Becoming Visible. A Biography of Elisabetta Caminer Turra (1751-1796) During Her Formative Years

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**BECOMING VISIBLE.**

**A BIOGRAPHY OF ELISABETTA CAMINER TURRA (1751-1796) DURING HER FORMATIVE YEARS**

Per questo, rammentandovoi solo che procuriate di seguitare quella carriera che avete intrapresa, scansando gli intoppi che il vostro sesso, ed il vostro merito vi moltiplicherranno nel corso della vostra giovinezza, vi prometto che non avrete da invidiare la gloria del Goldoni, o quella più solida ancora di altre Donne illustri, e rare.

(Giuseppe Pelli Bencivenni, in a May 1772 letter to Elisabetta Caminer)

Una giovinezza di buon’indole, d’ottimo costume, pregiabile nella sua inclinazione alle belle lettere, che faceva qualche verso armonico e prometteva di potersi ridurre un adorno dell’esercito di strani persone a non contentarsi d’un’opera filologica, e del rendersi capace d’un’opera traduzione, ma a divenire Capitanessa d’un Giornale intitolato L’Europa letteraria, e a far la comparsa repentina d’un diluvio universale di scienze; a far estratti e dar pareri, a condannare, a lodare, ad assolversi magistralmente, in tutti i Scrittori, e in tutti i Libri di tutte le materie.

(Carlo Gozzi, in a September 1776 letter to Giuseppe Baretti)

Nineteenth-century scholar Ernesto Masi wrote that Elisabetta Caminer Turra (1751-1796) was simultaneously loved and hated so much that it is impossible to discern the truth from the lies in the many rumors that circulated about her. As the epigraphs above suggest,
Giuseppe Pelli was one of the Italian «letterati» who were very supportive of Caminer, and he was well aware of the special challenges and potential rewards that awaited ambitious women. Carlo Gozzi’s biting words, on the other hand, illustrate the kind of hostility and obstacles that women faced when their ambition led them to cross the strictly inscribed gender boundaries of their society. While drawing opposite conclusions about her capabilities and her ambition, both positions focus on Caminer’s sex when weighing the validity of her claim to influence and fame.

Although Caminer experienced contradictory reactions from contemporaries throughout her life, she experienced resistance most keenly in her late teens and early twenties. This was the period in which she was establishing herself as a professional – becoming visible – in an area of the public sphere usually delegated to men.4 As a young, unmarried woman barely into her twenties, Caminer was facing the cultural imperatives of courtship, marriage and motherhood. All of these expectations would have been seen as rightfully taking priority over – and therefore conflicting with – her career ambitions. In his letter to Giuseppe Baretta, Carlo Gozzi highlighted the issue at the heart of Caminer’s transgression: she was not content to remain on the outskirts of intellectual culture, composing pretty verse and proving herself a fair translator. Rather, she had the ambition to participate in the cultural exchanges of her society in a broad-based, determined and influential way. Her goal was not to become «an adornment to society» but to become an active member of the Republic of Letters.

In her successful bid for a rich intellectual life, Caminer wore simultaneously the hats of journalist, translator, theater critic and director, editor and publisher, writer of occasional poetry and salonnière. Because she led such an exceptional life, it is important to consider how her personal experiences might have shaped her professional choices, and in turn how her professional activities might have influenced her personal life. How did her society’s notions of gender influence Caminer’s experiences and options in her early professional and personal life? How was a woman of the middle class able to join the ranks of other «illustrious women», most of whom were aristocrats? Were some options open to her because she was born into the middle class? In an age when a woman who made a name for herself in the public sphere


4. By the term «public sphere» I refer, of course, to Habermas’ notion of the public realm for the discussion and transformation of ideas which – through published materials (periodicals, books, etc.) or unpublished, but circulated texts (correspondences, manuscript newspapers, etc.) – gave rise to public opinion over the course of the 18th-century. See J. HABERMAS, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Enquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society, Cambridge (Mass.), 1989, trans. by T. BURGER. For the role of women in the public sphere, see Going Public. Women and Publishing in Early Modern France, ed. by E. GOODSMITH and D. GOODMAN, Ithaca (Ny)-London, Cornell Univ. Press, 1995.
risked her good reputation, how did Caminer negotiate the fine line between fame and infamy as she successfully created a space for herself in the Republic of Letters?

The answers to these questions lead us to examine the ways in which Caminer utilized the system of male patronage and support to gain a foothold in the world of learning. Reconstructing her personal and professional life together also brings into focus the strategies Caminer employed as she confronted the complex and often paradoxical realities of women’s roles in eighteenth-century Italy.

If fellow Venetian Carlo Goldoni was born «under the influence of the comic star», perhaps Elisabetta Caminer was born under the «star» of the Enlightenment movement. She came into the world, after all, in 1751: the year that the first volume of d’Alembert’s and Diderot’s *Encyclopédie* was published, and the year of Goldoni’s famous season of the 16 comedies.

Born in Venice on July 29, 1751, to Anna Maldini and Domenico Caminer, she was baptized in the church of S. Benedetto on August third, and her godfather was Antonio Locatelli. Aside from these few facts, the only detailed information about the earliest period of her life is found in the sensationalist nineteenth- and early twentieth-century page-length accounts of Caminer’s life, in dictionaries of famous Italians/Italian women, or in the literary histories of the same period.

These sources concur that the young Caminer was placed in a milliner’s shop to learn the trade of bonnet making and that she probably worked there as an apprentice until she was fourteen years old. From here the accounts become more inventive. Most describe how Caminer showed no inclination for such woman’s work: how she neglected her duties in order to read books and write poetry on the sly; how she began attracting the attentions of the young men around her; and how her mother “punished” her by removing her from the milliner’s shop and placing her among the copyists who worked for her journalist husband in order to better supervise the young girl. Numerous accounts concur that there could have been no more profitable “punishment” for the young girl, because it actually allowed her to pursue her true interests: reading, writing, literature and poetry. These accounts describe how Caminer learned French on her own


6. Arnaldo Arnaldo Tornieri I reveals the date of Caminer’s baptism in his manuscript, «Notizie Biografiche di alcuni Scrittori Vicentini del Secolo XVIII», p. 116 (Biblioteca Bertoliana di Vicenza [=BBV], *Libreria Gonzati* 26.5.18). We know that Antonio Locatelli was Caminer’s godfather from a letter he wrote to her on November 29, 1769 (BBV: COOL 29).

7. Typical examples from this bibliography include the entries on Caminer in Ambrogio Levati’s *Dizionario biografico cronologico diviso per classi degli uomini illustri di tutti i tempi e di tutte le nazioni compilato dal professore Ambrogio Levati*, Classe V, Donne illustri, Milano, N. Bettoni, 1821-1822, pp. 185-186, and in Emilio De Tiptalo’s *Dizionario biografico degli italiani illustri nelle scienze, lettere ed arti del secolo XVIII*, Venezia, Tipografia Gio: Cecchini, 1844-1845; vol. 5, pp. 461-464. Vittorio Malamani’s longer study, *Una giornalista veneziana del secolo XVIII. Nuovo Archivio Venezia*, 2 (1891), pp. 251-275, focuses more extensively on Caminer’s early years, but it is the most extreme example of a sensationalist, misogynist style, and should be read with this in mind.

351
while helping her father, and they emphasize her “natural” and avid interest in the theater. Many suggest that her knowledge of French sparked her interest in the theater because it led her to translate French plays.

Whatever the extent of fact or fiction, these accounts are useful because they raise three issues that are central to an understanding of Caminer’s adolescence: the role of parental influence; the “natural” interests ascribed to the young girl; and the general question of her education. Importantly, they highlight the issue of Caminer’s movement within and across the gendered boundaries of her society.

There is little concrete information available on the status of girls’ education in eighteenth-century Italy. There were, of course, Italian women who enjoyed international fame because they excelled academically or intellectually. Even without an institutionalized system of formal education for girls, Venice boasted the first woman ever to earn a doctorate: in 1678, nearly a century before Caminer’s lifetime, Elena Cornaro Piscopia (1646-1684) earned a doctorate in philosophy at the University of Padua. There were also erudite contemporaries of Caminer (outside of the Veneto) who where a generation or two older than she, namely Laura Bassi (1711-1778), Anna Morandi Manzolini (1716-1774), Maria Gaetana Agnesi (1718-1799), and Cristina Roccati (1732-1787). These women, however, were born into special circumstances. Through their fathers’ influence, their families’ wealth or their brothers’ tutors, they gained access to the university system and acquired formal training. Historian Paula Findlen describes these women as «exceptions to the commonly understood rule that women were not capable of mastering the most abstract forms of knowledge – female prodigies who, in explicit defiance of this principle, were among the best physicists and mathematicians in Italy».

If women such as Agnesi, Bassi, Morandi and Roccati represent exceptions to the rule, what was the general norm for the education of girls and women in eighteenth-century Italy, and the Veneto in particular? Referring specifically to Venice, Pompeo Molmenti says that education was available for Venetian women in the convent or at home, depending on financial or social standing. He informs us that while the convents at St. Zaccaria and S. Lorenzo were strictly for the nobly born, the Augustinians, the Capuchins and the Carmelites undertook the education of the middle classes, and that citizens and the poor were mixed together in the Zitelle on the Giudecca. Molmenti says writing and arithmetic, as well as the ways of polite society were the subjects taught


in the convents. As scholar Madile Gambier has noted, the Venetian Republic never instituted a system of public education for girls, not even after the reforms of 1774. It was not until 1792 that schools for girls – with French mistresses – were opened.

Scholars such as Luciano Guerci and Anna Maria Rao have studied the eighteenth-century debates on the question of why women should study and which areas of study were considered appropriate for them. An important tenet of this period was that a woman should study in order to become capable of fulfilling her familial duties in life: she should know how to read, write and do enough arithmetic to be able to run a household efficiently and to keep a precise account of household expenses. Women should study in order to become enlightened mothers, but also in order to participate in conversation and to avoid appearing ignorant in social situations. Women should become somewhat “enlightened” in order to protect themselves from modern frivolities and prejudices. Some degree of study was seen as an antidote to boredom – which could lead women into trouble – and to the potential emptiness of old age, once women had lost their youth and beauty. Finally, women who were morally well-instructed had the responsibility to exert a positive influence on men by setting a good example and by monitoring their behavior. In general, education under these restrictions contributed to maintaining women’s subordinate and domestic role rather than opening doors to new careers or social freedoms.

As useful as this type of discussion is, its focus is primarily on the eighteenth-century debate about what women should or should not study rather than on what individual women’s experiences actually were, or might have been. My focus on Elisabetta Caminer’s specific experience – and the use of archival sources such as personal correspondences, eighteenth-century periodicals, theater records and the like – allows me to reconstruct an example of one middle-class woman’s actual educational experience.

To my knowledge, there is no indication that Caminer spent time in a convent where she might have received an education. Her family was neither noble nor wealthy, and it is unlikely that her father had the resources to pay for a private tutor for his children. It is more likely that Caminer and at least one of her younger siblings were introduced at a young age to the journalistic trade of their father. We may not know


15. Caminer had at least four siblings: Antonio (b. 1756 or 1757), and a set of much younger siblings, Angelo (b.
exactly how unusual or typical Caminer’s experience was for a girl of the middle class in Venice in the 1750s and 1760s, but we can assume that she was unusually fortunate in having at her disposition the flow of letters, books and periodicals that her father’s trade made available to her. These were the very tools necessary for anyone aspiring to become an active member of the Republic of Letters.\(^\text{16}\)

Her father’s journalistic activities afforded Caminer a library of sorts. His work also provided her with the training and connections for establishing herself as a professional journalist and theater critic.\(^\text{17}\) Caminer probably began her training in the journalistic profession by working as a copyist for her father as a young teenager. If she did not actually compose original articles, a job as copyist would have given her constant practice in reading and transcribing. If she was helping with her father’s correspondence – probably to some extent reading and writing in French – she would have had the opportunity to learn the business end of the trade, as well as to become familiar with the international language of the day. Caminer may even have begun to learn English in her teens, since her godfather bought her an English dictionary when she was eighteen years old.\(^\text{18}\)

Caminer’s thorough knowledge of French at such a young age merits some attention. It is true that most intellectuals in cosmopolitan eighteenth-century Venice were fluent to some extent in the language. It is nonetheless remarkable that between the ages of seventeen and twenty a young, middle-class woman with no formal education knew French

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18. In his November 29, 1769 letter to her, he writes: ‘Ridete mia buona Friend mia cara god daughter. Io vi ho comprato un dizionario inglese e mi son posto con tutto l’ardore d’un ragazzino a tradurre il Frontespizio’ (cited here from Lorenzo Farina’s thesis, *Carteggi di Elisabetta Caminer Turra*, tesi di laurea, University of Padua, Director Marco Pecoraro, academic year 1978-1979, pp. 472-474). A more suggestive piece of information is a letter that Francesco Albergati – who beginning in 1769, regularly resided in Venice during the months from November to January – wrote to Caminer on September 10, 1769: ‘Ill mostro studio d’Inglese avrà cominciamento domani sera, e il proseguiamo con tutti il calore…’ (R. TROVATO, *Lettere di Francesco Albergati Capocelli alla Bettina*, ‘Studi e problemi di critica testuale’, 28 (1984), p. 163). See also E. MASI, *La vita, i tempi, gli amici…*, p. 252. There are other, later indications of Caminer’s familiarity with the English language. Her correspondence with Clemente Vannetti reveals that in 1780 he considered her multi-lingual. Although she responded to his comments by highlighting the limitations of her linguistic abilities, her letter does reveal that she is familiar with the English language: ‘Per altro l’angliumante quando credete ch’io sappia molte lingue: io non so altro che molto la Francese, e pochissimo l’Inglese unitamente alla mia’ (no date, but spring 1780, Biblioteca Civica di Rovereto; MS. 7.26, c. 80-81). It may be that Caminer eventually came to know English reasonably well, if in 1795, Alessandro Pepoli could write to her asking for her help with his translation of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*: ‘Ella che intende molto bene l’Inglese, sarà uno de’ miei Giudici – letter dated March 25, 1795, BBV: *Carteggi Trissino*, ms G.2.1.5. 4 coll. E. 17 b). Further, there is a translation of Caminer’s – purportedly from English to Italian, rather than through a French version – entitled, *Penieri sopra la morte della Luttivendola di Bristol a Londra nella sua prima gioventù* – BBV: *Libreria Gonzati* 26.2.2 (168).
as well as Caminer did. During these years she read a wide range of French publications, including the works of Voltaire.\textsuperscript{19} She published translations, reviews, and/or extracts of these works for her father's literary periodical, the «Europa letteraria». She also translated contemporary French plays and saw them performed with great success on stages in Venice, Padua, Verona and Bologna.\textsuperscript{20}

Was such a well-versed young woman entirely self-taught? An answer to this question may be found in the pages of the Venetian periodical, the «Gazzetta veneta». In the February 16, 1760, issue, in a notice under the heading «People advertising their skills» («Persone ch’ésibiscono la loro capacità»), Venetian readers learned that a French engraver by the name of Benedetto Dupuy was living in Venice and offering excellent instruction of the French language. The advertisement informed readers that in order to contact Dupuy, they should go through Domenico Caminer, with whom Dupuy was residing («... abita in casa del Sig. Domenico Caminer in calle dietro il Magazzino di S. Benedetto»).\textsuperscript{21} Although we do not know how long Dupuy lived with the Caminers, it is plausible that as long as he was there, he taught the Caminer children French, perhaps in exchange for taking a room in their home. Domenico probably took in renters regularly in order to supplement the income from his journalistic endeavors. We know, for example, that Francesco Albergati considered renting a room from the Caminers in 1769.\textsuperscript{22} It is very likely, then, that at age eight Elisabetta Caminer had a native French speaker as a private tutor in her own home.\textsuperscript{23} Ironically, this was a direct result of her family’s financial need and her father’s business sense – in this case, two benefits of belonging to the middle class.

