

S K E N È

Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies

9:1 2023

Performing *The Book of Esther* in
Early Modern Europe

Edited by Chanita Goodblatt

SKENÈ Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies

Founded by Guido Avezzù, Silvia Bigliuzzi, and Alessandro Serpieri

<i>Executive Editor</i>	Guido Avezzù.
<i>General Editors</i>	Guido Avezzù, Silvia Bigliuzzi.
<i>Editorial Board</i>	Chiara Battisti, Simona Brunetti, Sidia Fiorato, Felice Gambin, Alessandro Grilli, Nicola Pasqualicchio, Susan Payne, Cristiano Ragni, Emanuel Stelzer, Gherardo Ugolini.
<i>Managing Editors</i>	Valentina Adami, Emanuel Stelzer.
<i>Assistant Managing Editor</i>	Roberta Zanoni, Marco Duranti.
<i>Book Review Editors</i>	Chiara Battisti, Sidia Fiorato.
<i>Staff</i>	Petra Bjelica, Francesco Dall'Olio, Bianca Del Villano, Serena Demichelis, Marco Duranti, Carina Louise Fernandes, Sara Fontana, Leonardo Mancini, Antonietta Provenza, Savina Stevanato, Carla Suthren.
<i>Typesetters</i>	Lorenza Baglieri, Veronica Buccino, Marianna Cadorin, Alda Maria Colella, Cristiano Ragni.
<i>Advisory Board</i>	Anna Maria Belardinelli, Anton Bierl, Enoch Brater, Richard Allen Cave, Jean-Christophe Cavallin, Rosy Colombo, Claudia Corti, Marco De Marinis, Tobias Döring, Pavel Drábek, Paul Edmondson, Keir Douglas Elam, Ewan Fernie, Patrick Finglass, Enrico Giaccherini, Mark Griffith, Daniela Guardamagna, Stephen Halliwell, Robert Henke, Pierre Judet de la Combe, Eric Nicholson, Guido Paduano, Franco Perrelli, Didier Plassard, Donna Shalev, Susanne Wofford.

Copyright © 2023 S K E N È.
The Journal is a CC-BY 4.0 publication
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)
SKENÈ Theatre and Drama Studies
<https://skenejournal.skeneproject.it>
info@skeneproject.it

Edizioni ETS
Palazzo Roncioni - Lungarno Mediceo, 16, I-56127 Pisa
info@edizioniets.com
www.edizioniets.com

Distribuzione
Messagerie Libri SPA
Sede legale: via G. Verdi 8 - 20090 Assago (MI)

Promozione
PDE PROMOZIONE SRL
via Zago 2/2 - 40128 Bologna

ISSN 2421-4353

Contents

Performing *The Book of Esther* in Early Modern Europe

Edited by Chanita Goodblatt

CHANITA GOODBLATT – <i>Introduction</i>	5
SUSAN PAYNE – <i>The Genesis of Modena’s L’Ester: Sources and Paratext</i>	13
CHANITA GOODBLATT – <i>Modena’s L’Ester: a Venetian-Jewish Play in Early Modern Europe</i>	37
VERED TOHAR – <i>Reading L’Ester by Leon Modena in the Context of His Other Writings</i>	63
NIRIT BEN-ARYEH DEBBY – <i>Queen Esther in Venice: Art and Drama</i>	81
TOVI BIBRING – <i>Vashti on the French Stage</i>	105
CORA DIETL – <i>The Feast of Performance: Esther in Sixteenth-Century German Plays</i>	121
WIM HÜSKEN – <i>Esther in the Drama of the Early Modern Low Countries</i>	141

Miscellany

LUCA FIAMINGO – “ <i>Becoming as savage as a bull because of penalties not to be paid with money</i> ”: <i>Orestes’ Revenge and the Ethics of Retaliatory Violence</i>	165
VASILIKI KOUSOULINI – <i>Cassandra as a False Chorus and Her Skeuê in Euripides’ Trojan Women</i>	187

Special Section

GHERARDO UGOLINI – Vayos Liapis, Avra Sidiropoulou, eds. <i>Adapting Greek Tragedy: Contemporary Contexts for Ancient Texts</i> . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. ISBN 9781107155701, pp. 436	203
ERIC NICHOLSON – William N. West. <i>Common Understandings, Poetic Confusion: Playhouses and Playgoers in Elizabethan England</i> . Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2021. ISBN 9780226808840, pp. 326	211
YVONNE BEZRUCKA – <i>Catharsis at the BeKKa</i> . Mariacristina Cavecchi, Lisa Mazzoni, Margaret Rose, and Giuseppe Scutellà’s <i>SceKspir al BeKKa</i> . Milano: Edizioni Clichy, 2020. ISBN 9788867997077, pp. 216	221
PETRA BJELICA – <i>The Role of Digital Storytelling in Educational Uses When Staging Shakespeare: a Case Study of a Lecture Performance – Gamlet (Hamlet)</i>	225

SUSAN PAYNE*

The Genesis of Modena's *L'Ester*: Sources and Paratext

Abstract

Leon Modena's play *L'Ester*, as is evinced by the title page, finds its origin in the 'holy scripture' of the Hebrew Bible, and more particularly in the *Book of Esther*, which constitutes the traditional explanation of the Jewish religious feast of Purim. Modena himself underlines this in the Preface to his play. Also on the title page can be found his recognition of the fact that the play constitutes the revision of a preceding play by Salomon Usque, written sixty or so years before. But it has been claimed that one of the reasons Modena decided to write his version of the story, still in dramatic form, may have been to counteract an attempt to convert his pupil and the play's Dedicatèe, Sarra Copio Sullam, to Christianity, on the part of Ansaldo Cebà, a Genoese scholar and monk, who had written a poem on Esther which was greatly admired by Copio Sullam. This poem, in its way, is said to represent a sort of source or 'antitext' against which Modena is reacting. Drawing on Gérard Genette's seminal work on the functions of the paratext, I intend to examine this specific area of *L'Ester*, bearing in mind the factors underlying its creation, its structure and especially the contradictions and paradoxes which will be revealed in a play that above all analyses the position of outsiders within an alien community.

KEYWORDS: Leon Modena; Ansaldo Cebà; *L'Ester*; Sarra Copio Sullam; paratext; Gérard Genette

1. The Three Players in the Paratext of *L'Ester*: Modena, Copio Sullam and Cebà

*L'Ester. Tragedia Tratta dalla Sacra Scrittura*¹ is first mentioned by its author, Leon Modena (1571-1648), in his own bibliography of his works contained in his autobiography, written in Hebrew, *Life of Judah*, where he records the Preface that will be the object of this study (Cohen 1988, 126). The Preface, together with the frontispiece, prologues and epilogue to the play itself, constitute what Gérard Genette usefully termed and theorized in his volume *Seuils* (1987) as the paratext. These conventions and devices make

¹ Leon Modena, *L'Ester. Tragedia Tratta Dalle Sacre Scritture*, Venezia, per Giacomo Sarzina, 1619. The text and the English translation of this text are from Modena (forthcoming).

