



Gender Equality in Isotta Nogarola (1418–1466)

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In Nogarola's *De pari aut impari Evae atque Adae peccato dialogus* we find one of the earliest defense of gender equality in Renaissance Europe. However, the question of gender equality was not addressed directly; Nogarola used the question of the guilt for Original Sin, which symbolically represents the question of gender equality. The starting point of the dialogue is the traditional Augustinian position by which Eve bore greater guilt for Original Sin. The character "Isotta" in the *Dialogue* challenges this view by apparently ironically advocating the conventional "defense" by which Eve could not be guilty because Eve's God-given nature is weaker and she was more ignorant than Adam, and as such could not be held fully responsible for her deeds (Nogarola 1886, II. 188; Nogarola 2004, 146). However, later in the dialogue, her male interlocutor "Ludovico", in order to defend his position, is forced to argue – against "Isotta" – that women's intellect is the same "divinely created" as men's and that women's nature is not any weaker than men's (Nogarola 1886: II. 193–94; Nogarola 2004: 148–49), so that in the closing word of the *Dialogue* he concedes to her equal intellectual, rhetorical, and literary skills (Nogarola 1886: II. 215–16, Nogarola 2004: 158). Moreover, on the metatextual level, Nogarola as the author of the text presents "Isotta" as equally knowledgeable and versed in classical and patristic literature as her male interlocutor, and operating with even better philosophical arguments. That Nogarola indeed advocated an absolute form of gender equality can be also found explicitly in her *Letterbook* of publicly distributed correspondence: "[M]any women surpass not only other women but also men in every kind of virtue and excellence [...]" (Nogarola 1886: I. 256; Nogarola 2004: 98).

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