Armed with her growing knowledge of French (and perhaps English), with which periodicals might Caminer have assisted her father during her adolescence? According to historian Mario Infelise, from sometime in the early 1750s until 1780 – certainly during Elisabetta’s childhood – Domenico was probably the gazetteer who compiled the weekly political gazette entitled «Europa». Because it was a manuscript paper, the «Europa» enjoyed the advantage of freedom from censorship, and it contained up-to-date news of political events in Europe,

\textsuperscript{19} Caminer’s first contribution to the Europa letteraria – also the opening piece for the very first issue of the periodical – was the « Estratto del recente Romanzo del Sig. di Voltaire intitolato: La principessa di Babilonia» which she translated from the «Mercure de France». See «Europa letteraria», September 1768, pp. 3-19.

\textsuperscript{20} Caminer’s translation of Falbaire’s Hommelè criminel, ou l’Amour filial and possibly also that of Saurin’s Béverly were performed in Verona (R. TROVATO, Lettere di F.A.C., p. 106). Caminer’s renditions of Du Bello’s Gabriele de Vergy and of Mercier’s Le Déserteur were performed in Albergati’s Zola theater in 1771 (R. TROVATO, Lettere di F.A.C., p. 169). Her translation of Le Déserteur was also performed in Padova in 1771 or 1772 (see Caminer’s correspondence with Giuseppe Gennari, in a letter dated January 7, 1772). The correspondence between Elisabetta Caminer and Giuseppe Gennari is located in the Biblioteca del Seminario di Padova: Codice 620, vols. 10, 13 and 18, and Codice 621, vols. 3 and 4. This correspondence is the only one of Caminer’s that includes letters from both writers in such an extensive fashion. There are 59 letters in this collection; all but one were written between September 1769 and August 1772. From here on I will simply refer to any letter I cite from these correspondences as «E.C. - G.G. correspondence» and include the letter’s date.

\textsuperscript{21} «Gazzetta veneta», Venezia, 1760, n. 4.

\textsuperscript{22} R. TROVATO, Lettere di F.A.C., p. 153. Generally, the financial situation of journalists was precarious, and as we shall see, Domenico’s petition of 1770 suggests he was not living in the lap of luxury. Nicola Mangini’s account of Domenico’s endeavors in theatrical management also confirms this idea (MANGINI, I teatri di Venezia, Milano, Murria, 1974, p. 119).

\textsuperscript{23} As this notice was published in February 1770, Caminer would not turn nine until July of that year.
Asia and the New World. Perhaps this was the young Caminer’s first journalistic endeavor: helping to write out the forty to fifty copies of the «Europa» that her father distributed every week. From March to September 1762 when Elisabetta was ten or eleven years old, her father was almost certainly the editor of the literary periodical, the «Nuova gazzetta veneta», having succeeded previous editors Pietro Chiari and Gasparo Gozzi. Domenico is also thought to have founded (in 1765) the first daily paper in Venice that focused on urban news, the «Diario Veneto appartenente al commercio civile e alle curiosità di ogni genere». Thus it may have been with these three periodicals – the manuscript gazette «Europa», the literary periodical «Nuova gazzetta veneta» and the daily, «local» newspaper «Diario Veneto» – that Elisabetta Caminer began her journalistic career between the ages of eleven and fourteen. At the age of seventeen, she would be a founding staff member of her father’s new literary periodical, the «Europa letteraria».

There is no underestimating the importance of Caminer having been born in Venice during the eighteenth century, when the Lagoon city was the principal center of journalistic activity in all of Italy. Of course, she did not limit or define her career by journalism alone; from the beginning she engaged in and earned her living through a variety of intellectual activities. A list of them is provided by Infelise as he describes the city of her apprenticeship: «there existed no other city in the [Italian] peninsula where it was possible to earn a living from intellectual work, translating from the French, editing books, revising proofs, compiling newspapers».

If Caminer was well known in literate circles because of her work as a journalist for the «Europa letteraria», her participation in the world of the theater brought her even broader recognition. As early as 1769 – from the age of eighteen – she began publishing her translations of the most recent French plays for Venetian theater companies who wished to perform them. She directed some of these performances, and she continued to publish her translations of European theatrical works for the rest of her life. Eventually, she also directed her own theater in Vi-

24. Infelise suggests that in 1768 Domenico Caminer may have named the Europa letteraria after this manuscript gazette. See M. INFELISE, 'Europa. Una gazetta manoscritta del 700, in Non uno itiner. Studi storici offerti dagli allievi a Federico Seneca, Venezia, Stamparia di Venezia, 1993, pp. 221-239: esp. p. 230.


26. The «Diario veneto» was short-lived, lasting only from January to April 1765. We cannot definitively identify the «diarista» but Infelise affirms that it was probably Domenico Caminer. One clue is the great similarity between the «Diario veneto» – in both structure and content – to the «Gazzetta Veneta» during the phase in which Caminer was its likely editor. Infelise informs us that, after the first «diarista» (presumably Caminer) handed over the periodical to someone else on March 30 1765, (and it did not last a week), there were numerous requests on the part of the Venetian public for him to take it up again. He apparently did consider publishing a «Nuovo diario veneto» unfortunately we do not know whether or not he succeeded in doing so, because there are no other extant copies of the paper aside from the one in the Biblioteca del Museo Correr, which is from the period January-April 1765. See M. INFELISE, L’Italie et le pique-vole..., pp. 113-126. See also C. DE MICHELI, Caminer, Domenico, in DBI, XVI, Rome, 1974, pp. 234-236.


cenza where she taught children and young adults the art of acting. With the performances of her earliest translations, Caminer’s public extended beyond the «Europa letteraria»’s intellectual or well-read audience to include a more “popular” crowd whose tastes often contrasted with those of established men of letters. Through the theater – perhaps to an even greater extent than through her initial collaboration on the «Europa letteraria» – Elisabetta Caminer made a conspicuous professional debut.

How or why did she develop an interest in the theater? How did she manage to acquire the status of «resident playwright» (albeit “in translation”) at the S. Angelo theater at such an early age? While Caminer’s personal drive and talent are not to be underestimated, circumstances in her life did “set the stage”, so to speak, for the development of her interest and activity in the theatrical world. It is of central importance that she grew up in a city that boasted eight public theaters at the beginning of the eighteenth century, which was more than either London or Paris could do. Once again, we may also look to her father’s interests and financial struggles as a primary influence. According to De Michelis, Domenico was interested in the theater and had written some comedies. More importantly, however, we know that he was one of the most active private investors involved in the financial management of theaters, especially for productions of musical theater. Domenico Caminer’s experience during the 1765 «Sensa» theater season exemplifies the margin of risk typically involved in such an undertaking. Caminer had hired musicians and dancers for the S. Giovanni Grisostomo theater, but he was unsuccessful in his effort to secure enough box seat subscriptions to cover the cost of the scheduled performances there. In order to avoid incurring debts, he convinced the Saregos to allow him to rent the smaller S. Luca theater instead. Caminer was also among the many “impresari” who managed the S. Moisè theater. The young Elisabetta was probably influenced by her father’s direct involvement with theaters, if only by sheer exposure to them.

Domenico Caminer’s intellectual and artistic pursuits – coupled with his need to support a large family – were crucial factors in his ability to act as a role model for his daughter and to provide her with the training and the connections she needed to gain access to the worlds of journalism and the theater. His remarkable open-mindedness and his

33. (Elisabetta) Caminer may also have been aware of Luisa Bergalli’s brief experience as the first female manager of the S. Angelo theater in 1747-1748. Perhaps this knowledge informed her own decision to act as a resident director in the same theater some twenty-five years later.
34. A common way for women in England in the first half of the eighteenth century to get into the business of journalism, printing and bookselling was through fathers, husbands or sons.
ability to recognize and encourage the personal drive and talents of his daughter were equally fundamental in shaping the direction of her intellectual and professional development.

In contrast to such positive influences, evidence of a restricting influence which helped shape the direction of Caminer's professional development is revealed in a letter she wrote to the renowned naturalist (and contributor to the «Europa letteraria»), Lazzaro Spallanzani.35 At the age of seventeen, Caminer wrote to Spallanzani thanking him for the gift of one of his works which he had sent to her.36 In this letter she claimed that she was unable to read and truly appreciate his works because, «in spite of myself, I lack the necessary knowledge».37 Spallanzani must have responded shortly afterwards, reaffirming the admiration he had for her. The following month Caminer wrote in response:

La bonté que vous marquez pour moi, et pour les petites productions de mon Esprit preuve que vous êtes aussi poli que savant; mais vous perdrez beaucoup du coté de la justice en poursuivant de la sorte. Je me connais assez, Monsieur, et je suis bien fauchée de ce que ma situation ne me permettra pas de devenir quelque chose de raisonnable. Il faudra que je me borne à traduire, ou tout au plus à faire quelque morceau de Poesie. Les Sciences pour les quelles j’aurais peut-être quelque disposition me seront interdites à jamais.38

By the phrase «my situation» Caminer could have been referring to her family’s lack of financial resources. She might have been alluding to the fact that she had no time to dedicate to scientific study because of the demands of her journalistic work. But the way she described scientific study as «forbidden to [her] forever», and the way she placed it in direct contrast to the more traditionally “female” intellectual activities of translation and poetry makes it clear that she was lamenting gender restrictions. Caminer knew of Bassi, Agnesi, Morandi and Roccati, and she must also have known that their unusual circumstances had provided them with access to university and professional training in physics, mathematics, anatomy and philosophy. In contrast to the experience of these accomplished Italian women mathematicians and sci-

35. Lazzaro Spallanzani (1729-1799) would be a friend and correspondent for most, if not all, of Caminer’s life. Although there are not many extant letters, their correspondence was quite extensive, beginning in January 1769 (or earlier) and lasting at least into 1793. Spallanzani came to know Caminer because he was a friend of Alberto Fortis’ and an early collaborator on the «Europa letteraria».

36. The work in question was probably the essay Spallanzani dedicated to the Bologna Academy of Sciences, entitled Saggio di Osservazioni microscopiche concernenti il sistema della generazione de’ Signori di Needham, e Buffon, which refuted the theory of spontaneous generation in strongly heated infusions and which criticized work by Needham and Buffon. This essay was first published jointly with a short thesis in Latin on the mechanism of stone-skipping on water — De lapidibus ab aqua resiliensibus — which Spallanzani dedicated to Laura Bassi, under the title Dissertationi due, Modena, Per gli Eredi di Bartolomeo Soliani Stamp. Duccali, 1765. As we shall see, the essay was the subject of subsequent letters between Spallanzani and Caminer.


38. «The good will which you display towards me, and towards the trilling productions of my Mind, show that you are as courteous as you are knowledgeable; but you will suffer in the eyes of justice if you continue in this manner. I know myself well enough, Sir, and I am much put out by the fact that my situation will not permit me to aspire to the exercise of reason. I will have to limit myself to translation, or at the most, to writing bits of poetry. The Sciences, for which I might have some aptitude will be forbidden to me forever.» The letter (February 4, 1769, BEM: Raccolta Campori) has been published in LAZZARO SPALLANZANI, Edizione nazionale delle Opere. Parte Prima: Carteggi, ed. by PERICLE DI PIETRO, vol. III, Modena, Mucchi, 1985, p. 309. For an earlier treatment of this letter see C. SAMA, Women’s History in Italian Studies... (1994), pp. 126-128.
entists who had been born at the beginning of the eighteenth-century, Caminer may have faced a different situation in the late 1760s. Indeed, Findlen suggests that the second half of the eighteenth century was less hospitable (than the first half of the century) to women in the sciences.39 Perhaps at a young age Caminer gave up on the idea of following her inclination for scientific study because she recognized that the gender boundaries of her society would not readily allow her such a possibility.

It is also plausible, however, to read Caminer’s letter to Spallanzani as an indirect plea for his assistance and encouragement. She was writing, after all, to the man whose cousin and scientific mentor was none other than Laura Bassi. In fact, Caminer wrote this letter to Spallanzani only months after he had been accepted into Bologna’s Academy of the Institute for Sciences (Istituto delle Scienze) where Bassi was one of the Institute’s élite «Benedettini» members, enjoying full voting rights with her male counterparts.40 It is important to note the context of Caminer’s missive to Spallanzani, because in the letter she was monitoring the public debate about the differing theories of generation (epigenesis vs. preformation vs. materialism) which were being formulated and disputed at the time. Displaying the very «aptitude for the Sciences» which she claimed she might have – or at least demonstrating a general knowledge and affinity for the discipline – Caminer was writing to Spallanzani about the delicate issues involved in publishing a scathing review of John Turbeville Needham’s critical version (in French) of Spallanzani’s own Saggio di osservazioni microscopiche in the forthcoming issue of the «Europa letteraria».41 In the closing of her letter, Caminer reiterated her desire to pursue her interest in natural history. She asked Spallanzani to pray that she might find herself in a position to devote herself to her mind – «en état de me livrer à mon génie» – in such a way that she might be able to better appreciate his works. Perhaps she hoped he would offer to tutor her or else use his connections in the scientific world to introduce her to someone who might. If so, she was unsuccessful in her attempt, since to my knowledge she never received formal instruction in natural history. The let-

40. During this same period, Spallanzani was sharing the results of his latest experiments in regeneration with Bassi, and she was offering suggestions to him and repeating his experiments to verify his results. See Lazzaro Spallanzani, Epistolario, ed. by B. Bogni, vol. I, pp. 173, 180-186. On Bassi and the Bolognese Academy, see P. FINDLEN, Science as a Career..., pp. 457-469.
41. More specifically, Caminer was referring to a review signed by Alberto Fortis – but perhaps originally written in part by Charles Bonnet – criticising John Turbeville Needham’s French translation of SPALLANZANI’s Saggio di Osservazioni microscopiche concernenti il sistema della generazione de’ Signori di Needham, e Buffon, which formed the first part of SPALLANZANI’s Dissertazioni due... (1765). Needham had published a French translation of Spallanzani’s Saggio – supplementing the translation with his own lengthy notes and a treatise – under the title Nouvelles recherches sur les découvertes microscopiques, et la génération des corps organisés, Paris, Lacombe, 1769. In Caminer’s letter to Spallanzani about this review, she expressed concern about misrepresenting Bonnet’s criticisms of Needham: «I shall not take the liberty that you grant to Mr. Fortis to include the Extract of Mr. Needham’s reveries in the issue [of the «Europa letteraria»] currently in press. It seems to me that it would be necessary to make some small changes in order not to expose Mr. Bonnet, who would perhaps not want to break with a man ‘that he esteems and loves’ despite his ‘irrationalities’ and ‘his occult qualities’. Between January and March 1769, the «Europa letteraria» published at least three articles regarding the Needham-Bonnet-Spallanzani discussion. For a detailed discussion of the complex debates of Spallanzani, Bonnet and Needham, see R.G. MAZZOLINI and S.A. ROE, Science against the Unbelievers: the Correspondence of Bonnet and Needham, 1760-1780, Oxford, The Voltaire Foundation, 1986, esp. pp. 7-52. See also C. CASTELLANI, L’origine degli infusori nella polemica Needham, Spallanzani, Bonnet, «Episteme», 3 (1969), pp. 214-241; and «Episteme», 4 (1970), pp. 19-36; and Lazzaro Spallanzani. Epistolario, ed. by B. Bogni, vol. I, esp. pp. 176-177.
ter to Spallanzani may offer us a glimpse into an unsuccessful attempt by Caminer to utilize the system of male patronage to her complete satisfaction.

