

# «TO DO GOOD AND LOVE ONE'S COUNTRY»

## Three Italian poetesses during the Risorgimento

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### *Abstract*

It is well known that the Risorgimento provides a vast reservoir from which to draw insights into a social, territorial and political fabric that was undergoing an era-defining transformation. Research into the substantial and significant metamorphosis underway during the period can be approached from various angles, allowing wider conclusions to be drawn. This article will consider an interesting source that had an essential role in the inexorable process of sweeping change that characterised the 1800s: the periodical press. In particular, it focuses on the analysis of a periodical which was founded during a particularly meaningful time period. *L'Alba* was published in Catania in 1845 as a “strenna”, a gift given to Baron Antonino Ursino Recupero on New Year's Day of that year. Among the eighty-nine compositions contained in the periodical, the contributions written by three Neapolitan female poets stand out: Laura Beatrice Oliva Mancini, Irene Ricciardi Capecelatro and Maria Giuseppa Guacci. The historical developments around the fate of periodicals, particularly those with political aims, during that part of the nineteenth century are intertwined with the public and personal lives of three women who played a significant role in the evolution of a society undergoing transformation, dedicating themselves to public work related to culture, literature and poetry, without forgetting the attention they gave more to innovative forms of education, moulded by their perspective as women.

*Keywords:* Risorgimento, Italian poetry, periodicals, Mancini, Capecelatro, Guacci

It is well known that the Risorgimento provides a vast reservoir from which to draw insights into a social, territorial and political fabric that was undergoing an era-defining transformation. Research into the substantial and significant metamorphosis underway during the period can be approached from various angles, allowing wider conclusions to be drawn. This article will consider an interesting source that had an essential role in

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the inexorable process of sweeping change that characterised the 1800s: the periodical press. In particular, it will focus on three women, educated Neapolitan patriots who would go on to play an active role in the events of the Risorgimento, each one with her own contribution, especially with regard to education from a female perspective. Brought together by their plans and intentions, these three poetesses – Laura Beatrice Mancini Oliva, Irene Ricciardi Capecelatro and Giuseppina Guacci Nobile – were also united in publishing some of their works in a periodical issued in Catania in the mid-1800s, a crucial period due to the important events that characterised it and which, in fact, were discussed in a particularly lively periodical press. The momentous events connected with the Risorgimento, which were soon to culminate in the unification of the peninsula, came to a head during those very years that saw revolts, even in Sicily, against the Bourbon rulers.

It was the natural and inevitable result of an ever clearer public opinion which proliferated and gained momentum in the traditional meeting places used by political and cultural groups: literary and scientific academies, reading rooms, salons, cafés, but also clubs with somewhat hidden agendas, which were often subjected to inspection by censors.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the periodical press became the indispensable corollary to a whirlwind of opinions and lines of thinking.<sup>2</sup>

After the uprisings of the 1820s, there was a veritable boom in periodical publications that were not limited to literary or scientific topics, but instead were more open to profound political reflections. The editors and founders of these publications were fully aware of the incredible tool they held in their hands, a powerful instrument able to reach a vast public and convey thoughts and ideologies.<sup>3</sup> As expected, the governments cast a censorious eye over these elements, with their potential to disturb the status quo, implementing targeted restrictive press legislation, taxing where pos-

1 On this topic, see: Elena Frasca, “A “New mania”. The Carboneria: conflicts and ambivalences (Sicily, 1820-1830),” in *Proceedings of the International Conference “Understanding Social Conflict. The Relationship between Sociology and History”*, ed. Liana Daher, Catania, 14-15 December 2016 (Milan: Mimesis, 2020), 141-153; Id., “La “nuova mania”. Carboneria, università e moti del 1820-21 nel Mezzogiorno,” in *Una rivoluzione “globale”. Mobilitazione politica, conflitti civili e bande armate nel Mezzogiorno del 1820*, ed. Sebastiano Angelo Granata (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2021), 72-87.

2 Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *La rivoluzione inavvertita. La stampa come fattore di mutamento* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1986).

