

Viewing the Stars from the Rialto: Astrological Dialogues in Sixteenth-Century Venice

Dario Tessicini, *Durham University*

THE *DIALOGO DEL GOBBO DA RIALTO*, et Marocco dalle pipone dalle colonne di S. Marco (fig. 1) is a rare and little-known pamphlet that stages an oral conversation between two talking statues about the comet of 1577.¹ Comprising four leaves, the *Dialogo* looks similar to many other inexpensive and quickly produced imprints churned out by the Venetian printing industry at the time.² It has no frontispiece or illustrations, except for a stock and worn-out woodblock figure. The first line of the title and the name of the author, “Antonio Glisente bresciano,” appear in capital letters on the first page, while italics are used throughout with only very few paragraph breaks. The colophon is missing, together with any indication of the date or place of publication. The appearance of the comet in early November 1577 establishes the earliest date of publication, while the absence of references to its disappearance (January 26, 1578) may indicate a

Contact Dario Tessicini at Durham University, Elvet Riverside, New Elvet, Durham DH1 3JT (dario.tessicini@durham.ac.uk).

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1. The complete title is *Dialogo del Gobbo da Rialto, et Marocco / dalle pipone dalle colonne di S. Marco, / sopra la Cometa alli giorni passati apparsa su nel cielo. // di M. Antonio Glisente Bresciano* (n.p., n.d. [possibly Venice, 1577]). As far as I could ascertain, the *Dialogo* survives in four copies, three of which I consulted in Venice at the Biblioteca Marciana (D206D and Misc 1631) and Museo Correr (P.D. 8512). Another copy at the University of Toronto, Thomas Fisher Rare Books Library, was consulted on my behalf by Nicholas Tersptra, whom I wish to thank.

2. On “large-circulation imprints” in early modern Venice, see Mario Infelise, *Prima dei giornali: Alle origini della pubblica informazione (secoli XVI e XVII)* (Rome, 2002); Laura Carnelos, “*Con libri alla mano*”: *L'editoria di larga diffusione a Venezia tra Sei e Settecento* (Milan, 2013); and Rosa Salzberg, *Ephemeral City: Cheap Print and Urban Culture in Renaissance Venice* (Manchester, 2014).

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DIALOGO DEL GOBBO DA RIALTO, ET MAROCCO
dalle pipone dalle colonne di S. Marco,

Sopra la Cometa alli giorni passati apparsa su nel Cielo.

DI M. ANTONIO GLISENTE BRESCIANO.

GOBBO. Io ho piu uolte sentito dire à molti di quelli Mercatanti che à me praticano intorno sulla piazza doue io sto, che gli è cosa dolcissima hauer cōpagno con il quale si possa cōferire gli chiribizzi che passano per la testa, causati dalle chimere, che si sentono formare da alcuni, per laqual cosa mi ho risolto trouarmi un amico, con il quale possa con lui di queste cose ragionando, prèdermi qualche pezzo di piacere, & sono piu giorni, che mi uenne questo pensiero, ma nō ho fin hora trouato alcuno che mi aggrada, se ben ne ho prouati alcuni, & uado fra me tutt hora pensando qual mi debba eleggere à questa impresa. At fine mi risoluo, che attorno alle due colonne da S. Marco stanno molti miei amici, quali tengono diuerse sorte di frutti in certe corbette di pietra, & stantiano sempre in quel luoco, come proprii guardiani delle colonne: io uoglio eleggermi uno di questi, perche essi fanno molte cose, & intendono le nuoue che uengono de Levante: Talche agiongendo gli quelle che io sento di questa piazza, & quelle che uengono de Ponente, potremo anchora noi formare quante chimere piaceranno à noi, & uoglio chiamare Marocco dalle pipone, perche so ch'egli è mio amico, & che ogn'anno manda a star con meco dei suoi amici per qualche giorno, onde potrò ragionare con lui allegramente, perche mi risoluerà molte cose: & sarà bene che io stesso lo chiami, perche lui conoscerà la mia uoce, & mi risponderà. Ho Marocco dalle pipone. **MAROCO.** Che dianol è quello, che si forte mi chiama Marocco, che dappoi che nacqui in questo luogo mai piu mi ho sentito chiamare per tal nome: egli è il Gobbo da Rialto, che lo conosco alla uoce, certo gli è stato detto qualche cosa che non gli piace. Io gli uoglio rispondere anchora megridando, di modo che forse stornirò qualch'uno che mi adira, & farò andare la mia uoce da l'uno à l'altro Mare. Ho Gobbo, non posso uenire da te, perche son congiunto con la colonna de S. Marco, in piazza de S. Marco, ne mi posso partire dalla sua guardia, ma se tu uoi qualche cosa, parla, che ti risponderò. **GOBBO.** Statti pur al tuo luogo, che non uoglio altro che ragionar con te, di quelle cose che tutto il giorno sento gridare quasul mio ponte, della Cometa, che è stata uisita questi giorni passati su nell'aere. **M.** Miguardaua bene se tu mi uolenti parlare di qualche cosa importante, & non di queste fandonie, delle quali quasi mai si puosapere veritate alcuna. **G.** Non dir così Marocco, che queste sono cose dette da persone, che fanno gran professione di Astrologhi. **M.** Poca cosa è il far professione di Astrologhi, ma il tutto consiste essere boni Astrologhi, delli quali à questo tempo pochi si ritrouano, & io odo certi Astrologuzzi, che quasi

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Figure 1. First page of Antonio Glisenti, *Dialogo del Gobbo da Rialto*, fol. A1r. (© Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali e del Turismo: Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana.)

terminus ante quem.³ Various types of astrological texts were popular throughout Europe, ranging from annual *tacui* to prognostics, *discorsi*, dialogues, poems, and broadsides. As the studies by Ottavia Niccoli, Elide Casali, and others have shown, prognostications circulated widely throughout the sixteenth century and beyond. Their production in print surged on the occasion of regular celestial events and unexpected appearances, such as eclipses and planetary conjunctions, comets and new stars.⁴ Pamphlets on the comet of 1577 were published while the phenomenon was still visible in order to capitalize on a novelty when it had the full attention of potential readers. This is also the case of the *Dialogo del Gobbo da Rialto*, one of a copious number of works produced in Venice and its territory, with which it shares subject matter and genre conventions.⁵

This article will put to the test the *Dialogo*'s unassuming typicality by investigating the way in which the conversation it purports to represent relates to Venice's social and cultural environment. The dialogue is imagined to take place within the public space of the city, as the statues speak from their locations in the Rialto and San Marco, and their voices travel across the Mercerie, the thoroughfare that connects them. While the built space between the statues provides the static settings of the conversation, the flow of information taking place within that space represents a model to which the dialogue aspires. The dialogue between the two statues originates from the desire of one of them to replicate the exchange of news and gossip in the streets and squares of Venice. Moreover, not just one dialogue takes place in the *Dialogo*. The penultimate section of this article will recount how the *Dialogo* is far from existing in exemplary isolation but is connected to other pamphlets and *dialoghi* with which it constitutes a shared cultural environment.

THE *DIALOGO* AND VENICE

The fictional dialogue is securely anchored to the physical presence in the city of the two characters that animate it. Gobbo and Marocco are in fact still visible today in the same sites as they were at the time of the publication of the *Dialogo*. Gobbo di Rialto is in the Sotoportego del Banco Giro, in the square that faces the

3. On the comet's appearance and its observations, see Gary W. Kronk, *Cometography: A Catalog of Comets*, 5 vols. (Cambridge, 2000–2010), 1:317–20.

4. See Ottavia Niccoli, *Prophecy and People in Renaissance Italy* (Princeton, NJ, 1990); and Elide Casali, *Le spie del cielo: Oroscopi, lunari e almanacchi nell'Italia moderna* (Turin, 2003).

5. A study and bibliographical survey of the Italian literature on the comet of 1577 is in Dario Tessicini, "The Comet of 1577 in Italy: Astrological Prognostications and Cometary Theory at the End of the Sixteenth Century," in *Celestial Novelities on the Eve of the Scientific Revolution, 1540–1630*, ed. Dario Tessicini and Patrick Boner (Florence, 2013), 57–84.

