



Guittone d'Arezzo and Female Superiority through Paradox: An Antecedent of the Renaissance Querelle des Femmes?

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Article abstract

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Guittone d'Arezzo and Female Superiority through Paradox: An Antecedent of the Renaissance *Querelle des Femmes*?

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This article aims to analyze the participation of the Italian poet Guittone d'Arezzo in the querelle des femmes, considering especially the poem Ahi lasso, che li boni e li malvagi, which anticipates some of the issues that would be central to the debate on female dignity in the following centuries. In his text, Guittone plays with paradox, overturning, undoing, and giving new form to the concepts of superiority and inferiority between men and women in order to exculpate the female sex. Later on, his arguments will serve not only some authors of the querelle but also writers such as Isotta Nogarola, Arcangela Tarabotti, and Moderata Fonte.

Cet article se donne pour fin d'analyser la participation du poète italien Guittone d'Arezzo à la Querelle des femmes, en considérant en particulier le poème « Ahi lasso, che li boni e li malvagi », qui anticipe certaines des questions qui seront au cœur du débat sur la dignité féminine au cours des siècles suivants. Dans son texte, Guittone joue avec le paradoxe, bouleversant, dénouant et donnant une nouvelle forme aux concepts de supériorité et d'infériorité entre hommes et femmes, afin de disculper le sexe féminin. Ultérieurement, ses arguments seront non seulement mis à profit par certains auteurs de la Querelle mais également par des écrivains comme Isotta Nogarola, Arcangela Tarabotti et Moderata Fonte.

Introduction

During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a large number of misogynist texts circulated, listing the vices and defects of women. Among the poetic genres that aim to revile the female sex in troubadour lyric are, for example, the *mala cansó* and the *maldit*, which develop the motif of the *mala dompna* (bad woman). Another type of composition where women are often represented as lustful and always ready to cheat on their husbands is the *fabliau*, among whose practitioners we find authors such as Jean Bodel and Guglielmo de Blois, who had an important influence on Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron* and his *Il Corbaccio*.¹

1. Also noteworthy among the texts that demonize women are works such as *Bocados de Oro* or *Sendebár*, *Libro de los engaños e los asayamientos de las Mujeres*, the last part of Andrea Cappellano's *De*

At the same time, there are other texts that may represent an important antecedent to the *querelle des femmes* and aim to defend women, highlighting their qualities and suggesting an idea of female excellence.² Among the figures who in the early centuries of Italian literature display an approach to and interest in the defining themes of the *querelle des femmes*, Guittone d'Arezzo occupies a significant place, not only because he represents a rather atypical figure in the Italian literary panorama for having been a supporter of the Guelphs and then having joined the religious order of the Cavalieri di Santa Maria, also known as Frati della Beata Gloriosa Vergine Maria, but also because, on more than one occasion in his writings, he offers an image of the feminine that is far removed from the passivity or ideality that, by contrast, characterizes the representation of women in authors of the *dolce stil novo*.

Guittone seems to anticipate not only issues of the *querelle* but also the use of rhetoric and paradox that writers in following centuries will constantly employ in their texts, especially the authors of Cinquecento dialogues and treatises such as Moderata Fonte and Lucrezia Marinella.

Strategies of the *querelle* debate

In the *querelle des femmes* debate, the theorization and demonstration of women's inferiority or superiority follows two main strategies. The first uses the examples of famous and illustrious personalities, sometimes historical and sometimes mythological, which serve as arguments for praising or blaming the female sex. It is very significant, and also clear proof of the paradoxical nature of the debate, that the same characters, depending on the author's approach and reasoning, can be used to support either one thesis or its opposite.³ The second strategy originates from the supposed inferiority of females based on biological difference, as theorized by Aristotle and Galen, which allowed a long

Amore, Proverbia quae dicuntur super natura feminarum, and Gerardo Patecchio's *Lo Splanamento de li proverbi de Salomone*.

2. Other texts that can be included in the above-mentioned philogyny literature in these centuries are, for example, *De lodo delle femmine* by Andrea da Grosseto and two anonymous texts, *Il Fiore di Virtù* and *La defensione delle donne*. On misogynist and philogynist texts, see, for example Cerrato, "Filoginia."

3. Christine de Pizan's *La cité des dames* can be considered an early example of feminist hermeneutics that allows us to question the traditional representation of certain female figures of the past. On Christine de Pizan, see Caraffi, *La città delle dame*.

misogynist tradition to attribute to women characteristics such as irrationality, inconstancy, and lust.