* University of Florence - susankpayne1@gmail.com

up the material surrounding the published main text – the “threshold of interpretation” which mediates among book, author, publisher and reader, and which, as Macksey (1987) points out in his introduction to the English translation of Genette’s work, form part of the special pragmatic status the paratext lends to a book’s private and public history. By the time T. L. Berger and Sonia Massai publish their two-volume compendium of English early modern dramatic paratexts in 2014 they can claim that Genette’s term maintains its critical currency and in their edition it refers to “all the extra-dramatic texts such as title pages, dedications, addresses to the reader, lists of dramatis personae, prologues and epilogues, stationers’ notes and errata lists, which were prefaced or appended to the English printed drama to 1642”. Macksey also interestingly adds that “the terrain of the paratext poses intriguing problems for any speech-act analysis, situated as it is between the first-order illocutionary domain of the public world and that of the second-order speech acts of fiction” (Genette 1997, xix). This comment is of particular interest in the case of Modena’s play. For, as is well-known, the polymathic Rabbi is celebrated in the history of early seventeenth-century as a brilliant scholar, linguist, speaker and writer of Latin, a gifted liturgical musician, a revered leader of the Synagogue and an important figure in the Venetian culture of the moment as well as further afield,² poet in Hebrew and Italian. We shall see that from the beginning of the paratext that the motivating force behind the composition of the play (and indeed the illocutionary force of the discourse of this liminal area of the work) is that of persuasion.

The paratext is quite obviously intended to be read. The play itself was never to our knowledge staged, and indeed, with its many long speeches and monologues it would be difficult to do so.³ At the best it has many of the characteristics of a closet drama. The ideal readers of this “threshold” to the play were probably the members of the prestigious intellectual salon hosted by Modena’s protégée the ‘bella Hebraea’ Sarra Copio Sullam, situated in the Venetian Ghetto and frequented by illustrious Christian and Jewish members of the Italian intelligentsia. And it would seem to be in the first

² In 1608 in Venice Modena met with English Protestant scholars some of whom were seeking Hebrew instruction relating to James I’s authorization in 1604 of a new Bible translation. Adelman informs us that the rabbi “knew Henry Wotton (1569-1639), the English ambassador to Venice; William Bedell (1577-1644), Wotton’s chaplain, provost of Trinity College in Dublin . . . and translator of the Bible into Gaelic; Samuel Slade (1568-1612) Oxford graduate, vicar and bibliophile”. He also corresponded with David Farar of Amsterdam “who consulted him about his disputations with Hugh Broughton (1549-1612), an English Hebraist and dissenter” (Adelman, “Leon Modena: The Autobiography and the Man” in Cohen 1988: 26).

³ That is until 17 February, 2022 in Ferrara. See *Qinà Shemor / Ester la Regina del Ghetto*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ixfIZAR-wkc> (Accessed 30 May 2023).

place, an advertisement of the author's intentions towards his dedicatee, in the second, closely connected, a duel, a literary, very Venetian, 'tenzone' with the Christian monk Antonio Cebà to save Copio Sullam's soul, and in the third, the author's desire to strengthen his already well-established position as an authoritative member of the salon. Whereas, as far as the theatrical text is concerned, the message is sent to unknown readers and/or spectators, in the Dedication and the Preface sender and addressee become personalized and the function is less literary.

Between 1618 and 1626, the meeting-place at the wealthy Sullams' home "fostered Christian-Jewish intellectual interaction of an intensity and duration unique in early modern Venice" (Westwater 2020, 15). The exceptionally learned and beautiful Jewess, Sarra Copio Sullam,⁴ founded this cultural community following a correspondence she began in spring 1618 with the elderly Genoese monk, and author of lyric and epic poems, treatises letters and dramas, Ansaldo Cebà (1565-1622). Though she herself, at the probable age of twenty-six, already, as Umberto Fortis points out was certainly very well-known in the Venetian intellectual milieu (Fortis 2003, 30), this prestigious connection was of material use in introducing her to a wider circle of eminent Christian intellectuals (Westwater 2020, 31-5). Copio Sullam's admiration for Cebà's epic poem *La Reina Esther* (Genova, 1613-15), and the letter she sent him telling him of this admiration, was the beginning of a long and complex correspondence between the two which lasted from 1618 to 1622. The Jewish intellectual Copio Sullam regarded the Christian intellectual Cebà's celebration of the revered figure of the Jewish Esther as a cornerstone upon which to build interchange between the Jewish and the Christian cultural worlds. Yet Cebà's interest in Copio Sullam was different. For besides the Platonic and literary "love affair" he was to conduct with Copio Sullam between 1618 and 1621 when his "love" turned to contempt on the failure of his plan, Cebà's major concern was "to win another soul for the church" (Harrán 2009, 43). He actually tells Copio Sullam this in one of his first letters (Cebà 1623, 24):

La mia fede è tanto vera
 E il mio amor cotanto puro,
 Ch'io ti prego e ti scongiuro
 A lasciar l'ebraica schiera

⁴ The name of the "bella Hebraea" is subject to a series of variations wherever else she is mentioned. Sarra becomes 'Sara' or 'Sarah', Copio 'Copia' or 'Coppio/a' and Sullam is also written 'Sulam'. Here, for reasons of homogeneity, I shall maintain Modena's spelling, although on the frontispiece of her own volume *Manifesto* (1621) where, in its preface, she writes in the first person, her name is spelt Sarra Copia Sulam.

[My faith is so true
 And my love is so pure,
 That I beg and beseech you
 To leave the Hebrew ranks]⁵

Scordari makes this plain in her essay on Modena's play and points out that whereas Copio Sullam saw the Genoese monk's poem as "portraying Esther as a courtly heroine and Vashti as a convert to Judaism [thus] both a celebration of Jewish national existence and an invitation to cross-faith dialogue", Cebà's Vashti was a double of Esther who was "an exceptional woman, imbued with moral virtues; by epitomizing a God-inspired reason she foreshadowed true Christianity" (Scordari 2020, 54). By the time Modena presents his play to the salon in March 1619, at the time of its publication, he is obviously concerned about the effect that the relationship between Cebà and Copio Sullam was having within the confines of the salon and beyond, however great the age-gap was between the two correspondents, not to mention the distance between Venice and Genoa. A scandal was brewing as Cebà, disappointed that his project to convert Copio Sullam was having little effect and apparently regretting the fact that their "love" was destined to remain Platonic, began to smear the reputation of the innocent and naïve, however cultured, young woman (Harrán 2009, 30). Copio Sullam eventually became the centre of a polemic on the immortality of the soul and was accused of heresy. She was able to prove her intellectual status by rebutting this accusation in writing when she replied to Baldassare Bonifaccio's publication *Dell'immortalità dell'anima* (1621), by publishing her *Manifesto* immediately afterwards (Fortis 2003, 61-81). Yet the ensuing scandal and the risk of her trial by the Inquisition began the gradual disintegration of the salon and her eventual disappearance from the public scene.

2. The Construction of the Paratext: Sender and Receivers

Adelman (1988, 23) mentions that Modena, who was always in need of money, had been involved in Jewish publishing in Venice as a proof-reader and jobber working with typographers and in touch with authors whom he advised on type fonts, volume size and the nature of the paper used. He also concerned himself with proof-reading, binding and distribution of the texts and wrote dedicatory poems for the books. It does not seem too much to hypothesize that the paratext of *L'Ester* was almost certainly carefully constructed by the author himself. It is a complex piece of work, consisting

⁵ Unless otherwise stated, all translations from Italian are my own.

of a Title-Page; Dedication; Dedicatory Sonnet; Author's Preface to the Play; *Dramatis Personae*; Prologue; Monologue by Amalek's Ghost, all preceding the first act and an Epilogue at the conclusion of the fifth. Modena, as is the case with most dedicatory paratexts, must have added this one to the completed play. The same is probably true of the prologue and the epilogue. Possibly, ideally, the author imagined it to be perused by the members of Copio Sullam's salon as well as by her, his dedicatee – as we shall see this is made evident from what he himself says in the dedication and the preface. The only textual area that there is evidence of a hand other than the author's own is that of the title-page. Genette includes this part of the text in the area he calls the "publisher's peritext" (1997, 16ff.) and the title-page itself is, as Berger and Massai point out, "probably the most formulaic of all the paratextual materials included in early modern playbooks" (2014, Introduction). That of Modena's play is no exception, but this is not to say that the information it conveys is difficult to interpret, with the possible exception of the title.

