

PARLOUR GAMES AND THE PUBLIC LIFE
OF WOMEN IN RENAISSANCE ITALY

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GEORGE McCLURE

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Public Life of Women in
Renaissance Italy

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Preface

Rejoice, Ladies of the Assicurate, that through a pastime you can make war on time, and through play you can acquire immortality. With the spirited fearlessness of your wits this evening you can open up for yourselves a passage to glory. Do not be frightened of the heroic majesty that . . . will give you courage to make public those virtues that until now you have kept hidden under the silence of a rigorous modesty.

(BCI, C.VIII.26, fol. 58r)

So was recorded the speech of a Sienese woman to her colleagues in the all-female Academy of the Assicurate (the Assured) during a spirited parlour game in 1664. Parlour games involving both men and women emerged as a distinctive institution and literary genre in Italian Renaissance culture. Especially when moving beyond the confines of the court, such revels constituted a new social space. Somewhere between the fully public male contests (e.g., tournaments) and fully private games in women's quarters, parlour games – occurring in the public room of the private home among mixed company – comprised a playing and viewing public that afforded a novel venue for discourse on a variety of literary, social, and political issues. They also reflected a new cultural zone somewhere between learned and popular culture – whether “lowering” learned thought to a vernacular idiom or “elevating” oral culture (such as proverbs) to the realm of intellectual debate. What do these games tell us about the interactions of men and women? What do the structure and content of the games reveal about the intellectual and cultural life of polite, festive society? How do these games both reflect social realities in some ways and challenge them in others? Operating in a temporary world on the margins of traditional hierarchies, such

ludic encounters fall into that category Victor Turner defines as the “liminoid,” capable of posing alternative social models. In this sense, parlour games are a window onto a neglected dimension of social experience and experimentation. In particular, my focus will be on patrician women, who were often the overseers of night-time revels and who, for once, were able to engage men competitively on a somewhat equal footing and aspire to open their own “passage to glory.” The purpose of this study is to show that beneath the frivolous exterior of such games – as occasions for idle banter, flirting, and seduction – there often lay a lively contest for power and agency, and the opportunity for conventional women to demonstrate their intellect and talent, to achieve a public identity, to engage the *querelle des femmes*, and even to model new behaviour and institutions in the non-ludic world.

In presenting such an opportunity, the parlour game broadened the social base of women afforded the chance for intellectual engagement and cultural performance. As Frances Yates, Diana Robin, Carolyn Lougee, and Julie Campbell have shown, emerging salons and academies in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italy, France, and England included some women, but such participants were generally limited to a courtly or noble elite or to the exceptional literary figure. Moreover, because Italian salons at times featured or promoted courtesans such as Tullia d’Aragona or Veronica Franco, female eloquence could, as Margaret Rosenthal has argued, be associated with promiscuity. The parlour game, by contrast, allowed – practically commanded – respectable women to speak up. And it did so in a manner paralleling the rise of female actresses such as Isabella Andreini in the *commedia dell’arte* companies beginning in mid-sixteenth-century Italy. A Sienese parlour game called the Comedy mirrored the performative structure of such comedies; in fact, the contest or *agon* that animated parlour games even has some counterpart in the singing contests between these professional actresses, which Anne MacNeil describes. The other opportunity for female performance was to be found in the convents, as Elissa Weaver has shown in her study of convent theatre in Venice and Colleen Reardon in her treatment of convent music in Siena. The women of the Italian *giuochi di spirito* (witty games), however, were largely a class of participants distinct from these groups. They were not necessarily royalty or nobility, not necessarily courtesans, not professional actresses, not nuns, but simply the wives and daughters of the urban patriciate. In this sense, these festivities offered a voice to the traditional, the unexceptional: to matrons of the home and to daughters coming out into

society. It is this heretofore silent and invisible group that our study wants to hear and see.

The game dynamic was, moreover, one that interested writers in broad, experimental social terms. Whether in treatises on card games, chess, or parlour games, one area of their theoretical concern involved the sexual rules of play. Should men lose to women out of courtesy? Are games simply surrogates for the metaphorical game of courtship? Should women be shy or assertive in game playing? Do women want truly to compete with men? Part of my study will explore this larger discourse on gender politics and consider its relevance to general views of female agency. In two versions of his treatise on games, Torquato Tasso, imprisoned in Ferrara, presented a powerful case for the assertive female player in the card game *primiera* – and likely did so with an eye towards eliciting female help in the “real” world of his embattled circumstances. A similar plea for authentic competition came in the voice of a female interlocutor in a Mantuan game book written by Ascanio de’ Mori. As in the case of Mori’s treatise, my chief focus will be on descriptive and prescriptive collections of games of wit and intellect, and literary simulations of such games, for these offered the opportunity for women to “*far pompa dello spirito*” (to make a show of their wit). Such treatises – including those by Innocenzio Ringhieri in Bologna, Girolomo Bargagli in Siena, Bartolomeo Arnigio in Brescia, and Stefano Guazzo in Casale Monferrato – reveal that another prominent debate revolved around larger moral and cultural function of games: are they meant to elevate or to divert? To control or to liberate?

Although my study will treat the literature of games emanating from various parts of Italy – including Florence, Rome, Urbino, Bologna, Brescia, Casale Monferrato, Ferrara, Mantua, Venice, and Padua – my principal focus will be on Siena. Here emerged the most vibrant tradition of “*giuochi di spirito*,” one that eventually became a central theme in Sienese cultural identity and a source of Sienese fame throughout Italy and even abroad. This tradition was spawned by the new academy culture emerging in the second quarter of the sixteenth century. The Academy of the *Intronati* (the Stunned) arose in reaction to the chaos of the Italian Wars as an overtly non-political literary society aimed at cultural restoration and escapist diversion. The entertainment and promotion of women was a pivotal part of the *Intronati*’s cultural agenda. Not only did the academy collectively pitch its literary and theatrical productions to women, but individual members, such as Alessandro Piccolomini, became spokesmen for female dignity and champions of

certain local Sieneſe women. Quite poſſibly the general turn to women can be ſeen as part of the Sieneſe retreat from traditional political concerns – which itſelf may have been intensified by its increasing domination by Florence, a proceſſ capped by the ſiege and fall of Siena in the mid-1550s. Thus, juſt as in an earlier time Siena played “Ghibelline” to Florence’s “Guelph,” ſo in the ſixteenth century it once again aſſumed an almoſt antithetical identity to its powerful neighbour – this time playing the role of apolitical, ludic, “feminized” ſtate to Florence’s aggressive, powerful, ducal ſtate.