3 Paolo Viola, *Storia moderna e contemporanea. L'Ottocento* (Turin: Einaudi, 2000), 17-18.

sible and censoring in cases that were considered “dangerous”. Despite this, the phenomenon displayed every sign of being irreversible and unstoppable. During these difficult years, the role of the all-seeing Bourbon police came to the fore, with particular attention given to censorship.<sup>4</sup> This struggle between police inspections and the printing presses thus showed no signs of easing, but this did not in any way discourage those who believed in the free circulation of news and ideas by means of the printed word.<sup>5</sup> Hence, the periodicals that sprang up, especially during this particularly meaningful period, represent a precious source that allows one to delve deep into a very specific territorial situation and take an intimate look at aspects and depictions of society, getting closer to the customs and political thinking of the time.<sup>6</sup> In that tumultuous century, characterised by the upheaval that accompanied the Italian unification,<sup>7</sup> above all in Sicily itself, the attempts made to modernise the system or to resist such change found an ideal channel to do so in the periodic press<sup>8</sup> which, particularly in the 1840s and 1850s, proliferated and flourished.<sup>9</sup>

Many were the periodicals that emerged during those months. In this political and cultural climate, women also played a decisive role.

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- 4 For a wider overview, cfr. Silvana Raffaele, *La bottega dei saperi. Politica scolastica, percorsi formativi dinamiche sociali nel Meridione borbonico* (Acireale-Rome: Bonanno, 2005), in particular, 353-357.
- 5 Cfr. Elena Frasca, “Misfatti e malfattori. Il sistema penale nel Meridione borbonico”, in *Pensiero politico e istituzioni nella transizione dal Regno borbonico all’Unità d’Italia*, ed. Franca Biondi (Acireale-Rome: Bonanno, 2011), 245-265.
- 6 Guido Dall’Olio, *Storia moderna: i temi e le fonti* (Rome: Carocci, 2004).
- 7 On this topic, cfr.: Rosario Romeo, *Il Risorgimento in Sicilia* (Bari: Laterza, 1950); Francesco Saverio Romano, *Momenti del Risorgimento in Sicilia* (Messina-Florence: D’Anna, 1952); Francesco Renda, *Risorgimento e classi popolari in Sicilia (1820-1821)* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1968); Massimo Ganci, *La nazione siciliana* (Siracusa: Ediprint, 1986); Vincenzo D’Alessandro and Giuseppe Giarrizzo, *La Sicilia dal Vespro all’Unità d’Italia* (Turin: Utet, 1989), in particular, 667-783.
- 8 Cfr. Guido Libertini, “Aspetti della cultura catanese nell’Ottocento,” *Rivista del Comune* 1 (1934): 14-27; Alfio Carrà, *La stampa periodica catanese nel Risorgimento italiano (1818-1870). Rassegna critica del giornalismo in Catania dal 1818 al 1870* (Catania: Etna, 1962); Santi Correnti, “Per la storia della stampa periodica in Sicilia,” *Rivista Storica Siciliana* I, 1 (1973): 3-28. See also Dina Bertoni Jovine, *I periodici popolari del Risorgimento* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1965).
- 9 On this topic, see Elena Frasca, “«Per smascherare l’ascoso veleno». Religione, eresia e censura in una rivista catanese dell’Ottocento,” in “*Non conformismo religioso*” nel Mezzogiorno d’Italia dal Medioevo all’età contemporanea, Atti del 4° Incontro di studi sul Valdismo Mediterraneo – Monteleone di Puglia, 9-10th June 2017, eds. Alfonso Tortora and Claudio Azzara (Avellino: Terebinto, 2018), 99-111.

