperanza di Bona (Nada Bunić). See: Vekarić 2011.

² Marija Ivan Gundulić or Maria Ivan Gondola (Gondula), with variants of her name Maruscia, Mara and surname Gondula or Gundula, married to Nicolò Vito di Gozze, was born around 1557. Maria and Nicolò di Gozze had a son named Vido (Vid/Vito) Gučetić, who died in Ancon on the 5th February 1612 (Pantić 1983: 126). About Maria Gondola there is not enough archival data; her name was mentioned in a business book: *Amministrazione Niccolo e Maruscia di Gozze*, but apart from mentioning her name on the cover, the name does not appear anywhere else in the manuscript. See: Janeković-Römer 2009: 37–54.

*le Metheore d'Aristotile, Ridotti in dialogo & divisi in quattro giornate. Interlocutori Esso M. Nicolò di Gozze, e M. Michiele Monaldi*³.

This book is written by her husband, Nicolò Vito di Gozze (1549–1610)⁴, a philosopher, statesman, and writer, “the greatest Ragusan eclectic and compiler” (Novak 2008: 180–184)⁵. The dedicatee is Fiore Zuzzori, a poet, muse, inspiration, “the first female myth in Ragusa” (Fališevac 2007: 24); a woman, in Maria Gondola’s words, “no less beautiful than she is virtuous and gentle” (Gondola, in Gozze 1584)⁶. The dedication of the first edition of the book is signed by Maria Gondola on July 15th, 1582, therefore it is possible to assume that the book was written in the same year, although published in 1584. The revised version of the dedicatory text is dated March 27th, 1585, and the book is published in the same year.

The place and the dedicator in both editions are the same: Ragusa and Maria Gondola. Although it was the second edition of the book, there is no sign on the cover or frontispiece indicating that fact⁷. After a close reading analysis of both versions of the book, a number of scholars (Zaninović 1953; Marković 1970; Šimunković-Rožman 1998; Vidan 1998; Janeković-Romer 2004; Novak 2009: 678, 693, 2008; Fališevac 2007) have concluded that they differ only in the content of the dedicatory epistle written by Maria Gondola⁸.

³First edition: In Venetia, MDLXXXIII, appresso Francesco Ziletti. The second edition is published one year later, within the same publishing house.

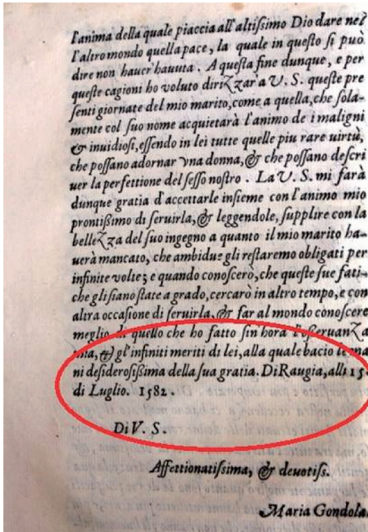
⁴M. Nicolò Vito di Gozze, *Gentil'huomo ragugeo, Dell'Accademia de gli Occulti*. When signing his books written in Italian he mentioned his noble origin and belonging to the academic circle, the Academy of Occults, and in Latin he signed as “patrius Reipublicae Ragusinae”. For the catalogue of his books possible to find in Italian archives and libraries see: <http://edit16.iccu.sbn.it/web_iccu/imaain.htm>, 19.01.2015. On Gučetić's life and work, see: Šifler-Premec 1977.

⁵Novak points out the non-originality of some of di Gozze's work, naming his method “perfect and masked compilation” (2008: 181). He suggests that in *Dialogo della bellezza e Dialogo dell'amore secondo la mente di Platone* (1581), di Gozze was compiling the ideas of Paduan philosopher Agostino Nifo (1469–1538) using the ideas from his book *De pulchro libr.* (1531).