The title could have been simply *Ester* but Modena called his play *L'Ester* with a definite article preceding the proper noun. This may be of immediate significance, and could possibly have to do with the motivation lying behind the whole literary project. Although in Italian, the optional placing of a definite article before a given name, especially that of a familiar person, is very common, especially in northern Italy and in Florence, it is less common in book or play (or opera) titles. To hypothesize that that this particularizing of Esther's name, an enduring Latinism (*Ester illa*), may be deliberate on Modena's part, seems quite possible. In her seminal essay Scordari (2020, 54), after mentioning the fact that Modena's play is the reworking of an earlier one and that from a cultural standpoint it aims at conveying Judaism to the Christian world, the drama itself was composed "for a third and more personal reason": that of warning Sara of the risks of her exchange with Cebà. Not *La Reina Ester* then, but "the" Esther whose story is told in the *Book of Esther*, read at the feast of Purim. However, as Genette points out (1997, 75):

... if the addressee of the text is indeed the reader, the addressee of the title is the public . . . The title is directed at many more people than the text, people who by one route or another receive it and transmit it and thereby have a hand in circulating it. For if the text is an object to be read, the title (like, moreover, the name of the author) is an object to be circulated - or, if you prefer, a subject of conversation.

The message to Copio Sullam and to Cebà, if it is one, is thus encrypted within a more generalized reception: the wider public to whom Modena is addressing himself in the paratext, in itself a limited one, being Copio

Sullam's literary salon whose members may or may not pick up the message. In Genette's terms the first function of the title "the only one that is obligatory in the practice and institution of literature [that] of designating, or identifying" could be seen to have been changed by the addition of the definite article before the proper noun 'Ester' from simply being a designative to a connotative one. Here is Genette's opinion (93):

Third is the connotative function attached (whether or not by authorial intent) to the descriptive function. This connotative function, too, seems to me unavoidable, for every title, like every statement in general, has its own way of being or, if you prefer, its own style - and this is the case even with the most restrained title, which will at least connote restraint (at best; and at worst, the affectation of restraint). But perhaps we go too far in calling a sometimes unintended effect a function, and it would no doubt be better to speak here of connotative value.

As we have seen, Modena also gives the play a classifying subtitle, *Tragedia Tratta dalla Sacra Scrittura (A Tragedy Taken from Holy Scripture)*, in which he identifies both the genre in which he is writing and the main source of the play's story. We shall see later in the paratext exactly what he means by the term *tragedia* and the truth value he gives to his source material.

Interestingly, the name of the author, the next item to appear on the frontispiece, is, using Genette's paratextual categories, worthy of comment (39):

Either the author "signs" (despite the above-mentioned reservation, I will use this word to make a long story short) with his legal name: we can plausibly surmise (I am not aware of any statistics on this matter) that this is most commonly the case; or he signs with a false name, borrowed or invented: this is pseudonymity; or he does not sign at all, and this is anonymity. For referring to the first situation, it is fairly tempting to follow the model of the other two and coin the term onymity.

The Rabbi would appear to fit the category of *onymity*, in that "Leon Modena da Venezia" is the Italian name he goes by in the cultured Jewish and Venetian society he frequents. Many of his acquaintances, colleagues and interlocutors were distinguished men. Adelman (1988, 26-7) tells us that the notable English Protestant connections already mentioned here (note 5) were also friends of Fra Paolo Sarpi (1552-1623):⁶ when Modena acquired a

⁶ See Adelman (26): "the Venetian leader in the controversy with the papacy that culminated in the papal interdict imposed on Venice in 1606. Sarpi - who lived near the ghetto and whose years in Venice coincided with those of Modena - regularly attended gatherings where Jews were present, which was among the reasons given by Pope

copy of Sarpi's *Istoria del Concilio Tridentino* (*History of the Council of Trent*) "he copied sections from it and referred to Sarpi as 'my' friar". During 1609, the year Modena spent in Florence as a rabbinic authority on Jewish law, one of his most eminent students was the French Catholic Jean Plantavit de la Pause (1576-1651), to whom he taught Hebrew, Bible and rabbinics. Part of his desire for a constructive dialogue with Christianity is also to be seen in his own *Dizionario hebraico-italiano* published in 1612. What Genette calls his "legal name", the one he signs himself with in Italian, is Leon Modena da Venezia as Adelman and Ravid (Cohen 1988, 187) note:

From the available sources it appears that Leon Modena had visited the city of Modena once . . . [he] consistently referred to himself in three ways: in Italian as Leon Modena; in Hebrew as Yehudah Aryeh mi-Modena, and in Latin as Leo Mutinensis.

So this would appear to be his formal Italian identity, as the bearer of an Italian given name followed by a toponymic typical in early modern Italy as a last name and the addition of a place name to indicate where he was born and where he worked as an adult. Yet it disguises the fact that his Hebrew name, the one really expressing his *onymity* so to speak, was Yehudah Aryeh *mi-modena*, Modena being one of the cities his ancestors had settled in after migrating from France. Right from the title page the author's condition as an outsider is revealed, though it must not be forgotten that the "pseudonym" Leon Modena is completely transparent – every one of his contemporaries knows anyway that the two names belong to the same person. One who uses the rough translation of his name (*aryeh* means lion, *leone* in Italian) from a language rarely known by the native inhabitants, may be seen to have adopted a pseudonym in spite of himself and thus unconsciously signal the "doubleness" the alterity which as he is an outsider he must live with. This is confirmed by the immediate give-away and officially-approved racial identification below his name "Hebreo da Venetia" (A Jew from Venice).

In Counter-Reformation Italy the most greatly-feared heretics were Protestants, who, notwithstanding the tolerant attitude of the commercially astute Venice of the time, were considered by Rome to be particularly dangerous and censorship was imposed by the Inquisition on their works (Grendler 1975, 49). But it is evident from the frontispieces of the various publications of Modena and his Jewish friends and associates that censorship was also the norm here – every title-page of a Jewish publication carries the word "Ebreo/a". Here the only peculiarity is the fact that Modena, or his printer Giacomo Sarzina (mentioned by Cohen as also being a Jew, though

Clement VIII (1592-1605) for refusing to grant Sarpi a bishopric".

this is very unlikely),⁷ has failed to specify the fact that Modena had been awarded the title of Rabbi in 1609. I have not been able to find the decree that Papal censorship imposed on Venetian editors and printers to declare the nationality of Jewish writers on the title-pages of the relatively few books published by them in Italian so that they and the authors were able to claim copyright, the “licence and privilege” granted by the City’s officials and counsellors and thus have the exclusive right to sell their volumes. Yet on all the title pages I have seen of books published by Jewish authors this is the case. The copyright declaration, together with the printer’s name and ornament, as well as place and year of publication, make up the rest of the exiguous peritext: it is probably Modena himself who added the term “rinovato” (revised), as is discussed by him later in the preface.⁸