The public and private lives of these three Neapolitan poetesses, Laura Beatrice Mancini Oliva, Irene Ricciardi Capecelatro and Giuseppina Guacci Nobile, which were often intertwined, reveal a great deal of the social, political and cultural climate that characterised the age in which they lived. Women tried to make progress, through the power of the written word, in a social and mental labyrinth, which seemed to only recognise male achievements, relegating the other half of the population to second class citizenship. Yet, concrete changes began to take place, above all towards a slow, but steady unpicking of ancient webs of prejudice and censorship towards the female world, which hitherto had been confined to comfortable domesticity in the reassuring roles of daughter, wife and mother.

It was in the nineteenth century that women began to make a name for themselves as authors, including in periodicals, drawing attention to what Cesare Beccaria<sup>10</sup> had observed in 1865 about female “giornaliste”, “willing to benefit from periodicals”, presented as more interesting and lighter than a book.<sup>11</sup>

To this, we must add the increasingly common bonds that would form between women, and even men, in the cultural and political salons<sup>12</sup> in vogue in Italy and beyond. These venues provided a home for practical activism, the circulation of ideas, intellectual debates and exchanges as well as playing a decisive role in the fitful process of creating an identity. In these environs, women also had an active role, not only on a political<sup>13</sup> and cultural level, but also in decisively asserting the urgent need to give women an innovative and complete intellectual education, while not neglecting the essential role of the wife, and above all, the mother, her children’s first teacher.<sup>14</sup> In addition, women were finally given the opportunity to publish their compositions in newspapers, magazines and newsletters, showcasing their work to a broad and varied audience.

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10 (1738-1794). Milanese jurist, famous for his well-known work opera *De' delitti e delle pene*, on which modern penal law is based.

11 Francesca Serra, “Lumi di giornalismo galante a Firenze: il Giornale delle Dame,” *Studi italiani*, no. 1-2 (2002): 304.

12 On this topic, cfr. Elena Brambilla, *Salotti e ruolo femminile in Italia tra fine Seicento e primo Novecento* (Venice: Marsilio, 2004).

13 Maria Teresa Mori, *Figlie d'Italia, Poetesse patriote nel Risorgimento (1821-1826)* (Rome: Carocci, 2011).

14 See Elena Frasca, “Donna per ingegno e virtù rara in ogni tempo. Quasi unica nel nostro». Caterina Franceschi Ferrucci (1803-1887),” *Annali della Facoltà di Scienze della Formazione*, vol. 15 (2016): 101-122.

This article provides the analysis of a periodical founded during a particularly meaningful time period. *L'Alba*, which was published in Catania in 1845 as a “strenna”, was a gift given to Baron Antonino Ursino Recupero<sup>15</sup> on New Year's Day of that year and bore the following dedication:<sup>16</sup> “To the illustrious Antonio Ursino Ursino, lover of literature and science, jurist and notable orator on his beloved land, we dedicate this literary Alba as a token of our admiration.”<sup>17</sup> Percolla himself, in the introduction, explains the importance of “strenne” in general:

Italy, that famous land, was the first to employ “strenne” as New Year's gifts – these pleasant, delightful and instructive books: from there they made their way to France and England – and grew so much, in literary terms, quality of print and artistically, that on returning to our shores so beautiful and praiseworthy, many believed (as they still do) that these were an entirely French and English discovery.<sup>18</sup>

although he does promptly specify that “it is only in Sicily that “Strenne” are not particularly successful, in fact one could say that they never have been so.”<sup>19</sup>

The 235 pages which make up *L'Alba*, or *Strenna Catanese*, include 98 compositions, which can be grouped into 61 poems and 37 stories in prose. Leafing through the periodical, works by important authors such as Nicolò

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15 “Al chiaro nome di Antonio Ursino Ursino, vago di lettere e di scienze, giurisperito ed oratore cospicuo delle patrie cose amatissimo, quest'Alba letteraria in segno di ammirazione.” Antonio Ursino Recupero had an impressive book collection which, according to a specific provision made in his will, was bequeathed on his death to Catania's municipal Library; collections were then combined to form, on 11th May 1931, “l'Ente Morale Biblioteche Riunite “Civica e A. Ursino Recupero”, which was recognised as part of a World Heritage Site in 2002 by Unesco. Rita Angela Carbonaro, “Un patrimonio da salvaguardare: Le Biblioteche Riunite Civica e A. Ursino Recupero di Catania,” *Kalòs-Luoghi di Sicilia. Catania. Le istituzioni municipali?* (Catania: Palermo Kalos, 2001), 16-25. Orazio Viola, *Le Biblioteche riunite “Civica e Ursino Recupero”* (Catania: Zuccarello e Izzi, 1934), 7-9.

