

Recovering Early Modern Esteem for Parasole

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III

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Susan Nalezyty

This brief survey of the Accademia's portrait collection reveals that multiple hierarchies were being narrated. A culture that exalted genius prevailed, as indicated by the 1633 inventory that listed Michelangelo, Raphael, and Titian first. Family relations of current academy members were also added, subtly promoting the paradigm that fathers and brothers were evidence of the innate ability of current members—a form of self-promotion by artists, some of whom saw to their own portraits being added later. But if artistic merit had been the only requirement for inclusion, then this art school's mission to teach hard work and diligence to learn a craft also needed to be promoted. Parasole's career certainly represented that ideal. Her work very likely did not hang in Roman palaces, like

Caravaggio's; instead, her inclusion reflected her contributions to publications that served the institution's religious and educational mission. Perhaps Cesare Ripa had been included for a similar reason. Artists employed his emblem book as a source for composing traditional iconographic subjects and allegories. The Accademia had two copies of it in its library. Documentary evidence, in fact, tells that Leonardo Parasole had been contracted to cut blocks for illustrations in Ripa's 1603 edition, the first to have images since its initial publication in 1593.⁴⁷ There are no illustrations signed by Girolama for the Ripa second edition, but she signed one woodcut of "Giove Pluvio" in the *Annales Ecclesiastici* (1594) published by the Oratorians (fig. 1.7).⁴⁸



Figure 1.7 Girolama Parasole, "Glove Pluvio," from Cesare Baronio, *Annales Ecclesiastici* (Rome, 1594), 2:209, Bibliothèque municipale de Lyon

The Parasole woodcuts for this evangelizing history illustrated artifacts from antiquity, cited as evidence of the church's long history and traditions. This 12-volume series was the official reply to the Protestant *Magdeburg Centuries*.⁴⁹ Leonardo and Girolama Parasole maintained strong ties to the Congregation of the Oratory of Saint Philip Neri.⁵⁰ Also for the Oratorians' press, the Parasole family delivered illustrations for its *Tortures of the Holy Martyrs* (1594). In this Latin edition, Girolama signed an illustration of types of torture by wheel, composed from Antonio Tempesta's engravings in the first edition (fig. 1.8).⁵¹ Translated from Italian, this second edition disseminated the veneration of early Christian witnesses in a more universally understood language. It could also have served as a kind of visual reference book for artists seeking to compose images of martyr saints, an encyclopedia of ways to die through torture, like Ripa's *Iconologia*, but for sacred images.

There is no evidence that Girolama, or any woman, taught at the Accademia, but perhaps the academicians valued her contributions to resources for artists. Underlying the

institution's educational mission was the church's Counter-Reformation goals. Alberti's *Origin and Progress of the Academy* tells that Pope Clement VIII appointed Gabriele Paleotti and Cardinal Francesco Maria del Monte as "educato(s) of reform"—that is, that the institution would follow post-Tridentine artistic reforms.⁵² This might be another reason why academicians respected Parasole's work, because it aligned with the Accademia's larger values attached to the church, which promoted the veneration of saints.



Figure 1.8 Girolama Parasole after Antonio Tempesta, *Torture by Wheel*, from Antonio Gallonio, *De SS. martyrum cruciatibus* (Rome, 1594), 44, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Roma. Creative Commons, Public Domain Mark 1.0

Late 16th- and early 17th-century Rome was a place where visual artists could earn a living and raise their families, as Leonardo and Girolama Parasole had. The finding of a great many artists' names mentioned in primary documents is an important contribution of *The History of the Accademia di San Luca*, c. 1590–1635. By exploring the possible motivations for Parasole's inclusion in the Accademia's portrait collection, recognizing its didactic potential and acknowledging the esteem it would have conveyed to viewers, we can at least

partially recover the reasons Girolama Parasole's contemporaries felt she merited a place among the artists in the Accademia's collections. At the same time, it is important to be attentive to the lived experiences of early modern women, which were not always autonomous and were constrained by societal and legal limitations. Despite these

restrictions, a recently deceased female artist was included within that group of prominent male artists. This conveyed an important message. A teaching institution in early 17th-century Rome promoted Girolama Parasole as an "illustrious" artist—one therefore worthy of emulation.