Church of San Giacomo in the area of the Rialto Market, while Marocco dalle pipone is one of the four small and badly ruined statues of fruit merchants on the base of the column of San Marco in Piazzetta San Marco. Both were already part of Venetian life and culture when the *Dialogo* was published. Gobbo di Rialto was regarded as a Venetian counterpart to Rome's Pasquino, the talking statue that gave its voice and name to anonymous social and political satire through poems and other short texts pinned to its body. Similar writings to Roman *pasquinate* circulated in Venice in the first half of the sixteenth century, and some of them were affixed to the columns of the Church of San Giacomo, right in front of where the statue of the Gobbo was later placed.⁶ The Venetian "hunchback" was sculpted in 1541 by Pietro di Salò (1500–1561), an assistant of Jacopo Sansovino during the works for the restoration of the Rialto.⁷ It represents a naked and crouched atlantid that supports a short flight of steps. Its current location is adjacent to one of the ancient truncated columns used for public proclamations—the "pietra del bando." The stairs on the back of Gobbo served the practical purpose of allowing the town crier to reach an elevated position in one of the busiest squares of Venice, facilitating the *grida* and the circulation of government deliberations. It also appears that over time Gobbo acquired a secondary function in the city's rites of punishment, as the statue became the end point of a public "walk of shame" for thieves and other criminals who were ritualistically flogged along the route between San Marco and the Rialto.⁸ As reported by a contemporary chronicle, the punishment ended when the criminal kissed the statue of Gobbo, but the practice was prohibited later on and replaced by a kiss to an

6. The term *pasquinate* applied to Venetian anonymous writings occurs for the first time in Marin Sanudo's diary (November 29, 1532). Satirical poetry against courtesans and their clients affixed near the Gobbo is reported in Arturo Graf, *Attraverso il cinquecento* (Turin, 1888), 186–87. On Gobbo di Rialto and the early circulation of political posters in Venice, see Filippo de Vivo, *Patrizi, informatori, barbieri: Politica e comunicazione a Venezia nella prima età moderna* (Milan, 2012), 265–66, 272–80. Still useful are the articles by Andrea Moschetti, "Il Gobbo di Rialto e le sue relazioni con Pasquino," *Nuovo Archivio Veneto* 5 (1893): 5–93, and "Ancora del Gobbo di Rialto," *Nuovo Archivio Veneto* 11 (1896): 363–93.

7. The sculpting of the statue is recounted in Giorgio Vasari, *Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architetti nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, ed. Rosanna Bettarini and Paola Barocchi, 3 vols. (Florence, 1966), 1:190: "[Pietro da Salò] fece ancora . . . un'altra nella piazza del Rialto di Vinezia, per sostegno di quella pietra dove si fanno i bandi publici, che si chiama il Gobbo di Rialto." In *Le lettere di Messer Andrea Calmo, riprodotte sulle stampe migliori, con introduzione ed illustrazioni di Vittorio Rossi* (Turin, 1888), 1:85, the statue is called "el gobo de la piera del bando." On the works in the area of the Rialto, see Deborah Howard, *Jacopo Sansovino: Architecture and Patronage in Renaissance Venice* (London, 1987), 52–61.

8. On Venice's system of punishment, its relation to the urban spaces, and the *chemin de l'honte*, see the analysis in Elizabeth Crouzet-Pavan, "*Sopra le acque salse*": *Espaces, pouvoir et société à Venise à la fin du Moyen Age*, 2 vols. (Rome, 1992), 1:902–32.

image of the Christ, an act more in tune with the symbolic meanings associated with public punishment.⁹ Moreover, recent evidence provided by Laura Carnelos shows that from 1543 the same punishment was inflicted on those caught printing or selling books without permission, including, as the archival record explicitly notes, astrological prognostications sold in the Rialto.¹⁰

Both aspects of Gobbo's role in the civic rituals are alluded to in the *Dialogo*. As will be shown in more detail later, the exchange of news between the statues imitates the way in which the town crier spread the news to the city, as the two interlocutors overcome their physical distance by using their voices to cross the space that separates them.¹¹ The impossibility of movement (the statues' immobility eventually becomes part of the narrative of the *Dialogo*) is compensated by some "friends" of Marocco. They are sent regularly to Gobbo, thus representing in the fiction of the *Dialogo* the celebrated and multifunctional walking route between San Marco and Rialto.¹² The "friends" may be an allusion to the public humiliation mentioned above, which in this case would also be an ironic self-reference, as the punishment could apply to the author and to those involved in the production of the *Dialogo* itself.

The second interlocutor of the *Dialogo*, "Marocco dalle pipone dalle colonne di S. Marco," is, like Gobbo, associated with a location of prime importance in Venetian life. Located at the base of the column of San Marco, the statue of Marocco was probably carved when the column was erected in the square in the 1260s, and it represents a vendor of melons—*pipone* or *popone* is Venetian for

9. See the *Cronaca del Barbo* (Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Misc marciana it. VII, 66), cited in Moschetti, "Il Gobbo di Rialto," 6: "jera costume in Venetia che, quando era terminato un per ladro over per altro ad esser frustado da s. Marco a Rialto, li malfattori, come erano in Rialto, andavano a basar il Gobbo di pietra viva che tien la scala che ascende alla colonna delle grida; fu terminado che più questi tali non andassero a far tale effetto et però fu posto in la colonna sopra il canto sotto il pergolo grandio in Rialto, una pietra con una croce, et uno s. Marco di sopra acciò li frustadi vadano de cetero a basar la detta [croce] et fu posta a dì 13 marzo 1545." On the religious aspects of public humiliation, and the relations with the *calvario*, cf. Filippo Fineschi, "La rappresentazione della morte sul patibolo nella liturgia fiorentina della Congregazione dei Neri," *Archivio Storico Italiano* 150 (1992): 805–46.

10. Laura Carnelos, "Words on the Street: Selling Small Printed 'Things' in 16th- and 17th-Century Venice," in *News Networks in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Noah Moxham and Joad Raymond (Leiden, forthcoming). I am grateful to the author for allowing me to read a preprint of her article.

11. On sound in the early modern city, and on its religious and political aspects, see the seminal works by David Garrioch, "Sounds of the City: The Soundscapes of Early Modern European Towns," *Urban History* 30 (2003): 5–25; and Niall Atkinson, "The Republic of Sound: Listening to Florence at the Threshold of the Renaissance," *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 16 (2013): 57–84.

12. Glisenti, *Dialogo*, fol. A1r: "et voglio chiamare Marocco dalle pipone, perché so ch'egli è mio amico, et che ogn'anno manda a star con meco dei suoi amici per qualche giorno." On walking in Venice, see Filippo de Vivo's article in this issue.

melons.¹³ The area around San Marco and the Palazzo Ducale was the epicenter of Venetian politics and state rituals, but it was also used for commerce, the administration of justice, and the circulation of news and official decrees. Similar to the Rialto, San Marco hosted a market with stalls and had its own “pietra del bando” (once provided with stairs) adjacent to the Basilica, and the space between the two columns was used for public executions.¹⁴ Anonymous poems were affixed to the columns in San Marco as in other squares and landmarks of Venice, but before the publication of the *Dialogo*, there is no known tradition of Marocco as a talking statue. Despite his public silence, though, Marocco takes center stage in the *Dialogo*: he is the *princeps sermonis*, the authoritative voice that provides the explanations concerning the comet and astrology.

The proliferation of talking statues and their literary success in the sixteenth century paved the way for the development of their fictional conversations as a literary subgenre—most notably Pasquino with his peer Marphurius (Marforio) and occasionally with Gobbo di Rialto.¹⁵ In fact, the first contact on record between Gobbo and Pasquino also marks Gobbo’s first appearance in print, as he takes on the role of translator in a *bergamasco* adaptation of the first canto of the *Orlando furioso*. The slightly incongruous link between the Venetian statue and this dialect translation is due to Gobbo’s supposed provenance from the city of Bergamo, one of the Serenissima’s territories in Lombardy.¹⁶ In fact, both the

13. See Manlio Cortelazzo, *Dizionario veneziano della lingua e della cultura popolare nel XVI secolo* (Padua, 2007), s.v. “pipona.”