At age seventeen Caminer was already confronting the paradoxical and shifting realities of her society’s notions of gender. On the one hand, she was an accomplished member of the editorial team of the newly established «Europa letteraria». On the other hand, she was faced with limitations she was sure would be imposed upon her as a female. Her letter to Spallanzani is especially interesting because it allows us a glimpse into the young Caminer’s perception of the limits of her own power to shape the parameters of her life. The importance of this private revelation is that it challenges the traditional image of Caminer and the scholarly assumptions about her “natural love” for literature and theater.

Caminer’s letter to Spallanzani is especially significant for our purposes in its function as an autobiographical text. It provides us with one of those rare moments when we catch a glimpse of Caminer speaking about herself. Her words leave little doubt about her perception of the restrictions placed on her, but they also reveal a definite awareness of her own intellectual talents and potential. The letter is one of the earliest examples of Caminer developing her public persona. Early in her career, Caminer’s mode of self-presentation often oscillated between self-promotion and internal promise on the one hand, and a recognition of her limits – often presented as external societal pressures – on the other. A certain amount of formulaic self-deprecation was a typical eighteenth-century trope for men of letters as well as for women. But for women it had special meaning – and function – as a strategic move, as they were beginning to “invade” and take part in the public, professional sphere that was still considered men’s territory. Throughout her late teens and early twenties Caminer adopted this «double-voiced discourse» often, and it is especially visible in those moments when she is publicly defending herself from attack.

The very first text that Caminer published embodies this deliberate and delicate balance of boldness and modesty. At age twelve, she published a sonnet in a collection of poetry in honor of Gian-Francesco Pisani’s entrance into the office of Procuratore of S. Marco. She dedicated her poem to Pisani’s sister-in-law, the procuratessa Paolina Gambara Pisani:

Invido Veglio, al cui perpetuo volo
Beltà finisce, e fama ancor si oscura,
Onde chi vezzi, e vanità sol cura


Col veloce tuo cor so empi di duolo;
È per me troppo tardo il tuo orivolo,
È troppo ancor la mia mente (1) immatura,
Per ispirar soffribile figura
Fra l'Apollineo mio dilettò stuolo.

Io canterei pur di PAOLINA i pregi:
La gran Madre de' Gracchi (2) io la direi,
Matrona, augusta, e di costumi egregi.
Perché sprezzò fu chiesto un di a colei,
Le gioje, fasto dei donneschi fregi?
Son mie gioje, rispose, i Figli miei.

(1) L'Autrice di questo Sonetto è di anni dodici.
(2) Cornelia illustre Dama Romana, Figlia di Scipione l'Africano, e moglie del console Sempronio Gracco, di cui l'unica cura era di allevare i propri Figlioli con attenzione e coll'instillar loro ne' teneri petti tutto ciò che li poteva render idonei a ben servire la Patria.44

In stylistic terms, the poem is typical of Italian eighteenth-century occasional poetry: it is a sonnet with a traditional rhyme scheme, lexicon, and classical allusions. In lines 1-4, Caminer addresses Jealous Time («Invidio veglio»), bowing to the power of its inevitable and ceaseless passage. This is perhaps a direct allusion to lines 7-8 of one of Horace's odes — Liber primus, Carmen XI: «Even while we speak, Time envious («invida aetas») slips away; Incredulous of the morrow, — pluck today!» The allusion is indicative of the cultural background Caminer brought to her writing. Interestingly, she turns Horace's «carpe diem» idea on its head. Rather than suggesting that one should live for the moment in face of Time's inevitable flight, she uses it to suggest the opposite: one should plan for the future and not get caught up in the frivolities of the day. Caminer acknowledges the commonplace warning about Time's power to cause grief to those (usually women) who would waste their youth on frivolous material concerns, in particular by valuing physical beauty and ornamentation, which inevitably fade with time, rather than internal qualities. But she immediately sets herself apart from the ominous effects of the passage of time. At her young age, she feels time is passing too slowly («E per me troppo tardo il tuo orivolo»). Time is somehow to blame for the fact that she is still inexperienced.

Caminer's explicit mention of her age in the footnote to the sonnet is a strategic move that highlights the interplay between her modesty and her self-assertion. Caminer states that she is too inexperienced («immatura») to write this poem well, yet in the same sentence she reveals her ambition to claim her own place among important literary figures—her beloved circle («diletto stuolo») of revered poets. In fact, by the time Caminer finishes claiming that she is too young and inexperienced to write this poem, she is already in the middle of doing it. The first half of the sonnet sets the stage for singing the praises of Paolina Gambara Pisani, the "authentic" subject of the poem. Its primary function, however, is to introduce Elisabetta Caminer, the poet.

The transition to the final six lines of the sonnet corresponds to a change in focus from the autobiographical sketch to the laudatory por-

44. Poeti componimenti Pisani, p. x. The footnotes which accompany the sonnet are Caminer's.
trait of Paolina Gambara Pisani. Caminer presents the Procuratessa in striking contrast to the image of dangerous frivolity described in the first four lines of the poem: she is a woman of honorable and excellent customs who resists the temptations of superficial ornamentation. She is, in fact, nothing less than an eighteenth-century «Madre de’ Gracchi», embodying the ideal of the enlightened mother whose greatest responsibility and honor is the education of her children.

Caminer's decision to incorporate Cornelia into the imagery of her poem is suggestive in other ways, especially concerning the definition of gender roles. Cornelia is one of the most famous women of Ancient Rome, a complex figure who embodies both “feminine” and “masculine” values. She is “feminine” in that her role as mother is her only care and her glory; yet she is also revered for her rejection of the frivolity typically ascribed to women. Her “masculine” attributes – her erudition and the political influence she exercised over her two sons – deepen the ambiguous perception of her sexual identity. As is typical in the case of learned women from the past, she is frequently described as both female and male. Although the twelve-year-old Caminer may not yet have experienced such public “gender categorization”, she would be subjected to this phenomenon throughout her life, and particularly during her late teens and early twenties.

To my knowledge, no other published texts by Caminer appear until 1768, when she began working with her father on the «Europa letteraria». With the emergence of this family project, Caminer started to become visible in the intellectual circles in the Veneto and beyond. Her extracts, summaries and reviews of the latest Italian, French, German and English publications brought her to the attention of the periodical's readers. The breadth of her visibility was further enhanced by the wide network of correspondents she began developing as part of her work as a journalist. Caminer wrote letters to the most renowned intellectuals in and beyond the Veneto in order to solicit articles, reviews and extracts for the periodical, to discuss borrowing books or purchasing volumes of the periodical, and to request help in expanding the list of subscribers to the periodical. Correspondences that began as strictly work-oriented exchanges in many cases grew into friendships which lasted for years, and some for the whole of Caminer’s life. This circle of erudite friends and colleagues – her «diletto stuolo» – would rapidly expand in the following years. As we shall see, some of her earliest correspondents played key roles in supporting her in her new career.

On a personal level, one of the most influential correspondents at this early point in Caminer’s life was Francesco Albergati Capacelli, the

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45. It is interesting that Caminer's earliest publication is a poem in praise of a woman (rather than of the Procuratore himself, for example) in which she calls forth the image of another (illustrious) woman. By demonstrating her awareness of a heritage of admirable, exceptional women, and by ascribing a role-model status primarily to Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi and secondarily to Paolina, she sets up a female network of both inspiration (Cornelia) and support (praise of Paolina). Indeed, the sonnet is an early illustration of what would become an important concern in Caminer's own life: the condition of women in society.

46. Dena Goodman underscores the importance of correspondence networks in the eighteenth-century, describing this «reciprocal exchange» as «crucial to the Republic of Letters from its inception» and «the means of expanding a scholarly republic into what Habermas has called a 'critically debating public', a 'public engaged in rational — critical debate'» (GOODMAN, The Republic of Letters, p. 138).
aristocratic Bolognese playwright and dilettante actor. Unfortunately, we have only one side of the story from this correspondence, because all the extant letters are Albergati’s. However, because Albergati often quoted Caminer directly from her letters when responding to her queries, and because the two wrote to each other very frequently – as often as every few days during the most intense period of the correspondence – it is possible to glean direct information about what Caminer wrote by reading Albergati’s letters.

This is certainly one of the most entertaining of Caminer’s correspondences, because it reads like an epistolary novel of the time (albeit one-sided). When Caminer and Albergati began to write to each other, they had not yet met in person. Mutual attraction to each other’s literary accomplishments and reputations had drawn them into a courtship correspondence. Their relationship on paper grew in intensity, led to a proposal of marriage, culminated in their first meeting in person, and then dwindled in frequency, eventually becoming formal again. Although Caminer and Albergati did not marry, they remained friends and professional colleagues.

In these letters we see once again Caminer’s conscious blending of self-assertion and modesty, of ambition tempered by acknowledgment of societal limitations – this time in her hopes and decisions about love and marriage. While the young Caminer was clearly taken with the older, more experienced Albergati, it is also evident from many letters that she did not trust him completely. Some of her caution stemmed from self-consciousness and perhaps a certain amount of disbelief that such a well-known playwright and nobleman would court her.

One of the first signs of her mistrust is evident in a letter in which Albergati quoted her while responding to her doubts:

Au reste, Mademoiselle, vous avez trouvé un moyen bien sûr et bien rigoureux de m'imposer silence sur de certains points. Plus j'examine quelques unes de vos Phrases et plus je connais que je devrais me taire. Je porte bien loin le badinage. Vous ne voulez pas être jouée. Ramenons à la Littérature notre commerce.

In response, Albergati told her that she did not know him well enough. He reassured her that he was honest, that he «[took] pride in being a

47. The first extant letter dates from November 1768, and the last from November 1771; the letters peak in frequency and intensity in the year 1769. Ernesto Masi quoted from some of the letters in his 1878 biography of Albergati, but it was not until 1984 that the entire correspondence was published, in R. TROVATO, Lettere di F.A.C. For a neat synthesis of the cultural context behind this correspondence, see R. UNFER-LUKOSCHIK, E.C.T. (1751-1796) Una letterata veneta ..., pp. 14-17.

48. F. Albergati (1728-1804) married three times during the course of his life. His first marriage – to the contessa Teresa Orsi – was arranged by his parents in 1748. It was annulled in 1751, the year Caminer was born (Albergati told Caminer about the marriage in a letter dated May 2, 1769). In 1772, he married Caterina Boccadabati. It may be that Albergati and Boccadabati were involved even as he was talking of marrying Caminer; the timing is quite close, since the Caminer-Albergati marriage plan was called off in September of 1769, and Albergati’s and Boccadabati’s first son was probably born in 1770. In 1787, Boccadabati allegedly committed suicide. Although the details of what actually happened remain somewhat murky, Albergati was accused and acquitted of her murder. In 1789, he married the 25-year old dancer/actress, Teresa Checchi Zampieri.

49. «As for the rest, Miss, you have found a very sure and rigorous way to impose silence upon me about certain points. The more I examine some of your sentences, the more I know I should keep quiet. I carry bantering too far. You do not want to be played with. Let us bring our exchange back to Literature ...». This letter is dated January 27, 1769 (R. TROVATO, Lettere di F.A.C., p. 108). Unless otherwise noted, words in italics are original to the correspondence: they indicate the phrases Albergati quoted directly from Caminer’s letters. From here on the passages I quote from this correspondence will be taken from R. TROVATO, Lettere di F.A.C.
As the letters became more frequent, Albergati began to make allusions about where his honest intentions would lead. In one letter he wrote that many ideas about Caminer were swirling through his head, «none of which are indifferent or inappropriate to your most honorable Person. Enough said». Naturally, Caminer did not let this cryptic comment slip by without comment, as we discover in Albergati’s subsequent letter where he gleefully quoted her as having said she was «extremely curious» («curiosissima») to know what those ideas about her were.

This kind of “cat-and-mouse” game continued for a while, and Albergati suggested that they needed to see each other in person in order to properly discuss the situation. Caminer pressed the point, however, and in his subsequent letter her suitor responded playfully—although with condescending irony and some aggression—in a paragraph worth quoting at length for its succinct description of what their relationship had been thus far:

Voglio [...] aiutare il suo pigro ingegno, che in verità è stupido assai, come già ognuno è persuaso e io più di tutti. Mi dica un poco: l’accidente ha dato principio al nostro carreggio. La letteratura ne è stata per qualche tempo argomento. Indi siamo diventati amici. Io poi mi sono espresso con termini più vivi ancora delia amicizia. Ho [detto?] che desidererei di vivere sempre al fianco. Ella è persona civile ed onesta. Io sono un Galantuomo: cosicché non è da supporre prava intenzione in me; né questa potrebbe mai rivolgersi a lei. Ardentemente desidero il Ritratto. [...] mi dica adesso se le dà l’animo d’indovinar nulla?

At this point, Caminer conceded to his repeated request that they address each other informally, using «Voi» rather than «Lei». He was so enthused by her concession that in the following letter he painted a vivid picture of what their life would be like together, should they marry:

Vi accennai in una mia [lettera] ch’io era superiore ai pregiudizi del mondo e che la mia Filosofia mi portava all’unico pensiero d’esser felice e tranquillo. Noi vivremmo in una perfetta quiete. A voi piace lo studio; piace a me. Teatri, Recite, Spettacoli farebbero il nostro trattenimento. Ho qualche Casa in campagna, che non è spregevole, e dove amo assai di passare quattro o cinque mesi dell’anno, con alternativa di solitudine e di compagnia [...] cosicché tutto avrei, avendo voi al mio fianco.