16 All translations from Italian into English are mine.

17 Vincenzo Percolla, *L'Alba ovvero Strenna Catanese, pel Capo d'Anno 1845* (Catania: Tipografia del Reale Ospizio, 1845), 4.

18 Percolla, *L'Alba*, 6.

19 Percolla, *L'Alba*, 7. See Giuseppe Baretta and Grazia Maria Griffini, *Strenne dell'Ottocento a Milano* (Milan: Scheiwiller, 1986); Marino Berengo, *Intellettuali e librai nella Milano della Restaurazione* (Turin: Einaudi, 1980); Carlo Tenca, “Le strenne”, *Rivista Europea*, no. 1 (January 1845): in Id., *Delle Strenne e degli almanacchi*, ed. Alfredo Cottignoli (Naples: Liguori, 1995).

Tommaseo, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Thomas Moore, George Gordon Byron, Alphonse de Lamartine stand out, as do writers from Catania. Recurring themes in the published contributions include child rearing, patriotism, marriage, art, poverty, the family, religion and the rules of Italian. However, many other topics can be found in its pages, showing the editor's openness to a variety of themes and lines of thought, as befitted a good "strenna". Some readers turned their noses up at the results of this choice, including Abbot Antonio Racioppi:

I would not give too much blame to Percolla for having included in his "Strenna" puerile works, full of solecisms that perhaps he did not have the courage to reject; rather, I find deplorable his indolence in leaving uncorrected certain unforgivable and grave errors. While I urge him as much as I do and might not to be dismayed by the errors that his concern for the dignity of others might have allowed to slip through unseen, I am sure that on his second attempt he will be capable of opening his eyes when choosing authors, and will not allow himself to be beguiled by their fleeting renown; thus most praiseworthy success will crown his work.<sup>20</sup>

Among the eighty-nine compositions contained in the periodical, the contributions written by three Neapolitan female poets are to be noted: Laura Beatrice Oliva Mancini, Irene Ricciardi Capecelatro and Maria Giuseppa (Giuseppina) Guacci Nobile. The historical developments around the fate of periodicals, particularly those with political aims, during that part of the 19th century are intertwined with the public and personal lives of these three women who played a significant role in the evolution of a society undergoing transformation, dedicating themselves to public work related to culture, literature and poetry, without forgetting the attention they gave more to innovative forms of education, moulded by their perspective as women.

Our three Neapolitan poetesses' contributions to the "strenna" were primarily sonnets on various subjects, sharing a melancholy air characterised, inevitably, by the influence of Romanticism. Reading between the lines of their works, we will see how these women's clear and incisive patriotic spirit, which shaped their lives, also shines through. The "torment"<sup>21</sup> that Mancini Oliva refers to the "italiche genti"<sup>22</sup> evoked by Ric-

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20 Antonio Racioppi, "Esame di opere," *Il Lucifero, giornale scientifico, letterario, artistico, industriale*, a. VIII, dal 5 febbraio 1845 all'8 gennaio 1846 (Naples: 1845-1846), 50.

21 Laura Beatrice Oliva Mancini, "Sonetto," *L'Alba*, 17.

22 Irene Ricciardi Capecelatro, "A Vincenzo Bellini," *L'Alba*, 30.

ciardi Capecelatro in her apology to Vincenzo Bellini,<sup>23</sup> and the “hope” spoken of by Guacci Nobile are perfectly in tune with the atmosphere of the time, both in Naples and beyond.