3. Dedication and Dedicatee: a Reaction to the “Antitext”?

The Frontispiece is immediately followed by a grandiloquent Dedicatory Epistle to his protégée and host, Copio Sullam. This part of the paratext, as Genette points out, establishes a different relationship between sender and addressee. It is usually almost a private “coded” message (although all coeval readers would have understood it) between a dependent and a hoped-for paymaster. In this case, although her Ladyship is called Modena’s “Illustre Signora e Padrona Osservandissima” (“illustrious Lady and patroness most worthy of regard”) and her virtue, worth and intelligence are mentioned several times in the dedication, its actual function would seem to be that of parodically deflating both Cebà’s poem *La Reina Ester* (considered by several scholars⁹ as a sort of “antitext” against which Modena is reacting when he “re”-writes the play *L’Ester*) and Copio Sullam’s idolatry of it, warning her, at the same time, of the dangers she is incurring. Genette (1997, 134) comments:

⁷ In his detailed 1997 essay reconstructing Sarzina’s life and editorial activity, nowhere does Mario Infelise make any mention of the possibility of the printer’s Jewish origin (207-23). In fact his career as one of the most highly-regarded printers who was, between the years 1631 and 1641, in charge of the official printing press of the Accademia degli Incogniti, would seem to prove this. It is very probable that Sarzina was able to print Hebrew texts like the two of Modena’s mentioned here by employing Jewish workers sub-contracted from Hebrew printing presses.

⁸ See Sarnelli 2004, 166-9. Modena had also already revised *I Trionfi*. Favola Pastorale, a work written in about 1575, influenced by Tasso’s poetry, whose author, Angelo Alatini was a Jew from Città di Castello. This had been published in Venice by Modena in 1611 and, although the rabbi denies it, in this case too according to Sarnelli, he had made substantial adaptations to update its language.

⁹ See, cited in this essay, Arbib (2003), Adelman (2016), and Scordari (2020).

Whoever the official addressee, there is always an ambiguity in the destination of a dedication, which is always intended for at least two addressees: the dedicatee, of course, but also the reader, for dedicating a work is a public act that the reader is, as it were, called on to witness. A typically performative act, as I have said, for in itself it *constitutes* the act it is supposed to describe; the formula for it is therefore not only "I dedicate this . . ." but also . . . "I am telling the reader that I am dedicating this . . ."

Modena had been instructed in the "art of poetry and the language of letter-writing" (Cohen1988, 86) from his childhood and had practised this art from then onwards, both writing his own poetry in Italian and Hebrew and translating from Italian into Hebrew and vice versa. He is well able, while appearing to praise Cebà's poetic virtuosity, to exploit and parody a sort of hyperbolic *accumulatio*, and of what Fortis (2003, 70) calls the exaggerations of the rhetoric of baroque poetry and its artificiality:

. . . nè i suoi giudicii habbiano bisogno di approbatione, nè io sordo possa dar conto delle armoniche consonanze; ma per il vero vi si scorge lo stile Heroico, le inventioni dilettevoli, i concetti in copia, gli episodi possibili, le digressioni non vane, l'incatenatura con ordine, la spiegatura facile, i versi numerosi, le comparationi proprie, le metafore, e il parlar figurato, e in somma tutti quei requisiti, che desiderarsi puonno per render riguardevole, un come quel Poema.

[. . . nor may my dull hearing permit me to pronounce on his harmonious consonances, while, to tell the truth, I recognize the Heroic style, the delightful inventions, the abundant conceits, the realistic events, the justifiable digressions the well-ordered sequence, the effortless narration, the numerous lines, the just comparisons, the metaphors, the figures, indeed, all the prerequisites necessary to render such a Poem remarkable and notable.]

With a nice example of *sprezzatura* Modena dubs himself aesthetically "sordo" ("deaf") while deflating the "requisiti" ("prerequisites") to which Cebà has had recourse in order to render his poem in "stile Heroico" ("Heroic style") – the number of lines ("i versi numerosi") being a particularly shrewd thrust as Cebà's poem is inordinately long. Here are all the prerequisites that one could desire, indeed, Modena goes on, "per rendere riguardevole, e notabile un come quell Poema" ("to render such a poem remarkable and notable"). Beauty and, in particular, truth are not mentioned.

As for the flattering commentary on the "Illustre Signora" the dedication begins in a conventional manner, praising "l'honesta, e gentil sua conversatione, la quale per le sue rare maniere, e molte virtù, e scienze, avanzando e gli anni, e'l sesso di se stessa, diletta" ("your virtuous and courteous conversation, that for its incomparable manner, and its many

qualities and great knowledge [is] delightful beyond your age and sex”). Then, once again, Modena apparently humbles himself, begging his patroness to read his play if only for “la conformità del nome, e dell’Historia” (the similarity of the name, and the Story) to Cebà’s poem.

However, in the conclusion to the Dedicatory Epistle, the function of the message and the sender’s attitude to the dedicatee would seem to change:

. . . si come corrispondenza tra queste nostre antiche madri Sarra e Ester, che quella generò la stirpe nostra, e questa la regenerò, salvandola da morte, il nome di Sarra vuol dire Principessa, e Ester fù Regina, quella santa e virtuosa, questa pia, e da bene, così V.S. cerca quella, e questa nella bontà, nella virtù, e nella grandezza dell’animo imitare. Piaccia al Signore concederle sempre prosperità, e bene, perche possi avanzarsi tuttavia di bene in meglio con vita felice.

[. . . since there is this similarity between these two venerable forebears, our mothers, Sara and Esther, the first who engendered our race and the second who restored it by saving it from extinction, the name Sara means Princess, and Esther was a Queen, the first blessed and virtuous, the second pious and righteous; so, may your Ladyship seek to emulate the goodness, the virtue and the greatness of soul of both. May God always grant you prosperity and fortune, so that you may continue in all ways better and better with a happy life.]

The tone becomes didactic, the message contains historical and religious information, the Rabbi blesses his protégée and member of his flock, subtly warning her to emulate the eminent forebears of her race while instructing her to continue to be happy as one of their progeny.

The dating of this epistle, “Li 25. Febraro, il giorno istesso del nostro Purim, cioè della festa di Ester. 1618.” (“25th February the very day of our Purim, that is the feast of Esther. 1618.”),¹⁰ with its proud affirmation of the Jewish religious meaning of the figure of Esther, is also a significant continuation of the deliberate re-assumption of Modena’s “original” identity as Rabbi, teacher and Jew, even though, after the correct rhetorical formality of the salutation “Di V.S. Illustre / Affettionatiss per servirla” (“From your illustrious Ladyship’s most affectionate servant”) he signs himself “Leon Modena”. It should not be forgotten that Purim is also the festival of masks. It could be said that here in the dedication the Rabbi is using the mask of the accepted rhetorical clichés of the dedication (what Genette calls the “well-tested formulae”; 163) to enable himself to criticize Cebà.

What is particularly interesting here is that Modena, the sender of the

¹⁰ Here Modena is using the dating system called *stile veneziano*, or more commonly “more Veneto” the idiosyncratic calendar used in Venice resulting from the delayed adoption of the Gregorian calendar, whereby the new year began on the first of March. In fact, the more modern dating would already be 1619.

message whose main intention is that of persuading, is using his duplicated authority to do so. Apart from his renowned polymathic intellectual capacity, he exploits the sharpened wits of the successful (masked) outsider, an identity that Jews coming from an unjustly denigrated and persecuted culture have often had to adopt. In order to find success such an individual must not be simply as good as his native-born rivals but better. As "Leon Modena", a fully-recognized member of the Venetian intelligentsia with solid connections to the freethinking members of the nascent *Accademia degli Incogniti*, he is able to show himself as a feasible critic of Cebà, an Italian scholar poet and Catholic monk on the right side of the religious ravine. Yet he is also, and has been since 1609, Rabbi Judah Aryeh mi-Modena, who cannot, but more importantly does not, and does not desire to deny his identity. His paternal ancestors had come from France to Italy probably in the fourteenth century and had lived in Viterbo, Modena, Bologna and Ferrara before coming to Venice where he was born (Adelman 1988, 20). He is someone who also excels in his religious profession and in his own culture, and in this way may demonstrate the authority of his recognized learning to his fellow Jews and neighbours both in the Ghetto and far beyond. In this guise his duty (and his own function) is to guard the spiritual well-being of Copio Sullam, his protégée and hostess.