As Sandra Plastina emphasizes, during the Renaissance there were a series of treatises that contradicted Aristotle's theories, starting with his assertion in *De partibus animalium* that softness of flesh determines higher intelligence.⁴ It is especially in this context that paradox becomes a fundamental tool in the service of the *querelle* and that different authors use it to highlight feminine qualities and virtues.

Within this group, in the sixteenth century, we find authors such as Ortensio Lando and other members of the Accademia degli Intronati who systematically employed paradox alongside reasoning that aimed to refute what other authors, or in some cases they themselves, had previously affirmed.⁵ The debate on the inferiority/superiority of women becomes on several occasions a pretext for showing off one's own rhetorical abilities, and the discussion ends up being an exercise more characteristic of heresy than of Platonic dialectics, as exemplified by the literary genre of Siena's paradoxical commentaries.⁶

Moreover, as both Rosalie Colie and Francine Daenens note, paradox offers numerous advantages to authors who employ it to participate in the ongoing debate, such as the possibility to intervene without taking a strong position while hiding behind a rhetorical façade.⁷ At the same time, paradox makes it possible to synthesize, through striking sentences and statements, more complex concepts that, when formulated in this way, can captivate the attention of the public.

It is quite clear that the paradox can be confusing and makes it impossible to reconstruct a univocal and coherent ideological profile of the various authors of the *querelle*, but many of these authors are the first to try to distance themselves from easy categorization. On the other hand, as Daenens underlines, "sostenere nel Rinascimento la superiorità significa sostenere una tesi insostenibile, negare l'evidenza," so much so that "una lettura che distinguesse la produzione molto

4. See Plastina, *Mollezza*.

5. Lando's *Paradossi* (1544) also had an influence on Charles Estienne's *Paradoxes*. Estienne, inspired by Lando's paradox 25 on the superiority of women, styles his own paradox "Pour les femmes. Que l'excellence de la femme est plus grande, que celle de l'homme." On Lando and Estienne, see Cazes, "Anatomie d'un paradoxe."

6. See Cox, "Un microgenere senese."

7. See Colie, *Paradoxia Epidemica*; Daenens, "Superiore perché inferiore"; "Doxa e paradoxa."

eterogenea, in panegirici e testi misogini, renderebbe conto solo parzialmente e in modo incerto, molto riduttivo e schematico, delle contraddizioni [...] non solo perchè vi appaiono gli stessi argomenti ma anche perchè il discorso sulla dignità della donna spesso annulla l'elogio in una altrettanto eloquente critica e ne ammette di fatto l'inferiorità.”⁸

Beyond the rhetorical exercises and the *divertissement* that characterize part of the debate, the presence of such a conspicuous number of texts reflecting on these questions is a consequence of the ever-increasing presence of women in cultural and academic circles, as well as of a public interested in reading and discussing about new themes and arguments.

A longer history of “the gender question”

The interest for “the gender question” is something that is already outlined, though not theorized, in previous centuries, and Guittone d'Arezzo can be considered the initiator of this discussion in the field of Italian literature to the extent that, as Teodolinda Barolini affirms, “possiamo identificare la moraleggiante, utilitaristica, pragmatica corrente della letteratura italiana, che parte da Guittone ed arriva fino a Boccaccio, come la più aperta e progressista verso le donne.”⁹ In fact, we can say that Guittone's lessons go further, exerting a specific influence in terms of style and content on Faustino Perisauli and his *Trastullo delle donne da far ridere la brigata* as well as offering inspiration to authors who develop the debate through other literary forms and genres.¹⁰

It should also be noted that these types of discussions about female abilities and qualities are already present in troubadour lyric poetry, where female authors participate and exchange verses and share spaces with their

8. Daenens, “Superiore perchè inferiore,” 13. “To claim superiority in the Renaissance is to uphold an untenable thesis, to deny the evidence,” so much so that “a reading that would distinguish the very heterogeneous production, in panegyrics and misogynistic texts, would only partially and uncertainly account for the contradictions, very reductive and schematically [...] not only because the same arguments appear there but also because the discourse on the dignity of women often cancels out the praise in an equally eloquent criticism and in fact admits their inferiority.” All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

9. Barolini, *Il secolo di Dante*, 581. “we can identify the moralising, utilitarian, pragmatic current in Italian literature, starting with Guittone and ending with Boccaccio, as the most open and progressive towards women.”