Laura Beatrice Fortunata Oliva Mancini was born in Naples, on 17th January 1821, to Domenico Simeone Oliva, a literature and philosophy teacher, and Rosa Giuliani, both of whom were from “old, upstanding families.”<sup>24</sup> The father was a respected poet, earnestly combating “Gallicisms, banalities and Arcadian pseudo-pastoral writing,”<sup>25</sup> and defending Italian’s peculiarities. Hence, Laura was soon educated in literature and the Classics. The first years of her life were spent in France, where the family had taken refuge due to her father’s political activities during the 1820-21 uprisings.<sup>26</sup> The biographer Savini writes that

Laura Beatrice was born for art and literature and these she adored as deities [...]. The poetic creations that her young girl’s mind unveils allow a glimpse of what she will become as a woman: just as from the delicacy of her heart one can easily understand her inspirations and the themes to which she will consequently wish to dedicate it.<sup>27</sup>

Deeply affected by religion, young Laura particularly appreciated music, which was a veritable “revelation of her soul”<sup>28</sup> and she found great inspiration in reading Dante, Petrarch and Alfieri. Her patriotism greatly influenced her production, especially during those years that were so meaningful for Italy’s destiny. She soon dedicated herself to composing numerous patriotic songs, which drew the attention of the day’s literary critics and allowed her to meet Pasquale Stanislao Mancini, founder, in Naples, of the periodical entitled *Ore solitarie* and who became her husband. Towards the end of 1846, the couple began a tour of the principal Italian cities, meeting important authors of literature and poetry and hosted cultural salons particularly in Florence but also in Naples and Turin, frequented by important personali-

23 (1801-1835). Renowned composer from Catania, author of well-known operas including *Norma*, *I sonnambuli* e *I puritani*.

24 Medoro Savini, *Laura Beatrice Oliva-Mancini* (Florence: Tipografia e libreria Galletti Romei e C., 1869), 11.

25 Savini, *Laura*, 12.

26 Valeria Guarna, *Oliva Laura Beatrice Fortunata*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (Rome: Treccani, 2013), vol. 79.

27 Savini, *Laura*, 16-17.

28 Savini, *Laura*, 19.

ties including Carlo Poerio,<sup>29</sup> Guglielmo Pepe,<sup>30</sup> Giuseppe Garibaldi<sup>31</sup> and Terenzio Mamiani.<sup>32</sup>

It was almost 1848 and, inevitably, the uprisings had a profound effect on Laura and her production, which now took a decisive turn towards heartfelt patriotism, earning her the nickname “muse of the Unification of Italy.”<sup>33</sup> Once the uprisings had been quelled, Mancini Oliva, along with her husband who had been involved in the anti-Bourbon movement, moved to Piedmont, where she was able to play an active role in founding a school that would train future female teachers, working towards fulfilling her desire to improve public education. Her clear attachment to those revolutionary experiences, which extended beyond Italy and characterised the Risorgimento, led her to encourage her two sons to enlist, inspired by patriotic ideals. She died, prematurely, in 1865. On the house where she was born, a plaque reads: “*poetess of the misadventures and liberty of Italy.*” Her biographer recorded that her mottos were: “Do good and love one’s country.”<sup>34</sup> “For Laura Beatrice Mancini, the highest ideal was to be found in passion for great things and great ideas and the union of the disparate concepts of Truth, Beauty and Goodness, which is why she was happy in fulfilling her duty.”<sup>35</sup> Mancini Oliva published a sonnet in *L’Alba* in which she sings of the beauty of heaven and earth, recounting how poetry, for her, is the ideal means through which to express her soul’s emotions and sentiments: “I will always entrust to you alone, my rhyme, the agony of my heart, and my torment.”<sup>36</sup>

Irene Ricciardi Capecelatro was born in Naples on 14th November 1802, to Francesco Ricciardi and Luisa Granito. Detailed particulars of her family<sup>37</sup> can be found by consulting her brother Giuseppe Ricciardi’s extensive archive, held at Naples’ Biblioteca Nazionale, and which contains a diverse collection of documentation, from private correspondence

29 (1803-1867). Italian lawyer, patriot and politician.