4. The Raven *versus* the Dove: a Literary *Tenzzone*

Modena's literary duel with Cebà does not, however, end at this point. He continues to challenge his "rival" by contributing a sonnet of his own, as a contrast to the fervent sonneteering continuing between the Genoese monk and the Rabbi's pupil. The dedication, "Alla medesima" ("To the Same") is followed by this sonnet in which Modena, once again abasing himself, compares the ignominious example of versifying he offers in *L'Ester* to Cebà's skill. Here the Rabbi reiterates his pupil's unfailing affirmation that *La Reina Ester* outshines every other poem. Once again he eulogizes the monk's "Historia, in fila d'or, dilette, e grate . . . cantate" ("story spun in threads of gold, delightful, pleasing . . . singing"), written a style that awakens every soul to noble deeds while declaring that "abietto" ("abject") style he adopts in his humble tragedy betrays the Swan, here seen as the symbol of poetry. Yet perhaps, Modena says, the fact that his own work is "difforme" ("ill-made") is an advantage, as it will permit the hope first alluded to in the prose dedication, that his dedicatee will admire his tragedy simply because the name of his heroine is the same as that of Cebà's poem, that "Pel nome sol voglio sperar che accetta / Vi sia per la Colomba la Cornice" ("If only for its name I hope and trust / You will accept the Raven for the Dove").

This last verse presents no little ambiguity. For the first interpretation of the juxtaposition of the Raven and the Dove, the two birds mentioned, immediately calls to mind the book of *Genesis* and the story of Noah, in which the Raven and the Dove are sent out from the ark (*Genesis* 11:4-12). This, however, does not really enlighten one much as to what Modena meant by this metaphor or by any symbolism accruing to the birds in such a context. If anything, the Raven, which would appear to represent Modena and/or his play, is indeed perhaps the more negative of the two, as it does not really help Noah except by showing that it has nowhere to perch. It is also, according to Jewish teaching, an unclean bird in that it is a bird of prey. The Dove, on the other hand, is the creature that shows Noah when he may leave the ark, and linked with the symbolism of the olive leaf, is a sign of the peace restored between God and man. Far too positive a sign, one would imagine, to stand for Cebà and his “golden” but dangerous verses.

If we look more closely at Modena’s sonnet, which carries on in the same vein as the prose dedication, Cebà and the Swan are associated within the poem itself, both qualified as “buon[o]” (“good”). Or rather, in the case of Cebà, as “the good” an adjectival phrase which if placed before the noun in Italian, as it is here, often carries with it a condescending tone, rather like that in “buon uomo” (in English “[my] good man”), and has exactly the same patronising effect as Modena is uses in his dedication to demonstrate exactly what he thinks of the high baroque excesses of the Genoese monk’s poetry. The image of the “good Swan” as a symbol of poetry – here the adjective “buono” (“good”) is in its syntactically usual position in Italian, that is, following the noun and is obviously a sincere evaluation – is the particular one of the bird singing as it dies: the beauty of its voice is the crux. So perhaps both the Raven and the Dove are being used in this way. The harsh crowing of the raven in Modena’s “abject” verse “ch[e] à Cigno buon disdice” (“that is unworthy of the good Swan”) is perhaps meant to represent the hard, but realistic message that Modena is trying to convey to his protégée, whereas the aesthetically pleasing “Swansong” of high baroque poetry and the sweet, seductive cooing of the dove could signify Cebà’s enticing voice.

Perhaps even more significant is the fact that in the penultimate line Modena expresses the hope that Copio Sullam will accept his play “pel nome sol” (“only for its name”). The play itself is so far away in conception, treatment of the subject matter and, as we shall discuss further, period of composition, from what has been considered as the “antitext”, that the only way the Rabbi can signal a warning for his pupil is here in the paratext.

To return to the function of the message itself, Genette (1997, 121-3), when discussing the development of the Epistolary Dedication as a separate or sub-genre, mentions the fact that during its life it mutates, and, for example, what I shall term the “flattery function” changes and often becomes criticism

within its own boundaries. Before its disappearance, it at times undergoes what other dying genres experience, a stage of pastiche, and mock-heroic parody. A remark Genette quotes by Montesquieu (1689-1755), who wrote one of its first epitaphs, is worth recalling here. In his *Pensées* (1726-1727) the philosopher comments: "I will not write a dedicatory epistle: those who profess to tell the truth must not be hoping for any protection on this Earth". Further on in the chapter, Genette comments that the two features obviously connected, the most direct (economic) social function of the dedication and its expanded form of laudatory epistle, tend to disappear. Here Modena seems to anticipate this trend, changing the insincerity of the flattery function to a form of truth however much masked by parody and apparent adulation together with an astute employment of the topos of modesty when referring to his own work. What emerges from this message is a challenge to Cebà and a protective warning to Copio Sullam.

5. The Reader's Preface: on the (Back)dating of *L'Ester*

Although Modena had already dropped various hints as to the nature of his play both on the title-page and in the dedication and the appended sonnet, what Genette calls "encroachments on the functions of the preface" (135), the main function of these two latter parts of the paratext is, as we have seen, to save his pupil both from the religious and the worldly snares of Cebà and his ilk, and to save her soul for God. The tone changes completely during what constitutes the prefatory remarks which are headed "L'Autore a' benigni Lettori" ("the Author to his benevolent Readers"). Genette uses the word preface to designate "every type of introductory (preludial or postludial) text, authorial or allographic [Modena is in Genette's terms, both authorial and authentic] here consisting of a discourse produced on the subject of the text that follows or precedes it" (161), and I use the term in the same way. His quotation of Novalis and the commentary on it is particularly cogent:

"The preface", said Novalis, "provides directions for using the book". The phrase is accurate but stark. The way to guide the reading, to try to get a proper reading, is not only to issue direct orders. The way to get a proper reading is also –and perhaps initially –to put the (definitely assumed) reader in possession of information the author considers necessary for this proper reading. And advice itself benefits from being presented in the light of information: information, for example (in a case in which this might interest you), about the way the author wishes to be read. (209)

The information Modena immediately provides his readers with bears out a further remark of Genette's:

The original preface may inform the reader about the origin of the work, the circumstances in which it was written, the stages of its creation . . . A special aspect of this genetic information . . . is the indication of sources. This is typical of works of fiction that draw their subjects from history or legend . . . The indication of sources thus appears especially in the prefaces to classical tragedies and historical novels. (210)

Here it is explained in detail why Modena and/or Sarzina specified on the title-page that the play was “rinovato” (“revised”). Modena immediately reveals that his play is the rewritten version of a previous one:

Sessant’anni in circa sono, che un Salamon Uschi, con luce e aiuto di Lazaro di Gratian Levi mio materno zio, compose questa Tragedia, o Rappresentatione, che dir vogliamo; e ben ch’essi per doversi recitar ad Hebrei solamente, la facessero, fù però in pubblico alla nobiltà di questa città di Venetia pomposamente rappresentata, e ne riportarono non poco honore. Già vintisette anni un’altra volta ad istanza d’una compagnia de Nobili Signori, fù pur recitata, e riuscì con grande, e comune applauso. Hor quasi sei anni sono, che la terza volta era per recitarsi, quando facendo capo meco quelli, che ciò voleano effettuare, io gli ammonii à desistere dall’impresa . . .