10. On Faustino's participation in the *querelle des femmes*, see Cerrato, “Il Trastullo.”

male colleagues, while in the Italian context they represent quite a novelty, as the coexistence between male and female authors is still in the process of development.¹¹

In this regard, Andrea Poli identifies in the *sirventes* by the Gascon troubadour Aimeric de Belenoi, *Tant es d'amor honratz sos seignoratges*, a model for two texts by Guittone: *Ahi lasso, che li boni e li malvagi* and *Altra fiata aggio già, donne, parlato*.¹² In his text, Aimeric de Belenoi defends women against the accusation of having induced man to original sin, answering to the *sirventés* of another poet, Albertec of Sestaro. It is important to underline how in Aimeric's case we find the classical *tenso*, while *Ahi lasso* is not limited to literary polemic addressing a specific adversary, assuming, in addition, the characteristics of a manifesto or pamphletary text and speaking to men in general, as several treatises of the sixteenth century would also do.

Guittone's contribution to the *querelle*

The paradox of Guittone's text lies in the fact that it introduces a theme such as the dignity and value of women, which no author was talking about at the time when it was written, and that it can therefore be considered a precursor to the *querelle des femmes*. Guittone points out an issue that until then had gone unnoticed and stresses that it is necessary to leave the "*cortese* context" and rethink the male–female relationship, not only from a literary point of view but also from an ethical and social point of view. Another detail of no less importance is that, in order to overcome the stereotypical and banal idea of the feminine, Guittone decides not to use prose but the same poetic language that has contributed to constructing the idea of a woman as either an object or a muse.

Criticism of the language of the poets, on the other hand, is also evident in the sonnet *S'eo tale fosse ch'io potesse stare*, where Guittone directly attacks the master of the Stylnovists, Guido Guinizzelli, and his composition *Io voglio*

11. On the Italian women poets of the first centuries of the Renaissance, see Arriaga Flórez, Cerrato, and Rosal Nadas, *Poetas italianas*, which analyzes the texts of Nina Siciliana, Compiuta Donzella, the Marquesan women poets of the fourteenth century, and Bartolomea Mattugliani. Regarding Compiuta Donzella, it is significant that Guittone was among the poets who maintained relations and literary correspondence with her. He addressed *epistola* 5 to her, where he praises Compiuta for her qualities.

12. See Poli, "Una scheda provenzale."

del ver la mia donna laudare.¹³ According to Andrea Beretta, already in this sonnet Guittone “veste in modo singolare i panni del sottile ragionatore per paradossi”¹⁴ and rises to the role of *caposcuola* (head of school) who can dictate and propose a line to follow, as he will also do in the *canzoni Altra fiata* and *Ahi lasso*.¹⁵

After a self-criticism (“S’eo tale fosse ch’io potesse stare, / senza riprender me, riprenditore”),¹⁶ which recalls that of *Altra fiata*, where he admits to having hurt women with his verses (“ma debitor son voi, ché fabricate / ho rete mante e lacci a voi lacciando: / di che merzé domando”),¹⁷ Guittone directly addresses Guido Guinizzelli, although he does not name him explicitly, and refers to his *Io voglio del ver la mia donna laudare*. He then criticizes the choice of stylnovistic poetry (practised by Guittone himself), which compares women to natural elements such as flowers, stars, and precious stones (“e dice ched è bella come fiore / e ch’è di gem[m]a over di stella pare”),¹⁸ because he considers it a way of discrediting them, since woman is superior to everything that man can contemplate and touch (“Or tal è pregio per donna avanzare / ched a ragione mag[g]io è d’ogni cosa / che l’omo pote vedere o toc[c]are?”),¹⁹ and Nature has not created any element superior to her, except for man, who is slightly superior (“Che Natura [né] far pote né osa / fat[t]ura alcuna né mag[g]ior né pare, / for che d’alquanto l’om mag[g]ior si cosa”).²⁰

The last tercet is related to a fundamental theme of the *querelle*, the relationship between Nature and the female inferiority supposed by Aristotle.²¹

13. For the full text of *S’eo tale fosse ch’io potesse stare*, see Guittone d’Arezzo, *Rime*, 257.

14. Beretta, “Sinopie macrotestuali,” 15. “Singularly plays the role of the subtle reasoner by paradoxes.”

15. For the full text of *Ahi lasso*, see Guittone d’Arezzo, *Rime*, 119–22.

16. “If I were such that I could stand to admonish [other men], / without also taking myself back together.”