14. The stairs near the “pietra del bando” in San Marco are visible in the painting by Lazzaro Bastiani, *La Piazzetta* (Venice, Museo Correr). On San Marco, its columns, and the uses of its spaces, see Manuela Morresi, *Piazza San Marco: Istituzioni, poteri e architettura a Venezia nel primo Cinquecento* (Milan, 1999); Giuseppe Samonà and Silvano Boldrin, *Piazza San Marco, l'architettura, la storia, le funzioni* (Padua, 1970); Holger A. Klein, “Refashioning Byzantium in Venice, c. 1200–1400,” in *San Marco, Byzantium and the Myths of Venice*, ed. Henry Maguire and Robert Nelson (Washington, DC, 2010), 193–225. See also Edward Muir and Ronald F. E. Weissman, “Social and Symbolic Places in Renaissance Venice and Florence,” in *The Power of Place: Bringing Together Geographical and Sociological Imaginations*, ed. John A. Agnew and James S. Duncan (Boston, 1989), 81–104.

15. On the *petromachias* as a subgenre of *pasquinate* (although with notable differences from the anonymous poetry commonly associated with them), see Chiara Lastraoli, “Petromachies Renaissantes: De la Dispute Rituelle au Combat des Idées à l'Ombre des ‘Pierres Parlantes,’” in *Die Kunst des Streitens: Inszenierung, Formen und Funktionen öffentliches Streits in historischer Perspektive*, ed. Marc Laureys and Roswitha Simons (Bonn, 2010), 219–43, which refers to Du Bellay’s *Satyre de M. Pierre du Caignet sur la Petromachie de l’université de Paris* (1552) as initiator of the genre. On sixteenth-century dialogues, see Virginia Cox, *The Renaissance Dialogue: Literary Dialogue in Its Social and Political Context*, Castiglione to Galileo (Cambridge, 1992).

16. See *Orlando furioso. De misser Lodovic Ferraris, novament compost in buna lingua da Berghem . . . indrizat dal Gono [sic] da Venesia a M. Pasqui* (Venice, 1553; this is the date according to the *Censimento nazionale delle edizioni italiane del XVI secolo* (Edit16), Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo Unico; sometimes

sculptor of Gobbo, Pietro di Salò, and the author of the *Dialogo*, Antonio Glisenti from Brescia, were Lombard immigrants to Venice (and Glisenti may have chosen Gobbo on account of their common origin). At the time of the *Dialogo*'s publication, there had already been occasional literary exchanges between Gobbo and Pasquino. Letters from Pasquino to Gobbo and vice versa circulated in the second half of the sixteenth century, beginning with *Una piacevole lettera del mordace Pasquino Romano al Gobbo di Rialto* in May 1554, which was then reprinted in 1564 and again in 1586 along with Gobbo's reply (the *Lettera et disfida . . . Con la risposta pronta del Gobbo a Pasquino*). Further exchanges were dominated by political matters: Pasquino writes against Gobbo during the Interdetto,¹⁷ while later on the two statues reconcile, and in fact in 1671 Gregorio Leti imagines a "Pasquino exiled" having several conversations in Venice with Gobbo (*Visioni politiche sopra gli interessi più reconditi, di tutti i prencipi e repubbliche della Christianità. Divise in varij sogni, e ragionamenti tra Pasquino e il Gobbo di Rialto, "Germania" 1671*).¹⁸

Little is known about the author of the *Dialogo*. His family, whose name was commonly spelled "Glisenti," was from Vestone in Valle Sabbia, a small town near Brescia and part of the Venetian *terraferma* state since 1439. Antonio lived between 1540 and 1602 and spent his active life in the service of the government of the Republic. He was a land surveyor and irrigation and reclamation expert who worked together with the "provveditore sopra gli beni inculti," the official in charge of managing the expansion of the Venetian farmland. To him is attributed a corpus of works on agriculture, health care, and the plague of 1575–77: the *Trattato del regimento del vivere, et delle altre cose che deveno usare gli huomini per preservarsi sani nelli tempi pestilenti*, the *Summario delle cause che, dispongono i corpi de gli huomini a patire la corrottione pestilente del presente anno 1576*,

this work is dated 1550). In a contemporary pamphlet, published for the first time in 1554, Gobbo portrays himself as a porter from Bergamo working in the Rialto market: see *Lettera e disfida che manda il mordace Pasquino romano al Gobbo di Rialto. Con la pronta risposta del Gobbo a Pasquino. Nuovamente ristampata* (Venice, 1586; rev. ed., 1596): "Da Bergamo a Venetia son venuto, / Per starvi, perché son tutto Marchesco," cited in Moschetti, "Il Gobbo di Rialto," 18; and de Vivo, *Patrizi, informatori, barbieri*, 276–77.

17. *Risposta di Maestro Pasquino cittadino romano a quanto gli scrive il Gobbo di Rialto. Sopra, la scomunica pubblicata contra la Serenissima Republica di Venetia da Papa Paolo V* (1606). A Latin version is in Paolo Sarpi, *Consideratio censurarum S. Papae Pauli V in sereniss. Rempub. Venetam* (Venice, 1610) with the title *Responsum Magistri Pasquini civis Romani ad id quod scripserat ad eum Gobbus de Realto Patricius Venetus*, 45–56.

18. Moschetti, "Il Gobbo di Rialto," refers to a further dialogue involving the Gobbo di Rialto: Luigi Manzini, *L'ombra di Aristofane atheniese. Discorsi di frate Manzino e del Gobbo da Rialto. Divisa in tre notti* (Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, ms. Marc. It. cl. X 189), a polemical work composed around 1636.

and one polemical defense of his work titled *Risposta fatta per il sumario della cause pestilenti . . . alla apologia dell'eccell. m. Anibal Raimondo veronese* (of which, more below). All three were published in Venice between the end of 1576 and the beginning of 1577, months before the presumed date of publication of the *Dialogo del Gobbo da Rialto*.¹⁹

The conversation between the two statues is initiated by Gobbo and focuses on the transmission of information through oral exchange. In the opening lines of the *Dialogo*, Gobbo hears the conversations of the merchants on the square in the Rialto and notices what great profit they receive from them, despite some of the gossiping (*chiribizzi* and *chimere*) that they share. Nonetheless, Gobbo understands the advantages of discussing the news of the day with a companion. Since his crouched position prevents him from observing the comet directly, his knowledge is never informed by firsthand observation and needs the reports of others.²⁰ After a few days of thinking, Gobbo decides that his most appropriate companion would be “one of his many friends” around the columns of Piazzetta San Marco. Like those in the Rialto, these “friends” belong to the merchant class (the statues at the bases of the two columns represent different types of sellers). Gobbo’s choice is dictated in the first place by the merchants’ location within the city. Being placed in San Marco, at the opposite side of the Rialto, they receive and circulate the news that arrives from the East—a reference to the area as Venice’s door to the Orient—while Gobbo in the Rialto has access to the news coming from the West: “I want to choose one of these [friends] because they know many things and hear the news from the Levant. So that in adding to what I hear from them the things that I hear in this square, along with whatever comes from the West, we too can create whatever rumours we would like.”²¹ The dialogue is thus established on the grounds of sociospatial relations (the position of the statues in relation to the activities that take place in their locations) that

19. Biographical notes on Antonio Glisenti are in Antonio Schivardi, *Biografia dei medici illustri bresciani* (Brescia, 1839), 197, where the *Trattato* and the *Sommario* are attributed to the “medico e naturalista” [Giovanni] Antonio Glisenti di Vestone, deceased in 1576. Compare Primo Griguolo, “Il diploma di laurea in arti e medicina di Giovanni Antonio Glisenti da Vestone (24 gennaio 1540),” *Quaderni per la storia dell’Università di Padova* 43 (2010): 303–8; Alfredo Bonomi, *I Glisenti: Cinquecento anni di storia; Industria, arte, politica, cultura* (Brescia, 2004); Samuel K. Cohn, *Cultures of Plague: Medical Thinking at the End of the Renaissance* (Cambridge, 2011), 189–91.