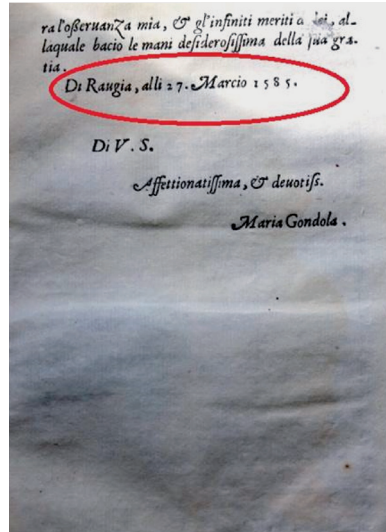
⁶The pages of the dedicatory epistle are without numeration. All quoted parts are taken from the first version of the dedicatory text, published in 1584.

⁷In the other works by Nicolò Vito di Gozze with two editions, it is usually written “Nuovamente posto in luce” – “republished”.

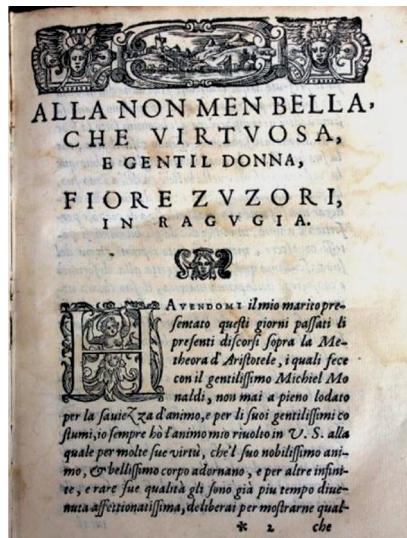
⁸There are also small differences on the title page, in two transcriptions of Aristotle's name, and a difference in the size of the letters: “de gli Occulti/de gli occulti; d'Aristotele/d'Aristotile”.



The dedicatory epistle dated
on 15th July 1582



The dedicatory epistle dated
on 27th March 1585



The first page of the dedicatory epistle (second edition), 1585

The first version of the dedication is 13 pages long, and the next edition is shortened by 1.5 pages – precisely 430 words. Both versions of the book are preserved, and it is possible to find them in both Italian and Croatian libraries and archives. Written in Italian, until today the book has not been entirely translated to Croatian, or to English⁹.

This dedication, as well as the book, should be analysed together with another Gozze's book published just one year before the *Discorsi sopra le Metheore d'Aristotile* (1584) was finished. It is his book of Neo-Platonist dialogues on love and beauty, *Dialogo della Bellezza detto Antos e Dialogo dell'amore detto Antos secondo la mente di Platone* (Gozze 1581)¹⁰ whose originality and novelty for Ragusan context lies in the choice of the two interlocutors, rather than in the main ideas, mainly compiled from the work of Italian philosophers (Novak 2008). The interlocutors are two women, Maria Gondola and her friend Fiore Zuzzori. The author of the book decides to dedicate it to a third woman, Fiore's older sister Nika¹¹ and gives the explanation for it: "and because it was always the costume, anyone who wanted to make any of his works public, to show to the world the flowers and the fruits of his genius, would often dedicate it to the person he loved with the greatest love, or because of some other worthy cause" (Gozze 1581: no pagination). But not surprisingly, although dedicated to Nika, the real dedicatee is possible to read from the very title, as "Antos" in Greek means flower. Fiore once again became the addressee, supposed to be the best reader of the book. Probably, it was easier to choose Nika, as Fiore, being one of the interlocutors, could not take the role of the dedicatee at the same time.

⁹The forthcoming edition of *Other Voice in Early Modern Europe* is dedicated to *Renaissance Women's Writing between the Two Shores of the Adriatic*, and includes the translation into English of this dedicatory epistle. Ed. and intro. Francesca Maria Gabrielli, trans. Shannon McHugh, Melissa Swain, and Francesca Maria Gabrielli.