17. “But debitor am I with you, for I have made / many nets and snares to ensnare you: / and I beg your pardon.”

18. “He tells her that she is as beautiful as a flower, / and that she looks like a precious stone, or a star.”

19. “However, is woman not endowed with such value / that makes her excel and rightly places her above everything else / that man can see or touch?”

20. “For Nature neither can nor dares to do / anything else that is superior or equal [to woman], / with the exception of man, who is slightly superior to her.”

21. The first quatrain of Leonora della Genga’s poem *Tacete o maschi*, composed almost a century later, seems to rejoice and qualify Guittone’s final lines: “Tacete o maschi a dir che la Natura / A far il maschio solamente intenda, / E per formar la femmina non prenda, / Se non contra sua voglia alcuna cura”

In this text, which predates Guittone's conversion and his entry into order of the Cavalieri di Santa Maria, he does not appear to have reached the end of his "path of equality" and still affirms a slight male superiority. However, he does lay the foundations and anticipates the arguments that will later be developed in *Ahi lasso*.

Guittone's reflection on the Nature/God who creates woman and her representation can also be found in *epistola* 5 included in his *Epistolario* and addressed to Compiuta Donzella. In this letter, the friar seems to encourage Donzella to pursue her path and take holy vows.²² Guittone speaks of the poet as a figure who seems more an angelic than an earthly creature, one that God created to inspire not only women but also men. In this case, the perfection of the angel-woman is connected to the value of the poet, and Guittone proudly claims to have lived in her time.

L'onnipotente Dio mise in voi sì meravigliosamente compimento di tutto bene, che maggiormente sembrate angelica criatura che terrena, in ditto e in fatto e in la sembianza vostra tutta, ché, quanto omo vede in voi, sembra mirabil cosa a ciascun bono conoscidore. Per che non degni fummo che tanta preziosa e mirabile figura, come voi siete, abitasse intra l'umana generazione d'esto seculo mortale; ma credo che piacesse a Lui di poner vo' tra noi per fare meravigliare, e perché fuste ispecchio e miradore, ove si provedesse e agienzasse ciascuna valente e piacente donna e prode omo.²³

A fundamental text: *Ahi lasso, che li boni e li malvagi*

However, it is with the composition *Ahi lasso, che li boni e li malvagi* that Guittone takes the decisive step and enters fully into the *querelle des femmes*,

(Silence, O males, to say that Nature / Only intends to make the male, / And to form the female she does not take, / If not against her will any care).

22. On Compiuta Donzella and Guittone's letter, see Cerrato, "Nuove ipotesi"; Hackett, "Voices."

23. Guittone d'Arezzo, *Selected Poems*, 26. "Almighty God has instilled in you the accomplishment of all that is good. Now you are more like an angel than an earthly creature in both words and deed and in your whole appearance, which seems admirable to every good judge. Since we, the human offspring of this mortal world, were not worthy to live beside such a precious and admirable person as you, it must have pleased Him to place you among us to make us wonder. But also to be a mirror and model of perfection for every gallant woman and man of valour to look at and adorn themselves." Guittone d'Arezzo, *Selected Poems*, trans. Borra, 27.

foregrounding and highlighting the relationship between men and women.²⁴ He thus marks a path that will be followed soon afterwards by several authors—above all by Dante Alighieri.²⁵ In this regard, Barolini, in her discussion of Dante’s lyric poetry, highlights the influence of Guittone on the texts in which the poet of the *Commedia* introduces themes related to the role of women and where he reflects on the construction of gender. Moreover, the ambivalence of Dante’s discourse and its evolution from concepts and issues embedded in courtly love poetry to explicitly moralizing themes seems to follow the same trajectory as that of Guittone, who can be considered “il precursore di Dante in materia di donne e di utilità del discorso poetico.”²⁶ Texts such as Guittone’s *Ahi lasso* and *Altra fiata* influence Dante’s *Doglia mi reca*, “per la sua anatomia del desiderio, per la sua filosofia del desiderio non polarizzato sul genere che sarà in effetti di grande importanza per la *Commedia*,”²⁷ and *Ora parrà*, “per il suo discorso sulla identità di genere e sulle donne.”²⁸

From the first lines of *Ahi lasso*, Guittone underlines that his aim is the defence of women, but he also hints at another purpose, which is to demonstrate

24. In *Ahi lasso*, compared with *Altra fiata*, the role that Guittone gives to women is more active, and their capacities are highlighted. These go beyond hating vice, and defending virtue, and aspiring to the model of the Virgin Mary, as proposed in *Altra fiata*.