A life of books, theatrical rehearsals and productions, a house in the country, companionship, tranquillity and excitement all guided by an Enlightenment philosophy—what must this have sounded like to a sev-

51. Ibid., p. 116.
52. Ibid., p. 117.
53. In fact, throughout the correspondence, Albergati repeatedly insisted that Caminer have her portrait done and send it—and the bill—to him. His letters indicate that she did sit for a Milanese painter, but that the painter kept the portrait for himself in the end.
54. R. Trovato, Lettere di F.A.C., pp. 119-120.
55. Ibid., p. 122.
enteen-year old Caminer, whose budding career mirrored these same values? This image of a life with the aristocratic Francesco Albergati – a marriage that would constitute a move up the social ladder as well as a companionship of shared interests – must have been very enticing. At this point in the correspondence, Caminer seemed to take Albergati’s words more seriously and to be more open to expressing her feelings for him. Her suitor reveled in the fact that she said she was overjoyed («rapita dalla contentezza») upon receiving his letters. In another letter she spelled out for Albergati the three qualities she was looking for in a companion, and it is possible to reconstruct her words through Albergati’s response. Her first two requirements were that her companion have an honest soul («un animo onesto»), and that his heart belong totally to her («un cuore che sia tutto mio»). Albergati declared that no man could best him in assuring her of these things. The third requirement – an attractive appearance – was more troublesome to the forty-year old Albergati. He «trembled» at the thought of it and begged her to be scrupulously demanding about the first two qualities but indulgent about the third.

The three qualities Caminer demanded give us a glimpse of her character: despite whatever excitement and lofty images she might have had in mind at the idea of marrying a marquis, she shows a decidedly practical side of herself by placing her priorities on honesty and dedication in love, as well as on a pleasing physical appearance. Actually, both Caminer and Albergati expressed concern over their appearance. What would happen if, when they actually met in person, one of them did not find the other attractive? In many letters they went back and forth over this issue. In one letter Albergati told her that she should abandon her excessive humility because he knew «from reliable sources» that she was beautiful. He explained that should he somehow find her unattractive, he would be honest with her, and they would simply agree to continue being close friends.

Once the marriage proposal was out in the open and accepted as serious, the two began to discuss possible obstacles. Aside from appearance, age (and the financial consequences of Albergati’s obligation to care for his ailing mother), their class difference emerged as a major potential obstacle to their marriage. Albergati claimed he was not worried about the laws which stated that a Chevalier who married a non-noble woman forfeited aristocratic status for himself and for all his descendents. He claimed that he had proposed a union «which would make those who were slaves to prejudice envious». Yet in truth

56. Ibid., p. 127.
57. Ibid., p. 131.
58. As simple as this observation may seem, it is worth noting because it contradicts the image of the self-absorbed, ambition-ridden seductress with which Caminer has often been portrayed over the centuries. As we shall see, it is also touches on a «character issue» that came up repeatedly in appraisals of her by contemporaries.
59. R. TROVATO, Lettere di F.A.C., p. 141. In the original: «Ma via, cara Bettina, bandite una soverchia umiltà. Ho di voi relazioni, datemi da Persone che non s’ingannano, e non m’inganno. Scusate la frase, forse troppo familiare: se so siete una bella Ragazza».
60. Ibid., pp. 124-125. In the original: «Venghiamo alle leggi el mio paese, che vi accennai. Un cavaliere che sposò donna non nobile resta degradato dalla nobiltà si egli che tutta la sua discendenza».
61. Ibid., p. 130.
he was worried that if he married Caminer he would risk losing the honorary titles granted him by the king of Poland. Above all, he wanted to avoid the familial resistance and the gossip that would result from an interclass marriage, so he advised secrecy and prudence («flemma, prudenza, costanza e segretezza») in all matters concerning their correspondence and marriage plans. In fact, he wanted to arrange a clandestine marriage and have the two of them remain secluded from society until they had been married for some time. Caminer was not pleased with this idea and at one point refused to discuss it further.

In the face of these obstacles, and as the reality of their first encounter drew near, Caminer apparently put forth all her doubts to her suitor once again. At this point Albergati responded with anger, declaring that one of her latest letters «would nearly disgust him» for its «pathetic dissertation» designed to deprive him of his most happy thoughts. He told her bluntly: «Either you do not care to be mine, or you do not believe I am sincere, or you do not believe I am constant. You are in error if you fear I am insincere, and you do me the gravest wrong if you believe it possible for me to regret it now that I have obtained and acquired you».

How did their long-awaited meeting go? Scholar Ernesto Masi surmised that Albergati had no intention of following through on his promises to Caminer because he was already involved with another woman, Caterina Boccadabati, who was pregnant with her and Albergati's first child. This is a plausible speculation, but I question the idea that Albergati came to Venice fully intending to break off the relationship with Caminer. If he did not marry Boccadabati until about two years after the birth of their son, can we assume that he would have decided to break things off with Caminer immediately upon hearing of the pregnancy? I suggest that it was Caminer who withdrew from the marriage proposal. She may or may not have known about Albergati's relationship with Boccadabati, but she may very well have concluded that despite his idealistic words the Bolognese marquis would not follow through on his promises if the secret courtship were to become public. Or, against her suitor's wishes, Caminer may have confided in her parents about the secret correspondence and had been pressured into refusing Albergati.

In any case, it was probably Caminer who wrote the first letter after their meeting, since, in the first extant letter following his visit to her, Albergati is clearly responding to a letter she had written to him. If

62. Ibid., p. 149. In 1767, King Stanislaus II granted Albergati the title of Chamberlain to the King. In 1768, at Albergati's insistence, the king also granted him an honorary military title, «Generale aiutante di campo di servizio». According to Masi, Albergati was extremely jealous of these titles. See E. MASI, La vita, i tempi gli amici..., pp. 181-185. For more on Albergati's complex and shifting position on the issue of class, especially as it manifests in his theatrical writing, see E. MATTHIA, Di dilettante 'per mestiere', Bologna, il Mulino, 1994, esp. pp. 18-20, 30-32.
63. R. TROVATO, Lettere di F.A.C., p. 123.
64. Ibid., p. 125. In the original: «A me piacerebbe [...] che ciò [il matrimonio] potesse seguire per via di Mandato secretissimo, e che fossimo visti insieme, un pezzo dopo d'essere già sposatis».
65. Ibid., p. 153.
66. E. MASI, La vita, i tempi gli amici..., p. 248.
Caminer had written to express her desire to end their courtship correspondence and remain friends, Albergati’s response makes perfect sense.67 Addressing the “solution” they had discussed in previous letters if their meeting were not to go as planned (i.e., to remain friends), it was Albergati who acquiesced to Caminer’s wishes: «So, dear Bettina, our friendship and our tender correspondence must remain intact, if you enjoy such an innocent pastime».68 Albergati’s ironic tone here – as well as the generally aggressive way in which he had pursued Caminer throughout the correspondence – certainly suggest that this «innocent pastime» of friendship was not the kind of activity he would have preferred.

Regardless of who initiated this change of plans, its relevance here lies in how the experience affected Elisabetta Caminer. In what ways might it have shaped the choices she would make later in life? Did it make her more cautious when other colleagues approached her with amorous intentions? Did such disillusionment in her attempt to marry for love influence her decision to marry a financially stable man from her own class, for what would seem to be practical reasons rather than “romantic” notions? Searching for answers to these questions leads us to examine the presence of three other men in Caminer’s life during this period (from the time of her courtship correspondence with Albergati until her June 1772 marriage to Antonio Turra): the Paduan naturalist, Alberto Fortis, the Florentine man of letters, Giulio Perini, and the Vicentine doctor and botanist, Antonio Turra. As we shall see, her interactions with each of these men (as colleagues, mentors or suitors) had direct effects on her career as well as on her private life.

Sometime in the late summer or early fall of 1768 – just prior to the beginning of the correspondence with Albergati – Alberto Fortis became Caminer’s colleague. As primary members of the editorial team of the newly established «Europa letteraria», Fortis and Caminer became close friends as well as working partners. Scholars have often described the spiritual and intellectual bond the two shared over the course of their lives.69 Indeed, as a mentor, friend and business partner over the years, Fortis was probably one of the single-most influential people in Caminer’s life.

Nevertheless, Fortis’ relationship with both Caminers – especially with Domenico – was a conflicted one. Indeed, after less than a year of collaboration on the «Europa letteraria», he broke with the Caminer team and refused to contribute further to the periodical. In an explosive letter he wrote to Domenico in June 1769, Fortis vented his anger. He explained his reasons for leaving, and he even threatened retalialogo
tion for the unfair way he had been treated. Fortis sent the letter through a mediator, Giulio Perini, possibly hoping that Perini could convince Caminer to meet certain conditions under which he (Fortis) would consider returning to the periodical.

Despite the vehemence of Fortis' letter, he returned to the «Europa letteraria» within a couple of months. But the following spring – around April 1770 – he separated once again from the Caminers, and this time his absence from the «Europa letteraria» lasted into 1772. As evidence from (Elisabetta) Caminer's correspondence reveals, she was upset at Fortis' leave-taking. In response to a friend's condolences about the turn of events, Caminer penned the following rather bitter comment: «I am sorrier than anyone else about Fortis' alienation; but I know that good things rarely last, and it was useless to hope that they would».

Not only did Fortis leave, but it appears that he carried out his threat of retaliation as well. Although the primary target of his anger may have been Domenico, the person he attacked was Elisabetta. He published something negative – perhaps a satirical poem – about her. This text has not been found, but we do have evidence of its existence – and of Fortis' possible motives for writing it – in a letter that his friend Perini wrote to Giuseppe Pelli. Perini's letter is fascinating not only for the portrait it offers of the volatile Paduan abbe, but also for its frank description of Fortis' relationship to both Elisabetta and Domenico Caminer:

Il P. Fortis è un' Uomo pieno d'ingegno e di Lum; ma egli è Poeta più fantastico che Filosofo, egli ha una fantasia troppo vivace e piena di immagini e di deliri. Erasi, benché nol dica, invaghito della Ragazza, ella è savissima, ed aveva per lui molta gratitudine ed amicizia e niente d'amore; son corsi varj interessi fra il Padre di Lei ed il Fortis, egli non fu troppo delicato osservatore di certe leggi, egli animo turbolente ed inquieto; più volte si è sciolto dalla Società del Giornale, io gli ho accomodati più volte; ma egli che era molto amico mio, si è stancato di esserlo, ha stampato contro la Caminer un foglio inde-

70. The letter is located in the Archivio di Stato di Firenze («ASF»: Acquisti e Doni, 93, inserto 77. On June 17, 1769, Alberto Fortis wrote: «Alla sua lettera piena di motivi di lunga risposta, ed acre, rispondo breve, e fiemmatico [...] Io non faccio scarti infero al suo Giornale, quando dico, ch'io non vedo mano; ma faccio un buon ufficio a me. Non è giusto ch'io usirop le glorie o i biasimi altrui. I cattivi, e indegni uffizj o io ricevuti pur troppo spesso, e nessuno può negarlo, nessuno. Ella non potrà dolersi di me, quando penserei che le ragioni del mio disgusto sono assai giuste. Possono mancare al Giornale molti associati, che sono venuti per me: ma s'è V. S. che crede utile di fare tutto ciò che mi pare pregugiglievole, allontanandosi dal primo piano, io non avrò rimorso. Ecco quanto rispondo categoricamente alle insolenze, onde la sua ultima lettera è impastata. Le prego a non iscrivermi d'ora in poi, perché veramente il suo stile non può sempre trovare disposto all'indolenza un uomo, che sò molto bene di aver meritato tutt'altro presso di Lei. L'amico Perini ascolterà le sue doglianze, e tratterà meco in modo meno pericoloso. A qualche minaccia non rispondo; capisco nell'atto ch'ella è l'imprudenza di farla che conta molto sulla mia discrezione, e amicizia per chi la merita. Ma veramente un altro uomo perderebbe la pazienza, ricordando tutto il passato, e trovandosi punto dal presente [...]. Io non vorrei essere spinto a farne ma sono determinatissimo di non sofferme tacitamente. Questa lettera non è da nemico: anzi è il contrario. Sono certo che l'Abate Perini la troverà molto onesta; è però possibile che a Lei [senbri] altrimenti. Ad outa di tutto lo non cangio le mie prime disposizioni. Sono, quond' ella il volgia, A. F.».

71. Giulio Perini was residing in Venice at this time. He knew Fortis and the Caminers well, and he collaborated on the Europa letteraria. For more on Perini, see M. MORELLI TIMPANO, Autori, Stamatori, Librai per una storia dell'editoria in Firenze nel secolo XVIII, Firenze, Olschki, 1999.

72. According to the statistics in Dino Benacchio's thesis on Alberto Fortis, the Paduan abbe did not sign any reviews in the May and June 1769 issues of the «Europa letteraria» (this corresponds to June and July in «real time»), since the periodical was usually printed a month after the date indicated on the frontispiece. Fortis' second period of absence began with the March 1770 issue (thus April 1770) and lasted into mid 1772 (aside from a few occasional reviews). See D. BENACCHIO, Alberto Fortis e i giornali dei Caminer, tesi di laurea, University of Venice, Director Gilberto Pizzamiglio, academic year 1985-1986.

73. «E.C. - G.G. correspondence»: April 24, 1770.
According to Perini’s account of the story, Fortis was in love with Caminer, frustrated that she did not return his amorous feelings, and offended by her father as well. Perhaps this was motive enough for such a «turbulent soul» to lash out at her. Another letter from Fortis to Perini may shed further light on this conflict. In it, Fortis explained that he might never reconcile with Domenico but that he was shocked that Elisabetta was not writing to him. Clearly, he was hurt and displeased with her, although he did not directly explain the circumstances. Perhaps she had defended her father rather than taking Fortis’ side in their disagreement. The conflict between the two men closest to Caminer cost her a mentor and friend in Fortis, and risked damaging her good reputation at an early point in her career. As we shall see, Fortis’ public criticism of Caminer would be used as evidence against her in an attack by a rival journalist later that summer.

Although Fortis and (Elisabett a) Caminer eventually resumed their friendship and remained close for their whole lives, over the years their relationship was marked by conflict. It seems that they had fluctuating periods of collaboration or contact through the years, in part as a result of Fortis’ travels to Dalmatia and Southern Italy, as his phases of collaboration on and distance from the periodical reflect. Some comments in their few extant letters reflect phases of affectionate and frequent communication, while others suggest frustration and attenuated contact.

But what of Giulio Perini? What perspective did he bring to his description of this early skirmish between Fortis and the Caminers? Certainly, he was present for the unfolding of events. He was even drawn into the conflict, by acting as mediator, by contributing to the periodical (thus filling the gap created by Fortis’ absence), and possibly by defending the Caminers. Like Fortis, however, Perini, was suffering from the frustrations of his own affection for Caminer. Evidence of his feelings for her is found in his letters to Pelli as well as in four letters he wrote to Caminer directly.

Perini’s bold writing style makes for amusing reading. In one letter he described Caminer’s charms to his friend in Florence:

Una Ragazza alquanto bella, spiritosa amabile e d’età fresca invita ed accende, e la di lei

74. All letters written by Giulio Perini and Elisabetta Caminer to Giuseppe Pelli are located at the ASF: Carteggi Pelli Benvenuti. M.A. Timpanaro Morelli published an inventory of the entire correspondence in Lettere a G. Pelli, and I will use her numerical system to identify each letter from which I quote. This letter from Perini to Pelli, dated August 18, 1770, corresponds to number 3599 in the inventory of Giuseppe Pelli Benvenuti correspondence (= GPB). From here on I will refer to each letter I cite here under the title «GPB correspondence» and according to its inventory number (n.) and date.