Whatever the reaſon, the Intronati and numerous other academies of the Sieneſe elite directed their attention to women, and not juſt in an amatory way. As the principal literary ſpokeſmen of the parlour games of the Intronati, Girolamo and Scipione Bargagli emphasized the importance of women aſſertively engaging in theſe games, which offered them an opportunity for public fame denied them in other areas. The Bargagli brothers’ game books preſent theoretical ſtatements on the purpoſe and ſtructure of parlour games as well as, in Girolamo’s caſe, deſcriptions of games that had been played and, in Scipione’s caſe, fictive ſimulations of games as they could have been played. Written in the 1560s, both books came in the aftermath of the fall of Siena; in fact, Scipione’s book is explicitly ſet during the ſiege, a criſis that prompted the leadership of three women who, under banners with their individual inſignias, led a force of three thouſand women to aid in the fortification of the city. This famous incident became the ſtuff of legend in ſubſequent centuries, and the early eighteenth-century Intronati writer Girolamo Gigli preſſed the caſe that the military agency of theſe women was linked to their ludic agency in the parlour games.

But the military role of Sieneſe women is only the moſt dramatic poſſible example of the ludic nudge to public agency and viſibility, as the games alſo offered opportunities for women publicly to preſent poetry, to lecture and debate, and to receive (and ſometime deviſe) public perſonas through fortunes, emblems, inſignias, nicknames, and mottoes. When the Florentine ſtate ſhut down the Intronati and other Sieneſe academies in 1568, new groups aroſe, ſuch as the Ferraiuoli and the Travagliati, which continued the Intronati tradition, making compilations of female medallions and fortunes that were in effect public ſtatements of female identity and potential. This in turn led to the entrée of women into the world of the Renaissance emblem, which could be an important vehicle for women’s public fame and ſelf-expression. By the mid-ſeventeenth century the Sieneſe games produced their moſt

tangible institutional result, the creation of Italy's first all-female academy. The Academy of the Assicurate, which flourished from 1654 to 1704, was created out of an Intronati parlour game in which the "rule" of the "Kingdom of Love" was transferred from men to women. Like the male academies, this new female academy inducted individuals who, proving themselves deserving through some demonstration of talent or cleverness, were assigned appropriate nicknames, emblems, and mottoes. Aside from brief records of their events and membership, there is to be found in Siena's Biblioteca Comunale a compilation containing lengthy accounts of several of the parlour games played by members of the Assicurate and Intronati. Written in various hands, these accounts are an invaluable and rare source preserving oral culture, as they offer us an almost reportorial account of the exchanges between men and women at these games.

The swan song of the Assicurate came in a game of 1704, which actually resulted in a brief publication under the name of their academy. In the following years the leading figure of the Intronati, Girolamo Gigli, lamented the decline of the Assicurate and urged its revival, in part for the benefit of his daughter. In various published and unpublished works, Gigli celebrated the history (and mythology) of the Sienese games and women. In 1719 he published a work in which he envisioned a dramatic expansion of the universe of Assicurate to include notable women throughout Italy, whom he immortalized in a catalogue of 219 members identified by flattering nicknames, devices, and mottoes. The legacy of the Assicurate endured somewhat, as at least two of its members would be enrolled in the Roman Academy of the Arcadi, which published their poetry in its multi-volume anthology of 1716–20. This same academy also held Olympic (parlour) Games in Rome, one of whose participants was the improvisational poetess Maria Maddalena Morelli of Pistoia, who became the model for the novel *Corinne* (1807) by France's most famous *salonnière*, Madame de Staël.

A few words on method and terminology. While historical in its purpose and focus, this study seeks to join historical and literary analysis in one particular way. In essence, the book will deal with the triangulation of three realms: the actual lives of women in their world; their ludic lives in this liminoid realm of the parlour game; and the writings concerning these games and their female dimension. This last realm – the literary one that connects the "real" world and the game world – sometimes has a function that is not simply descriptive or imaginary but also prescriptive, even at times functioning as a form of rhetorical

advocacy to embolden both the ludic and real agency of women. These literary accounts thus need to be read not only for the reality they purport to record or the fictional worlds they create but also for their rhetorical subtexts in regard to female autonomy. The interaction between this literary realm and the world of play and reality constitutes what I call a “ludic triangle,” which represents an unexplored model of social change and cultural innovation.

As for my use of the term “feminism,” for me as for others writing of this period this is largely by way of default. Certainly, I do not intend by its use to transpose the feminist sensibilities of the modern era back onto the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. I use the term as an antonym to “patriarchy” (male control of government, society, and family) to indicate a sentiment favouring greater female voice, equality, and autonomy. As the title of Torquato Tasso’s *Discorso delle virtù femminile e donnesca* suggests, Renaissance writers themselves struggled to find the proper language to describe the domain of female virtue and character. Nor does my study intend to credit men with too much empathy or women with too much power. To be sure, some men doubtless sang the praises of women for amatory reasons, and some men were condescending in coaching women to be more assertive and cerebral. And yet, some of these same men were also truly invested in facilitating the emergence of women from an exclusively private sphere into the public domain. As we shall see, this is evident not only in the parlour game literature per se, but also in other genres of history, biography, moral philosophy, and funeral orations, in which Sieneese men defined and praised female virtue. In this regard, I hope that my study complements the work of Diana Robin, Meredith Ray, and Lynn Lara Westwater on the cooperation of men and women in the publishing of female authors in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Finally, why “Renaissance” in the title? I could as well have chosen “early modern,” as the book’s boundaries run from the mid-fourteenth century (Boccaccio) to the early eighteenth. To some, the term “Renaissance” connotes a backward-looking, elite, Latin culture; and “early modern” a forward-looking, more inclusive culture and society. This study in part touches on the transition between these worlds, especially since parlour games at times translated classical culture to a more accessible vernacular plane. But I chose “Renaissance” in part because I want to provide another response to Joan Kelly’s famous question, “Did Women Have a Renaissance?” As Margaret King has shown, various answers to this question have been given in terms of social and

economic history, spiritual life, and humanist and literary pursuits. In the case of the last area, the series of texts of female writers that she and Albert Rabil have issued over the past twenty years (*The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe*) has certainly affirmed the literary gains made by women in this period – as have the studies of Virginia Cox, Janet Smarr, and Sarah Gwyneth Ross – but the realm of play and oral culture has not been fully explored. What this study will show is that the flowering of games promoted a cultural renewal for a certain class of women in several ways. First, the ludic world offered them opportunities to perform in an intellectual setting in which both classical themes and contemporary popular culture could be debated and contested. Second, it gave them an arena for fame, as originality and cleverness in such settings became a theme of praise. Third, in Siena it led to the institutionalization of cultural activities in the creation of a female academy, which, if not as fully autonomous as the male academies of the period, certainly mirrored their cultural practices. The visibility of this female “Renaissance” is attested to by the sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and eighteenth-century histories and biographies that trumpet this fame of Sienese women and their game playing as a signal feature of Sienese glory. Indeed, these games and their legacy represent an underexamined link between the archetypes of the idealized, “beloved” woman of medieval court culture and the actualized, intellectual woman of early modern salon culture.