25. The relationship between Dante and Guittone is rather contradictory because, as Antonello Borra recalls, in *De Vulgari eloquentia* 2.6 Dante criticizes Guittone for not having elevated and cleaned up his language by eliminating plebeian expressions and vocabulary, while in the *Commedia* (*Purgatorio* 24.55–62) he accuses him, through Bonagiunta Orbicciani and Guido Guinizzelli, of not following the true dictates of love, claiming that Guittone’s unjustified fame is due to an error of judgment on the part of his contemporaries.

26. Barolini, *Il secolo di Dante*, 540. “Dante’s forerunner in matters of women and the utility of poetic discourse.”

27. Barolini, *Il secolo di Dante*, 540. “for its anatomy of desire [and] for its non-gender-polarized philosophy of desire, which will indeed be of great importance for the *Commedia*.”

28. Barolini, *Il secolo di Dante*, 540. “for its discourse on gender identity and women.” Specifically, Barolini constructs a journey through Dante’s various texts, including *Sonar brachetti*, *Guido, i’vorrei*, and the *canzone Doglia mia reca*, observing how the Florentine poet moves away from the concept of courtly love and assumes a certain autonomy: “la donna può essere percepita come soggetto (ancorché soggetto errante) e non servire soltanto come sfondo alla soggettività maschile, a commento del comportamento del maschio” (the woman can be perceived as a subject [albeit a wandering subject] and not merely serve as a backdrop to male subjectivity, commenting on the behaviour of the male). Barolini, *Il secolo di Dante*, 520.

women's poetic and dialectical superiority, refuting other past and contemporary writers ("e prenderò solo la defensione, e aproverò falso lor sermone"; ll. 8–9).²⁹ It is therefore a rhetorical polemic, in a way anticipating authors such as Ortensio Lando, who later constructs two of his paradoxes as a direct challenge to Aristotle.³⁰

Guittone's poem opens with a direct indictment of the men who, through their texts, have attempted to discredit and vilely accuse women. The poet suggests that the men's attacks are part of a strategy and a kind of "pacto de caballeros" (pact between knights),³¹ which the male sex has used to establish cultural and natural supremacy over women. For Guittone, these assertions are based on what Pierre Bourdieu calls the "culturally arbitrary,"³² as it is impossible to find a plausible justification for holding women guilty of all the ills of humanity ("non per ragion"; l. 13).³³ Rather, they are determined by an underlying bias ("malvagia usanza"; l. 13)³⁴ with no scientific argument.

Later, some female writers would continue Guittone's line of argument to defend their own sex, including the fourteenth-century writer Leonora della Genga in her poem *Tacete o maschi a dir che la natura*,³⁵ and Lucrezia Marinella in her treatise *La nobiltà e l'eccellenza delle donne e i difetti e mancamenti degli uomini*, published in 1600.³⁶ Both women attribute the cause of male hatred to an emotional component: envy.

29. "and I will take only the defense, and prove false their sermon."

30. Lando titles his paradox 28 "Che l'opera quali al presente habbiamo soto nome di Aristotele Stagirita non sieno di Aristotele" and his paradox 29 "Che Aristotele fusse non solo ignorante, ma anche lo più malvagio huomo di quella età."

31. "Pacto entre caballeros" (pact between knights) is how Celia Amorós defines patriarchy; see Amorós "Notas," 52. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her study *Between Men* refers to male homosocial desire to connote a form of male bonding often accompanied by fear or hatred of homosexuality.

32. See Bourdieu and Passeron, *La Reproduction*, 48.

33. "not for reason."

34. "malicious custom."

35. The sonnet *Tacete o maschi a dir che la Natura* by Leonora della Genga is cited for the first time in Giovanni Andrea Gilio da Fabriano, *Topica poetica*, 75.

36. The text was first published in Venice in 1621. For a modern edition of the text in English translation, see Marinella, *Nobility and Excellence of Women*, ed. and trans. Dunhill. In Spanish, see Cagnolati and González De Sande, *Lucrezia Marinelli Vacca*.