30 (1783-1855). Italian General and patriot.

31 (1807-1882). Italian General and patriot, played a decisive role in unifying the peninsula.

32 (1799-1885). Italian writer, politician and patriot.

33 Ivi, p. 24.

34 Ivi, p. 52.

35 Ivi, p. 54.

36 Oliva Mancini, “Sonetto,” 17.

37 On the Ricciardi family, cfr. Angela Russo, «*Nel desiderio delle tue care nuove*». *Scritture private e relazioni di genere nell’Ottocento risorgimentale* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2006).



to official letters, from unpublished writings to manuscripts, and so much more, produced between the 1830s and 1880s, when the political spirit of those times was at its peak. Much of the information we have about Irene comes to us through her brother, to whom she was especially close, and with whom she shared the same political ideals,<sup>38</sup> which were developed after hearing their mother's first-hand account of the emergence and collapse of the Parthenopean Republic.<sup>39</sup> Giuseppe Ricciardi describes his sister as having: "a candid disposition, noble intelligence and singular virtue."<sup>40</sup> A lover of painting, music and poetry from a young age, he describes her talent:

she debuted on the poetic stage together with another poetess, Giuseppina Guacci, who, from that time onwards, shone like a brighter star and who was bound to my good sister, to whom she wrote the most beautiful letters, a collection of which would make one of the most noble letter collections that Italy has ever seen.<sup>41</sup>

This friendship between Ricciardi and Guacci was deep and long-lasting, as shown by the prolific correspondence they exchanged, which can be consulted at the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale in Florence. They were bound by the idea of "avoiding banal subjects and always singing of Italian themes."<sup>42</sup>

Irene's first tutor was her mother Luisa, a woman with a sharp intellect. She was a determined supporter of girls' education, and for her daughter selected excellent teachers that educated her in various subjects: Mathematics, Chemistry, Botany, French, Music, Drawing, as well as Poetry and Dance.<sup>43</sup> Thus educated, it was not long before Irene began publishing her work in the well-known Neapolitan periodical *Il Lucifero*, contributing substantially to promoting her (anti-Bourbon, Mazzini-sympathising and republican from the outset<sup>44</sup>) brother

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38 Russo, *Nel desiderio*, 16.

39 Irene Flavia Caporuscio, *Ricciardi, Irene*, in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani* (Rome: Treccani, 2016), vol. 87.

40 Irene Ricciardi Capecelatro, *Poesie Scelte, Introduzione* by Giuseppe Ricciardi (Naples: Stamperia del Vaglio, 1876), XXIV.

41 Ricciardi Capecelatro, *Poesie*, XVIII.

42 Russo, *Nel desiderio*, 101.

43 Russo, *Nel desiderio*, 15-17.

44 Russo, *Nel desiderio*, 15. On Giuseppe Ricciardi, see Marta Petrusiewicz, "Giuseppe Ricciardi, ribelle romantico europeo," *Archivio Storico per le Province Napoletane* (1999), 235-261.

Giuseppe's work, supporting his ideas in the various intellectual circles of the time. Irene did not hide her own fervent patriotic spirit, as also shown in many of her verses, delivered in public at the "poetesse sebezie" cultural circle, which included Giuseppina Guacci and Laura Beatrice Mancini Oliva as members. Her ideals were surely further strengthened by the numerous trips she made around Italy, providing essential opportunities to enter the important intellectual circles of the time and meet people of the calibre of Alessandro Manzoni,<sup>45</sup> Vincenzo Monti<sup>46</sup> and Giacomo Leopardi<sup>47</sup> but also Isabella Teotochi Albrizzi.<sup>48</sup> Her marriage, in 1837, to the composer Vincenzo Capecelatro steered her cultural interest towards the theatre, for which she soon began to write various operas.