75. This undated letter from Fortis to Perini reads as follows: «Stupisco assai che Bettina non mi scriva una parola; ma è il torto di stupire, e purtroppo lo conosco. Sarà difficile ch’io mi raccomodi col Caminer, che m’a punto sul vivo in più maniere, e che vuole vedere precipitato il suo affare, e ne avrà la consolation; io o sofferto assai da lui e da sua moglie; non avrei creduto di dover soffrire da qualch’altro, e qualche insospetato tratto m’a scosso da un sonno riprensibile e dannoso. Tu sai quant’amicizia io o sentita per Elisa, e quanto mi costi il dovere dolermi di lei, perch’ella lo vuole. Addio» (ASF: Acquisti e doni, 93, inserto 77). Interestingly, this is the only primary source I have found (apart from the 1805 Registro) that even mentions Caminer’s mother.
onesta e saviezza respinge e mortifica. Pochi anni mi restano ancora da essere idoneo puellis, onde io non voglio avermi a pentire d’averli trascurati al freddo punto della mia morte parziale. Non fo Estratti per lei, perchè Ella non vuole riceverli tutti; S’Ella ricevesse ancora quegli estratti ammirabili che mi detta e mi fabbrica la Natura, vedreste più spesso nell’Europa il G. P.76 Consigliatela dunque voi, come saggio amico suo a lasciarsi da me servire con ambedue le penne.77

His rather lewd comment about wanting to “serve” Caminer with «both of his pens» («ambedue le penne») leaves little doubt as to his desirous feelings for her. During this period Caminer, too, was corresponding with Pelli, and some of their letters contain oblique references to their mutual friend Perini’s interest in her. Although it is difficult to determine, it seems that she was unaware of Perini’s feelings for her at this point. Sometime in the course of the next year, however, Perini told Caminer how he felt in four letters he wrote to her.78 In the first letter, he revealed both his passion for her and his caution in hoping she might feel similarly towards him:

E veramente bisognerebbe essere o troppo ciechi, o troppo vanagloriosi per lusingarsi d’ottenere da voi un’armonica retribuzione a quelli affetti che avete forza d’ispirare. Io so che le facoltà sensitive delle umane passioni sono molto limitate, e che il nostro cuore ha una porta simile a quella del Teatro S. Angelo ove si entra uno alla volta. Io dunque sapendo questo, pieno d’amor proprio, come io lo sono e che vedo già occupato l’andito che conduce alla platea del vostro cuore, m’armo di cautela, mi difendo, sem-pre più vi conosco, e finalmente trionfo.79

Apparently Caminer was emotionally attached to someone else at this point, since Perini metaphorically alluded to the fact that the «pathway» to her heart was already occupied («... vedo già occupato l’andito che conduce alla platea del vostro cuore»).80 His use of the S. Angelo theater’s narrow doorway— which allowed only one person in at a time— as a metaphor for the human heart was particularly clever. It would have been quite meaningful to Caminer, since at that time she was working at the S. Angelo theater, translating plays for the actors and supervising their performances.

Despite acknowledging her interest in another person, Perini poured on the charm as he described her attractiveness, thereby presenting us with an almost “live” image of the young Caminer surrounded by numerous admirers:

Quanto vi ringrazio! quanto devo a quella innocente semplicità non spenta ancora dalla malizia dei vostri adoratori e dal fermento delle passioni; vi baleno gl’affecti sul viso, vi muovono i sensi a vostro dispetto, vi elettrizzano, e non vi spaventa

76. Perini is referring to his own initials printed at the end of reviews he wrote for the «Europa letteraria».
77. GPB correspondence n. 3691: December 28, 1770.
78. These letters are undated, but they were probably written sometime in 1771 (between the fall of 1770, and definitely prior to Caminer’s June 1772 marriage and subsequent move to Vicenza, because the letters are addressed to «Bettina Caminer» in Venice). The letters are located in the ASF: Acquisti e Doni, 97, inserto 1. Since they are not numbered in any way and are not identifiable by date, I shall simply refer to them as «Perini to Cammer, ASF» in the notes here.
79. «Perini to Caminer»: ASF.
80. Perhaps Perini was referring to Caminer’s future husband, Antonio Turra.
In the same letter Perini described the intensity of his desire for her, lamenting the impossible struggle between “nature” (the primitive demands of his physical attraction to her) and “education” (the demands that polite and respectful comportment placed upon him). Although it is difficult to interpret Perini’s dramatic and sometimes cryptic language, the letter seems to suggest that he and Caminer had shared some degree of flirtation. It seems he was asking her to clarify the situation for him: was he hoping in vain, or might she return his desire? Caminer responded to his letter and explained the nature of her feelings for him. We must rely on Perini’s comments, of course, to infer what the content of her letter must have been. In his subsequent letter he began by expressing his gratitude for her honesty. He asked her for…

81. Ibid.

82. Ibid. In the original: “Una sola contraddizione scorgo in voi, che mi urta un poco, e mi dispiace, e che io collo mia solita sincerità vi dico. Per quanto rispetto, e modestia ispiri una savia, e virtuosa fanciulla quale vo siete, in un animo delicato, ed onesto, pure vi è quella lotta terribile della natura, e della educazione, che vincono a vicenda; la modestia, e l’incatenano la lingua, gli occhi, le mani, e i piedi, ma la natura di tanto in tanto gli scioglie tutti, e gli pone nella loro primitiva natura libertà; Amica, voi lo sapete, a me così successe; vedeste il muto linguaggio degli occhi miei, sentiste alcune mie parole tronche, ed abbozzate, sentiste le convulsioni delle mie mani, vedeste stendere i nervi dei miei piedi, e giungerne fino ai vostri; e voi allora, e voi indiscreta, cosa faceste! Vi scordaste voi forse in quel momento della lingua immagine che vi stà fissa nel cuore? no, no, non voglio lusingarmene, fingeste, forse per farmi vostra vittima? Nol sò […] Addio; ma prima ascoltate = O più malizia o meno sensibilità.

83. Ibid. In the original: “Ora poi che avete la bontà di dirmi che volete solamente essermi amica, vedrete di quant’altra forza io sia capace, vedrete qual’argine saprò opporre all’impeto degli affetti; io vi guarderò come una immagine di virtù, e di saviezza, e soffogherò qualunque mio desiderio…”

84. In Perini’s words: “…m’ha ricordatemi, che siete sul fiore dell’età, che siete bella, che siete amabile, che avete molte parti del vostro corpo fatte apposta dall’innocente Natura nell’accostamento, con cui siadimplano i suoi disegni, che son uomo, e ancor non languido dal peso degli anni miei; attenerimi, non lasciate a me solo tutta la imprese; raffrenate il naturale dolicissimo movimento degli occhi vostri, troncate qualche mio discorso che a voi si riferisca, parlatemi della vostra indifferenza per me, del vostro genio per altri; pensate ch’io son degno di commissione, e d’appoggio, e se mi riesce il trionfo, come io lo spero, voi ne avrete la maggior parte. Non sò, se potrò venire a trovarmi per qualche giorno; Lasciatemi stare, non mi cercate, voi non perderete mai l’amicizia mia, e la mia stima, e vorrei essere in uno stato da farvi provare di quant’altra forza io sia capace l’animo mio.”
collections of occasional poetry. Thanks to her correspondence network, she thrived within a supportive intellectual community both in and outside Venice. She lived with access to a constant flow of international books and periodicals, and she had an established rapport with a reading public and with theatergoers. She had had the experience of attracting men of letters with her intelligence, honesty and beauty. In short, she had begun to build a reputation for herself on many levels. She was succeeding marvelously at satisfying her most fervent desire to develop her mind, a desire she described as "the most useful and constant internal disposition to which I have completely abandoned myself." She was, in effect, a rising star. What could go wrong? In a remarkably prescient letter that she received from Francesco Albergati when she was seventeen years old, Caminer was confronted with a veritable list of her transgressions - both personal and professional. Albergati warned her that she would have to pay a price for her newly acquired visibility in the public sphere: "I will speak very clearly: the increase in your beauty, vivaciousness, knowledge; the fact that you have made a well-deserved name for yourself [...] in the Republic of Letters; the fact that you have a vast circle of learned people who admire and approach you [...] all this is a body of crimes, and grave crimes, that will not be easily pardoned". Here, Albergati is not writing to Caminer as her suitor, but as her colleague in the Republic of Letters. To what kinds of encouragement and discouragement would Caminer be subject? How would these experiences shape her character and her career? For which "grave crimes" would she have to answer?

One of the earliest public criticisms directed at the young journalist came from an unexpected source: one of the most prominent figures of the Venetian Enlightenment, Tommaso Antonio Contin. Contin taught canonical law at the University of Parma between 1769 and 1772, and it was during this period that the conflict with Caminer arose. Between 1767 and 1771, Contin translated and published the abbé François-André-Adrien Pluquet's *Dictionnaire des hérésies*. In 1771-1772, Venetian publisher GianFrancesco Garbo published a second edition of this translation, to which Contin added a sixth volume.

85. The second poem was published in 1769. At Gennari's request, Caminer wrote a sonnet for the collection he was organizing in memory of the late Contessa Antonia Dondi Orologio-Borromeo.
86. GPB correspondence n. 3669: Dec. 1, 1770.
87. R. Trovato, *Lettere di F.A.C.*, p. 137. In the original: "Parlo chiaramente: il crescere voi in bellezza, in vivacità, in sapere; il favvi un nome, ben meritato [...] nella Repubblica letteraria; l'aver ve vasto circolo di dotte Persone che vi pregiano e vi si accostano [...] tutto questo è un complesso di colpe, e colpe gravi, che facilmente non si perdonano».
88. Contin was a prominent figure in the jurisconsult movement of the 1760s in Venice. He authored various works in which he engaged in the anti-Jesuit polemic, including *Monumenti veneti intorno i padri gesuiti* (1762) and *Lettera seconda [...] ove si recano tutti, nessuno eccettuato i documenti ottenuti dalla medesima sinora usciti* (1767), which called for a return to the anti-Jesuit and jurisconsult teachings of Paolo Sarpi. In 1769 he published his most famous work, the *Riflessioni sopra la bolla In Coena Domini*. In 1764 Contin was appointed by the Reformators to the position of censor of books. Between 1780 and 1784 he was a journalist for the annual periodical *Progresso dello spirito nelle scienze e nelle arti ossia Giornale letterario dei confini d'Italia*, together with Giuseppe Maria Pujati and Ludovico Antonio Loschi. For more on Contin, see P. Preto, *Contin, Antonio*, in *DBI*, XXXII, Rome, 1983, pp. 509-513; F. Venturi, *Settecento riformatore*, Torino, Einaudi, 1976: vol. II, pp. 103-130; and M. Infelise, *Gesuiti e giurisconsulti nella pubblicistica veneziana di metà '700*, in *I Gesuiti e Venezia. Momenti e problemi di storia veneziana della Compagnia di Gesù*, ed. by M. Zanardi, Padova, Gregoriana, 1994, pp. 663-686.
89. The second edition of Contin's translation of Pluquet's work was entitled, *Dizionario delle eresi, degli errori, e
The «Europa letteraria» published a short commentary about this translation, and when Cantin read the bibliographical section of the July 1771 issue of the «Europa letteraria», he found this unflattering description of his work:

Il nostro Sig. Francesco Garbo Stampator e Librajo ci dà una seconda Edizione del Dizionario delle Eresie [...] del P. Tommaso Antonio Contini [...]. Nelle Notizie letterarie, foglio periodico di Firenze, parlandosi del Dizionario suddetto vi si rimarcano alcune falsificazioni di testi, e singolarmente riguardo al Pallavicini, a cui pretende il Notiziere, che il P. Contini abbia fatto dire ciò che non aveva neppure sognato, ed alcune altre galanterie simili, come per esempio, che ha mutilato persino l’Originele tutto del Dizionario ommettendo nella traduzione qualche periodo, e specialmente alla pag. 20 del primo Tomo all’Articolo «Abaelardo» ec. ec. ec. Il P. Contini però sarà molto bene difendersi.90

Clearly, the «Europa letteraria» had taken the information about Contini’s work directly from another periodical, the «Notizie letterarie» of Florence.91 Although the «Europa letteraria» positioned itself as neutral – by neither endorsing nor refuting the opinion of the Florentine periodical – it is understandable that Contini viewed the decision to print such a negative review of his work as provocative, if not downright hostile. Indeed, the «Europa letteraria»’s closing sentence essentially invited Contini to respond to the accusations made against him in the «Notizie letterarie».

In the preface to the sixth tome of the Dizionario, Contini responded to these accusations. The timing of the «Europa letteraria»’s critique was probably a factor in his decision to respond so strongly. At the time of this exchange, Contini was under attack by conservative local priests and canons in Parma – to the extent of being pointed at in the streets for his liberal views.92 If he had been concerned about his reputation during this period, any criticism by supposed allies would have felt like insult added to injury, and he would have been quick to retaliate. Contini’s dismay at the «Europa letteraria» was undoubtedly heightened precisely because he knew that the Caminers were progressive thinkers like himself.

Curiously, however, rather than focus his criticism on Domenico (the head of the «Europa letteraria») or more generally on the periodical’s editorial team as a whole, Contini specifically attacked Elisabetta. This fact is especially remarkable because there was no indication in the periodical that she had written the notice: her trademark signature – the initials «E.C.» – did not follow the brief paragraph.93 Even more surprising is the fact that Contini described Caminer – and not her family – as the cause of the conflict, and not her faction.94

deglì scismi, cosa Memorie per servire all’Istoria degli Sviamenti dello spirito umano, rapporto alla Religione Cristiana, Opera tradotta dal francese, ed accresciuta di Nuovi Articoli, Note, ed Illustrazioni da T. A. Contini, tomo 6, Venezia, Garbo, 1772. The sixth volume included a strong polemic against the Catholicism of the Counter-Reformation and against Cardinal Pallavicino.

90. «Europa letteraria», July 1771, pp. 95-96.

91. The «Notizie letterarie» (1771-1773) was compiled by Alberto Maria Gaetano Faggiani of the «scuole pie» in Florence, and it was printed by Gaetano Albizini. The periodical was in direct competition with the «Nuovelle letterarie», the periodical compiled by Pelli and Lasstri (among others) after the death of Lami. See La stampa italiana dal ’500 al 800, ed. by V. Castronovo, G. Ricuperati and C. Capra, pp. 291-292. For more on the two Florentine periodicals, see M.A. Morelli Timpanaro, Autori, Stamperari, Librai..., pp. 192-204.


93. As was the custom for all notices in the bibliographical section of the «Europa letteraria», initials were never appended to the commentary.
Contin attempted to undermine Caminer's professional credibility by calling attention to her sex and young age rather than by taking on the issue of whether or not his translation was accurate. In fact, he addressed the linguistic issue only in a footnote and wrote the more personal aspect of the attack into the main body of the preface. Contin chastised Caminer for even reading a conservative periodical like the «Notizie letterarie», much less publishing erroneous information from it. He told her she «should not read bad books and even worse lend them credence», and «under no circumstances» should she «let it be known to the «Europa letteraria» that the «Notizie letterarie» were published in Florence.