Guittone, in addition, replaces the traditional idea of the temptress woman, which the whole misogynist tradition identifies in the prototype of Eve, and presents man as the real culprit in the behaviour of some women, because he leads them to error (“falla e fa donna fallare: adonque che diritto ha ‘n lei biasmare?”; ll. 44–45).³⁷ In the following verses, Guittone highlights a disparity of treatment and value judgements when analyzing male and female behaviour, because what is considered reprehensible in women is valued and celebrated in the case of men. Furthermore, he underlines how it is, in fact, men who commit the most serious crimes.

Embola, robba, aucide, arde o desface,
periura, enganna, trade o falsa tanto
donna quant’om? non già, ma quasi santo
e ‘l fatto so, ver’ ch’è quel d’om fallace. (ll. 25–28)³⁸

Male superiority becomes a means to exempt women.³⁹

Poi più savere e forza en l’om si trova,
perché non si ben prova?
Non vol, ma falla e fa donna fallare:
adonque che diritto ha ‘n lei biasmare?
Già non e meraviglia qual s’arende,
ma qual s’aiuta e [qual se] defende,
poi d’entro e de for tanto assalto tene. (ll. 42–48)⁴⁰

37. “He’s wrong and makes women wrong: so what right do you have to blame her?”

38. “Cheats, steals, aucides, burns and undoes, / Perjures, deceives, betrays, or falsifies as much / The woman as much as the man? Not already, but almost saintly / And the fact I can see is fallacious that of man.”

39. Also, in her work *De pari aut impari Evae atque Adae peccato*, Isotta Nogarola refutes the thesis of Lodovico Foscarini, who maintained the greater guilt of Eve. She observes how Eve, being a woman, represents a weaker and more corruptible creature with respect to the wise and perfect Adam, who is therefore truly guilty for original sin. On Isotta Nogarola, see Nogarola, *Complete Writings; ¿Quién pecó más, Adán o Eva?*

40. “Then more knowledge and strength is found in man, / why does he not prove it? / He will not, but he is wrong, and makes woman wrong: / so what right have you to blame her? / Already it is no wonder

To reinforce his thesis, Guittone stresses that God himself loves woman more than man, since he chose a nobler origin for her, creating her from flesh and not from clay, and that it was a woman, Mary, who gave birth to Jesus Christ.

Deo, che mosse Sé sempre a ragione,
 de limo terre l'om fece e formòne,
 e la donna dell'om, siccome appare;
 adonqu'è troppo più naturalmente
 gentil cosa che l'omo e meglio è nata,
 e più sembra ch'amata
 ella fosse da Dio nostro signore
 e maggiormente più feceli onore
 che non per om, ma per donna, salvare
 ne volle veramente ed a Sé trare;
 e ciò non fu senza ragion neente. (ll. 62–72)⁴¹

Through this argument, Guittone provides a contrast to the idea presented in Aeschylus's *Oresteia* (and echoed by Aristotle), where it is suggested that it is the father who generates, while the mother only takes care of the semen she receives.⁴²

We find the idea of God's preference for women in Renaissance authors such as Lodovico Dominichi and Alessandro Piccolomini, as well as in later authors such as Arcangela Tarabotti. Tarabotti, for example, observes in *Paradiso monacale* that God loves all creatures, but particularly woman and then man, even if the latter does not deserve it,⁴³ while Moderata Fonte in *Il merito delle*

which one surrenders, / but which helps itself, and which defends itself, / then inside and outside so much assault holds."

41. "God, who moves Himself always in reason, / from the mud of the earth made and formed man, / and the woman of man, as it appears; / therefore is a thing far more natural / than man and better born, / and seems she was more / beloved of God our Lord / and did greater honours for woman than man / he really wanted to save her and take her to himself, / and this was not without reason."