¹⁰Nuovamente posto in luce. Apresso Francesco Ziletti, MDLXXXI. Dedication: "Alla molto mag.ca signora mia osservandissima Nika Zuzori, in Ancona" (Gozze 1581: no pagination). V. Cox mentioned this dialogue under the reference "quasi – documentary dialogues". See: Cox 2013c: 81–82.

¹¹Within the Italian context, the dialogues with female interlocutors were quite present in the 16th century literature. Cox has given a number, which should not be taken as a definitive one of "fifty-nine Italian dialogues featuring female speakers produced between 1437 and 1628". See: Cox 2013c: 82.

The dedication of the book, as the pre-textual opening space, represents direct communication from the author to the public, and would always include “offering the work as a token of esteem to a person, a real or ideal group, or some other type of entity” (Genette 1997: 117). To dedicate a book to someone was the common practice in the early modern times, but usually the dedicatory text was written by the authors of the book, or by printmakers, curators, or publishers¹². Moreover, the common practice was to choose the rich and powerful protectors as the dedicatees of the work, making the dedication a “tribute that was remunerated” (Genette 1997: 119). However, it was always the matter of relationship, “whether intellectual or personal, actual or symbolic, ...always at the service of the work” (Genette 1997: 135).

Here we have a case where one woman dedicates the book written by third person (her husband) to another woman (their friend)¹³. This important space of the book is given to Maria Gondola by the author of the book. Or perhaps it is better to say that Maria Gondola assumes the responsibility for the text of the dedication. Her role of dedicator is connected with at least two things: the year of publication and the dedicatees’ “fate”, as the content of the dedication does not mention anything about the work it opens, apart from the title and the name of the interlocutors. In the first place, this text pledges and defends Fiore Zuzzori, and in addition it “pulls out”, in Maria’s words, “these present discourses on the protection, or defence of the female sex” (Gondola, in Gozze 1584). But it is important to highlight that although dedicated to a concrete person, this text cannot be taken to be a reliable source about social, cultural, and general historical contexts. It can, however, still provide us with some useful information about the nature of social relationships, cultural and social context, and power relations. Maria Gondola uses the philosophical authority of her husband to make a case for a social critique against strict Ragusan societal

¹²As it is pointed out in the article by M.A. Terzoli, “I margini dell’opera nei libri di poesia: Strategie e convenzioni dedicatorie nel Petrarchismo italiano” (Terzoli 2010).

¹³This practice was common in Italian peninsula, Cox (2008) mentioned that in 16th century in Italian peninsula, there were over 200 women writers who published their work. Among these works she selected the list of dedications of published works by women, which was not intended to be comprehensive, but which counted 21 dedications to the other woman (Cox 2008, 247–254).

rules. Using three male authorities: her husband, Aristotle, and the poet Monaldi¹⁴ — in order to get printed and published, Gondola at the very beginning gives us her explanation of the reason to write this text, laying out the important personal relationships, as well as citing the authorities:

Being introduced by my husband to the discourses, on Aristotle's *Meteorologica*, which he conducted in these days with the very gentle Michele Monaldi, never praised enough for the wisdom of his soul, nor for his very gentle customs (...) I decided to show a few signs of this, my inner and continuous attachment, to show it not to you, as you already know it, but to the world, to introduce these discourses, to which I was introduced by my husband, that courageously appear among men escorted by your honourable name... (Gondola, in Gozze 1584).

The “honourable name” in question is Fiore (“fiore” in Italian means “flower”, cvijet – Cvijeta). Following the Christian, *Dolce Stil Novo*, or Petrarchian tradition¹⁵, where “nomen becomes omen”, the emblem of the flower is used to signify love, beauty and femininity. Fiore's name appears throughout the text as respectable, fatal testimony of divine virtues, defense against strokes, and “(...) the perfect witness, almost fatal, that it was locked in the light and splendour of the divine virtues of her graceful mantle” (Gondola, in Gozze 1584).

