

Foreword

Angela Veronese's 1826 prose autobiography is an extraordinary text. It tells the fascinating true story of a gardener's daughter who came of age in the last decades of the eighteenth century, among the Venetian elite who employed her father to tend the magnificent grounds of their city and country villas. Those cultured surroundings nurtured her budding literary aspirations, and soon Veronese was welcomed into the performative poetry culture of the leading lights of the Veneto. Following the trends of the time, Veronese (1778–1847) assumed the Arcadian name Aglaja Anassillide – and as Aglaja, she improvised, circulated, wrote, and published – enough to become a well-recognized poet in and outside the Venetian territory. By 1826, when she decided to memorialize her unique trajectory, she had published five collections of her poetry, as well as made numerous contributions to anthologies and other printed publications honouring local luminaries and milestone events.

Veronese's decision to position her autobiography, *Information on the Life of Aglaja Anassillide Written by Herself* (*Notizie sulla vita di Aglaja Anassillide scritte da lei medesima*, hereafter *Notizie*), as preface to yet a sixth collection of her verses (this one exhaustive, including almost all her lyrics to date), is only the first indication of her strategic self-promotional thinking.¹ By this time she had a sufficient body of work around which to weave a reality of fame. The story of the exceptional ascent of a modest peasant girl who educated herself well enough to become an *improvvisatrice* and then a respected producer of written verse, a

1 The entire work, prose autobiography and poems, is titled *Versi di Aglaja Anassillide aggiuntevi le notizie della sua vita scritte da lei medesima* (Padua, Crescini, 1826).

narrative recounted by the protagonist herself, would sell well. *Notizie* is furthermore a model of social network theory in action. Veronese lays out a dense matrix of learned supporters and underscores her many connections within noble circles and salons. As it touts her past celebrity, her autobiography courts celebrity in the present and projects it into the future. Ideally, Veronese's enthralling life story will heighten her status and increase demand for her poems, serving both personal and economic ends.

Veronese employs a distinctive narrating voice in *Notizie*. Given that this voice is one of the most compelling aspects of her work, we give primacy to her words – presenting first her original Italian text, followed by our translation. Only afterwards do we offer detailed interpretation and analysis, in the section of our volume entitled “Contexts and Conclusions.” We want readers to encounter Veronese's account directly, before our or others' mediation. Thinking derived from postcolonial studies guides us in this intention, such as that of Gayatri Spivak, who emphasizes the potential silencing of the “Other” by virtue of the very framework the investigating “Self” uses to represent the Other.² Of course, translation itself inevitably alters an original expression, as do the conventions of the English-language literature publishing enterprise. Nonetheless, we hope that by subverting at least one norm – i.e., by putting Veronese's words ahead of our interpretation of them – we allow readers an initial semi-unmediated meeting with the remarkable story an Italian author tells about herself. Readers are obviously still free to read “Contexts and Conclusions” first, as if it were a traditional introduction.

The selection and ordering of additional components in our study likewise seeks to prioritize authorial production over critical explanation. The translation of *Notizie* is immediately followed by a select subgroup of Veronese's poems, in both Italian and English. An author biography appears next, substantiated as extensively as possible by available factual data. An extensive bio-bibliography follows.

To better elucidate Veronese's enterprising thinking, we include the autobiographical writing of another contemporary Italian woman poet, Teresa Bandettini (1763–1837), the well-known Tuscan *improvisatrice*. Bandettini penned an account of her life in 1825, only one year before Veronese published *Notizie*.³ Although her manuscript was never

2 Spivak rearticulated her groundbreaking 1985 article “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*.

3 Bandettini, “Autobiografia.”

published and does not seem to have circulated widely, Bandettini's text (hereafter "Autobiografia") serves to flesh out the world of poetic improvising intrinsic to Veronese's self-presentation.⁴ It is important to note, however, that we do not conduct a thorough analysis of Bandettini's work comparable to our undertaking with Veronese's text. Ample scholarship already exists on Bandettini, whereas no one has investigated Veronese to the extent we do here. We include Bandettini's life story to bring another woman-authored text to light, in a period still wanting hard data on women's intellectual and literary endeavours. Towards that aim, ours is the first English translation of Bandettini's "Autobiografia."⁵ Our primary reason for featuring her short work, however, is that reading the two narratives together helps highlight the singular approaches Veronese took. We order the crucial elements in the Bandettini section identically to their Veronese counterparts: transcription of Italian original, English translation, and author biography.