As for technical matters, for the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries I have converted all dates in Siena from “old style” to “new style,” but for dates in the first half of the eighteenth century (when the conversion is in transition) I will use the customary slash (e.g., “1721/2”) when dates fall between January 1 and March 25. As for the surnames of women, which during the period would often take the feminine form (as in “Laudomia Forteguerria”), I will use the patronymic (“Forteguerri”) except in quotations, as this conforms to modern citation style. Portions of chapter 1 appeared in *Renaissance Quarterly* 61 (2008) as “Women and the Politics of Play in Sixteenth-Century Italy: Torquato Tasso’s Theory of Games.” Finally, all translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.

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Venice, the Biblioteca del Museo Correr; in the United States, Sterling Memorial Library at Yale, Memorial Library at the University of Wisconsin, the John J. Burns Library of Rare Books and Special Collections at Boston College (holder of the only copy in the States of Ottonelli's massive 1646 *Pericolosa conversazione con le donne*, which they digitized and provided free to me, courtesy of Robert O'Neill), and the Interlibrary Loan staff of Gorgas Library at the University of Alabama. For research support, I am grateful to the Bankhead Fund of the Department of History of the University of Alabama. For thoughtful criticisms and helpful suggestions I am indebted to the anonymous readers for the University of Toronto Press – and I thank others at the press, especially Suzanne Rancourt, who helped bring the book to life, and to Charles Stuart, who rescued the text from many infelicities. My children Rosie and David became adults during the writing of the book. Even after leaving home – yes, they really left – they continued to ask of my “progress” with utmost tact and discretion. My greatest debt is to my wife, Jennifer, who is an astute and tireless (!) critic in matters of both substance and style. Her suggestions have been invaluable. Born a bit earlier, she would no doubt have been the Principessa of the Asicurate. To her I lovingly dedicate this book.

PARLOUR GAMES AND THE PUBLIC LIFE
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1 The Renaissance Theory of Play

Rabelais would lead us to believe that the sixteenth-century appetite for games could match a giant's boundless capacity for food, as his Gargantua played over two hundred games in one sitting. Certainly, this gargantuan list bespeaks the considerable presence of play in European popular culture in the sixteenth century.¹ Cinquecento Italy's distinction in this realm lay not in its inheritance of such a rich tradition of games, but rather in its pioneering articulation of a cultural theory of games. This century had seen the growth of game culture and game analysis in various settings: from the verse treatment of chess in Girolamo Vida's *Scacchia ludus* (1527), to Aretino's dialogue *Le carte parlanti* (1543), to Antonio Scaino's treatise on tennis in his *Trattato del giuoco della palla* (1555), to the parlour-game books of Innocenzio Ringhieri (1551) and Girolamo and Scipione Bargagli (1572, 1587), and finally to a general theory of play in Torquato Tasso's *Gonzaga secondo overo del giuoco* (Second Gonzaga or on games) (1582). No longer were comments on games submerged in larger encyclopedic or geographical works, but there arose a discrete literature defending the utility of play and contextualizing its cultural and social meanings.² This chapter will consider the Renaissance theory of play with a particular eye to issues of gender and the emergence of parlour games.

In his popular *La Piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo* (1585), Tomaso Garzoni included a chapter entitled "Game Players" among his comprehensive catalogue of vocations and avocations. Surveying ancient public games, chess, cards, dice, all manner of contemporary children's games, tavern games, and the recent appearance of tarot cards and parlour games, he opens his chapter with a definition of

a game from Tasso's recent *Gonzaga secondo overo del giuoco*.³ It is revealing that Garzoni, who often traced out the classical roots in the definition of human pursuits, turns to a contemporary source in this case. For all of its specific traditions and descriptions of games, the Graeco-Roman world offered no theoretical treatment of generic play. Renaissance Italy did, and one significant dimension of sixteenth-century game literature was its transformation from a predominantly ironic or burlesque treatment of play to an authentic, serious analysis. Three works dealing with card games illustrate the point.

In 1526 Francesco Berni – whose burlesque works included praises of the urinal, eels, and thistles – composed a *Capitolo* and *Commento del gioco della primiera*, a poem on the card game primiera and a gloss on the poem in the style a humanist might give to a work of Virgil. He offers detailed etymologies of vernacular proverbs and expressions used in card games, and shows primiera's capacity to mirror theological and cardinal virtues, to pique all the passions, and to test character.⁴ Berni's fulsome flattery of cards undoubtedly influenced Aretino's lengthy dialogue, the *Carte parlanti*, in which Cards persuade a card maker of the nobility of his vocation. The conversation combines absurd and ironic praises (of the player who is as zealous as a religious hermit) with more serious encomia of the "liberal" player who conforms to the laws of play and shows moderation and "true constancy" in the face of both winning and losing. In naming examples of many impressive card players, such as the dedicatee Ferrante Sanseverino, Aretino moved beyond the exclusively ironic and showed that such a popular pastime could truly be a mirror of character, a test of skill, and an arena for fame. In fact, he contrasts the honesty and clarity of cards – where a seven is a seven and an ace an ace – with the hypocrisy and ruses of the lawyers and doctors and the false flattery meted out by writers.⁵ Much of what was animating Berni and Aretino was a hostility towards the pretensions of high-humanist learning and establishment culture. Their promotion of game culture was partly a plea for the recognition of a more inclusive and universal realm of popular experience. But by the last quarter of the sixteenth century, the irony has fallen away, and in Tasso's *Gonzaga secondo* the analysis of primiera – and all games – is wholly serious, as Tasso attempts to reform the rules of play among the well-born.