Fiora/e Zuzzori (1552–1648)¹⁶ was born in Ragusa, and later went to Ancon, where she died at the age of 96. There she, as well as her sisters and brothers, had the possibility to gain an education different from the one typically reserved for women at the east shore of the Adriatic. After marrying

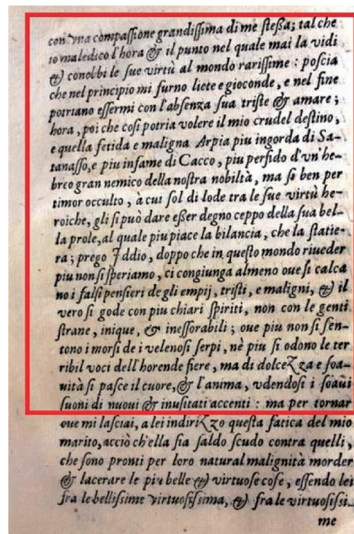
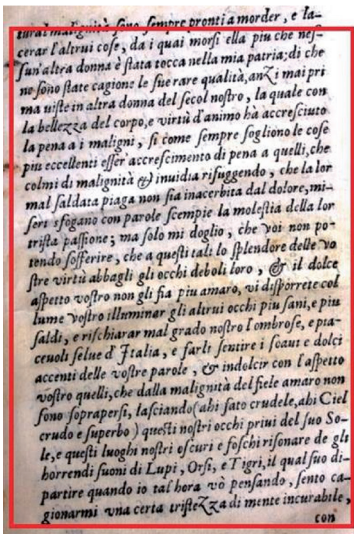
¹⁴Michele Monaldi (1540–1592), the poet and philosopher, friend of Nicolò Vito di Gozze. His poetry *Rime del Sign. Michele Monaldi* (1599) and the book of ten philosophical dialogues: *Irene, ovvero della bellezza et Dell'Haveve, et della Metafisica – Dialoghi Del Signor Michele Monaldi* (1599), are published after his death.

¹⁵This was common strategy in defending the female “excellence” during early modern time. For example, in Marinella's influential book *The Nobility and Excellence of Women, and the Defects and Vices of Men*, 1999 there is a chapter entitled: “On the nobility of the names given to the female sex”, where we can read: “We may affirm therefore, without any doubt, that the more dignified and honored the name, the nobler and more remarkable the object. Who will ever deny that the feminine sex is adorned with worthier and more illustrious names than the masculine sex?” (Marinella 1999: 45).

¹⁶About this and the other research on Cvijeta Zuzorić and poems dedicated to her by Torquato Tasso, Cesare Simonetti, Dominko Zlatarić, Dinko Ranjina, Miho Monaldi see: Marković 1970; Torbarina 1931; Tadić 1948; Fališevac 2007. For bibliography see: <<http://knjizenstvo.etf.bg.ac.rs/sr-lat/authors/cvijeta-zuzoric>>, 19.01.2015.

Italian merchant Bartolomeo Pescioni in 1570, they came together to Ragusa where he became the Florentine consul, and stayed there until 1583. After this date, we do not have any proof of Fiore's presence at the eastern part of the Adriatic shore. She enjoyed a considerable reputation in her native Ragusa, but at the same time she was rejected and criticized by others. The reasons for this are only speculated upon, as many things from her life remain unknown. Among that speculation, "envy as the enemy of virtue" is the commonest. In the line with Neo-Platonist ideas, Fiore's corporeal beauty connected with her inner beauty, in Gondola's words are the reason enough to be envied, "(...) beauty of her body, and the virtues of soul, made evil people suffer, as it always happens that excellent things foment rancour in those who are full of evilness and envy" (Gondola, in Gozze 1584). But her name, in Gondola's words, "so worthy and respectable, should be the most secure defence against impudent strokes by the envious and those who, because of their own and natural malignity are always ready to bite and rip apart other people's things" (Gondola, in Gozze 1584).

Immediately after these words, one and a half pages of the text are omitted in the second edition of the book.