20. Glisenti, *Dialogo*, fol. Aiir: “Che cosa sono queste Comete, dimmi di gratia, perché io sto con la testa sempre bassa, & non le posso vedere.”

21. Ibid., fol. Air: “Io voglio eleggermi uno di questi, perché essi sanno molte cose, et intendono le nuove che vengono de Levante. Tal che aggiongendogli quelle che io sento di questa piazza, et quelle che vengono de Ponente, potremo anchora noi formare quante chimere piaceranno a noi.” Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

Gobbo perceives to be most appropriate to his purposes. In addition, his choice of Marocco follows the social and literary convention of finding a peer with whom to enter in a dialogue, in this case another talking statue in a public square.

Genre conventions of literary dialogues would have allowed the conversation to take place in written form, such as via an exchange of short poems or letters. In fact, this is the format most commonly associated with the fictional communication between talking statues. As mentioned above, Pasquino's conversations with Marforio and Gobbo adopt the written form of the epistolary exchange. In this case, the "voice" of the talking statues refers to communications in writing rather than sounds articulated through their mouths. Instead, the fiction of the *Dialogo del Gobbo da Rialto* is based on an oral dialogue whose existence depends on the interlocutors' relations with the urban environment. The statues' inability to move and the crouched position of Gobbo, which prevents him from the direct observation of the comet, shape the way in which the dialogue develops, as both interlocutors have limited access to either direct knowledge or direct communication of information. Gobbo and Marocco overcome their inherent limitations with their voices, shouting across the streets of Venice.²² The beginning of the dialogue between the statues emphasizes the performative aspects of the conversation, starting with the interjection used by Gobbo to get Marocco's attention:

Gobbo: *Hoo*, Marocco dalle Pipone!

Marocco: Who the devil is calling me so loudly? . . . It is the Gobbo di Rialto, I recognize him from his voice. . . . I will answer him by shouting so loud that I might make some listener deaf, and my voice will travel from one sea to the other.²³

The nature of the communication is repeatedly stressed by the sequence of terms referring to oral exchanges. Gobbo calls up Marocco, and his loud voice is recognized by Marocco who, in turn, replies in the same fashion ("gridando") so that his voice travels from one side of the city to the other. Oral communication is thus fundamental to the establishment of the fiction of the dialogue. Its narra-

22. On the subversive meaning of screaming in public places, see Atkinson, "Republic of Sound," 81–83.

23. Glisenti, *Dialogo*, fol. [A1r]: "Hoo Marocco dalle pipone.—MAROCCO. Che diavol è quello, che si forte mi chiama Marocco. . . . egli è il Gobbo da Rialto, che lo conosco alla voce. . . . Io gli voglio rispondere anchora me gridando, di modo che forse stornirò qualch'uno che mi udirà, & farò andare la mia voce da l'uno a l'altro Mare."

tive depends on a literary artifice rooted in the attempt to replicate the exchanges of information on the comet within and across the Rialto and San Marco. In turn, these two places both separate and unite the statues. The dialogue presupposes the social exchanges taking place along the commercial route connecting the two locations, but at the same time the two statues cannot physically enter this space. They must thus resort to making the sound of their voices travel back and forth between the Rialto and San Marco.

“A RIALTO SI SPACCIA PIÙ UN PRONOSTICO D’UN CERETANO”

Sparked by Gobbo’s insistent curiosity, the central part of the *Dialogo* is dedicated to the examination of the nature and meaning of the comet. The prognostication of the future effects of the comet is the reason why Gobbo contacts Marocco in the first place, and the desire for a credible explanation, better than anything he had heard in the market square, informs the content of the *Dialogo*. Astrological pamphlets circulated widely in the city, and according to Tomaso Garzoni (quoted in the title of this section) the epicenter of their diffusion was the area of the Rialto, where charlatans and other peddlers tended to converge in numbers.²⁴ Gobbo’s perseverance in requesting a prognostication is grounded in public interest in the comet: “everybody wants to observe it, and many express their opinions.” Ultimately Marocco succumbs to pressure, but contrary to expectations the *Dialogo* takes a stance against the astrologers by claiming that the comet originated from meteorological perturbations rather than from celestial influence. Moreover, Marocco marks a distance between his own outlook on the comet and the popular market-square prognostications. He worries that providing a prognostication will somewhat ruin his reputation, as he will be mistaken for a charlatan (“ceratano”) and as on a par with the astrologers advertising their services “on the bridge.”²⁵

24. Garzoni laments the popularity of astrological prognostications sold by charlatans in the Rialto at the expense of more respectable literature on sale in the bookshops of the Mercerie. The second part of the quotation reads: “che in merciaria qualche compositione fatta da un valent’huomo.” I owe this quotation to Salzberg, *Ephemeral City*, 54 n. 38, who notes how Garzoni’s association between astrology sold in the Rialto and poetry in the Mercerie may not correspond to the real distribution of sellers and goods, different activities, and social classes, as they all tended to rub shoulders within the city center.

25. Glisenti, *Dialogo*, fols. [A4r–v]: “[Marocco]: Questo te lo hanno detto quei tuoi astrologhi che gridano sul ponte, & te lo dirò [the meaning of the comet] per satisfarti, se bene diranno che mi vesto de gli suoi panni. . . . Tu vorresti che entrassi nel numero de Ceretani.” On the wide circulation of printed materials sold by peddlers, see Angela Nuovo, *The Book Trade in the Italian Renaissance* (Leiden, 2013), 315–27, 315, who shows how “a large portion of the urban population came in contact with printed materials in the streets.” Lunaries and astrological pamphlets were among the printed matter circulated by peddlers. On the “cerretani” in the Italian printing industry, see Gian-

In explaining the origin of the comet to Gobbo, who cannot see it, Marocco follows Aristotelian meteorology, the dominant model of explanation at the time. Comets are “vapors” ascended to the region of air and produced by the same primary qualities that produce changes and variations on the earth.²⁶ To make his point, he asks Gobbo to agree on a set of nine assumptions, starting with an application to meteorology of the principle of noncontradiction (i.e., that two contrary qualities cannot exist at the same time in the same body).²⁷ Heat is contrary to cold, humid to dry, light to heavy, and corruptible to incorruptible, so that each pair cannot be predicated at the same time on a given body or substance. Each member of the same pair indicates “privation” of the other: cold is lack of heat, humidity of dryness, and so on. The next step is the analysis of the four elements: earth and water are heavy, while air and fire are light, meaning their tendency is to descend or ascend, respectively. They also form pairs of contraries, like water and fire. Gobbo raises doubt on this last point, claiming that water and fire are not always opposites, but Marocco clarifies by referring to the previous “concessions” and, importantly, by bringing in examples from his observations of the natural world. Finally, it is agreed that since comets are not eternal, their bodies are corruptible, while stars and planets are incorruptible.²⁸

This set of principles allows Marocco to explain the current comet. Since all comets are corruptible while primary elements are not, comets cannot be formed by one primary element alone. Thus, they can only be mixed bodies formed by a combination of primary qualities. Marocco examines the different alternatives, but at the end he concludes that the comet can only be formed by the thinnest and lightest parts of the elements. Hot and dry exhalations ascend to the upper sphere of air by way of natural heat, and there they stay until they are completely consumed. The conclusion is that comets are meteorological phenomena (where meteorology is defined in Aristotelian terms as the study of changes applicable to the region below the moon) whose occurrence is determined by exceptional and unpredictable variations in the terrestrial atmosphere. These “inequalities,” such

carlo Petrella, “Ippolito Ferrarese, a Travelling ‘Cerretano’ and Publisher in Sixteenth-Century Italy,” in *Print Culture and Peripheries in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Benito Rial Costas (Leiden, 2012), 202–26 and n. 2 for further bibliography.