Tasso's Theory of Games

Tasso's theory of play, which he develops over the course of two treatises, warrants close attention for several reasons. Not only is it a

serious (rather than a burlesque) analysis of *primiera*, but also it represents the most ambitious theoretical attempt in the Cinquecento to develop a theory that embraces all types of games. Most importantly, the story behind Tasso's writing of his two game books is emblematic of the ties between female play and female agency. Tasso's first treatment of games appeared in a short treatise entitled *Il Romeo overo del giuoco*, published in 1581.⁶ This dialogue is set at the Este court at Ferrara during Carnival of 1579 at the occasion of Alfonso II's marriage to Margherita Gonzaga. At the festivities, according to the treatise's framework, the Ferrarese courtier Count Annibale Romei had discussed games before the dignitaries at court, and one auditor, Annibale Pocaterra, later reported the conversation to an unidentified Margherita while she watched her husband play the card game *primiera*. Their conversation, thus purporting to convey aspects of Romei's discourse, ranges over many issues such as the types of games (those, like dice, in which luck is dominant, and those, like chess, in which skill prevails); the venues of games (fully public spectacles, fully private games in women's quarters, and the middle realm of polite play usually occurring in the home and yet sometimes in public);⁷ the goals of games (victory yielding a reward, an imitation of events in the real world); the role of Fortune in play; and the delight derived from games.⁸

This broad outline of the theory of play was rather brief, and Tasso soon revisited the topic, greatly expanding the *Romeo* in the *Gonzaga secondo*, published the following year in 1582. Though framed in the same context of Romei's Carnival discussion of games, this version adds a third interlocutor, Giulio Cesare Gonzaga (namesake of the treatise), who joins Pocaterra and Margherita, now fully identified as Margherita Bentivoglio (daughter of Alfonso's military commander, Cornelio Bentivoglio). This longer dialogue broadens and deepens the earlier treatment in several ways:⁹ for one, it delves more deeply into the psychology and moral philosophy of play. Explaining that recreation is a necessary relief from the rigours of both the active and the contemplative life, Tasso explains that a *trattenimento* is literally a diversion that "ci trattiene da l'operazione," ("draws us away from work") returning us to our tasks more willingly.¹⁰ Moreover, in discussing the archetypes of players, he treats in considerable detail not only the "avaricious player" and the "liberal player" (types adumbrated in the *Romeo*) but also the typical player (reflective of "the greater part of players") who, far from the liberal player's Stoic detachment from the vicissitudes of the game, allows himself be engulfed in the *hope* and *delight* of gain and the *doubt* and *fear* of loss. This wallowing in the *pathoi* resulting from the game's

fortune is in fact what allows the time of *ozio* magically to pass.¹¹ This embrace of psychological chaos shows how far distant the escapism of Cinquecento game culture was from the moralism of, for instance, Petrarch, who envisioned a Stoic sage rising above *both kinds of fortune* and who was generally sceptical of play.¹²

In both treatises, Tasso discusses the proper goals of men when playing with women.¹³ Of particular interest are the changes between the first and second treatises in regard to this question of the gender politics of play. In the *Romeo*, when Pocaterra suggests that one should not play for monetary gain but for the honour of winning, Margherita counters that if it is not honourable to take money from friends, it likewise would not be honourable to feel superior to them. To this Pocaterra answers that the honour of victory is indeed appropriate when men are playing with men, but might be ill-advised or disadvantageous when playing with women: "He with whom you might play, gracious Lady, would be able rightfully to place the victory in losing and artfully allowing [you] to win, as do some courteous men, who playing with women allow [them] to win on purpose ... But as it is politeness and courtesy to allow women to win, so it would be foolish for him to willingly allow men to win, because everyone ought to strive to be superior to others in things honest and praiseworthy, but victory is the most honest and most praiseworthy."¹⁴ Margherita objects that such behaviour, which "by you is called politeness and courtesy, by me is considered deceit and artifice, because as you said a little before, they do not allow [women] to win except in order to win" (i.e., in some other amatory way).¹⁵ Pocaterra acknowledges that some might do this "out of love or some other motive, but many do it simply for politeness."¹⁶

Margherita then bores in and explicitly confronts this social nicety, arguing that it is considered good manners to lose to women because true victory comes only in a true contest, and women cannot compete with men in fortune or skill. Pocaterra denies that a woman such as Margherita cannot compete in skill, but does acknowledge that she cannot compete in Fortune with men (presumably meaning, in the circumstances of life). Margherita asks why Fortuna, though female and a goddess, does not favour women over men, and then offers the remarkably blunt statement that such fortune is a fiction: "But perhaps this name Fortune is a vain one, to which nothing corresponds; whence, if we [women] cede to Fortune, this happens because we cede by force, although we are equal in ability; and *the violence of men is the maker of this Fortune, which, even if it is anything (which I doubt), is nothing other*

than the result of their tyranny."¹⁷ Female subordination is not simply fortuitous or circumstantial; it is premeditated and imposed by men. But if women lose in the fortunes of life, they do, Pocaterra affirms, seem to win in the fortunes of love. That is, to Margherita's assertion that "the violence of men is the maker of [female] fortune," he counters that "the beauty of women would be the maker of the fortune of men, because if fortune has force in anything, it has it in the game and in love."¹⁸ In explaining women's advantage in the fortunes of love, Pocaterra argues that, as men rule in the marital world, women rule in the amatory realm: "In the Kingdom of Love, female fortune rules, because the woman, to the degree she is loved, is always superior to the lover, although to the degree she is wife, she is inferior to the husband."¹⁹ When Margherita asks him to reconcile the contradiction between his contentions that women are inferior in fortune but superior in the fortune of love, Pocaterra flatly states his position: "In all the other offices of life they [women] are born inferior to men; only love is perhaps that which, equalizing their inequality, renders women equal to men."²⁰ In Margherita's resentment and in Pocaterra's condescension, these two interlocutors speak harsh truths about female subordination in the real world and women's temporary and contrived superiority in the artificial world of love and polite play. Moreover, the *Romeo*, by largely linking game culture with amatory culture, depicts the game as just a component of the duplicitous ritual of male seduction and conquest.²¹