Rather than suggest that Caminer should no longer work as a journalist (as some critics did), Contin would have had Caminer be more careful about her collaborators, editorial decisions and sources of information. In the main body of his critique, Contin included a cryptic comment warning Caminer that she should be more discerning about her colleagues since «she knows from experience that a certain literary society has not always acted in her best interests». He might have seen the «shameful text» that Fortis had circulated about her. Or, more likely, he had heard about it in the recent slanderous attack against her – the next episode in Caminer's life that I will examine in this article. In any case, Contin let the young journalist know he had his eye on her and on the public literary persona she was creating for herself.

But why did Contin hold her personally responsible for the «Europa letteraria»'s critique of his translation, whether as its direct author or as its approving editor? Did he really believe that she was in charge of the «Europa letteraria»? Or if Contin suspected that, in fact, she had neither written nor authorized the criticisms against him, what were his motives for attacking her so harshly? Like many of Caminer’s detractors, Contin was uncomfortable with a young woman assuming the role of critic. In an era when it was deemed unnatural or dangerous for women to be engaged in such “men”'s work, Contin must have been aware that Caminer's position as an exception to the rule – as an anomaly – made her an easy target for public criticism. Perhaps Contin

94. CONTIN, Prefazione, in Dizionario delle eresie..., tomo 6, p. x.
95. In the footnote, Contin made a few subtle corrections to his translation. Despite his dismissive tone, he had clearly been disturbed enough by the critical comments to double-check his translation against the French original and publish a correction to clear his name.
96. Ibid. In the original: "è ben vero che altri concorrono a formar degli Estratti in quel Giornale, ma ella non dovrebbe quindinanzi ammetterli indistintamente, dopo che sa per esperienza, che certa Società letteraria non le riusci sempre di vantaggio".
focused his critique on the lone female member of the «Europa letteraria» team as a way of «feminizing» the periodical and therefore weakening its authority with the reading public or with rival journalists. He may even have purposely highlighted or exaggerated Caminer’s role in the «Europa letteraria» in order to strengthen his position.

It is difficult to speculate about the effect this encounter with Contin had on Caminer, primarily because I have found no evidence of her – or the «Europa letteraria»'s – response to it. One wonders what Caminer thought of the way her critic had presented her as the leader of the «Europa letteraria» équipe. Perhaps it suggested to her that she could indeed assume such a role in the future. Undoubtedly, it assured her of the complex challenges inherent in a public position such as her own. Perhaps it reinforced for her how difficult it was for a journalist to assume a position of neutrality; even if she avoided expressing her own opinion while relaying other journalists’ critical comments about a publication, she would not be protected from retaliation. The experience must also have reminded her that her sex would make her especially vulnerable to personal attacks.

An earlier experience of conflict with the Venetian journalist Cristoforo Venier – to which I turn now – had certainly brought that lesson home to the young Caminer. Originally from Istria, the abbé Venier moved to Venice around 1739. By 1771 he had already established an infamous reputation for making sacriligous comments in public, and between 1763 and 1771 he was officially accused by the Sant’Uffizio of atheism. In 1770 Venier launched a vicious attack against Caminer in his literary periodical, the «Nuovo corriere letterario». His public criticisms of her reached the point of sexual slander, and Domenico Caminer took legal action against him in order to defend his daughter’s (and his family’s) honor. On September 14, 1770, (Domenico) Caminer filed a formal complaint against the rival journalist. His petition to the Riformatori dello Studio di Padova began as follows:

Col più sensibile cordoglio l’umilissimo servo, e suddito di V.V.E.E. Domenico Caminer

97. ASV: Sant’Uffizio, b. 148. I am thankful to Federico Barbierato for generously sharing with me the information he gathered about Venier. I have found no other trace of Venier, except for a footnote by M. Infelese (L’edito­ria veneziana..., p. 188), and a mention of him in M.A. Timpanaro Morelli’s inventory of the Pelli Bencivenni corre­spondence (Lettere a G. Pelli..., pp. 632-634).

98. I am indebted to Mario Infelise for directing my attention to this document (ASV: Riformatori dello Studio di Padova, filza 37, carte 86, 87, 90, 94 and 97). The filza contains four items: Domenico Caminer’s petition to the Riformatori; two pages from the July 28, 1770 issue of the «Nuovo corriere letterario»; four pages from the August 4, 1770 issue; and the decision on the case by the Riformatori. Little information is available about the «Nuovo cor­riere letterario». I presume it is the continuation of Francesco Grisellini’s «Corriere letterario», a Venetian periodi­cal that was issued weekly between December 1765 and December 1768. Saccardo notes that there may have been a continuation of Grisellini’s periodical under the name of Nuovo corriere, but even today no copies have been found (Saccardo, La stampa periodica..., pp. 72-73). Consequently, the pages of the periodical that accompany Domenico Caminer’s petition may be the only surviving trace of the periodical. According to the information printed on one of the pages, the «Nuovo corriere letterario» was issued every Saturday; subscription cost eight lire per semester, and Giammaria Bassaglia was the bookseller who handled subscriptions as well as the collection of any articles or information submitted by readers.

There is one extant letter from Cristoforo Venier to Giuseppe Pelli, dated July 14, 1770; Venier wrote it during the same weeks that he published his attacks against Caminer. Once Domenico Caminer – who was also a corre­spondent of Pelli’s – discovered that Pelli had mentioned Venier’s periodical in his «Novelle letterarie», he wrote to the Florentine journalist: «Spacenni [...] vedere menzionato nel suo ultimo foglio il «Nuovo corriere letterario» è quello un foglio tanto screditaio, che non merita la di Lei attenzione. E scritto da un Abatino, che cerca farsi nome col strappazzare, e cova imposta» (GPB correspondence: n. 3590, August 4, 1770). As we shall see, Domenico Caminer was not the only correspondent of Pelli’s who set him straight about Venier’s character; Giulio Perini was very much involved in orchestrating a defense of the Caminers.
What had Venier published that was so incriminating? Why had he chosen to attack Caminer in the first place? What kinds of repercussions did this have on her, and how did she defend herself? What kind of formal action, if any, did the Riformatori take upon receiving the petition? The answers to these questions deepen our understanding of the network of male mentors and protectors that Caminer was forging in these early years of her career. The details of this story underscore how crucial this network was to Caminer’s survival at this point in her literary career.

The focal points of Venier’s attack on Caminer were two plays. One was Caminer’s translation of Fenouillot de Falbaire’s *L’Honnête criminel, ou l’Amour filial*. The performance of her version of the play had constituted her successful début on the theatrical scene in Venice the previous year. In addition, the staging of Caminer’s translation was probably the very first public performance of Falbaire’s play – albeit in Italian. These are two factors that would have reinforced for Venier the extent of Caminer’s influence on the Italian and even European theatrical scene. The other play at the center of Venier’s attack was Francesco Albergati’s comedy, *il Saggio amico*. Letters between Albergati and Caminer from the early summer of 1769 reveal that Caminer had been Albergati’s muse and editor for *il Saggio amico*, and that she had probably supervised the play’s production in Venice that fall. This explains why Venier used a comedy by Albergati as a vehicle for an aggressive act against Caminer: the more involved Caminer had been with the play, the more an attack against the play constituted an attack against her.

The «Europa letteraria» publicized both of these plays in the spring of 1770. In the May issue Caminer published a review of her translation, *l’Amore filiale*. The significance such a review holds for the story at hand is that Caminer was actively promoting herself, which undoubtedly served to further irritate critics like Venier. In the April issue of the «Europa letteraria», Caminer published a review of *il Saggio amico*. She dedicated a good amount of space to the discussion of Albergati’s talents, to the positive reception of his play and, especially, to the unfair criticism his play had received. I believe that this review was part of a journalistic dialogue between the «Europa letteraria» and the «Nuovo corrier letterario», a dialogue whose opening lines are missing.
because of the disappearance of all copies of Venier's periodical. Caminer was probably responding directly to Venier's (earlier) criticism of Albergati's play.

In her defense of Albergati, Caminer called upon a figure who was for her practically unassailable: Voltaire. She mentioned that the French «philosophe» had written a letter to Albergati in which he had compared the Bolognese playwright to himself, and she claimed that Albergati could receive no greater praise. Caminer also pointed out that the Venetian public had received *il Saggio amico* very warmly. In accordance with her Enlightenment culture and her practical experience, Caminer promoted the authoritative opinion of Voltaire as well as the reaction of the general public to support her argument.

After summarizing the plot of the play Caminer addressed its critics directly, and she offered them scathing remarks. This is the section of her review from which Venier would quote in the «Nuovo corrier letterario» three months later. She compared the play’s critics to «little dogs howling at the moon» («cagnuolini che abbajano contro la Luna»). She claimed that they criticized other’s works «often without bothering to give any reason» for their negative opinions, and she implies that they did this primarily «to make themselves heard». Such strong language reflects Caminer’s personal interest in the play’s author and in the role she herself had had in bringing forth the play. As the director of the performance at the S. Salvatore theater, she would have been keenly aware of the public’s response and even more invested in the play’s promotion. Clearly, at the age of eighteen the young journalist was unafraid to participate actively and critically in the literary debates of her city.

What was the reaction of the «Nuovo corrier letterario»? Venier used Caminer's review of *il Saggio amico* to place her at the center of a mock epistolary dialogue with his readers which carried over into two issues of his periodical. He also wrote a stinging review of Caminer’s translation, *l'Amore filiale*. Venier retaliated against Caminer without ever mentioning her name – perhaps as a precaution against a suit – but as we shall see, he left no possibility for his readers to doubt the true identity of his target. On the front page of the July 28, 1770, issue of the «Nuovo corrier letterario», Venetian readers were presented with a question: was a person «qualified to appraise the qualities or the defects of a play simply because this person had learned how to translate into Italian notices about books published in foreign periodicals?». Clearly Venier had his answer in mind, even as he posed this loaded question. Interestingly, however, he prefaced the rest of his article with a disclaimer – almost as if he were anticipating hostile reactions to his words on the part of Caminer and her supporters:

102. «Europa letteraria», April 1770, p. 76. In the original: «La commedia] ha certamente moltissimo merito, checché ne dicano alcuni Censori, i quali, a guisa di cagnuolini che abbajano contro la Luna, criticano a dritto e a torto le opere altrui, benespresso senza prendersi l'incommodo di addurne veruna ragione, e cercano di farsi almeno in questa maniera ascoltare ...».

103. «Nuovo corrier letterario», July 28, 1770, p. 225. Subsequent quotations from the Nuovo corrier letterario will be indicated by the title «N.c.l.» and include date and page numbers.
Una finissima malizia può esservi in chi propone somigliante quesito; e chi sa che mira
sua non sia di spargere appunto un qualche ridicolo su quei medesimi ancora che per
soverchia adulazione verso il bel sesso vorrebbero mettere in estima una Ragazza,
non per altro diventata Letteratuccia, se non per aver incominciato ad esercitarsi in
quello, che ben appreso ancora, non sarebbe, riguardo alle Scienze, niente di più di ciò
che in effetto è la semplice scala in ordine alla armonica cognizione del suono e del
Canto.¹⁰⁴

Venier took the opportunity to criticize Caminer’s male supporters, whom he claimed encouraged and admired her because of their own «excessive adulation of the fair sex». In his own estimation, Caminer’s preparation for an intellectual profession was «so amateurish as to amount to less – in musical terms – than an ability to sing the scales». This type of criticism reflects the stereotypical accusations brought against the increasing number of women who were reading and becoming knowledgeable by mid-century. That is, women became only superficially cultured in letters («letteratuccia») or in philosophy («filosofesse»); they learned just enough to try and show off their knowledge while in reality succeeding only in revealing their ignorance.

While becoming more explicitly insulting, the journalist assured his audience that he was only trying to be of service to this «idiotic little girl» («la scimunitella»). He merely wished to provide the means by which she could learn a «much-needed lesson», so that she would not continue to «foolishly» («da sciocca») pose as a literary or critical authority. He chastised her for daring to pass judgement «on the opinions of others», revealing that «the girl»’s greatest offense was the arrogance she had displayed in believing she was in a position to disparage a real critic’s opinion – perhaps even his own. Lacking ability or education, she had to be saved from herself.¹⁰⁵

A week later the «reader response» was printed in the next issue of the «Nuovo corrier letterario». It was allegedly submitted by an anonymous man of letters from Padua, but we may assume that it was Venier answering his own query. In this letter, Venier quoted Caminer directly from her review of Albergati’s il Saggio amico; in a separate section of the periodical he also published a negative review of her translation, l’Amore filiale. At this point Caminer’s identity was explicitly revealed for those readers who might not have understood the reference to her in the prior issue. Of course such readers would have numbered very few, since she was the only female journalist in the Veneto – someone who constantly translated book reviews from foreign periodicals – and the most famous female journalist in Italy at this time. Significantly, in the moment when Venier exposed Caminer’s identity, his attack became a sexually slanderous one.

¹⁰⁵. Ibid. In the original: «L’interesse pertanto che noi prendiamo per la soluzione dell’ammonziato problema, non può aver altro certamente in veduta, se non che dalle memorie che ci venissero per avventura sopra di ciò comunicate, ne tragu la scimunitella una saggia ed opportuna lezione per consigliarsi in avvenire un po’ meglio con l’appena elementar enciclopedia del saper suo, prima d’impegnarsi da sciocca a cianciare su quello che può esser per lei bianco e bruno nel medesimo tempo, e molto meno a passare in tal proposito su i giudicj altrui, non avendo essa in fine la minima capacità, né criterio che basti per instituirne quei confronti, che soli mettono al caso di rilevare se giustamente o ingiustamente sia stato sopra un’opera qualisia deciso e pronunziato».  

378
When the Venetian reading public turned to the front page of the «Nuovo corrier letterario», they read this «reader response»:

E che senza studio veruno si potrebbe egli dunque instituire l’esame in un Dramma sull’essenzial della favola, sulle qualità del protagonista, sulla forza degli affetti, sulla proprietà de’ costumi, sulla gravità delle sentenze? Co’ semplici elementi della lingua potrebbe qualsiasi pronunziare, e pronunziare adeguatamente sull’avviamento degli affari e de’ successi, sulla maniera d’introdur le persone, sulla dignità e proprietà de’ coloqui, e per taci di tante altre cose, sul regolamento degli atti e delle scene.106

While Venier took Caminer to task specifically for her review of il Saggio amico, he clearly regarded it as simply one example of her repeated misdeeds as a journalist and translator, exclaiming: «How many more times will she attempt to write and translate things she absolutely neither understands nor comprehends!». Perhaps Venier’s fury eventually got the better of him – as his mixed metaphors attest – in his protest against Caminer’s arrogance in assuming the role of literary critic: «and there she is [...] sitting like a judge with furrowed brow pronouncing upon the merits of a play as if she were an oracle».107

Venier also brought Alberto Fortis into this “reader response”, barely cloaked as «Padre A. F.». At first he referred to Fortis as a mentor to Caminer, but then he commented on the conflict between the two that I described earlier in this article. Indeed, he specifically mentioned the «shameful text» against Caminer that Fortis had circulated earlier that year. Obviously, Venier had seen one of the few copies of Fortis’ text that had been circulated, and he was capitalizing on the situation in order to make his case against Caminer more convincing. And so it is through Venier’s eyes that we get an idea of what Fortis’ points of attack against Caminer had been:

Egli sarebbe un far torto al finissimo di scernimento del Padre A. F. a non convenir seco, che rimanga veramente ad essolei d’imparare peranche gli elementari principj di ogni sapere; e tutto ciò che ebbe egli, non ha molto, a stampare contro di lei a manifesto disinganno del pubblico, pareva a dir vero, che avesse quindi per essa ad essere una lezione profittevole per non impegnarsi mai più a batters becco, ove di cose specialmente si tratti, che alla poetica, e all’arte del Teatro immediatamente si riferiscono.108

Venier claimed that Fortis – a respectable and discerning man of letters – had exposed Caminer’s near total lack of formal education with a statement suggesting that she did not have even the most elementary grasp of any field of knowledge («... rimanga veramente ad essolei d’imparare peranche gli elementari principj di ogni sapere»). The journalist did not stop here, however. He went beyond the boundaries of professional and literary debate into the realm of sexual slander. This is the sentence to which Caminer’s father especially objected in his petition to the Riformatori: «The ridiculous vanity to appear a tiny bit knowledgeable [‘sacentuccia’] has led her to ignore the wise warnings [of A.

