

Radical Renaissance Writers – Pre-Class Activities

Week 2: Isotta Nogarola

(1418 - 1466)

1. Read Isotta's dialogue *On the Equal or Unequal Sin of Eve and Adam* (1451).

The two speakers in this dialogue are positioned at two real people: Isotta Nogarola and her long-term friend and correspondent, Ludovico Foscarini, who was a well-known Italian diplomat trained in canon and civil law.¹

- **First Impressions.**
 - What is the tone of the debate?
 - What strategies does each speaker use to support their arguments?
 - Who 'wins' the debate?
 - What can we learn from this exchange about a) Isotta Nogarola b) Social norms at the time?
 - How relevant is the gender of each speaker to the debate?
- **Classical and Christian authorities.**
 - Note down the names of any classical & Christian authorities used by each speaker.

2. Extra Reading (Optional): Latin Poem by Angela Nogarola (1380 – 1436) to Niccolò de Facino. In this poem, she is responding to an accusation made by Niccolò ... what do you think it was?

It does not please me to place others' clothes
On my limbs and to circle my arms with another's
Light feathers: I know the story of the painted crow. 4
Nor do I care to mount the praises for virtue 3
and to ascribe the laurels of the ancient poets to myself. 5
I have modesty and love of virtue and decorum of thought.
But no wonder moves my mind, that (the lines)
are not thought by anyone (?) to have been forged by my bellows
and are denied to have been made in my ancestral [...]
For the cohorts of women begin their practice, 10
because in modern times it is said no woman has tasted
the Gorgons' waters and heard the learned sisters.
But Nature, creator of all with equal reason,
you are said to form the male and female soul equally
and are accustomed to infuse them with equal minds. 15
Therefore, you do not need, o woman, to call on the ancient poets.
Nature's gift has endowed both sexes.

¹ It has been a matter of speculation whether this debate happened first as an in-person debate between the two, or whether it was the result of an exchange of letters, as suggested by the composition. The dialogue is composed in Latin, [available in the original here](#) along with a collection of letters to and from Isotta Nogarola in two volumes.