Firstly, Maria accuses a “cruel destiny and superb heavens” (Gondola, in Gozze 1584) because Fiore left Ragusa “to resound with horrible sounds of Wolves, Bears and Tigers” (Gondola, in Gozze 1584), and she remained without her best friend. Maria expresses a self-compassion, and sometimes uses this text as a tool of self-presentation. The influence of Petrarch is more than obvious, which is possible to read from the passage where Gondola writes about Fiore’s leaving from Ragusa:

(...) and now and then when I am thinking about your departure I feel such a sadness in my mind which is impossible to cure, together with enormous compassion towards myself; that I curse the hour and the place when I saw and met you, on the earth very rare (Gondola, in Gozze 1584).

But still she hopes to see Fiore again, only this time in a place where it is not possible to hear the terrible voices of these horrendous wild beasts. Maria laments the fact that Fiore will illuminate with her splendour other “healthier and steadier eyes” (Gondola, in Gozze 1584), Italian eyes, and that she will:

(...) despite us, make brighter those shady and pleasant Italian woods, and they will hear the pleasing and sweet accent of your words, and you will make sweeter, with your appearance, those who are not overwhelmed by the mischievousness of bitterness (Gondola, in Gozze 1584).

She uses powerful imagery to contrast Ragusans and Italians, and then finishes with a bit of hope:

I pray God, as in this world there is no hope that we see each other, to connect us, at least where false, blasphemous, sad, and malicious thoughts are a hindrance, and where the truth is relished with more illustrious souls, not with hopeless, unjust and cruel people; where no more is it possible to feel the bites of the poisonous snakes, nor is it possible to hear the terrible voices of these horrendous wild beasts, but where the heart is satisfied by sweetness and softness, and the soul, by hearing the pleasing sounds of new and unusual accents (Gondola, in Gozze 1584).

It should be noted that the same idea, the possibility that Fiore could leave Ragusa with her husband, is present in *Dialogo dell'amore* (Gozze 1581: 24). In the dialogue, Maria at one moment says to Fiore that sometimes her heart has a premonition of a bad future, and if it happened that Fiore left Ragusa, she would prefer death, praying God to take her life.

Fiore answers that she could not live without her dear “Gondolina” either, and that she too would prefer to die together (Gozze 1581: 24).

The text of the dedication continues here with 15 examples on the next 6 pages of illustrious women from the history of ancient Rome and Greece, which Maria uses as a proof of female genius and female equality or superiority¹⁷. She also explains why this list is important, stating: “I believe, women should have some recommended encomium in order to shut the mouths of those who are their detractors, and open their eyes to reason” (Gondola, in Gozze 1584). In explaining the reasons which made her “pull out these present discourses on the protection, or defence of the female sex”, she speaks not only about speculative letters (supported by the exempla, those powerful arguments in early modern time), but also about weapons: the catalogue of illustrious women finishes by mentioning the heroic lives of the then-very-popular Amazons. The rhetorical technique of the exemplum together with the analogy was highly popular during the early modern time, and it was used “to provide clarification of the general statement and to demonstrate the truth of the general statement” (Lyons 1989: X).

After mentioning all these examples, she asked: “Don’t you see the excellence of our sex?” (Gondola, in Gozze 1584) Among the philosophical