[It was almost sixty years ago that a certain Salamon Uschi, with the help and elucidation of Lazarus of Graziano Levi, my maternal uncle, wrote this Tragedy or, if you prefer, Play; and although it was only to have been performed before Jews, it was staged publicly and with all ceremony in the presence of the nobility of this city of Venice, bringing no little honour to the authors. Twenty-seven years later it was performed again at the request of a group of Noble Lords, and its success was greatly applauded. Six years ago, it was about to be put on for the third time when I intervened in what they wanted to do and warned them to desist from their project . . .]

This account has been the subject of much theorizing among scholars, especially concerning the language in which Usque’s original play was written and performed, Portuguese and Spanish being suggested as well as Hebrew. Cecil Roth identifies Salomon Usque as being a Portuguese *marrano* (convert) to Christianity from Lisbon, who also worked as a printer and dabbled in literature when his family arrived in Ferrara at some time between 1543 and 1558. Roth (1943, 77-8) writes: “In 1558, when the Usque press at Ferrara was suspended, he removed to Venice and here composed the earliest Jewish dramatic experiment in the vernacular now extant”.¹¹ It

¹¹ In this fascinating reconstruction of Usque’s identity it is “disentangled” from

is obvious to Roth that Usque must have had a good command of Spanish, Portuguese, Hebrew and Italian by the time he writes the Purim play on Queen Ester; Roth gives the date for its composition as 1558 and that of the performance as 1559 with a repeat performance in 1592. Piatelli (1968, 165) in his account of the dating of the last attempt to stage Usque's play and Modena's advice to avoid this until it had been rewritten gives an approximate date of 1612, all dates collated from the information Modena provides here. The most interesting point of Roth's account is the suggestion that it was Modena's uncle Lazzaro di Graziano Levi who was responsible for the Italian version, as nowhere does Modena mention having to translate either from Hebrew or from Spanish as other scholars suggest (Lelli 2020, 26n26), and the play would seem, by the Rabbi's description, at all times to have had a cosmopolitan audience.

By now it should not surprise us that Modena very much wants to make sure his "benevolent Readers" know how he wishes to be read. It is at this point that the overriding interest of the Dedicator gives way to the desires of the Author. As we have seen, the paratext was written just before the publication of the play, in 1619. Yet the play itself, that is, the revised version, would seem to have been envisaged in about 1612-1613 and its subject, Queen Esther, had certainly been decided upon more than half a century before the establishment of the salon, and even before the publication of Cebà's poem. Before affirming that the actual play was written in order to flout Cebà's desire to convert Copio Sullam, and to give the lady herself an example of how a good Jewish woman should behave, all this should be carefully considered.

From the title-page on, Modena calls his play a tragedy, and by this he is using the term which in France, a little later, will cause the celebrated *querelle* between the ancients and the moderns. His concept of tragedy by now owes everything to the early modern genre of tragicomedy and its paradigm as will also be seen in the Prologue. Thus, Modena's "rinovamento" is clearly one that changes, as most scholars thought, a typical mid-sixteenth century "Purim play" into something quite different:

... gli dicevo, che da quegli anni in quà lo stile della Poesia Italiana in qual si sia genere, s'era fuor di modo avanzato, si che questo era al presente molto basso, e senza quella gravità, legatura, e sentenze, ch'alle Tragedie, e cose Heroiche, e quanto più sacre, si richiede. Al che rispondevano essi ch'io à ciò rimediar potevo, come quello, che (ingannandosi di lungo però) mi credevano haver un poco di cognitione nella Poesia, con andar accomodando alcuni di

that of another person, Duarte Gomez, whose name is still often seen as a sobriquet of Usque's.

quei versi così insipidi, e ridurla al meglio. Io non seppi disdirle, e procurai di farlo, e gettandola quasi tutto in fascio, la riformai, e in tutto la rinovai.

[. . . I told them that since the play had been written the style of Italian verse in every genre had changed out of all recognition. By now this play had fallen out of fashion, being without that particular sobriety, unity and wit now required of Tragedy, of the Heroic and of the sacred. To this they replied that I could improve it in that way (and here they were greatly deceiving themselves, however), as they believed I had some little skill with Poetry, and could get to work and mend those insipid verses, and remodel it to the best of my ability. I did not know how to refuse them and managed to accomplish this. Starting almost completely afresh, I restyled and renewed the whole thing.]

It is evident that the original play must have been similar to that described by Capelli (2020, 6) “a farcical celebration of the generally hostile confrontation between the Jews and their pagan neighbours and/or rulers (such is the case, for instance, of the enactment of the Biblical story of Queen Esther)”. Early modern Italian Purim plays, given “the osmotic society of sixteenth-century Italy” could often “portray biblical characters as classical or contemporary figures of the *commedia dell’arte*, and in many *Purimspielen*, for instance, King Ahasuerus was represented as a sort of Jewish *Pantalone*” (Lelli 2020, 18). Modena’s re-creation seems at this point to be completely different from the source play then, a play in five acts, which are further subdivided into five or more scenes, preceded by a Prologue followed by what could be termed an Induction and concluded by an Epilogue, in formal Italian hendecasyllabic verse. It comes as no surprise that of his two sources, the comic and the sacred, it is the latter which is of greater importance. Indeed, some readers may be surprised when they find that a Rabbi is the author of the play. As Capelli points out “Right at the beginning of the formative period of rabbinic Judaism, the rabbis disavowed theatre as a despicable form of blasphemous admixture of their idea of Judaism with the surrounding dominant pagan cultures of the Hellenistic and Roman period” (2020, 5-6).

Modena, indeed, seems to hold the opinion that fidelity to sources, however appropriate this conduct is, proves more of a drawback than an advantage. In the case of Usque’s play, he felt it more fitting to “lasciarvi di quella primiera forma, acciò in certo modo fosse per quella conosciuta” (“to leave there something of the original, so that in some way it could still be recognized”) although he had said before he intended to raise the tone. Then he wanted to follow the Holy Scriptures closely, and there too, he says “non s’è alzato lo stile quanto forse si havrebbe fatto” (“so the style has not been heightened as much as it could have been”). He has also used another source, he informs the reader, which has had the same result “come anco l’hà causato l’havervi inserto alcune

glose de Rabini, detti da gli Hebrei Midrassim, per maggior gusto dei dotti, e verità del caso” (“the same thing has been caused by some glosses of the Rabbis, whom the Jews call the Midrashim have been inserted both for the greater interest of the scholars and to validate the truth of the case”).

He then explains why he has decided to publish the play:

Non seguì poi ultimamente il recitarla, e io trovandomi haver fatto la fatica, non ho volute che la mi resti in cassa, ma darla in luce al mondo, per diletto di chi la vorrà leggere, e chi vorrà recitarla, essendo cosa che à tutti conviene, come opera piacevole e Historia sacra.

[As this task was not followed by a performance, and having devoted much effort to it, I did not wish it to stay in my desk, but bring it to light to amuse whoever desires to read it, and to please those who want to stage it, since it is a thing suitable for everyone, both an enjoyable work and a sacred History.]