The concluding section of our volume, "Contexts and Conclusions," comprises an in-depth discussion of *Notizie*, to which is attached a General Bibliography (the "Works Cited" section).

Notes on Methodology

We use the following terminology to refer to the various texts under study: *Notizie* indicates Veronese's autobiography, while *Versi* indicates solely the poems following the self-account. Veronese's entire work – the prose narrative together with the poems – is referred to with the abbreviated *Versi ... Aggiuntevi le notizie*. Bandettini's text will be designated as "Autobiografia."

Transcriptions and Translations

The transcriptions follow as closely as possible the original texts: Veronese's 1826 volume and Bandettini's 1825 manuscript. We have replicated the prose just as it appears, including random use of italics and capital letters, mixed forms of spelling, erroneous or clumsy punctuation, and infrequent paragraph breaks.

4 Bandettini dated but did not title her autobiographical manuscript. Here we use "Autobiografia," the same term Di Ricco gives to the text in her 1990 edition. See the brief introduction preceding our transcription of Bandettini's text for more information about the manuscript and its history.

5 The first full publication of her work in Italian dates to 1990, where it appears as an appendix in Di Ricco.

Our translations of the two narratives, as well as any other translations that appear in our volume, are our own unless indicated. In translating both *Notizie* and “Autobiografia,” we have taken very few liberties. On occasion we have broken extensive prose sections into shorter paragraphs for easier reading and sense-making. In general, however, we have stayed faithful to idiosyncrasies in the originals. In the case of *Notizie*, for example, with respect to the use of italics, editorial decisions at times appear random (and one cannot be sure if they are the author’s or the editor’s choices). Some italicized phrases appear to emphasize an idea (e.g., *the cat’s roses*). In other places, however, as in a series of items or even titles of literary works, certain elements are italicized, others not. The same can be said for the use of capitalization. A noun that had not been capitalized for some time begins to be capitalized, and might return subsequently uncapitalized. Readers will also encounter many instances of spelling errors, in both Veronese’s and Bandettini’s texts. At times these deviations are not mistakes as much as archaic and fluid forms of orthography.

Readers will further notice that in sections of both autobiographies the punctuation is rudimentary, if not plainly problematic. There are many instances of run-on sentences with either overuse of commas or a complete lack of them, excessive or misplaced semicolons, and so forth. In these text areas we have attempted to imitate the sloppy punctuation the authors themselves used, and thereby to communicate certain characteristics of their prose. Interestingly, Veronese recounts in her text how, at the beginning of her self-instruction, an early mentor taught her how to use some elements of punctuation. She narrates in detail how she learned to place commas, periods, even exclamation points. Her text shows that she was still integrating these skills.

One of the most frequent instances of variability concerns the spelling of Veronese’s Arcadian name. The correct version is “Aglaja Anasillide,” and this spelling appears most often. However, we have taken care to replicate the several alternative spellings exactly as they appear in print on occasion (Agliaia, Agliaja, Aglaia; Anasillide, Anassilide) to demonstrate the realities and vagaries of early nineteenth-century printing operations.

Our decision to replicate these moments of textual disorder and/or authenticity seeks to focus attention on the two women’s still-developing mastery of the fine points of writing, as well as the varying standards of the time. Only in certain cases where imprecision could lead to serious confusion over meaning did we insert a correction or use the designation [*sic*].

Footnoting System and Citations

Given the number and variety of components in our study (transcriptions of originals, translations, biographies, etc.), it is important to clarify our system for providing reference information. Overall we have used the MLA style format, but annotated translations require careful and sometimes extensive footnoting, as does the biography provided for Veronese. When we cite a passage from *Notizie* (this occurs primarily in the “Contexts and Conclusions” section), the page number given refers specifically to our translation. Precise information on the footnoting system used for the poetry translations is included in the introductory section to the poems. In-text and footnote references in the “Biography of Angela Veronese” section are treated differently – they correspond exclusively to the “Bio-Bibliography for Angela Veronese.” All other citations are offered in full in the General Bibliography.

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