26. On Aristotelian meteorology, see Liba Taub, *Ancient Meteorology* (London, 2003); and Craig Martin, *Renaissance Meteorology: Pomponazzi to Descartes* (Baltimore, 2011).

27. Glisenti, *Dialogo*, fols. Aiiir–[A2v].

28. Ibid., fols. [A2v]–[A3r]: “le Comete sono corruttibili, et gli elementi semplici sono incorruttibili, dal che seguita, che le Comete non siano di alcuno di essi. . . . Resta adunque . . . che le Comete siano di sostantie elementari, di quel modo composte, che tutte l’altre cose corruttibili si compongono, ma però delle parti piu sottili.”

as extreme and unseasonable heat or humidity, are responsible for different types of phenomena, as exemplified by droughts, inundations, earthquakes, comets, and other perturbations. Some of them affect health as well and are responsible for the spread of epidemics, such as the recent plague of 1575–77, which is still fresh in Marocco's mind.²⁹

Prognostications on the basis of the relative positions of the celestial bodies at the time of the comet's appearance were the staple of astrological pamphlets. The *Dialogo* is no exception, although the prognostication serves a different purpose than forecasting the consequences of the comet's appearance. In fact, when Gobbo asks whether comets have any astrological significance, Marocco explains that they do not, as they are corruptible and meteorological by nature, and that the stars do not have any influence ("virtù attrattiva") on the alterations to the matter of which comets are formed. However, when pressed by his interlocutor, Marocco provides his own "infallible prognostication," which constitutes both the *Dialogo*'s main attack on astrology and its satire. The prognostication is an exercise in banality and truisms and serves the purpose of exposing the fallacies and ambiguities of astrological predictions:

some prince or great lord, a baron or one of his vassals will die before the end of the year, and all princes will try to keep their realms and therefore it may be that some will move against others that want to unseat them. Great disputes will take place in the republics because of their governments and conflicts among individuals. Moving down the social scale, artists will complain about their earnings, and universal famine will affect those who have no money for their livelihood. And for this reason poor people will suffer. . . . There will be earthquakes, and if this cold continues people will die in the spring. Pregnant women will give birth to either boys or girls, and a few or none [of their children] will look alike. And if the harvest is good there will be plenty.³⁰

Gobbo di Rialto responds with a tongue-in-cheek remark that this prognostication cannot fail ("Certo che il tuo pronostico è infallibile") and asks Marocco why his forecast does not rely on established sources and authorities in order to support his opinions. The *Dialogo* concludes with a consideration of how true

29. Ibid., fol. [A4r].

30. Ibid., fol. [A4v].

learning does not require erudition and states that Marocco's knowledge comes from studying, practicing a profession (perhaps a reference to Glisenti's work as land surveyor), and his own observations of natural phenomena.

THE *DIALOGO*'S OTHER INTERLOCUTORS:

PEDRO, BERTOLI, AND FALABACCHIO

Within the fiction of the *Dialogo*, the audience would be a socially and culturally diverse array of passersby, who may casually hear the dialogue between the statues of Gobbo and Marocco taking place along the Rialto and San Marco and who may stop for a moment to listen more carefully, as if in an early modern version of the speaker's-corner debates. Correspondingly, given its genre, subject, choice of characters, and style, the *Dialogo* seems to be addressed to a wide and equally anonymous public intrigued by the astrological news of the day. In contrast to many prognostics and astrological pamphlets, however, the *Dialogo* criticizes credulity and charlatanism and discusses at some length the natural process that gave birth to the phenomenon of comets. From this point of view, the intellectual core of the *Dialogo* is primarily aimed at a learned and interested public able to understand and conversant with some complex tenets of Aristotelian meteorology and natural philosophy. There is no contrast between the low colloquial style of the *Dialogo* and its anti-astrological and naturalistic stances, which would normally be reserved for more high-minded works.³¹ In the second half of the sixteenth century, vernacular dialogues inspired by the Lucian-Erasmian model were often vehicles of polemical and satirical content addressed to a learned public. Moralistic satire was the preferred topic, but the genre allowed for the contamination of different styles and subjects, including astrology and the celestial novelties. Several works dedicated to the comet of 1577 adopt the dialogic genre, and some of them, which will be discussed below, are linked to Glisenti's *Dialogo*. In turn, the *Dialogo*'s relations with these other works raises the question of its intended public. As will be seen, while the *Dialogo*'s circulation in print signals its availability to interested readers, the same does not necessarily rule out targeting more specific audiences and interlocutors. In fact, the conversation between Gobbo and Marocco is not only addressed to a general audience acquainted with astrology and meteorology but is also an integral part of an ongoing debate consisting of short pamphlets published at close intervals and closely

31. On the typologies and aims of the Renaissance dialogues, and in particular those of the Lucianic type, with which the *Dialogo del Gobbo da Rialto* may be associated for its use of interlocutors of low social standing and its urban setting, see Cox, *Renaissance Dialogue*, 26–39.

connected to one another. Some of these works are contiguous to Glisenti's *Dialogo* and contribute to our understanding of its cultural environment.

The comet to which the *Dialogo* is dedicated was a European phenomenon visible from around November 8 or 9, 1577, to the end of January 1578. Celestial novelties of any kind were the subject of considerable interest within and beyond the realm of academic and scientific knowledge. Alongside learned publications, mostly in Latin and following conventional genres and modes of philosophical and scientific scholarship, a great number of other works populated bookshops and market stalls and circulated widely across European cities. More than one hundred works were published throughout Europe on the comet of 1577 alone, around a quarter of which were published in Italy in the months immediately after its appearance.³² As can be expected from the powerhouse of the Italian printing industry, Venice takes the lion's share for the number of works printed in its territory. These works cover a wide range of interests and literary genres, such as natural philosophy, astrological and religious writings, and poetry in both Latin and the vernacular. Seen from this perspective, Glisenti's *Dialogo* is by no means isolated with regard to its subject matter, style, or genre. Moreover, the polemic against the "astrologuzzi" and the "ceretani" signals the author's acquaintance with the astrological literature that circulated in the streets and the markets of Venice. In one of his comments against the astrologers, Gobbo even quotes the title of one *Pronostico e discorso* by Giovanni de' Neri.³³ It is in fact the existence of a widespread discussion on the comet that sets the dialogue in motion. Gobbo did not actually see the comet, but he hears conversations about it in the Rialto. Looking more closely at and around the *Dialogo*, it is possible to further refine its intellectual context and target audience.

As seen above, in the central part of the *Dialogo* Marocco discusses the comet from the point of view of Aristotelian meteorology. Two ideas are found to be at odds with the received wisdom and rejected emphatically. First, there is a

32. Historians of astronomy are well acquainted with the phenomenon, as it sparked a widespread debate that led ultimately to the dismissal of long-held cosmological doctrines. See the comprehensive Dorisse C. Hellman, *The Comet of 1577: Its Place in the History of Astronomy* (New York, 1944; rev. ed., 1971). On the circulation of information, cf. Adam Mosley, *Bearing the Heavens: Tycho Brahe and the Astronomical Community of the Late Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge, 2007). Italy is studied in Ottavio Besomi and Michele Camerota, *Galileo e il Parnaso Tychonico: Un capitolo inedito del dibattito sulle comete tra finzione letteraria e trattazione scientifica* (Florence, 2000).

33. See Glisenti, *Dialogo*, fol. A1v: "Adunque gli Astrologhi non dicono la verità: non hai tu sentito gridare in piazza dove ti stai, tanti pronostichi fatti sopra l'eclissar della Luna, e altre cose vere"; and Giovanni de' Neri, *Pronostico e discorso . . . sopra la cometa apparsa il mese di Novembre l'anno 1577. Con il giudizio dell'eclisse della Luna passato; et alcune particolarità* (Mantua, 1578).