¹⁷“Ancient women, who were wise, both in Rome and in Greece”, mentioned by Gondola were used also in the other early modern texts as the proof of the female superiority or equality. For example in 1600 Lucrezia Marinella mentioned some of the exempla we find in Gondola’s text. The exempla used by Gondola are: Arete of Cyrene (the daughter of Aristippus); Themistoclea (Theoclea); Pythagoras’ daughter; Carmenta, wife (SIC) of Evander, Axiothea of Phlius and Lastheneia (or Lasthenia) of Mantinea (Plato’s students); Lydian queen Mirthis; Cornifacia; Lelia Sabina (Silla’s daughter); Cornelia Scipionis Africana (Gracchi mother); Chelia; Porcia (Cato’s daughter); Aretofila Cirenea,; Camma di Galatia; the list which she finishes, at the time very popular Amazons. All of them are “elevated” because of knowledge, and, of course, of some kind of connection with men. The most complete analysis on the influential texts, and of this dedication in general is done by Z. Janeković-Römer (2004: 105–123). Janeković-Römer suggests that Gondola did not read Boccaccio, but that she used it from second resources, and moreover she discovered that majority of the exempla are compiled by Antonio de Guevara, *Reloj de Principes* (Valladolid 1529). However, it is important to mention that some same exempla and same sentences we find in Camilla’s *Herculiana, Letters on Natural Philosophy* (1584), Krakow, Poland, published the same year as Maria Gondola’s dedicatory epistle. See: Ray 2015: 114. The author gives hypothesis that *Herculiana* (Erculiani) could have known Gondola/Gozze text, which in my opinion should be excluded as the option, rather the same influence should be searched in the previous literature.

authorities she invokes, we first find Plato and his *Phaedrus*, quoted as authority for the statement that “the clear evidence of the beauty of the soul is the beauty of the body” (Gondola, in Gozze 1584). The widely accepted theory on four humours she uses in a different way. Accepting that damp and cold humours correspond to women and dry and hot to men, Gondola writes relating on Aristotle:

Where Aristotle said, that those who are made of tender flesh are more inclined to mental work, because the soul operates upon the corporeal instrument, the constitution when tender, that is to say humid and hot, or humid and cold, is more apt to receive that which is not possible when the constitution is dry and hot, as it is in the male sex: by this mechanism, therefore, it is concluded that women are more perfect than men (Gondola, in Gozze 1584).

Gondola's main idea in defending the female sex is sometimes contradictory. In some passages, she claims that women are superior to men, and immediately after, “that our sex is perfect, and also the sex of their species is perfect, so it is not possible to say in an absolute way, that one is worthier than the other” (Gondola, in Gozze 1584). Gondola accepted the Aristotelian and Galen's doctrine, one of the bases of misogyny for the next several centuries, but interpreted it differently. She concedes that the female body is softer and more docile, but argues that as such it can feel more and is more suited than men's to intellectual things, emphasizing that the beauty of body is the clear proof of the beauty of soul¹⁸.

In concluding the dedication, Gondola hopes that Fiore will do her the favour of “(...) accepting these words together with my soul always ready to be at your service”, knowing that just by reading with the beauty of her intellect she will “fill any gap possibly made by my husband” (Gondola, in Gozze 1584). Attached and devoted, Gondola promises at the end that she will write a new encomium for Fiore, once she gets to know that she liked those “efforts of her husband” (Gondola, in Gozze 1584); however, if she ever did so, no record of it survives.

Three specific points regarding reception, veracity, and censorship may be worth emphasising, apart from the general one regarding female

¹⁸ However, also the contradictions in defending the female sex in the context of *querelle des femmes* were common practice in early modern writings both by men and women. See: Kelso 1956: 281–284.

authorship and their place in the public sphere of Ragusa. The first regards the reception of such texts. The dedicatory text, written in Italian, could not have been read by majority of women in Ragusa, nor by many of the men. The influence of Italian language and culture was reinforced by the constant exchange of books and people from one shore to the other. There are no data about the reception of this text during Gondola's lifetime. It is mentioned in later books such as in the bibliographical works by Sebastiano Dolci's *Fasti litterario-ragusini* (Venetiis, 1767), Appendini's *Notizie storico – critiche sulle antichità – tomo II* (1803)¹⁹, and later in Ljubić's *Dictionary about illustrious people from Dalmatia* (Gliubich 1856: 168). Maria Gondola is mentioned as di Gozze's wife, and a woman of great talent and knowledge who wrote a dedication.