By the time Tasso wrote the *Gonzaga secondo* (prior to Margherita Bentivoglio's death in September of 1581),²² the tone had changed significantly. At first glance, the prominence of women seems diminished, as Margherita, one of two interlocutors in the *Romeo*, is now merely one of three, her role eclipsed by the conversation between Pocaterra and Gonzaga. But there are other notable differences. The revised treatise excises some of the *Romeo*'s harsh and belaboured comments on the sexist conventions of society. Margherita's complaint that men intentionally lose to women remains, but her remark on men's violent mistreatment of women is gone, as is Pocaterra's "consolation" that women do rule in the realm of love and his assertions of female inequality in the larger scheme of life. Softening the indictment of "male tyranny" found in the *Romeo*, this version recasts the discussion of how women fare in the realms of *fortuna* and *ingegno*. Gonzaga here says to Margherita, "it seems to me that more readily you [women] ought to cede to men in *fortune* than in *intelligence*, since by the former there is not granted to you many opportunities to demonstrate the latter."²³ Perhaps games

represent a promising arena for women to test their intellectual mettle. Tasso never explicitly states this argument, but it might underlie the other major – and most important – change in the *Gonzaga secondo*, which concerns Margherita's particular interests in the discussion of play. At the start of the dialogue, when Gonzaga lays out various abstract questions on the nature and history of games, Margherita says that she had envisioned these same topics, but that he has left out one area that she also wants treated: namely, “*how one who wants to win ought to play*.”²⁴ And, appropriately, Margherita now comes to be seen by her male interlocutors as a player in pursuit of true victory, as Gonzaga comments, “I would well wish, if in any mode it would be possible, that we teach Lady Margherita to win, as she desires.”²⁵ In fact, the last portion of the treatise is cast as a discussion of how – in the face of the uncertainties of Fortune in a game such as *primiera* – Margherita can be taught to achieve true victory by making strategic (and even “insidious”) pacts (*accordi*) and agreeing to proper divisions of the stakes.²⁶ The implication of this becomes clear towards the end of the dialogue, where Pocaterra (so condescending towards women in the *Romeo*) now advises that, when splitting the pot towards the end of a game, the same divisions (true “arithmetic” ones, not “geometric” ones) should be used when playing with a woman as when playing with a merchant – without respect to the “quality of persons.”²⁷ This prompts Gonzaga's objection that “then your player, Signor Annibale, would be little courteous, and little worthy of playing with genteel women.”²⁸ Nonetheless, the dialogue ends with Margherita's inviting Pocaterra to further explain his theory about mathematical odds.

Not only is Margherita now more equal *Giocatrice* than unequal *Amata*, but she is generally depicted as wilier, more determined, and more forceful in the treatise. At the start of the dialogue, Tasso inserts an exchange in which Pocaterra praises Margherita in such a way that implies that she is as adept in the art of the game as Hannibal was in the art of war.²⁹ Most significantly, in the discussion concerning women's capacity to contend with men in skill or Fortune, Margherita deflects a compliment about her own qualities and cites several outstanding women of the day – Claudia Rangone, Barbara Sanseverino, Fulvia da Correggio, Felice della Rovere, and the Duchess of Ferrara herself (Margherita Gonzaga) – who have proven their capacity for *ingegno*.³⁰ In the *Romeo*, the first four of these women are not named, and instead Pocaterra (and not Margherita) simply refers generically to the women at the Este court, who had been routinely named and praised at the start

of the treatise; thus the insertion of these particular women (named by Margherita) in the later version is significant. And even though Tasso took out the harsh complaint from the *Romeo* that female fortune is really just violence done to women by men, Margherita's reference to these women provides a meaningful subtext concerning women who did forcefully challenge "male tyranny."

It is surely no coincidence that some of these women had lived lives of unusual independence and even defiance in the face of male control. Claudia Rangone, long unhappy in her marriage to Giberto da Correggio (who castigated her as a woman of "indomitable mind" (*cervello indomito*), in 1567 secured from the pope an annulment, and three years later she sued her ex-husband (unsuccessfully) to nullify their daughter's claustration.³¹ Fulvia da Correggio, widowed in her mid-twenties upon the death of her husband Lodovico II Pico della Mirandola in 1568, engaged in a power struggle with one of her brothers-in-law to win full control of Mirandola, staving off other opposition by executing one would-be assassin.³² Barbara Sanseverino, the charismatic Countess of Sala who attracted the attentions of princes and poets (including Tasso), clearly rebelled in her marriage to a man thirty-five years her elder.³³ In 1577, given leave to come to Ferrara for four days to help her stepdaughter in childbirth, this "intrepida" woman stayed on for two months and proved to be the chief reveller at Carnival.³⁴ Another measure of Barbara's personality would emerge long after Tasso's death, when in 1611 she became the ringleader of a conspiracy of nobles against Ranuccio I Farnese, the Duke of Parma, leading to her execution the following year in Parma's public square.³⁵ Clearly, by adding this list of assertive women Tasso has recast his female interlocutor Margherita, like his argument in general, in more affirmative feminist terms.³⁶ And in doing so he degendered game culture by moving it from an exclusively amatory and courtly realm to a more authentically competitive realm.

What was the larger context for Tasso's depiction of women's role in the realm of play? Certainly, the dynamics of game playing in this period were strongly shaped by the patterns of social hierarchy. Among the well born it could simply mirror and mimic social formalities of deference and ceremony. That is, a game such as chess or cards might serve as an opportunity for overly defined, and overly refined, forms of social intercourse between unequal men or between men and (unequal) women. Or a game could act as leverage in courtship ritual. The prominent Paduan literary figure Sperone Speroni (1500–88), one of Tasso's

advisors for the revision of his *Jerusalem Delivered*,³⁷ wrote a *Dialogo di Panico, e Bichi*, in which Jeronimo Panico and Annibale Bichi discuss Panico's playing dice with a woman he favours in the context of courtship ritual. Bichi suggests that Panico's beloved cleverly lost on purpose as a female ruse; and likewise he counsels Panico to make his "winnings" a gift to her to obligate her to him.³⁸ A woman's intentionally losing and a male's forfeiting winnings are thus cast as a strategem of the social game of courting rather than the true playing of a game.³⁹ Doubts concerning the intrusion of such artificiality in the game realm can be found, prior to Tasso's treatises, in a parlour-game book by the Mantuan Ascanio de' Mori.⁴⁰ In his *Giuoco piacevole*, written in 1575, Mori depicts a party of women and men engaged in a challenging game of extemporaneous storytelling, in which players must fashion tales about a city, inn, innkeeper, garden, tree, and animal (with a motto), all beginning with an assigned letter of the alphabet. This game, in contrast to Castiglione's parlour game of defining an ideal courtier, was designed not by a male participant but by a female player, Beatrice Gambara, who, against the protestations of an initially weaker foil Isabella, insists that women are capable of greater "prowess" than they think. And in the course of the game, even Isabella reflects increasingly feminist attitudes. When she has to give up various tokens because of slips she makes, an admiring male player gallantly provides one for her. Her reaction is a swift rebuke, as she chides him that any (amatory) *gain* he thus hoped to make with her he has in fact *lost* "with this courtesy of excessive generosity."⁴¹ And when others argue that she earlier escaped another penalty for a slip, she appealed this judgment, proving that she had not erred and rejected any condescending relaxation of the rules of the game, saying, "I do not wish to triumph without victory."⁴² Mori's character Isabella thus prefigures Tasso's character Margherita, who similarly resents women being deprived of true victory out of condescension or courtesy.⁴³