42. On the appropriation of motherhood through myth and the symbolic, see Cavarero, *Il femminile negato*.

43. *Paradiso monacale* is the third work by Arcangela Tarabotti, after *Semplicità ingannata* and *Inferno monacale*. See Tarabotti, *Paradiso monacale libri tre*. For an analysis of the themes that Tarabotti develops in her work, see Letizia Panizza's introduction to Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*, 1–31.

donne maintains that God loves women more and that is why their presence on Earth is greater than the presence of men.⁴⁴

Guittone relies on the Holy Scriptures, and, as Antonello Borra observes, “la glorificazione in chiave già tutta cristiana della figura femminile, depositaria di tutte le virtù a cui l’uomo deve ispirarsi, risulta un’ulteriore demistificazione dell’infondatezza di una letteratura come quella cortese [...] che vedeva in un’immagine non vera della donna, il nucleo centrale della propria ispirazione.”⁴⁵ In the following verses, Guittone insists on how the virtues and merits that men possess are mainly due to women, because if man had to depend exclusively on his own abilities he would be destined only to sleep and eat.

Vale per sé: nent’ho detto a sembrante;
 apresso val ché fa l’omo valere:
 ché ’ngegno, forzo, ardimento, podere
 e cor de tutto ben mettere avante
 donali donna en su’ amorosa spera;
 for che el non saveria quasi altro fare
 che dormire e mangiare.
 Adonque il senno e lo valor c’ha l’omo
 da la donna tener lo dea, sì como
 ten lo scolar dal so maestro l’arte;
 ed ella quanto face a mala parte
 dall’om tener lo pò simel mainera. (ll. 73–84)⁴⁶

44. See Moderata Fonte, *Il merito delle donne*, ed. Chemello; *El Mérito de las mujeres*, ed. Aguilar González, Abad, and Cerrato.

45. Borra, *Guittone*, 74–75. “The glorification in an already entirely Christian key of the female figure, the repository of all the virtues by which man must be inspired, is a further demystification of the groundlessness of a literature such as the courtly one [...] that saw in an untrue image of woman the central core of its inspiration.”

46. “Nothing I said seemed / to be appressed makes man worth / that wit, strength, daring, power / and heart that shows / the woman has given him in the third heaven/ he would know how to do nothing more / than sleep and eat. / Therefore the wisdom and valour of man / comes to him from the woman, even as / the schoolboy from his master learns the art / and she what she does in a bad way / can receive it from man in the same way.”

Irony is another tool used by male writers such as Faustino Perisauli,⁴⁷ but also by female writers such as Moderata Fonte.⁴⁸

In the final part of his panegyric, the poet from Arezzo inverts the relationship of dependence between man and woman, and it is the latter who is presented as the teacher, while the man becomes the pupil. He adds that if and when the female sex has made any mistakes, it may be due to bad male influence. If previously Guittone had used male superiority and the consequent female inferiority to emphasize greater feminine perfection, now the woman is configured as a being who provides wisdom and value to man, as Leonora della Genga would emphasize a century later in the last two tercets of her *Tacete o maschi*.⁴⁹

Finally, Guittone addresses his supposed female interlocutor. He praises her and presents her as a model, extending this particular example to and addressing all women, proposing himself as their defender and servant:

Gentil mia donna, fosse in voi tesoro
 quanto v'è senno en cor, la più valente
 fora ver' voi neente;
 e sed eo pur per reina vi tegno,
 e' vi corona onor com'altra regno:
 ché tanto è 'n voi di ben tutt' abbondanza,

47. Faustino Perisauli, in his *Trastullo delle donne*, emphasizes on several occasions the uselessness of man without woman and concludes by stating “se la donna non fusse creata che tutto il mondo non varrebbe un fico” (if woman were not created, the whole world would be worth nothing). Quoted in Gurioli and Tagliaferri, “Trascrizione,” 101.

48. In *Il Merito delle donne*, Adriana, one of the protagonists, responds to a question about the possibility of remarrying: “Rimaritarmi eh?—replicò ella—piuttosto mi affogherei che sottopormi più ad uomo *alcuno*; io sono uscita di servitu e di pene e vorresti che io tornassi da per me ad avvilupparmi? Iddio me ne guardi” (Marry me again, eh?—replied she—I would rather drown myself than submit to any man any more; I am out of servitude and pains, and would you have me come back to myself? God preserve me from it). See Moderata Fonte, *Il merito delle donne*, 16–17.