“ridicola opinione” that the comet can be both dry and humid.³⁴ Second, several self-proclaimed “dotti” claimed that the astrological qualities of the stars operated above the terrestrial and humid vapors, raising them to the upper sphere of air. According to this opinion, the comet originated in the celestial sphere, thus implying that the stars are ultimately responsible for comets and that comets are objects of astrological significance due to the connection to the stars that formed them.³⁵ Both ideas had circulated in meteorological and astrological literature since at least the Middle Ages, but in this case Marocco has a precise target in mind, as his words correspond to the text of the Veronese astrologer Annibale Raimondo, who argued that “our comet of November 1577 is not formed entirely by dry exhalations, but also contains some humidity, which suggests temperance.”³⁶ Even though dryness is dominant in the comet, its nature still remains somewhat tempered. In addition, according to Raimondo, the exhalations that form comets are attracted by celestial bodies, so that the comets that are so produced fall under the influence of the stars that have exercised their influence over the terrestrial exhalations. Raimondo concludes his argument with an astrological prognostication according to which the comet falls under the influence of Jupiter and Venus.³⁷

Annibale Raimondo was known in the intellectual community for his polemical spirit. In the 1570s he engaged in an acrimonious and lengthy exchange of pamphlets on the new star of 1572 with Thaddaeus Hagecius, court physician to Emperor Rudolph II. This debate brought Raimondo European exposure as well as discredit when the Danish astronomer Tycho Brahe wrote to the Venetian Senate complaining about the Veronese.³⁸ Over the following two decades Raimondo continued to exercise his polemical vein through a series of astrological and medi-

34. Glisenti, *Dialogo*, fol. [A3r]: “Conchiudo adunque che le Comete non possano essere di alcune delle sopradette qualità composte, seguita, che vada a monte quella ridicola opinione, che questa Cometa 1577 sia di natura secca, con qualche poca humidità, essendo il secco per la terza sententia contrario all’humido, et per la prima non possono i contrari insieme rimanere.”

35. *Ibid.*, fol. [A3v].

36. Annibale Raimondo, *Discorso . . . Sopra la Nobilissima Cometa che cominciò apparire il Novembre 1577. non mai più veduta a ricordo de’ viventi in questa nostra regione una tanto nobile, & con tanta lunga, & larga coda* (Venice, 1577), fol. A4r: “La cometa nostra di Novembre 1577 non è formata di fumosità secche di tutto punto, anzi tiene un poco di humidità, che significa temperanza, et se bene la secchezza la signoreggia, non resta però che ella non sia temperata.”

37. *Ibid.*, fols. A2v–A3r.

38. Gabriele Coradeschi, “Contro Aristotele e gli aristotelici: Tycho Brahe e la *nova* del 1572 in Italia,” *Galilaeana* 6 (2009): 89–122. On Raimondo’s astrological activity in the mid-sixteenth century, see Monica Azzolini, “The Political Uses of Astrology: Predicting the Illness and Death of Princes, Kings and Popes in the Italian Renaissance,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 41 (2010): 135–45.

cal pamphlets. His interlocutors and opponents were astrologers and physicians active in Venice and nearby Padua and Verona. In 1576 Raimondo targeted Antonio Glisenti's *Sumario delle cause pestilenti*. The matter of the debate was the origin of the plague that hit Venice in 1575–76: while Raimondo argued that the disease originated from putrid waters after Venice's fresh water resources were polluted due to an exceptional flood that occurred a few months earlier, in his *Risposta*, printed in January 1577, Glisenti maintained the more conventional miasmatic explanation, according to which meteorological circumstances had produced the "corruption of the air" that caused the plague. In turn, other astrologers and physicians active in Venice intervened in the issue, producing a lively exchange of dialogues, *discorsi*, and short treatises between the beginning of the plague in summer 1575 and its end two years later.³⁹

From the copious Venetian literature on the comet and the plague, whose account exceeds the limits of this research, two works emerge as very similar to the *Dialogo del Gobbo da Rialto*. Both of them are dialogues that put on stage fictional characters taken from the popular tradition, and both have polemical purposes. They were published anonymously, but all evidence shows that Annibale Raimondo is the author of both of them. The first one, the *Dialogo sulla cometa fra Falabacchio e Zefiriele* is only extant as a manuscript of three sheets preserved in the Ambrosiana Library (fig. 2). It was written, and perhaps printed, between January and April 1578. The second, the *Dialogo astrologico. Pedro & Bertoli. Indirizzato a tutti quelli, che hanno veduto con sano occhio, la cometa il novembre 1577*, was printed in April 1578, as per its title page and colophon. The author's identity can be ascertained through the works' content, which is largely apologetic of Raimondo's work, and cross-references with other works and from an inscription on the manuscript of *Falabacchio contra Zefiriele*. At the top of the first page, a handwritten note from a later hand attributes the work to Annibale Raimondo. The name of the first character, Falabacchio, is taken from the Italian burlesque tradition. In Pulci's *Morgante* (canto 24), Falabacchio is a giant who fights together with his companion Cattabriga and Queen Anthea against the French. In the sixteenth century the episode was extracted from the *Morgante*

39. Among the authors who wrote on both the plague and the comet there are some known to Glisenti and Raimondo (of which, more below), such as the Veronese physicians Giuseppe Valdagno (or Valdagni), Tommaso "Zefiriele" Bovio, the historian from Vicenza Giacomo Marzari, and the physician Fausto Bucellenti. For more extensive discussion of the astrological, meteorological, and medical debate in Venice, see Paolo Ulvioni, *Astrologia, astronomia e medicina nella Repubblica Veneta tra cinque e seicento* (Trento, 1982); Cohn, *Cultures of Plague*, and *Venezia e la peste, 1348/1797* (Venice, 1979); Paolo Preto, *Peste e società a Venezia nel 1576* (Vicenza, 1978).