The two versions of Tasso's game book address this issue of the sexist rules of play: the *Romeo* states the problem but largely leaves it unresolved, whereas the *Gonzaga secondo* makes an effort to transform Margherita from embittered victim to assertive player. Why did he make this change? The excision of the especially harsh comments on men's mistreatment of women might have been necessitated by his now clearly identifying the interlocutor as Margherita Bentivoglio.⁴⁴ But what about the changed assumptions of Pocaterra and the more generalized attempt to address Margherita's desire to be a true

player? Speculations on Tasso's thinking and his motives in the early 1580s necessarily must be somewhat tentative, as he was incarcerated (or hospitalized) in Sant'Anna during these years for instability and bouts with madness.⁴⁵ It is possible that, in introducing Giulio Cesare Gonzaga and renaming the treatise for him, Tasso may have been attempting to further strengthen ties to members of the Gonzaga family as possible intercessors who might aid in winning his release from Sant'Anna.⁴⁶ In the same year that Tasso published the *Gonzaga secondo*, he also published a *Discorso della virtù femminile e donnesca* (Discourse on feminine and womanly virtue), dedicated to the Duchess of Mantua, Leonora of Austria (1534–94), wife of Guglielmo Gonzaga and mother of Margherita Gonzaga.⁴⁷ This work lays out the debate as to whether women have a different – more private, less “heroic” – virtue than men, citing the position of Thucydides (following Aristotle) that they do, and the opposing stance of Plutarch (following Plato) that they do not.⁴⁸ As for his own position in the treatise, Tasso is able to have his cake and eat it too, by arguing that ordinary women might hew to the retiring, private type of “feminine virtue,” but that regal, courtly, and heroic women (such as his dedicatee Leonora) can display a “womanly virtue,” in which there is not found “any distinction of works and offices between them and heroic men.”⁴⁹ This last passage recalls and rebuts Pocaterro's comment in the *Romeo* that, aside from their upper hand in the realm of love, “in all the other offices of life [women] are born inferior to men.”⁵⁰ And, indeed, the *Discorso* argues for the agency of women in the public sphere – and might even be intended to plant the idea of such women interceding on behalf of an imprisoned poet.

In any case, in 1582 Tasso published both of these works that emphasize female agency – in the *Gonzaga secondo* naming notable women, some of whom (other than Margherita Bentivoglio herself and the duchess and ladies of the Este court) he might have hoped to plead his case.⁵¹ It was perhaps no coincidence that it was the young prince Vincenzo Gonzaga of the Mantuan court who ultimately secured Tasso's freedom in July of 1586. Tasso had earlier dedicated his *Discourse* on female virtue and power to Vincenzo's mother, Leonora, the Duchess of Mantua, and had expressed his hope in a letter of January 1585 that “by her and through her [his freedom] might be pled to all those by whom it can be conceded.”⁵² How much of a role did Vincenzo's mother Leonora play in Tasso's rescue? Had Tasso's feminist arguments in the *Discorso* and his overtures to Leonora in some measure hit their mark?

Tasso's personal situation may have linked the potential for female agency in the ludic realm with the potential for female agency in the public, political realm. Just as a more assertive Margherita Bentivoglio could truly win at *primiera*, an assertive female mediator could (and possibly did) win his release from house arrest.⁵³ In any case, between the *Romeo* and the *Gonzaga secondo*, Tasso goes far in resolving a problem that existed in both the ludic and the real world. By questioning and correcting the sexist conventions of *play*, his two treatises suggest that game culture might have provided a fertile ground for challenging the sexist conventions of *society* in the early modern era. As Tasso's *Discorso della virtù femminile e donnesca* suggests, this debate within game culture should be seen in the larger context of the late medieval and early modern "querelle des femmes," in which both men and women writers contested the capacities of women for virtue, learning, and autonomy.⁵⁴ What is interesting here, however, is that Tasso's solution in the *Gonzaga secondo* located the debate not in the realm of intellectual or political elites (such as learned female humanists or queens) but among a somewhat lower and wider range of women. Even his *Discourse* on female virtue remained moored to a traditional view that "ordinary" women are suited only for a private, domestic, "feminine" virtue and that only regal and well-placed women are capable of a heroic "womanly" virtue equal to that of men. The exemplars he names in that work include such highly placed and well-known figures as the dedicatee, Duchess Leonora of Mantua, Queen Elizabeth, Catherine de' Medici, Renata of Ferrara, Isabella d'Este, Lucrezia Borgia, and Vittoria Colonna.⁵⁵ Similarly, in his *Jerusalem Delivered*, Tasso's prominent women all fit into some archetypal category of the females who frequent the epic tradition: Sofronia the Christian martyr, Clorinda the Amazon warrior maiden, Armida the underworld seductress, Erminia the smitten lover.⁵⁶ By contrast, the women of *ingegno* that Margherita Bentivoglio names in the *Gonzaga secondo* belong fully to none of these categories. Claudia Rangone, Barbara Sanseverino, and Fulvia da Correggio were neither epic heroines nor highest royalty (although certainly aristocratic), but women who had undoubtedly shown their capacity for autonomy and even defiance in a male world.⁵⁷ More forbidding than an "armed knight," these women were identified by Tasso as individuals who could contend and compete.⁵⁸ So, too, Tasso apparently decided, was Margherita Bentivoglio, who should be taught how truly to win at *primiera*. Was the Margherita of the *Romeo* anonymous because of this unwomanly challenge to tradition? Certainly, by the point at which he

wrote the *Gonzaga secondo* Tasso had decided that it was time to identify women as true players – players whose agency might even rescue him.