49. “Sanno le donne maneggiar le spade, / Sanno regger gl' Imperi, e sanno ancora / Trovar il cammin dritto in Elicona. / In ogni cosa il valor vostro cade, / Uomini, appresso loro. Uomo non fora / Mai per torne di man pregio, o corona” (Women know how to handle swords, / They know how to rule empires, and they still know how to find the straight path in Helicon. / In everything your valour falls, / Men, after them. Never was a man / made to be worthy of valour or crown). Leonora della Genga in Gilio da Fabriano, *Topica poetica*, 75.

che viso m'è, Amor, che la mancanza
 d'ogni altra prenda in voi assai restoro.
 Ad Arezzo la mia vera canzone
 mando, Amore, a voi, per cui campione
 e servo de tutt'altre esser prometto. (ll. 93–103)⁵⁰

Conclusions

The poem *Ahi lasso, che li boni e li malvagi* can be considered the most important stage of a journey in which Guittone has moved away from his first poetic production.⁵¹ The paradox in Guittone's text consists of inverting and refuting, point by point, the accusations directed at women through a poetic style that has often been used (and which he himself used) as an instrument to attack and belittle the female sex. Now, however, it allows him to examine the various points to be dealt with, to sharpen them and make them more effective. Guittone emerges as the advocate of a new discourse that strengthens his own poetic evolution.⁵²

50. "Gentle my lady, were it in you a treasure / How much wisdom is in your heart, the most valiant / Would be compared with you nothing; / And if I yet for queen hold you, / And crown you with honour as to another a kingdom: / For there is in you an abundance of good, / That I know, Love, that the lack / Of every other, may find in you much rest. / To Arezzo my true song I send / I send, Love, to you, for whom champion / And servant of all others I promise to be."

51. In the second part of his poetic production (after his literary conversion around 1265), Guittone constantly refers to his past as something no longer belonging to him. He regrets with shame and anger that he no longer recognizes himself in the old Guido. In the poem *Vergogna ho, lasso, ed ho me stesso ad ira*, he says, "Vergogna ho, lasso, ed ho me stesso ad ira e doveria via più, riconoscendo co male usai la fior del tempo mio [...] tutta sommissi, ohimè lasso, al servaggio de' vizi miei, non Dio, né bon usaggio, né diritto guardando in lor seguire, non mutando desire? S'eo resurgesse, com fenice face, già fora a la fornace lo putrefatto meo vil corpo ardendo" (I'm ashamed and I'm angry at myself, and I should be even more ashamed, recognizing how badly I used the flower of my time [...]. All I've subdued, to the servitude of my vices, not God, nor good use, nor right, looking to them, not changing my desire? If I were resurrected, with the semblance of the phoenix face, already my vile body would be burning in the furnace). See Guittone d'Arezzo, *Rime*, 19.

52. On the subject of Guittone's poetic line and possible retractions, Simone Marcenaro observes that "la palinodia non comprende eliminazioni e ritrattazioni, bensì una dialettica interna al proprio canzoniere" (the palinodia does not include eliminations and retractions, but rather a dialectic within its own *canzoniere*). Marcenaro, "Polemiche letterarie," 81.

Guittone speaks not only on a personal level, referring to his own work, but at the same time in the name of the class of *literati* and men of culture in general. By presenting himself as an accomplice and ally of the female sex,⁵³ he anticipates the group spirit of Renaissance treatise writers, who proudly proclaim themselves defenders of women, placing themselves in open enmity with those who are their detractors, considered to be inferior men.⁵⁴ Simultaneously, he constituted a reference model for authors such as Isotta Nogarola, Arcangela Tarabotti, Moderata Fonte, and Lucrezia Marinella, who in their treatises defending their sex took up and developed some of the arguments used by Guittone.

The remarkable modernity of the poet from Arezzo lies in his awareness of his own importance as a writer to combat stereotypes and prejudices against women. Guittone illustrates with his own trajectory that both a change of mentality towards women and the construction of an alternative form of masculinity, not hegemonic but egalitarian, are possible. His texts and reflections play a vital role in enriching the debate on concepts of masculinity and femininity and offer new perspectives for re-evaluating the literature in the context of the *querelle de femmes*.

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53. In his fifteenth-century work *Trastullo delle donne*, Faustino Perisauli will use the same scheme and will propose a defence of women in verse, declaring himself a defender and servant of the female sex: "Perch'io voglio essere donne il vostro tutto / mi metto a defensare vostre ragion / [...] Io sarò sempre di questa opinione, donne mie, d'esser vostro fidel servo" (Because women I want to be your everything / I will stand up for your reasons / [...] I will always be of this opinion, my women, to be your faithful servant). Quoted in Gurioli and Tagliaferri, "Trascrizione," 95.

54. See Dialeti, "'Defenders' and 'Enemies.'"

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