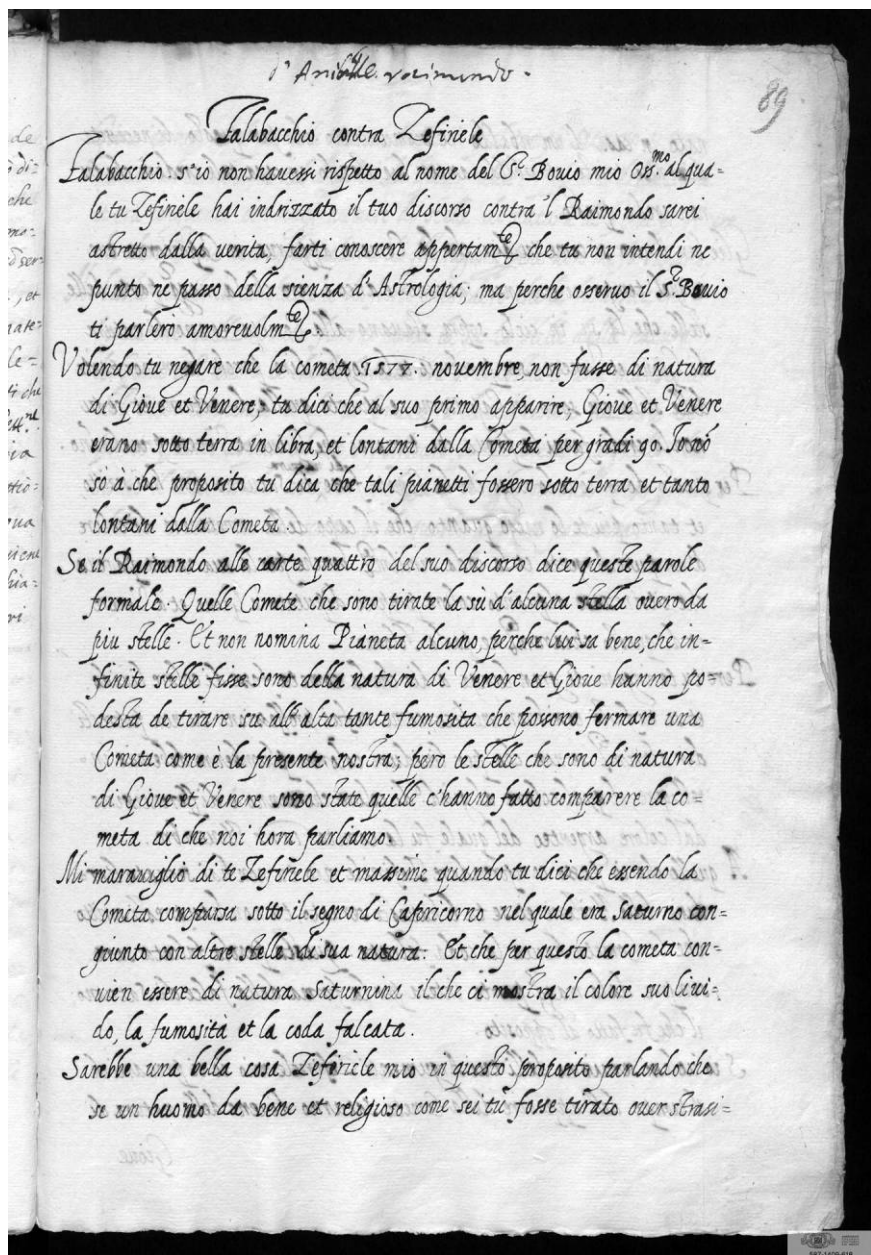


Figure 2. First page of *Falabacchio contra Zefiriele*, Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana, MS 95R sup., fol. 89r. (© Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana—Milano/De Agostini Picture Library.)

and printed separately in small pamphlets.⁴⁰ In turn, the name of the second character, Zefiriele, was chosen on astrological grounds by the Veronese physician and astrologer Tommaso Bovio.⁴¹ Bovio is in fact the explicit target of this short text, which begins with Falabacchio addressing “Zefiriele” as a spokesperson for Bovio. The dialogue originates from a previous attack by Zefiriele Bovio on Raimondo in his *Trattato di Zefiriele all[ia]s Thomaso Bovio . . . contra le sinistre opinioni*, published in Verona in 1578 (fig. 3). The polemical target of the *Dialogo sulla cometa*, Tommaso “Zefiriele” Bovio, replied to Raimondo with the *Dechiaratione*. Interestingly, Bovio mentions that Raimondo’s dialogue circulated, possibly in print (“mandato fuori”), in Venice, Verona, and other cities.⁴² However, only one manuscript copy of Raimondo’s *Dialogo* survives, making it impossible to gather precise information on the time and the place of publication. It may also be possible that the handwritten copy, uncharacteristically short, is a partial copy of a longer text. The content of the *Dialogo* is, for all intents and purposes, a defense of Raimondo’s ideas on the comet in the shape of a discourse by Falabacchio addressed to Zefiriele. The character Zefiriele, in fact, only appears as a silent interlocutor in what may be considered a “monological dialogue,”⁴³ where Raimondo’s astrological claims on the nature and significance of the comet of 1577 are discussed with respect to his own previous works. Falabacchio complains that Bovio misunderstood Raimondo and reiterates the idea that the comet was under Jovian and Venusian influence and that since these

40. See *Le Battaglie che fece la Regina Anthea per vendetta de suo padre contra Re Carlo & li Paladini, co[n] Falabachio & Catabriga suoi Giganti, cose bellissime* (Brescia, 1549); and Giancarlo Petrella, “Un’edizione del Turlini ritrovata e la tradizione a stampa di Falabacchio e Cattabriga,” *La Bibliofilia* 112 (2010): 117–40.

41. On Bovio, see Alfonso Ingegno, “Tommaso Zefiriele Bovio,” in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (Rome, 1971), [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/zefiriele-tommaso-bovio_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/zefiriele-tommaso-bovio_(Dizionario-Biografico)); and Antonio Dal Fiume, “Un medico astrologo a Verona nel ‘500: Tommaso Zefiriele Bovio,” *Critica storica* 20 (1983): 32–59.

42. Tommaso Zefiriele Bovio, *Dechiaratione a maggior intelligentia di ogn’vno. Descritta da Zefiriele alias Thomaso Bovio, per sua difesa, a confutatione dell’eccellente m. Annibale Raymondo Veronese, intorno all’aparitione della cometa apparsa ali’ 9 Novembre 1577* (Verona, 1578), fol. [A1v]: “si è poi trovato uno, il quale in certa sua scrittura pare far gran professione di Astrologo, et finto, et fantastico nome ha mandato fuori certo suo parere con parole puoco convenevoli in Vineggia, Verona, et altre Città d’Italia contra di me a difesa, et favore del Raymondo.” That the work in question is *Falabacchio contra Zefiriele* is confirmed a few lines later by textual reference: “et perche questo huomo mi brava in un certo modo, che *se non fosse il rispetto che porta a Bovio* [quotation from *Falabacchio*] (a cui *per errore delli garzoni del stampatore* pare il discorso mio indirizzato [refers to the error on the frontispiece of the *Trattato*]) mi farebbe, et direbbe, con tutto che io non dubbiti, che quando egli saprà che io, che son il Bovio, sia stato lo authore non sia però per far gran strepito” (italics are mine).