Together with her husband, she lived in Paris from 1838 to 1842, coming into contact with Italian exiles, including her brother Giuseppe, who had recently joined "Giovine Italia". In the French capital, she met important intellectuals, such as Alphonse de Lamartine and Victor Hugo. After having spent many more years travelling around Europe, so much so that her nephews and nieces gave her the nickname "Travelling Aunt", she died in her beloved Naples the 30th September 1870. The periodical *L'Alba* preserves one of Irene Ricciardi Capecelatro's songs, dedicated to an eruption of Vesuvius, and two sonnets – one dedicated to a mother's grief over the death of her son ("True, you saw bloodless your only son, but why did he ever suffer torments and death and ascend triumphant to the divine throne?")<sup>49</sup> and another in honour of Vincenzo Bellini. The latter, in particular, praises the Sicilian composer, who, she writes, delighted the "italiche genti"<sup>50</sup> with his operas and whose musical heritage continues, despite his premature death, to stir the hearts of his listeners.

Maria Giuseppa Guacci Nobile was born in Naples on 20th June 1807 to Giovanni Guacci, printer, and Saveria Tagliaferri. She was educated according to strictly liberal and patriotic precepts, rounding out her education at Basilio Puoti's purist school, which inevitably shaped her thinking and knowledge, allowing her to form friendships with Luigi Settembrini,<sup>51</sup>

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45 (1785-1873). Italian writer.

46 (1754-1828). Italian poet.

47 (1798-1837). Italian poet.

48 (1763-1836). Italian writer, hostess to a celebrated literary salon.

49 Irene Ricciardi Capecelatro, "Alla Santissima addolorata," *L'Alba*, 65.

50 Ricciardi Capecelatro, "A Vincenzo Bellini," 30.

51 (1813-1876). Italian writer and patriot.

Francesco de Sanctis<sup>52</sup> and the Imbriani brothers,<sup>53</sup> with whom she shared literary interests and similarly liberal political views.<sup>54</sup>

Her political activism led to her hosting political salons of a certain importance,<sup>55</sup> which were also attended by Giacomo Leopardi, with whom she shared a pessimistic view of life, even though that sentiment never reached the extremes that it did in his case. In 1833 Guacci received the honour of being the first woman to be admitted to the Accademia Pontaniana in Naples. In 1835, she married Antonio Nobile, deputy director of the Astronomical Observatory of Capodimonte and professor of Mathematics and Geometry. She published a number of texts related to various aspects of decorum. In addition to poetry collections<sup>56</sup> and strongly political and patriotic works, she also focused on writing for children: in 1841, she wrote *Alfabeto*, a guide to educating children, and in 1842 the *Prime Letture* (First Readings) and *Seconde Letture per fanciulli da' 9 a 12 anni* (Second Readings for children from 9 to 12 years of age). Her interest in children's education and training was also manifested in the important role she played, in the 1840s, in supporting the promotion of the "Società per gli Asili Infantili" (Society for Infant Schools), which was focused on the creation of public establishments for the children of the lower classes.

As previously mentioned, Guacci formed a deep friendship with Irene Ricciardi Capecelatro and their prolific correspondence gives evidence of the many interests they had in common and a convergence of their viewpoints, whether political, related to women's issues or to more personal accounts of private matters.<sup>57</sup> As Graziella Pagliano writes, the theme of friendship between women – "more intimate and substantial, compared to that between men"<sup>58</sup> – finds a certain "literary" dignity in the modern era, and above all, from the mid-1700s onwards.<sup>59</sup> A detailed picture of what

52 (1817-1883). Italian writer and patriot, Minister for Education in unified Italy.

53 Matteo Renato (1843-1901), Italian politician; Vittorio (1840-1886), writer.

54 Silvana Musella and Francesco Augurio, *Guacci, Maria Giuseppa*, in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani* (Rome: Treccani, 2003), vol. 60.

55 Anna Balzerano, *Giuseppina Guacci Nobile nella vita, nell'arte, nella storia del Risorgimento* (Cava dei Tirreni: Di Mauro, 1975).