108. Ibid., p. 233.
F.] who certainly knows her *intus & in cute*... The claim that Alberto Fortis knew Elisabetta Caminer “inside and out” called into question the nineteen-year old’s sexual mores, clearly insinuating that she was not only intellectually arrogant, but also sexually promiscuous. In order to punish Caminer for having assumed a public position of literary critic (for acting like a «capitanessa», to recall Carlo Gozzi’s words), Venier used her sex as a weapon against her in the most damaging way possible. An attack on her moral reputation jeopardized Caminer’s prospects for social acceptance as well as the future of her respectable career.

Domenico Caminer was well aware that such sexual insinuations were dangerous for his daughter (and for his whole family). In fact, in the petition he emphasized that he would not have brought this case to the attention of the Riformatori were it not for the slanderous aspect of Venier’s attack:

Se à sola questione letteraria si ristringessero gli acerbi moti dell’Abate Venier scrittore di tali Fogli, non ardirebbe l’umilissimo Caminer rassegnare le sue suppliche al Sapientissimo Tribunale di V. V. E. E., ma à tale eccesso arrivano, che in dis preggio delle Sacrosanti Leggi del Principe, e della Società, dalle quali si proscrivono le ingiurie personali tolgo que’ Fogli colle loro detrazioni stampate alla insidiata figlia non solo quel comportamento, che s’è procurata con indefesso studio, ma anche un stabilimento ad essa indispensabile e per la sua necessità, e per la sua condizione. Genuflessa un’afflitta famiglia calunniata per sino nell’onore, ed à cui barbaramente tentasi rapire il frutto de’ sudori del suo Capo, e dell’amarosissima figlia, supplica ossequiosamente le E. E. V. di detto ciò, che sarà dalla Sapienza di V. V. E. E. creduto di giustizia, e della grazia...

His complaint hinged on the effects that such an injurious attack could have on his daughter’s and his family’s life. He made it clear that he was economically dependent upon his daughter’s labor to help support the large (probably extended) Caminer family («Elisabetta sua figlia [...] s’assiste l’infelice padre nel procacciare il vivere ad una famiglia numerosa di 12 persone [...]. Genuflessa un’afflitta famiglia [...] à cui barbaramente tentasi rapire il frutto de’ sudori del suo Capo, e dell’amarosissima figlia»).

This is certainly a different angle from which to consider Elisabetta Caminer’s profession. Contrary to the conclusions of nineteenth-century sensationalist biographers and even twentieth-century scholars, Caminer did not owe her professional life to a fortuitous “punishment” on the part of her mother, nor to the excesses of an overdiligent father, nor even simply to her own “natural” talent and “tireless study”. Rather, she began work as a journalist because she represented an im-

109. *Ibid.*. In the original: «La ridicola vanità di parer Saccentuccia le ha tuttavia fatto al tutto negliger i saggi avvertimenti di lui [A. F.], che certamente la conosce intus & in cute ...».

110. Such conflation of public life with sexual activity dates at least back to Renaissance debates about women’s education and public activity. In the eighteenth century, this type of reaction reflects a culture where women’s sexuality was often used as a metaphor for all that was dissolute in society – reaching a peak in the pornographic portrayals of the woman in the (symbolically) highest position of power in France – Queen Marie Antoinette. See LYNN HUNT, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1992.

111. It is interesting to note that Venier’s attack on Caminer’s writing per se is fairly insubstantial and seems tacked on to the end of the article.

112. ASV: *Riformatori dello Studio di Padova*, filza 37, carta 87.
portant presence for the financial stability of her family. It is worth noting that this door was open to her precisely because she had not been born into an aristocratic family (where working for money might have been deemed inappropriate).113

The final thrust of Venier’s attack – a critical review of Caminer’s translation, L’Amore filiale – appeared a few pages later in the «Nuovo corrier letterario». Venier’s criticism focused particularly on the linguistic choices Caminer had made in translating the play.114 He had looked closely at her translation, because he had been the «correttore» in the process of granting her the official license («permesso di stampa») to publish her translation.115 He may also have been present at the successful performance of her translation at the S. Salvatore theater during the carneval season of 1769. Although Caminer’s was a verse translation of Falbair’s L’amour filial, Venier claimed that her language so lacked any poetic qualities as to constitute prose («questa, con buona licenza della Traduttrice, è prosa, e non poesia»). Even worse, in Venier’s opinion Caminer had adopted phrases that could have issued from a notary’s pen rather than a poet’s («Ella peraltro hai il merito di far gustare nella sua versione fino le formole stesse de’ nostri Notai»).116

Whatever became of Domenico Caminer’s petition to the Riformatori? As it turns out, Elisabetta’s friend Giulio Perini had been working to influence the outcome of the Riformatori’s decision on the case. In a letter he wrote to his friend Pelli, Perini was confident that he had succeeded in convincing the Riformatori to suspend publication of Venier’s periodical:

L’autore del Corrier Letterario non strappazzerà più la Caminer, perchè io mi sono molto adoperato, acciò in pena di tante baronate e villanie, sia soppresso quell’inutile ed insulso foglio. Vi assicuro che nè la Figlia, nè il Padre, hanno dato mai motivo alcuno al Venier di lacerarli così, ma egl’è poco onesto, e molto ignorante.117

The decision about the case was not officially made until two weeks later. In a motion signed on September 14, 1770, the Riformatori decided in favor of the Caminers.118 The «Nuovo corrier letterario» would not be suppressed as Perini had hoped, but Venier would no longer be

113. Here it is useful to recall the discomfort Carlo Gozzi experienced at his sister-in-law Luisa Bergalli’s attempts to support his impoverished aristocratic family (as best she could) with her translations.

114. In the context of the Enlightenment linguistic debate, the Caminers were supporters of other progressive thinkers in favor of expanding the Italian language through the adoption of neologisms, thereby giving it the elasticity and verbal resources to clearly and accurately express new ideas. They rejected the traditional, Cruscian-oriented approach, and favored clarity and simplicity of style over scholastic formality, especially for the language of periodicals. See A. Colla, E.C.T. e il giornalismo enciclopedico, «Filologia veneta» (1991), pp. 100-108.

115. ASV: Riformatori dello Studio di Padova, b. 342 entry n. 10, March 15, 1769.


117. GPB correspondence n. 3599: August 18, 1770. However, by September 1, the magistrates had not yet been able to meet together to formally suspend the publication of Venier’s periodical, although Perini informs us that they had each individually agreed to do so: «Non è per anche sospeso il Corrier Letterario per la infinita lunghezza di questi Magistrati; i Riformatori han già individualmente presa massima di sospenderlo, ma non si sono mai fino ad ora Magistralmente raccolti, ed eccone la dilazione» (GPB correspondence n. 3608: Sept. 1, 1770).

118. The four officials who signed this document were Angelo Contarini, «procuratore riformatore», Andrea Tron, «cavaliere riformatore» (possibly a friend of E. Caminer), Sebastian Foscarini, «cavaliere riformatore» and Davide Marchesini, «segretario».
allowed to act as «corretore» for the Republic; nor would he be able to
do so for any booksellers or printers for the editing of their books.\footnote{119} The Riformatori sent a copy of their decision to the head of the publishing guild so that he would communicate the news to the parties involved and also oversee its execution. In another letter to Pelli, Perini rejoiced that «the Caminer girl was vindicated from the insolence of the Abbé Venier». He also explained that the Magistrate would have suppressed Venier's paper but had decided not to because such a decision «would have hurt the periodical's subscribers and further discredited books of that genre [i.e., periodicals]».\footnote{120}

At the conclusion of an episode that had lasted throughout the summer and into the fall of 1770, Caminer and her father must have been quite satisfied with the outcome.\footnote{121} But even after the Magistrate's official sentence had been passed, the show of support for Elisabetta was not over. In Florence about one month later, Giuseppe Pelli too, responded to Venier's attack, thus extending the publicity of the episode into Tuscany. In the October 12, 1770 issue of his periodical, the «Novelle letterarie», the Florentine journalist came to Caminer's defense with his own review of her translation.\footnote{122} He acknowledged that Caminer's translation was not «without blemishes», but he emphasized that her translation of the play had been performed with great success in Florence. He especially objected to the fact that Venier's attack had been launched in a public forum («in faccia al pubblico»), and his response to such an ungentlemanly tactic was to defend Caminer in an equally public manner.

The Florentine journalist did not name Venier or the «Nuovo corrier letterario» directly. But he refuted Venier's claim of having written his articles about Caminer with the benign intention of instructing her («altra mira che d'instruirla»), and he implied that the Venetian journalist was not a decent man («un uomo pulito»). He then dismissed Venier, since the most salient part of his article did not address him at all. Rather, in front of all his readers, Pelli spoke directly to Caminer. He urged her to «despise indiscreet men» and to «follow those who love Letters, admire the fair sex and hate the idiotic, fanatical declamations of pedants». He reassured her that she would be «honored by most [men]». Significantly, he highlighted the unbiased nature of his opinion in this polemic by stating openly that he did not know her personally and that he was therefore able to write frankly, without either spiteful or amorous

\footnote{119. Venier had worked at some point for the stamperia Baglioni, and he was recognized by some as a talented «correttore di stampa» (ASV: Sant'uffizio, b. 148).}
\footnote{120. GPB correspondence n. 3617: September 15, 1770.}
\footnote{121. Francesco Albergati commented on the Riformatori’s decision in a letter to (Elisabetta) Caminer: «Parmi assai giusto, e quasi sufficiente il gastigo dato all’insolente Corriero. Dobbiamo esser contenti d’averlo noi punito col disprezzo, e lasciato a cui spetta il punirlo gravemente» (R. TROVATO, Lettere di FA.C., p. 166).}
\footnote{122. «Novelle letterarie», Allegrini, Pisoni, e Compagnia, October 12, 1770, p. 651. Pelli wrote: «Questo bel Dramma che in Francese ha per titolo L’Homme criminel, è molto noto, e con applauso è stato rappresentato in molti teatri d’Italia, fra i quali in quello ancor di Firenze, ove la traduzione della Sig. Caminer ha riscosse delle lodi. Un Foggio periodico ha trovate in essa delle cose da criticare, ma si è spiegato in modo da far credere che contro questa virtuosa, ed onesta fanciulla voleva scrivere con altra mira che d’instruirla. Noi non diremo che la sua versione sia senza nei, diremo bensì ch’ella non meritava di essere malmenata ...».
prejudices («parliamo francamente, perché sappiamo di farlo senza odio e senza prevenzione amorosa»).

Such support from someone Caminer did not know must have been most gratifying and encouraging. In fact, upon reading Pelli’s defense of her in the «Novelle letterarie» Caminer wrote immediately to the Florentine journalist to express her appreciation, and thus began the correspondence between the two. Caminer’s letter contains the only direct evidence I have found of her reaction to the Venier episode:

Benché la gentilezza colla quale Ell’ha parlato nelle sue Novelle Letterarie d’una delle mie traduzioni mi metta in dovere di ringraziarla, ed io lo faccia sinceramente, confesso che non è questo il solo motivo per cui mi prendo la libertà di scriverle; da che so che non esige ringraziamenti chi non conoscendo una persona dice imparzialmente di Lei quello che il proprio animo onesto gli detta. La civile ed onesta egualmente che cortese maniera con cui Ell’ha parlato di me desta una stima imparziale; né perché il pregiudizio voglia ristrette in confini indiscreti le donne io posso trattenermi dal assicurarvela, e dal pregalar d’una grazia ch’Ella deve assolutamente accordarmi.\(^\text{123}\)

Caminer was quite bold in her manner of thanking Pelli. She reiterated Pelli’s claims about the honesty and the impartiality of his defense of her. Further, she insisted that despite societal prejudices against assertiveness in women, she would not be stopped from making a further request of him which he “must absolutely grant” her – that he act as mentor for her:

Quanto detesto i birbanti, e disprezzo le satire, e le critiche villane, altrettanto io apprezzo le persone oneste, e fò conto delle critiche civili e ragionevoli, le quali mi fò servire d’ammaestramento, giacché è una direi quasi innata inclinazione mi porta a far dello studio l’unica mia occupazione. Ell’ha trovati nella mia traduzione varj «nei» de’ quali, dic’Ella, si potea rendermi «amichevolemente avvertita»; io la stimo per questa maniera di pensare, e la prego di porre in pratica quello cui pensa, «avvertendomi amichevolmente» de’ miei difetti, ond’io possa schivarli in avvenire.

Here Caminer expressed her anger at Venier, but more importantly she revealed her ability to act on her own behalf by using his attack as an opportunity to extend her network of male patrons. Not only would she refuse to be stopped by critics such as Venier, but she would assertively cultivate relationships with those critics who could be of use to her. She “detested” mean-spirited assaults, but she welcomed constructive criticism and openly pursued the latter as an opportunity for instruction («ammaestramento»). This is significant, for while male «letterati» also welcomed suggestions from their colleagues, they were most often not relying on such advice in the same way that a young woman with little or no formal education available to her did.

The vigor and boldness with which the nineteen year-old Caminer pursued such mentoring from the nearly forty-year-old Pelli is an example of how she strategically used all possible resources in order to develop her mind as fully as she could – or in her words, to follow her «innate inclination» that led her to make studying her «only occupation». She understood that she needed the support of men like Pelli in

\(^{123}\) GPB correspondence n. 3644: October 20, 1770. Following quotations are also from this same letter.
order to continue her education and pursue a career successfully. The intriguing thing is that she managed to obtain such support with striking confidence in one so young. Caminer concluded her first letter to Pelli expressing both self-confidence and a desire to please:

Ecco quale docilità trovano in me le critiche giuste; io non pretendo già di farmene un merito, ma di por Lei in impegno di non lasciarla delusa [...]. Ella non si meravigli di questa mia franchezza; io non me ne vergogno punto, ed avrei torto se lo facesse. Se posso in conto alcuno servirla, questa medesima franchezza mia l'assicura che lo farò con piacere...

