



The Worth of Women: Wherein Is Clearly Revealed Their Nobility and Their Superiority to Men (The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe)

Moderata (Modesta Pozzo) Fonte

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Gender equality and the responsibility of husbands and fathers: issues that loom large today had currency in Renaissance Venice as well, as evidenced by the publication in 1600 of *The Worth of Women* by Moderata Fonte.

Moderata Fonte was the pseudonym of Modesta Pozzo (1555–92), a Venetian woman who was something of an anomaly. Neither cloistered in a convent nor as liberated from prevailing codes of decorum as a courtesan might be, Pozzo was a respectable, married mother who produced literature in genres that were commonly considered "masculine"—the chivalric romance and the literary dialogue. This work takes the form of the latter, with Fonte creating a conversation among seven Venetian noblewomen. The dialogue explores nearly every aspect of women's experience in both theoretical and practical terms. These women, who differ in age and experience, take as their broad theme men's curious hostility toward women and possible cures for it.

Through this witty and ambitious work, Fonte seeks to elevate women's status to that of men, arguing that women have the same innate abilities as men and, when similarly educated, prove their equals. Through this dialogue, Fonte provides a picture of the private and public lives of Renaissance women, ruminating on their roles in the home, in society, and in the arts.

A fine example of Renaissance vernacular literature, this book is also a testament to the enduring issues that women face, including the attempt to reconcile femininity with ambition.

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