It is more than probable that it is the actual publishing of the play, rather than its revision, which was motivated or partly motivated by the Copio Sullam affair, nowhere mentioned after the Dedicatory Sonnet. This would indeed make sense with the dating of its inception – as Modena states here, six years before this (in 1613). At the end of the preface, he adds a note, which reveals the irrepressible teacher and perhaps betrays the covert uncertainty of the outsider, anxious that an incorrect reading of the Jewish names and thus a distortion of the metre on the part of the indigenous Italians will be blamed on his ‘ignorance’ as a ‘foreigner’: “i doi nomi Vasti, e Ester, secondo il vero modo del legger Hebraico, si devono proferir con l’accento grave al fine, cioè Vastì, e Estèr; e ciò si dice perché altrimenti leggendoli vi sariano de’ versi languidi, o senza il posarsi ove si deve” (“in order to read the two names ‘Vasti’ and ‘Ester’, correctly in Hebrew, they must be pronounced with a grave (tonic) accent on the last syllable, that is Vastì and Estèr. I say this as otherwise when you read them the metre of the lines will slide as they will lack the appropriate stress”).

6. From Page to Stage Paratextually: Dramatis Personae, Prologue, “Induction”, Epilogue

The next page of the paratext is headed “Interlocutori” (who in fact will not exchange a spoken word with one another until the festival of Purim on 17 February 2022 in Ferrara and some of them not then – see my note 7). Genette does not mention them but in her thought-provoking essay Jitka Štollova (2018, 312) states “Early modern character lists, frequently overlooked but vital paratexts, have a manifest ability to shape readers’ understandings of the plot

and characters". In our case, besides clarifying the intertextual provenance of the characters, it may possibly shed some light on the amount of "renewal" Modena carried out on the original play by Usque. The first two characters are themselves part of the paratext – at least part of the dramatic area where the paratext is becoming text. Their monologues will be commented on when we come to them: here however it gives rise to a question, the same one for both of them. As the part of the Prologue and of the Induction, which is perhaps the term that could be given to Amalek's speech, were generally taken by one of the actors who had a part in the main action, one wonders which of the actors would have played them. The fact that in such a relatively short play they would have been immediately recognizable would naturally have had the effect of altering or strengthening the audience's perception of the characters themselves: it was surely Esther (who says surprisingly little for the eponymous heroine of the title) who was intended to recite the monologue of Truth and give the Epilogue; and probably Haman was meant for the part of his father's ghost. The full supporting cast of courtiers, servants and the like seems to predict space for uptakes from the source play by Usque, as does the appearance of two children, Danetto and Gadino, and the Angel hints at the sacred theme. The names of the main characters and the courtiers are all of recognizably biblical origin and this also upholds the idea of a liturgical drama.

The Prologue is a moment when the status of the dramatic message is envisaged by the author/sender as being inevitably altered as it is at this point that it is delegated to an actor and received by an audience. How the message is 'sent' is no longer simply in the hands of the sender, and it is not envisaged by the playwright as being 'read' but heard by a series of collectives whose individual reactions can mutually condition one another and vary from performance to performance. In this case, as Modena describes in the preface, his first intention was that his play would have been even more suitable to be staged than the out-of-date original, so a possible state of affairs is that the Prologue was written after the play itself but before the Dedication and Preface, and was written to be performed. Not, then, to persuade Copio Sullam, but to persuade his imagined spectators. Since the soul and the intellect of his pupil, daughter of his late friend and protector Simon Copio, must have been an important facet of the reality of this polymathic internationally-involved and hardworking teacher and preacher. Yet they were just this, a facet. One only has to consult his own record of a day in his life that Modena left in a letter to realise that he would scarcely have found the time for such a roundabout way of persuading his protégée and utilizing something like his already-existing play on Esther as fit for the task seems a more credible alternative strategy. In the account of his overcrowded timetable, after talking about "time which is just not available" he says "Although I am tired and weary, as mentioned, I

find relaxation even if I have but half an hour each week to delight in the love of dear friends and to have pleasing conversations” .¹²

To return to the dating of events: Cebà's poem was first published 1615. Modena could possibly have decided, in 1613, to respond to a manuscript form of *La Reina Ester*. Yet in her detailed essay Marina Arbib (2003) maintains that “Modena's decision to compose a tragedy about Esther stemmed from the publication of Cebà's poem”. This was three years before the Genoese monk and the “bella Hebraea” began their correspondence in May 1618. Later in the essay Arbib suggests “that he [Modena] wrote *L'Ester* to advise Sullam to take a wiser, more realistic course of action”. The only explicit signs of warning are in the Dedication, which was dated by the Rabbi himself as being 1619. The decision to revise the original play, to render greater gravitas to a Purim play in whose composition a relative of Modena's had been concerned was decided in 1613, at a time when circulation in manuscript form was still a commonly followed practice, and publication could follow this after years had passed.

The Prologue moves even further away from the Cebà-Copio Sullam affair than does the Preface to the Reader and segues into the drama and the stage it is performed on. It is recited by the allegorical figure of Truth, and is another moment when Modena's hybrid state between Venetian scholar and Jewish rabbi becomes very evident. The decision to make Truth the speaker does not surprise so much – for as Genette remarks:

The only aspect of treatment an author can give himself credit for in the preface, undoubtedly because conscience rather than talent is involved, is truthfulness or, at the very least, sincerity – that is, the effort to achieve truthfulness. Taking credit for truthfulness or sincerity has been a commonplace of prefaces to historical works since Herodotus and Thucydides, and of prefaces to autobiographical works, or self-portraits, since Montaigne: “This book was written in good faith, reader”. (206)

The truth at this point of the paratext has much to do with the Holy Scripture and, even more so, with the literary devices used there. The symbolic attributes that Truth assigns to herself, as a queen, chastity, light, and time, before revealing her identity, her description of her provenance “Io son colei, d'antichi, e da moderni / Nomata Verità, nata divina, / Nata nel grembo al grande, al vero Dio, / Pria che il ciel fosse il mar, la terra, e il foco” (“I am she, by ancients and by moderns, / Called Truth, engendered as divine, / Born from the womb of the great, the very God, / Before the heavens became sea, earth and fire”) are of particular interest. This long monologue is inviting the

¹² See Adelman and Ravid, “Historical Notes” in Cohen (1988, 215).

audience to interpret the play in an allegorical manner, and to find a parallel meaning to their own reality in the story of Ahasuerus, Vashti, Mordecai, Haman and Esther and the diaspora of the Jews. Truth gives a reason for the writing of the play here which is of significance as to what has been said above. She says:

hor, mercè d'un non esperto Autore,
 Ch'à prieghi d'altri Hebrei fratelli suoi,
 Che vivon sotto à la custodia vera
 Del gran LEON de la città invitta
 Ch'è sol Donna del mar, del mar Regina
 Veng' hora in Scena a dimostrarmi a voi
 In seno a questi miei alti Signori.

[now, thanks to an inexpert Author,
 Acting on the prayers of other Jews, his brothers,
 Who live under the true guardianship
 Of the great LION of that invincible city,
 Sole Lady of the Sea, indeed its Queen;
 I come on stage to show myself to you,
 Surrounded by all these my eminent Lords.]

Modena is reporting in the words of Truth the same story of the play's genesis as he gave in the Preface – the rewriting of Usque's "old-fashioned" *Purimspiel*.