43. On this dialogic mode, see Cox, *Renaissance Dialogue*, 62.

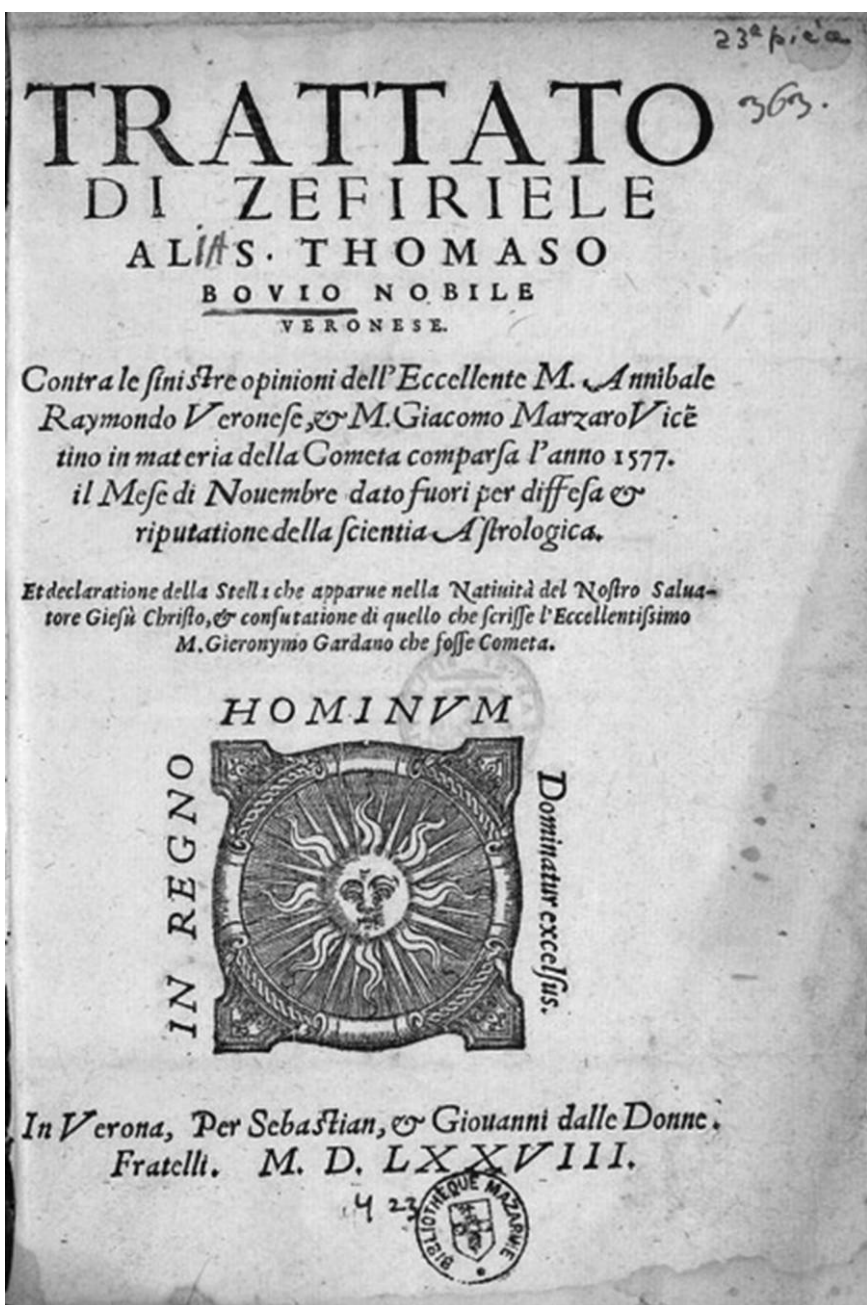


Figure 3. Frontispiece of Tommaso Zefiriele Bovio, *Trattato . . . contra le sinistre opinioni* (Verona, 1578). (© Bibliothèque Mazarine, Paris.) The manuscript correction on this copy clarifies that “AL.S.” is a contraction of “alias” and not an abbreviation “al signor,” which is instead how Raimondo interprets it, thinking that the text is dedicated by Zefiriele to Bovio.

influences have a positive nature, the comet is an auspicious sign for the future.⁴⁴ This is the assessment challenged by Bovio, whose prognostication on the comet was in fact nefarious on the grounds of its saturnine nature.

Bovio's reply, the *Dechiaratione* mentioned above, followed in a matter of weeks, while Raimondo's further reply, the *Dialogo astrologico*—his third intervention on the comet of 1577—was published in April 1578. The conversation is initiated by the character named Bertoli, an acute observer and critic, whose name may relate him to earlier incarnations of the seventeenth-century popular character Bertoldo, whose story also takes place in Verona at the court of the sixth-century Longobard King Alboino. Like Gobbo in Glisenti's *Dialogo*, Bertoli wants to share information and understand the true nature of astrology and predictions through a conversation with an expert, Pedro, who is presented as a student of the famous astrologer Antonio Arquato. In turn, Pedro agrees to converse with Bertoli and to clear his doubts, adding that both of them can gain something from the conversation.⁴⁵ The appearance of the comet is discussed in the central section of the pamphlet and in light of the debate on the status of astrology; the aim of the dialogue is in fact to defend astrology from widespread skepticism and from the claim that comets are not astrologically significant. Unlike Gobbo's *Dialogo*, references to other works are explicit, such as texts by Giacomo Marzari, Zefiriele Bovio, Giuseppe Valdagno, and Annibale Raimondo.⁴⁶

By following this trail, it is possible to have an overview of the exchange that forms the background of the dialogue, the different opinions represented by the authors, and how the debate developed around the issue of the status of astrology and astrological predictions with respect to comets. In their dialogue, Pedro and Bertoli defend Raimondo's theses as they appear in his *Discorso*, which is also the

44. [Annibale Raimondo], *Falabacchio contra Zefiriele*, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan, ms R95 sup., fols. 89r–90v, 90r: “Mi basta questo in conclusione di fatti intendere che le fumosità che formarono quella cometa furono tirate la su da stelle della natura di Giove et Venere, et che la cometa era sottoposta a una mansione del cielo temperato et che la cometa fu di temperata natura. Et perciò quanto aspetta al suo significato, si dee credere a quello c’ha scritto il Raimondo et anco confessare ch’egli non ha preso grancio alcuno si come tu hai scritto.”

45. Annibale Raimondo, *Dialogo astrologico: Pedro, et Bertoli. Indirizzato a tutti quelli, che hanno veduto con sano occhio, la Cometa il Novembre 1577* (n.p., 1578), fol. A1r: “Ber. Lungo tempo è Pedro, ch’io desidero di haverti un giorno a mio comando, per poter teco comunicare alcune cose . . . Ped. Onde tu hai a sapere, che l’Eccellente Arquato fu mio come padre, et me ne fece dimostrazione, percioche m’introdusse tanto innanti nell’Astrologia, ch’io potea comparere fra gli altri non mediocri nell’arte.”

46. Ibid., fol. A1v: “Questo Autunno prossimo passato 1577 di principio di Novembre, apparve quella cometa tanto nobile, si come vedesti, sopra la quale furono fatti molti Discorsi, tra i quali vidi quello di M. Giacomo Marzari vicentino, un altro d’un Zeferiele, che mai più l’udii nominare, uno dell’eccellente M. Giuseppe Valdagno, et uno del Raimondo Veronese.”

target of Glisenti's *Dialogo*. Raimondo is said to be the subject of envy,⁴⁷ and his arguments are explained and upheld against Valdagno and Marzari. Following Raimondo's ideas, Pedro and Bertoli defend the astrological nature of the comet and its origin from the stars' agency—the argument rejected by Marocco—while in the final part they examine different observations of the comet (again, in defense of Raimondo) and conclude by reasserting the astrological dependence of the comet on the stars.⁴⁸

In turn, Raimondo's *Dialogo astrologico* sparked more debate. The first responses were published only a few weeks after its publication. Giuseppe Valdagno, one of the authors attacked by Pedro and Bertoli, replied to the *Dialogo* with a pamphlet printed in Verona in 1578, the *Risposte ad alcune oppositioni fatte contro il discorso fisico sopra la cometa apparsa l'anno 1577*, which counters Raimondo's critique of his *Discorso fisico sopra la cometa apparsa l'anno 1577* (Verona, 1578). Raimondo wrote a counterreply, *Risposta alle cinque risposte* (Mantua, 1578), which was once again presented as the work of the pseudonymous duo Pedro and Bertoli. At this stage, however, the paternity of the work is clear, as Valdagno addresses Raimondo directly. The nature of this later set of pamphlets is increasingly polemical and follows along a conventional path of point-by-point discussion of each of the other's claims up until when, toward May 1578, the debate gradually exhausted itself.

CONCLUSION

This article shows how, in the first place, the socio-spatial relations of sixteenth-century Venice are at the root of Glisenti's *Dialogo del Gobbo da Rialto*. Furthermore, when scrutinized attentively, the fictional representation of Gobbo and Marocco reveals its connection with works similar in genre and purpose. The dialogues and the works by Raimondo, Bovio, and others are all mutually connected and share similar solutions and textual strategies, such as the use of lower-class spokespersons and language and references to Venice's urban life. As for the *Dialogo* at the center of this article, the possibility of the conversation between the two talking statues depends on their physical existence within the socially practiced spaces in which they are located and of the significant walking route that connects them. The *Dialogo*'s mise-en-scène is a representation of the ways in which astrological news circulated in the city. These are variously recounted in

47. Ibid., fol. A2r: "Ped. sappi il Raimondo è molto invidiato, e più da quelli che si pensano di saper molto, e nulla sanno, che da gli huomini intelligenti."

48. Ibid., fols. [A4v]–[A5r].

the text and include the oral exchanges between the merchants, the arrival of news from the East and the West, the printed prognostications of the charlatans being peddled on the Rialto bridge, and the way in which the two interlocutors imitate the *grida* of the town crier. Occasionally, Venice's public spaces become part of the argument, as when the astrologers and their works—some of whom are identifiable through intertextual allusions within the *Dialogo*—are connected to the spaces they practice and where their works circulate. The fictional oral exchange between Gobbo and Marocco appears to be deliberately exaggerated in order to serve the purpose of voicing the author's own critique of the real exchanges (both oral and in print) taking place in the market squares and streets of Venice. Gobbo's "infallible prognostication" and the references to the false and ingenuous opinions ("chimere" and "ghiribizzi") circulating in the city mock the notorious and disreputable ambiguity of the astrologers' predictions. In this case, however, it is possible to argue that the fictional stage onto which the dialogue between Gobbo and Marocco is projected alludes to the intellectual scene of which the *Dialogo* is part.