56 Pietro Ardito, *Le Rime della Guacci* (Naples: Morano, 1882).

57 Angela Russo, "Alla nobile donzella Irene Ricciardi". Lettere di Giuseppina Guacci Nobile," in Laura Guidi, *Scritture femminili e Storia* (Naples: ClíoPress, 2004), 272-293.

58 Graziella Pagliano, "L'amicizia taciuta. I testi letterari," *Memorie*, n. 32 (1991): 19.

59 On the value of epistolary relationships, not limited to women, see: Maria Luisa Betri and Daniela Maldini Chiarito (eds.), *Scritture di desiderio e di ricordo. Autobiografie, diari, memorie tra Settecento e Novecento* (Milan: FrancoAngeli,

was happening in Italy at the time emerges from reading the two Neapolitan poetesses' correspondence. For example, Giuseppina writes to her friend in consternation when referring to women's status in Italy, a country that "withholds the noblest offices, the most righteous pleasures, the most ardent desires and is a grave for women, a veritable moral plague."<sup>60</sup>

Guacci died young on 25th November 1848, a year full of social and political upheaval, in which she had been at the forefront of organising committees and fundraisers for exiles and political prisoners. The poet dedicated a sonnet to *L'Alba*, meaningfully entitled "*La Speranza*": "Hail my dear hope, hail my serene one! Spread over the earth a clear glow, rise up from the lively Tyrrhenian wave."<sup>61</sup>

These three "Italian Risorgimento poetesses" are perfectly in line with the cultural and political climate that pervaded Italy, but also much of Europe,<sup>62</sup> in those very significant years.

As Guidi wrote, by means of their writing, many women tried "to go beyond the boundaries of their prescribed identity, to express and draw out gifts, abilities and potential that otherwise would be condemned to the invisibility of cultural and legal norms."<sup>63</sup> This was a tradition that was deeply rooted in those times.<sup>64</sup>

Writing from a female perspective took various forms, not least letter-writing, which, as we have seen in Ricciardi and Guacci's case, was an 'acceptable' form of writing, that could be used to convey thoughts and opinions.<sup>65</sup> This need to express ideas and sentiments that historically had been "masculine" impelled many of these women to meet in literary circles and academies, similar to those hosted by men, that would allow for an

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2002); Guidi, *Scritture femminili e Storia*; Maria Luisa Betri and Daniela Maldini Chiarito (eds.), "*Dolce dono graditissimo*": *la lettera privata dal Settecento al Novecento* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2000); Russo, «*Nel desiderio*; Gabriella Zari (ed.), *Per lettera. La scrittura epistolare femminile tra archivio e tipografia (secoli XV-XVII)* (Rome: Viella, 1999).

60 Lucia Valenzi, "Maria Giuseppina Guacci Nobile tra letteratura e politica," *Archivio storico per le Province Napoletane*, CXVII (Napoli: Società Napoletana di Storia Patria, 1999): 537-548.

61 Maria Giuseppa Guacci Nobile, "La speranza," *L'Alba*, 51.

62 See Karen Offen, *European Feminisms 1700-1950: A Political History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

63 L. Guidi, "Patriottismo femminile e travestimenti sulla scena risorgimentale", in L. Guidi, A. Lamarra (eds.), *Travestimenti e metamorfosi. Percorsi dell'identità di genere tra epoche e culture* (Naples: Filema, 2003), p. 59.

64 Letizia Panizza and Sharon Wood, *A History of Women's Writing in Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

65 See Guidi, *Scritture femminili e Storia*.

exchange of views. The three Neapolitan poetesses, as previously stated, played an active role in the “poetesse sebezie” group, where they recited verses that often touched on deeply patriotic topics. Naturally, prejudice towards women that expressed their ideas would continue to be so for a long time. Many of them offered their literary or educational contributions while masking them behind the reassuring figures of wives or loving mothers, their children’s first teachers, eager to support the cause without overstepping the boundaries imposed by society. It is this method, or perhaps disguise, that allowed these women to make their voices heard without scandalising or destabilising the rigid social hierarchy of the time.

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