The Parlour Game

Tasso's two treatises reveal how sixteenth-century game theory wrestled with the gender politics of play. But what theories did the century advance concerning the purpose and structure of the parlour game per se? And what specific role for women was envisioned in these encounters? Parlour-game collections and ideals roughly fall into two general categories: one school saw the game more in terms of edification and social control; another, more in terms of entertainment and social licence. In both models women often played an important part – in contrast to the classical convivial setting in which women's presence was very limited and only indirect (as in Socrates's accounts of a dialogue with Diotima in *Symposium* 201d–212b and an oration by Aspasia in *Menexenus*) or limited to courtesans (as in the depiction of prostitutes in Athenaeus's *Deipnosophists* Bk. 13).⁵⁹ The emergence of women in literary gatherings was in evidence in the courtly love tradition in Provence starting in the twelfth century, and this tradition of course informed the poetic sensibilities of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio.⁶⁰ Moreover, an identification of women as principal overseers of the ludic and festive realm was already apparent in the *Decameron*. Boccaccio's Pampinea was the prime mover and first queen in the circle of seven men and three women who retreated from Florence to tell their hundred tales.⁶¹ And in Bk. 4 of his *Filocolo*, Fiammetta is named queen for a festive gathering in which she orchestrates (and dominates) a set of "questions of love."⁶² In the early sixteenth century Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* (1513–14) was framed as a dialogue enacting a parlour game at the court of Urbino. At that gathering the Duchess Elisabetta Gonzaga and Emilia Pia were identified as the directors of the ludic festivities – though in the dialogue they call for games to be proposed only by men, and when the game of defining the ideal courtier is suggested, they generally yield the floor to males who control the conversation.⁶³ Later in the century a more active role for women in parlour games emerged in Innocenzio Ringhieri's *Cento giuochi liberali, et d'ingegno* (Hundred games of learning and wit) of 1551, the ur-text of the edification model of games.

Ringhieri, a Bolognese poet, dedicated his game book to Catherine de' Medici for use in her court in France.⁶⁴ Distinguishing his games

from other types of play – for example, ancient gladiatorial and funeral games, modern jousts, soccer, masquerades, and board games – he lays claim to originality in his project by suggesting that he has no real model for creating such “liberal” games, “worthy of whatever rare and elevated intellect.”⁶⁵ The games consist of players reciting some lore – for example, the animal and instrument associated with a certain classical god – or keeping track of a fluctuating order of terms in rounds. Failure to do so, or failure to refrain from laughing, results in the payment of a forfeit (*pegno*), which players can redeem by declaiming on questions (*dubbi*), which he appends to the end of each game. The collection of one hundred games constitutes a virtual encyclopedia of polite culture with games on nature (Seas, Mountains, Islands), the arts (Poets, Painting, Comedy), the moral realm (Happiness, Misery, Envy), the intellectual tradition (Philosophy, the Liberal Arts), the social world (Husbands and Wives, Breeding), mythology (Council of the Gods, Centaurs, Proteus), professions (the Merchant, the Physician, the Gardener), and the wider semiotic and cultural world (Maxims and Signs, Time). Many of the games overtly deal with the amatory realm (Love, the Lover and the Beloved), or are framed as metaphors for love. Others are introduced so as to dignify – or be dignified by – some aspect of the female world.⁶⁶ That this work was largely addressed to a young female audience in an amatory framework is evident from what is not present in the games. There are no games on children, parenthood, or widowhood. The complete absence of children suggests a sharp divide between women as lovers and women as mothers in such literature – this despite the fact that the dedicatee Catherine de’ Medici had given birth to five children in the six years preceding Ringhieri’s publication of his work.⁶⁷ In a word, Ringhieri wanted to give structure to the “ozio” of young women of marriageable age – and even included a Game of Leisure, listing love and games as the first two “goods” of leisure (and indolence and lust as the first two “evils”).⁶⁸



While Ringhieri’s work thus certainly has a footing in the literary tradition of courtly love – and in fact he ends each of his ten books of games with a poem – its many intellectual themes suggest a serious didactic purpose.⁶⁹ For instance, the Game of Happiness and Goods is basically an adaptation of Aristotle’s treatment of the three categories of the goods of body, mind, and fortune (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1.8). Three sets of eight goods of each category are sounded by players either alone or in combination according to several possible definitions of happiness. Thus, happiness as “good fortune with virtue” would entail

players representing both the “goods of fortune” and the “goods of virtue” to sound off. Happiness as “in itself sufficient for life” would entail only the eight “goods of the soul” to sound off (Figure 1.1). Clearly, Ringhieri hoped to make the inaccessible accessible. No wonder that one of the debate topics he poses at the end of one game asks “whether high matters are lowered and rendered easy when reduced into sweetness and games.”⁷⁰ Ringhieri, moreover, is sensitive to the possibly wide intellectual variations in the mixed company present at games. In his opening Game of the Knight he explains that a judicious meting of penalty questions should take this into account. He proposes four gradations of questions scaled to the abilities of players who are classified across both genders according to intellect or learning: the scholarly male; the unlearned male; the clever woman (*donna d’ingegno*); and the “pedestrian woman of little intellect” (*donna positiva, & di picciolo intelletto*). Thus, the scholarly male might be asked “whether it is better to love a person of letters or arms, with his reasons,” while, at the other end of the scale, a woman of little intellect could be asked “how many lances would be needed (for breaking) in a joust?”⁷¹ Allowing for a diverse assemblage, the parlour game must operate at several intellectual levels at once.

Though acknowledging male participants, the chief audience for Ringhieri’s game book is women, whom he wants both (intellectually) to elevate and (socially) to control. In his dedication he says that he hopes his book will “return honest women, unworthily afflicted by savage stings, to their original reputation.”⁷² In several cases, his comments indicate that he aims to defend women against their intellectual or moral detractors and rescue them from their circumstances. As far as the intellectual challenges posed in his book, Ringhieri explicitly addresses this in several of his game prefaces, beginning with the first game, in which players must be able to pose and explicate the symbolism of a knight’s emblem, motto, and colours. He insists that women are good for this challenge, because they are “modern women, almost all very shrewd both by nature and by having read much, not a little wise, and perhaps not too inferior to those famous ancient women praised by writers.”⁷³ In his Game of Celestial Figures, he includes several questions – for example, on the nature of fate – that are rather philosophical, and he addresses potential criticism that such topics are too lofty for women. Such critics “do a great injustice to the female sex, if they do not believe that among them can be found some who are very ingenious, expert, and suited to clarify ... difficult matters.”⁷⁴ Ringhieri

L I B R O.

PROPI. BENI del Corpo,	PROPI. BENI dell' Animo,	ESTERNI. BENI della Fortuna,
La sanità,	La uirtù cō le sue parti,	La Nobiltà,
La Bellezza,	La Gloria,	Le Ricchezze,
Le Forze,	L' Honore,	Gli Amici,
La destrezza,	L' Ingegno,	I Beni inſperati,
La Robuſtezza,	La memoria,	Le Dignità,
La Velocità,	La diſpoſitiōe della mēte,	Molti figliuoli buoni,
L' Attitudine al cōbattere,	La Diſciplina,	La Moglie pudica,
La cōmoda' uecchiezza,	Il conſiglio,	La Proſperità,
Ditemi che coſa è la	F E L I C I T A'	la felicità è.