It is unclear if she wanted to introduce a shade of «docility» into her bold self-portrait or if she used the term «docilità» ironically. She asked Pelli «not to be shocked at her frankness,» and she assured him that she was «not a bit ashamed» of her boldness. She even stated that she would have been «in error» («avrei torto») if she had felt that way. Although Caminer clearly identified herself as the pupil or mentee in this new friendship, she still managed to convey a sense of being on equal footing with Pelli, at least in terms of mutual respect and directness.124

The conflict with Cristoforo Venier was a fundamental experience for the young Caminer. On the one hand, the experience confirmed the fact that her ambition and public position made her vulnerable to slanderous attack. On the other hand, the positive legal outcome must have taught her that defensive action could lead to social justice. In addition, such coordinated support on the part of her colleagues and friends – even from outside of the Veneto – must have been extremely gratifying. She seems to have come out of the situation with a positive attitude and a determination to take advantage of the new doors opened to her by this negative experience. She certainly came away from this situation without internalizing the primary «lesson» that Venier had wanted to teach her: she did not stop voicing her opinions in the «Europa letteraria» or translating plays that she deemed worthy. Pelli’s support in particular must have encouraged her to speak out for herself in future conflicts – something she did most ably two years later in the conflict with playwright Carlo Gozzi, and for the rest of her life.125

These two public skirmishes – and especially the threat against her good reputation from Venier – may also have pushed Caminer to attempt some “damage control” and to consider how she might protect herself from future attacks. The primary option available to a young woman who sought such social protection and public approval was, of course, marriage. Perhaps at this point Caminer (or her parents) decided that marriage might lend a degree of “normalcy” to her otherwise exceptional life, which had already placed her at the center of controversy at least three times in her twenty years (with Fortis, Contin and Venier). At the same time, however, Caminer would have sought a

124. Caminer’s strategies echo those Laura Bassi used to negotiate her way within the scientific networks of Enlightenment Italy. Findlen describes Bassi’s «adept use of the language of patronage» in Science as a Career in Enlightenment Italy, p. 460.
125. For the Caminer-Gozzi polemic, see C. SAMA, Verso un teatro moderno..., pp. 63-79.
husband who would not deny her the freedom to pursue her intellectual development, her network of male colleagues, and her professional career. She might have viewed Antonio Turra — a well-established man of her own social class who was also a well-regarded member of the Republic of Letters — as just such an individual.

Evidence about Caminer's relationship with Turra is scarce. I would conjecture that the two were introduced sometime in late 1770 or early 1771, possibly through Andrea Corner. Corner was Caminer’s friend as well as the twin brother of the Bishop Marco Corner whose botanical gardern in Venice (Torcello) Antonio Turra cultivated. The earliest evidence of Caminer’s engagement to Turra is found in an August 1771 letter she received from her Paduan friend and colleague, the abbé Giuseppe Gennari. In the letter, Gennari teased and congratulated Caminer about the upcoming changes in her life. What would Caminer’s Venetian friends say when she quitted them and moved to Vicenza? What would Minerva say when Caminer «[abandoned] her militia and [retired] to the dewy fields of Venus?».

Interestingly, Caminer responded to Gennari’s letter with caution. She asked him not to rush into the matter and she said she could not accept his congratulations until they were «fully justified». Gennari was taken aback at her response and explained that he had heard about her engagement from a reliable person claiming to have received the news directly from her. Could Caminer’s caution in publicizing her engagement have stemmed from her disillusionment with the way the marriage proposal from Albergati had concluded? Or perhaps she was simply annoyed that rumors of her engagement had reached Padua, even without her having mentioned anything to her friend Gennari.

By December 1771 the engagement was official and Caminer announced the news formally in letters to Gennari, Pelli and other friends. Significantly, when she shared her engagement news with friends and colleagues she consistently made a point of telling them that her marriage and her move would not interfere in any way with

126. Antonio Turra (1736-1797) was born in Vicenza to a well-off middle-class family. He earned a degree in medicine at the University of Padua and practiced medicine in Vicenza. Turra helped found Vicenza's Agrarian Academy and was its secretary («segretario perpetuo») from 1773 until his death in 1797. His most famous publication was the Flora italicae prodromus, a catalog of 1700 species of Italian plants. In 1780 he published this catalog with the printing press he and Caminer had recently opened in their home. Turra's work earned him awards and membership in many scientific academies both in Italy and abroad. Ironically, Turra's contributions in medicine, agriculture and botany have been perpetually overshadowed by Caminer's fame. See the Caminers' description of Turra’s accomplishments in the June 1772 issue of the «Europa letteraria», p. 24. For a scholarly profile of Turra, see Anna bellesia, L'accademia di coltura, in Storia di Vicenza. L'eta della Repubblica Venezia (1404-1797), vol. III/2, Vicenza, Neri Pozza, 1990, pp. 367-377.

127. The link between the Bishop Corner, Antonio Turra and Elisabetta Caminer was first advanced by Angelo Colla. Colla interprets the nature of Caminer’s marriage to Turra in Elisabetta Caminer e Antonio Turra, in Il vicentino tra rivoluzione giacobina ed età napoleonica... ed. by Renato Eronda, pp. 24-28. I doubt Caminer was involved with Turra much earlier than 1771. As late as October 1770 — as we see in a poem she wrote at that time to Andrea Corner — she was disillusioned in love and not in a frame of mind to be open to new suitors, despite Corner’s advice to that effect. The poem was published posthumously in the opuscle entitled Per le faustissime nozze del Conte Pietro Dalle-Ore colla Marchesa Giulia Buzzaccarini, Padova, Tipografia Cartallier e Sicca, 1839.

128. «E.C. - G.G. correspondence» Aug. 31, 1771. In the original: «... che diranno i vostri amici di Venezia, quando barbaramente gli pianterete, cangiando le salse acque coi colli di Berga? Anzi che dirà Minerva di voi, che abbandonando la sua milizia vi riparate ne’ molli campi di Venere?».

129. «E.C. - G.G. correspondence» Sept. 5, 1771. In the original: «... vi prego a non andar di si gran passo, e a sofferire ch’io non accetti le vostre congratulazioni fino a tanto che [...] non sieno giustificate pienamente».
her work or her correspondence. She informed Pelli that he did not need to worry about jealousy interfering with their correspondence. She told Gennari that she «would not be happy in [her] new state» if it prevented her from «maintaining an infinite friendship» with him. She assured a subscriber to her first collection of theatrical translations (Composizioni teatrali moderne tradotte, Venezia, 1772) that his volumes would arrive on time, despite the fact that she was about to move to Vicenza. In fact, she told him that once she moved she would have fewer things to do and so would actually have more time than ever to dedicate to writing for the «Europa letteraria». Significantly, she explained to him that her writing would «complement [her] husband’s mind» in the same way that it had done her father’s («...seconderò scrivendo il genio del mio sposo, come secondava quello di mio Padre»).130 Even as she vigorously asserted her intention to continue writing, Caminer assured her correspondent that this action would not compromise her in her new status as wife, just as it had not done so in her role as daughter. Caminer would be getting married and she would be leaving Venice, but it is clear that she had no intention of «abandoning Minerva’s militia».

Caminer understood how crucial her correspondence with male friends and colleagues was to her own intellectual development and to her career. The presence of these patrons and supporters was particularly important at such a transitional moment in her life. If her choice to marry Turra was a choice for stability and “normalcy”, it was also a decision that posed certain risks to her burgeoning career. Caminer was assuming the social role of wife (and would-be mother) and she was moving from the cosmopolitan city of Venice to smaller, provincial Vicenza. Would familial duties now constrain her literary ambitions? Would the move away from Venice – center of publishing in the Veneto and home to past generations of successful women writers – spell disaster for her career? She might have had little choice in the matter and dreaded the move to Vicenza. Or perhaps she wanted to remove herself from the limelight in Venice in the hopes that it would allow her to work more effectively, especially after the recent attacks upon her reputation and career. The move to Vicenza may also have been a way for Caminer to separate herself (professionally) from her father and begin establishing her own reputation independently of his.

We may never know the answers to these queries but we do have some evidence of Caminer’s thoughts about her future husband. In a letter to Pelli, she confirmed his observation that «Doctor Turra [was] indeed an expert botanist and a fine naturalist», and she continued, «but the quality one must appreciate most in him is his good soul».131 If financial and intellectual concerns were two qualities to be considered in a potential husband, basic goodness of character – «un buon animo»

130. For her letter to Pelli, see GPB correspondence n. 4047: Jan. 18, 1772. For her letter to Gennari, see «E.C. - G.G. correspondence» December 28, 1771. The letter to the unidentified subscriber is dated June 6, 1772, and is located in the Biblioteca Comunale Archiginnasio di Bologna: Aa. Pallotti VI, 365.
131. GPB correspondence n. 4047: Jan. 18, 1772.
was also important to Caminer. Indeed, this comment recalls the three requirements that Caminer had related to Albergati a few years earlier: a man she would love had to be an honest soul («un animo onesto»); he had to be dedicated to her; and he had to have a pleasing physical aspect. How fully did Antonio Turra measure up to Caminer’s expectations? Shortly after their marriage, Caminer described her husband and her move to Vicenza in a letter she wrote to Pelli. Whatever expectations she might have had about moving to Vicenza with Turra, she had a difficult time adjusting to her new home once she actually arrived there. She described her husband as a comforting and compensatory presence in this situation “up to a point”:

La mia situazione sarebbe compiutamente felice se non fossi lontana dalla mia famiglia, dagli amici miei, dalla mia Patria. Mio marito è l’uomo più rispettabile, più adorno di solide qualità, e più affettuoso per me che possa ritrovarsi. Io ho in esso un tenore sposo ed un amico sincero e stimabile, la cui compagnia è il solo compenso delle mie perdite, almeno fino ad un certo segno [...] Non posso però avvezzarmi si presto alla lontananza di tante care persone, nè al cambiamento d’una libera, sciolta, e buona Città con una sciocca, maligna, e piena di pregiudizj [...] i cui abitanti gentilissimi ma in fondo cattivi me la renderebbe odiosa se vi badassi molto!

From this description, it seems she appreciated Turra primarily as a gentle, sincere friend whose affection and company she could rely on for comfort in a new and stifling environment. It is significant that she described her new husband as a «compensation» («compenso») for all of the «losses» («le mie perdite») she experienced in leaving her home and friends in Venice. Certainly, this is only a small amount of evidence from which to appraise the nature of a long and complex relationship. Nevertheless, compared to the emotion Caminer consistently displayed when writing about people or subjects that stirred her, one cannot help but notice the lack of enthusiasm with which she described her husband. It seems that in the beginning, at least, Caminer and Turra enjoyed a stable and amicable marriage. They may have separated in later years, but it is undeniable that Caminer’s marriage to Turra was crucial in freeing her to develop and maintain a career, one that she would enjoy for the rest of her life.

132. GPB correspondence n. 4197: July 3, 1772.
133. I am referring to her suggestive July 6, 1789 letter to Spallanzani in which Caminer described the «extremely important revolutions» that had been occurring in her home, because of which she had «for a long while» been «close to taking the most decisive steps in a woman’s life». She described the situation as having been resolved only recently, and that this had involved a «decisive change in circumstances» which finally allowed her to resume her normal work routine (BEM: Autografooteca Campori, Carte Paradisi). Another indication of a separation from Turra may be that at her death, Caminer left the bulk of her possessions to her brother, Antonio, and nothing to her husband. This information is found in her Testament of May 3, 1796 (Archivio di Stato di Vicenza (ASVic): Notarile Vicentino, notaio Ottavio Borizio, busta [b.], 3821). Caminer’s testament was published in G. MANTEESE, Memorie storiche della chiesa Vicentina, vol V/2, Vicenza, Accademia Olimpica, 1982, p. 774. See also A. COLLA, Elisabetta Caminer e Antonio Turra..., pp. 24-28, and R. UNPER LUKOSCHIK, E.C.T. (1751-1796) Una letterata veneta..., p. 60. However, contrary to the interpretations of other scholars, Caminer did not die away from her home (in her friend Fracanzani’s villa in Orgiano). The inventory of Caminer’s possessions [Inventario dei beni] clearly indicates that she died in her home on contrà delle Canove in Vicenza (ASVic: Notarile Vicentino, notaio Ottavio Borizio, b. 3827, carte 38-44).

134. It is interesting to consider here the experience of Luisa Bergalli Gozzi (1703-1779). In her twenties, Bergalli published most of her original theatrical works, including: Agile, re di Sparta (1723), a drama set to music by Giovanni Porta; Le avventure del poeta (1730), a comedy satirizing the nobility and writers’ dependence on them for patronage; and Elenio (1730), a melodrama set to music by Albinoni. Bergalli enjoyed this success well before her marriage in 1738 when, at age thirty-five, she married her ten-year companion, Gasparo Gozzi. This marriage to a financially unstable man of higher social standing proved disastrous to Bergalli’s reputation and career. She was
Caminer's experiences in her teens and early twenties afforded her important training for her life as a “cittadina” in the Republic of Letters. By the time she reached her early twenties, she had been described by her male colleagues as an honor to her sex and as a failed ornament to her society, as an honest and virtuous girl and as a careless seductress, as a member of Minerva’s militia and as a convert to Venus’s dewy fields, as a «capitanessa», a judge and an oracle. She had learned to engage supportive male colleagues as mentors (without permanently alienating those who would have desired a more intimate type of relationship with her), and she had begun to defend herself from the attacks of hostile colleagues by relying on her network of supporters. During this same period, she also began developing her own literary persona through her correspondence, her poetry, the prefaces to her translations, and her writing for the «Europa letteraria». She presented herself as modest, unassuming and even unworthy of recognition, but also confident, knowledgeable and openly ambitious. While confronting – and creating – such contradictory and shifting images of herself, Caminer learned to successfully manipulate the system of male patronage available to her, and she acquired her first lessons in negotiating the gendered boundaries of her society.

sharply criticized for marrying a younger man of higher social status, and familial duties constrained her literary ambitions. She had five children with Gozzi and she took on the impossible task of the financial management of the impoverished Gozzi household. For some years Bergalli was the sole bread-earner for the extended Gozzi family. Her brother-in-law Carlo Gozzi publicly accused her of bringing the family to financial ruin because of her obsession with poetry and writing. Eventually, Bergalli’s own career was eclipsed by those of her husband and brother-in-law. One wonders if Caminer had this history in mind when considering her own options. For more on Bergalli, see ADRIANA CHEMELLO, Le ricerche erudite di Luisa Bergalli, in Geografie e genealogie letterarie. Eruditi, biografi, cronisti, narratrici, “epistolieres”, utopiste tra Secolo e Ottocento ed. by A. CHEMELLO and L. RICALDONE, Padova, Il Poligrafo, 2000, pp. 49-99; LUISA RICALDONE, La scrittura nascosta, esp. pp. 183-202; and L. BERGALLI, Le avventure del poeta, ed. by L. RICALDONE, Manziana (Rm), Vecchiarelli Editore, 1997. See also PAMELA STEWART, Erone della dissimulazione. Il teatro di Luisa Bergalli Gozzi, «Quaderni veneti», 19 (1994), pp. 73-92.