Modena uses the phrase "ancients and moderns" twice in the monologue by Truth, almost as if he is reminding himself of what he wishes to make clear concerning the genre of his play and how he wants it to be understood. Truth says that when the author uses the term Tragedy for the play he is not going to observe "tutti i precetti de lo Stagirita" ("all Aristotle's precepts") because to be able to "trattar varie attioni / E ne lo spattio che di tempi abbraccia" ("treat[ment of] numerous actions, / Neither the allotted space nor time suffices"). Besides not respecting the unities of time, place and action he adds, he is going to "finire in allegrezza" ("end in happiness") because it is not happiness or sadness that determines tragedy, but the treatment of people of high rank and their fall from one destiny to another which engenders pity and terror. It seems that we are in full "querelle des anciens et des modernes" but ante litteram, for what is being described here is – in truth – tragicomedy.

The arrival of the shade of Amalek from hell, which puts an end to the discourse of Truth and sends her off the stage, would seem to constitute an interval in which a figure from the old Purim play is resuscitated and re-invented. There is here a sort of collage of Hebrew history/mythology combined with the mythology of Ancient Greece, as the playwright seems to be conscious that his words are being addressed to a mixed audience

(Christians who may not know the provenance of Haman and Jews who will want to be assured that the happy ending will not be so for everyone). Amalek is the father of Haman the Agagite, the villain of Purim plays (and of the *Book of Esther*), and the personification of evil, whose fate at the end of the play is proleptically described by his father's ghost. The fact that the hell Amalek arrives from is Tartarus, the devil is Pluto, and the torments described are those of various characters from Greek mythology, could be an attempt to underline the Agagite's cultural separation from the Jews, a people he and his ancestors and progeny have always tried to destroy. Interestingly in Aeschylus' play *The Persians* the ghost of Xerxes' (Ahasuerus') father Darius prophesies doom for him. Perhaps Modena had been reminded of this. The Epilogue recited again by Truth is the traditional *captatio benevolentiae* of other early modern epilogues, but it also underlines the role of Providence in human affairs and points the moral of satisfaction with the position God has given one. Once again, no mention is made of the "tenzone" between Modena and Cebà, not even in a figurative way.

7. "Pel nome sol": Just for the Name

In conclusion, it seems to me that the paratext, and more probably only the Dedication and the Dedicatory sonnet were written in response to the *affaire* Cebà/Copio Sullam, and the revision of the play was carried out several years previously and for the motives its writer gives more than once. Perhaps, but not necessarily, some parts may have been altered before presenting the manuscript complete with Dedication to the salon as pointing a possible moral lesson for its *salonnière*, but the rewriting of the play itself must have predated the *affaire* Copio Sullam/Cebà by some years. It is in the Dedication that Modena, the outsider, whose rights to censure an Italian and a Catholic are conventionally very much curtailed, takes his chance to criticize Cebà and to warn Copio Sullam from a perfect forum and behind the mask of a rhetorically correct hypocritical eulogy. In doing so Modena is also aided in his task of rescuing his protégée, who he hopes will use his much earlier retelling of Esther's story simply as an allegory and will set it against Cebà's poem because the two works have the same heroine. His intellectual rights within the salon itself are also not to be underestimated, as there he would be considered if not superior to the Genoese at least on an equal footing. Beginning, perhaps, with the tiny addition of an abbreviated definite article to the title of his work – *L'Ester* and not simply *Ester* – the paratext of his play allows him, an "inferior" inhabitant of Venice, unjustly caged within the Ghetto, to assume his rightful authority as a scholar over Jew and Gentile alike and, if somewhat briefly in this limited literary context, carry out what

he considered one of his vocational tasks, that of maintaining a dialectal relationship between their religious doctrines and bringing closer to one another the two cultures in which he lived.

Works Cited

- Adelman, Howard. 2016. "Leone Modena, Sara Copio Sullam and the Accademia degli Incogniti", *Venice, the Jews and Europe. 1516-2016, Exhibition Catalogue*, 310-3. Venice: Marsilio Editori.
- 1988. "Leon Modena: the Autobiography and the Man". In *The Autobiography of a Seventeenth-Century Venetian Rabbi. Leon Modena's Life of Judah*, edited and translated by Mark R. Cohen, 19-49. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Arbib, Marina. 2003. "The Queen Esther Triangle". In *The Lion Shall Roar. Leon Modena and His World*, edited by David Malkiel, 103-35. Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press.
- Berger, Thomas L. and Massai, Sonia. 2014. *Paratexts in English Printed Drama to 1642*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Calimani, Riccardo. 2017. *Storia del ghetto di Venezia. Gli ebrei e la Serenissima Repubblica*, Milano: Mondadori.
- Capelli, Piero ed. 2020. Foreword, *Skenè. Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies, Jewish Theatres* 6 (2): 5-14.
- Cebà, Ansaldo. 1623. *Lettere di Ansaldo Cebà scritte a Sarra Copia e dedicate a Marc'Antonio Doria*, Genova: per Giuseppe Pavoni.
- 1615. *La Reina Esther*, Genova: per Giuseppe Pavoni.
- Fortis, Umberto. 2003. *La "Bella Hebraea". Poetessa nel ghetto di Venezia del '600*, Torino: Silvio Zamorani Editore.
- Genette, Gérard. 1997. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1987), ed. Richard A. Macksey, trans. Jane E. Lewin, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Grendler, Paul F. 1975. "The Roman Inquisition and the Venetian Press, 1540-1605". *The Journal of Modern History* 47 (1): 48-65.
- Harrán, Don ed. and trans. 2009. *Sarra Copia Sulam. Jewish Poet and Intellectual in Seventeenth-Century Venice*. Chicago and London: Chicago University Press.
- Infelise, Mario. 1997. "Ex ignoto notus? Note sul tipografo Sarzina e l'Accademia degli Incogniti". In *Libri, Tipografi, Biblioteche. Ricerche storiche dedicate a Luigi Balsamo*, edited by Arnaldo Ganda, Elisa Grignani, and Albeerto Petrucciani, vol. 1, 207-23. Firenze: Leo S. Olschki Editore.
- Lelli, Fabrizio. 2020. "Italian Jews and Theatre in Early Modern Italy". *Skenè. JTDS* 6 (2): 15-30.
- Modena, Leon (forthcoming). *Esther: a Tragedy Taken from the Holy Scripture*, edited and translated by Susan Payne. Skenè. Texts. Pisa: ETS.
- 1988. *The Autobiography of a Seventeenth-Century Venetian Rabbi. Leon Modena's Life of Judah*, edited and translated by Mark R. Cohen. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- 1619. *L'Ester. Tragedia Tratta dale Sacre Scritture*, Venezia: per Giacomo Sarzina.
- Piattelli, Abramo A. 1968. "Ester: L'unico dramma di Leon da Modena giunto fino a

- noi". *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 34 (3): 163-72.
- Roth, Cecil. 1943. "'Salusque Lusitano' (An Essay in Disentanglement)". *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 34 (1): 65-85.
- Sarnelli, Mauro. 2004. "Presenze della cultura ebraica nella Venezia del primo Seicento". *Studi veneziani* 57: 165-76.
- Scordari, Chiara Carmen. 2020. "Behind multiple masks: Leon Modena's diasporic tragedy *L'Ester* in Seventeenth-Century Venice". *Skenè. JTDS* 6 (2): 53-70.
- Smith, Helen and Wilson, Louise, eds. 2011. *Renaissance Paratexts*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Štollova, Jitka. 2018. "Reading Dramatic Character through *Dramatis Personae* in Early Modern Printed Drama". *Studies in Philology* 115 (2): 312-42.
- Westwater, Lynn Lara. 2020. *Sarra Copia Sulam. A Jewish Salonnière and the Press in Counter-Reformation Venice*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