 La fortuna ſeconda con la Virtù,
 Per ſe ſteſſa la ſufficienza della uita,
 La Vita giocondiſſima, & ſicura, 
 Molte Poſſeſſioni,
 Le forze del corpo con la facitrice,
 Conſeruatrice, & Amplificatrice Virtù loro,

Et coſi datogli al commandamento del maggiore eſſetto, egli primo di giuocare incominciado, riuolto alla Felicità dica, ditemi uoi che coſa è la Felicità? intanto il capo veramente de gli altri capi Felicità, vdendoſi al dolce, & amicheuole traſtullo inuitare, riſponda, la prima delle diffinitioni, cioè, la Felicità è la Fortuna ſeconda cō la Virtù; & per non perder tempo, colui che nel partimento l' hebbe anch' egli riſponda, inuitando quei due capi de Beni, che ſono dal la ſua deſſinitione contennuti, con l' ordine però che ſi richiede di cendo, beni della Fortuna eſterni, Beni della Virtù propi, a cui la Fortuna prima richieſta, potrà de gli otto nomi de beni, & delle perfectioni ch' ella ſotto di ſe tiene, nominarne vna, due, tre, quattro, & quante gli farà in piacere di nominarne, al che tutte in ordine richieſte, una doppo l'altra, per lo ſuo proprio nome riſponderanno, & doue il capo de beni laſciarà di Nominare, ſeguirà quello iſteſſo bene, in nominare un' altro, o' piu beni, il che finito di ri-

Figure 1.1. The Game of Happineſſ and Goods. From Innocenzio Ringhieri, *Cento giuochi liberali, et d'ingegno* (Venice, 1553), fol. 139v. (Courtesy of the Biblioteca del Museo Correr, Venice.)

thus sees his “liberal” games, and especially his debate topics, as opportunities for women to challenge and activate their *ingegno* and their learning. Not surprisingly, the Game of the Liberal and Noble Arts itself confronts this issue of whether such a “difficult” game is appropriate for “simple and modest women, shut inside the small circuit of their rooms, encumbered by the management of domestic matters, or restricted by their elders.”⁷⁵ He insists that such a topic should indeed be extended to them, that any limitations are owing not to their innate ability but to an upbringing that subjects them to lowly pursuits “against their desire and intent.”⁷⁶ As proof that it is only social circumstance, rather than nature, that determines women’s potential, he cites examples of learned and literary women in the ancient world (e.g., Aspasia, Diotima, and the poets Sappho and Corinna) and in the present day (i.e., Vittoria Colonna and Veronica Gambera).⁷⁷ A Game of Poets, furthermore, asserts that in fact many modern women have already triumphed, outshining the talent of Sappho and Corinna and earning the envy of many contemporary writers. This game is structured around lists of poets that juxtapose the likes of Homer, Virgil, and Dante, with about thirty contemporary male poets and eighteen female poets and scholars (including Colonna, Gambera, Laura Terracina, and Cassandra Fedele), all identified as “*donne famose*.”⁷⁸

For all of his intellectual elevation and flattering of women – which he frames as a socially revisionist position – Ringhieri, however, does strive to reinforce the traditional male ideals of female behaviour. Thus, in introducing his Game of Chastity he tells his female audience that this game is “truly and particularly yours,” since chastity is the source of their greatest virtue, and its violation the cause of their greatest misery.⁷⁹ The game turns on the cases of “venerable matrons” of antiquity (e.g., Lucretia, Penelope, Judith) who persevered in the face of threats – and other games reinforce the “triumph” of chastity and the ideals of purity and fidelity in marriage.⁸⁰ And even when Ringhieri flirts with the risqué, as in the Game of the Bawd, he does so in a way to warn women of these “wicked women, destroyers of your honour, corrupters of chaste minds, and often speedy procurers of your infamy, ruin, and death.”⁸¹ In the preface to this game, Ringhieri expressly refutes Boccaccio’s misogynist view (presumably that found in the *Corbaccio*) that the only chaste woman is one who has not been entreated or who has been rebuffed.⁸² The game, one of the longest in the collection, matches twelve male suitors with twelve young women through

the mediation of a bawd, who conveys a love letter (and gifts) from the men. The women reply with a "Response to a Lover, in Conserving Matrimonial Faith." The men then respond to this letter, and the women most deft at improvising in turn respond to them.⁸³ The game is largely a lesson in knowing and deflecting the snares of procurers and suitors and sublimates such temptations in a vicarious, safe, and playful way.⁸⁴

Both in crediting women with greater intelligence than tradition allowed and reinforcing conventional sexual values, Ringhieri's game book largely aims to be a work of edification and elevation. The intellectual dimension is particularly evident in the list of debate topics (usually ten, but occasionally more) appended to the end of each of the hundred games. Through these, he argues in his dedication, "rare wits will be able to ascend in a thousand fine ways and by thus disputing acquire immortality."⁸⁵ These debate topics range from lofty topics such as "why the philosopher need not fear death, but rather desire it" to the interpretation of popular proverbs.⁸⁶ We cannot know whether or how Ringhieri's games may have actually been played, but these debate topics certainly suggest the possibility for a new type of discourse on a variety of social, cultural, and political issues.⁸⁷ Indeed, the game world's provision for such discussions limns the contours of the emerging bourgeois "public" culture Jürgen Habermas charts in the early modern era. But whatever its actual practice, the theory of Ringhieri's games certainly reflected a high degree of intellectualism that others perceived as rather too cerebral. In the seventeenth century when the French writer Charles Sorel compiled his *Maison des jeux* he complained that many of "the games of Ringhieri ... are meant only for individuals who are somewhat learned, instead of the games ordinarily played among young people (whether in the court or in the city), who in short are people of the world and of unrefined conversation and without great exposure to learning" – a problem worsened by the fact that parlour games included "women, the majority of whom, not having undertaken extensive reading, are unaware of many of things one is not able to know without benefit of higher education."⁸⁸

Ringhieri was not the only sixteenth-century writer who saw the potentially didactic function of games. Early in the century the English humanist Thomas More prescribed the playing of a lofty game depicting the battle between Virtues and Vices as an ideal after-dinner game of moral improvement in his all-too-sober Utopia.⁸⁹ In fact, the proper game could be seen as a rein on unbridled urges of the appetite. In the