Where the veracity of ideas is concerned, the majority of the themes of this dedication are possible to find in the other works of Gondola's husband, mostly in his early works, and especially, as already said, in the *Dialogo sulla bellezza detto Antos* and *Dialogo sull'amore detto Antos secondo la Mente di Platone* (1581). Di Gozze, as it was common in 16th century literature, was inspired by the Neo-platonic ideas (initially by Marsilio Ficino) from one side, Aristotle's from the other, and Christian thought from a third. The same influence is possible to find in Gondola's text, which is written according to the paratextual conventions at the time, being at the same time an apology and the self-accreditation. Maria Gondola used "inclusive language"²⁰, as she wrote about "us" women, and "us" female friends. The use of inclusive language made more personal relationship between reader and the author.

Censorship is another important issue in early modern Ragusa (Fališevac 2007: 21)²¹. There are two main speculative critiques suggested as reasons for omitting the text; the first one is the lavish praise of Italians, which could have been considered to be inappropriate by the strict government of Ragusa. The second is that, as Nicolò Vito di Gozze took an important place in the government (he was elected seven times as the rector), he

¹⁹ He claimed that di Gozze married "Anna Gondola – the woman of the same virtue and class" (Appendini 1803: 67).

²⁰ I borrow the term from Julie A. Eckerle (2013: 104).

²¹ Fališevac mentions that in 1604 it was prescribed that every book, before it was sent to be published, should be controlled by Senate.

simply decided to cut the part where Ragusan society is compared to beasts (“Wolves, Bears and Tigers”, Gondola, in Gozze 1584). Apart from all this, the censored part represents more of a confessional kind of writing than the rest of the text; in this part it is possible to grasp the feelings and personal expression of the individual, one woman in one particular situation²² as the reaction on the concrete facts. Fališevac points out that in early modern Ragusa, different from the practice on the other shore of the Adriatic, there are no literary genres where individuality and subjectivity are considered as main themes (Fališevac 2007: 20)²³, which according to her could be understood as the modus and relationship of governance to the status of an individual, suppressing any kind of display of individuality (Fališevac 2007: 20). Finally, it is important to emphasize the importance of Maria’s words, in the 16th century Ragusa – the aristocratic Catholic republic, with strict patriarchal order, where almost all parts of life were defined by law²⁴.

Apart from Maria Gondola and her only preserved text, the dedicatory epistle, there are two more women who wrote in Italian at almost the same time as Gondola. Speranza di Bona (active in 1569) and Giulia di Bona (1550–1585)²⁵ were sisters and they wrote poetry. Fiore Zuzzori wrote mainly epigrams, according to a later critique, but nothing has been saved. The fact that Gondola wrote in Italian, the language (in her own words) of “the awakened intellects, and excellent and judicious imposers” (Gondola, in Gozze 1584), almost at the same time as for example, Moderata Fonte (1581)²⁶ and Lucrezia Marinella (1600) were proclaiming their ideas in their books on the other Adriatic shore, gives us a space to understand her unique female voice in defence of women’s rights as a contribution to “the querelle de femmes” from the east part of the Adriatic Sea (see: Janeković-Römer 2004). But it was not only women’s equality that she defended.

²² Janeković-Römer says that this dedication is a par excellence self-document written by Maria Gondola Gozze.

²³ Here she also adds the political issues.

²⁴ How strict the state norms were regarding cultural life is possible to read in Janeković-Römer 1994. The first printing house in Dubrovnik is opened in 1783, which is also connected with strict society rules.

²⁵ Recently an excellent and the most comprehensive study on these authors has been published by Gabrielli 2015: 83–182.

²⁶ See: Fonte 2006.

She also signed a text which criticized the Ragusan nobility²⁷ and used this part of book as one of the rare spaces where it was possible to express her own – female agency.

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²⁷ Here is important to mention works written in Italian which criticize Ragusan nobility such as: *Satira dell'archigiacono Mario Caboga, Gentil huomo Raguseo detto Cordiza et il Confuso, contro la nobiltà di Ragusi (unknown date)* and *four conspiratorial letters of Marin Držić to Cosimo I de Medici*, written in 1566, against the despotism of Ragusan aristocracy. See for example: Bogišić 1988.

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