

Reimagining Hipparchia: Clemenza Ninci's *Sposalizio d'Iparchia Filosofa*

On an uncertain date in the late 17th century, the Beneventan nuns at the convent of San Michele in Prato produced a five-act play entitled “Sposalizia d’Iparchia Filosofa,” “The Marriage of Hipparchia, Lady Philosopher.” The play was unusual in that it featured two secular storylines: a romance involving a prince and princess; and a retelling of Hipparchia’s marriage to the destitute Cynic philosopher Crates (4th century BCE). The author, Clemenza Ninci, used as her source for this second tale a contemporary Italian adaptation of Diogenes Laertius’ original ancient Greek version (Astolfi, 1606); yet Ninci does not fully adopt the approach of her sources. Her characters practice a distinctly Christianized, sanitized version of the pagan philosophy that is tailored to the monastic context of her play.

This paper explores Ninci’s adaptation of Cynicism for a Christian, vernacular, and specifically feminine context. Ninci’s version of Cynicism revolves around two sets of opposing forces: pain and pleasure, and fortune and free will. By training themselves to take pleasure in pain, Ninci’s Cynics escape the pitfalls of fortune and to proceed on a path towards “eternal joy,” in the presence of Jupiter himself— a clear parallel for the Christian concepts of salvation and the afterlife.

Ninci’s work has yet to be considered in this light. Hillman’s 2009 partial transcription and translation of the play contains some commentary, while an earlier edition by Guasti (1849) transcribes several additional scenes. My work builds on this by providing a full transcription of the Hipparchia story from the only extant manuscript (Riccardiana 2974); and by placing the play in the context of scholarship on convent theater, gender and philosophy, and the reception of Cynicism in the early modern era (e.g. Dorandi 2006; Goulet-Cazé 1996; Le Doeuff 2007; Matton 1996; Weaver 2002).

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