



Camilla Herculiana (Erculiani): Private Practices of Knowledge Production

Jelena Bakić

Abstract This chapter analyses the paratextual and epistolary rhetorical strategies connected with private practices of knowledge production used by the sixteenth-century Paduan natural philosopher, apothecary, and writer Camilla Herculiana (Erculiani). To legitimize her authorship, she used different rhetorical strategies, but her self-portrayal as a woman, housewife, mother, and wife, and her references to household maintenance, solving daily problems, and being free to learn only in the hours of the night, furnish fruitful terrain for a rhetorical-cultural analysis. Such an analysis will shed important light on the relationships between the private and public spheres, gender hierarchies, and the meaning of privacy in late sixteenth-century knowledge-making.

Keywords Camilla Herculiana • Natural philosophy • Sixteenth century • Gendered rhetorics • Paratext • Epistolary strategies

J. Bakić (✉)

Faculty of Education, University of Bolzano, Bolzano, Italy

© The Author(s) 2024

N. Klein Käfer, N. da Silva Perez (eds.), *Women's Private Practices of Knowledge Production in Early Modern Europe*,

https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-44731-0_3

The work of caring for my children, the burden of running my household, my obedience to my husband, and my fragile health—none of these weighs on my decision to publish so much as the knowledge that many malicious minds will condemn my efforts, and writings, and consider them frivolous and worthless just as they consider women of our age to be such.
(*Camilla Herculiana e Greghetta, 1584*)¹

In 1584, a book by Camilla Herculiana was published in Kraków, entitled *Lettere di philosophia naturale, di Camilla Herculiana, speciala alle tre stelle in Padoua, Indirizzate alla Serenissima Regina di Polonia: nella quale si tratta la natural causa delli Diluvij, et il natural formatione dell'Arco celeste. In Cracovia. Nella stamperia di Lazaro, nel'Anno 1584.*² It was written in Italian, by a woman from Padua, and as we can read already from the title, she wrote about themes not so typical for women: the theory of the natural origins of the Great Deluge, the natural disposition of man, and the natural formation of the rainbow. It might have been a limited edition, as only four examples of this book can be traced to this day.³

Herculiana's book was forgotten for centuries, and the first detailed analysis appeared only in 2013. Eleonora Carinci reconstructed the life and work of the author and provided highly important insights into the

¹*Herculiana, 1584. Translated in Ray, Meredith Kennedy. Daughters of Alchemy. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015, 120–121. Herculiana: "Né il far questo mi dà noia ancor ch'io habbia il travaglio d'allevar figliuoli, il peso del governo della casa, e l'obediencia al marito, e la mia complessione non troppo sana, quanto mi dà noia il conoscere che da molti velati da spirito maligno saranno queste mie fatiche, o scritti biasimate, e tanto più saranno tenute vane e di poca stima, per esser tenute tali le Donne de nostri tempi."* Itallics are mine.

²*Letters on Natural Philosophy, by Camilla Herculiana, an Apotechary at "Tre stelle" in Padua, addressed to the Most Serene Queen of Poland, in which is discussed the Natural Cause of the Flood, and the natural formation of the rainbow.* In Krakow. In publishing house Lazaro, in 1584. All translation in this chapter are mine, if not otherwise specified.

³Carinci, Eleonora, "Una speciala padovana: Lettere di philosophia naturale di Camilla Erculiani (1584)", *The Society for Italian studies*, Manchester, 2013, 206. She mentions that only four copies of the book have been identified, in the Biblioteca Civica, Padua, the Biblioteca Alessandrina, Rome, the Houghton Library, Harvard University, and the Biblioteca PAN, Kórnik. For Italian libraries see: edit16.iccu.sbn.it/web_iccu/imaain.htm. I have used a digitalized copy of the Kórnik library, available at: <https://www.wbc.poznan.pl/dlibra/publication/395210/edition/308563>, last access on 1 November 2021.

cultural practices connected with female literary and scientific production.⁴ Following her main findings, important works have been done in English and Italian.⁵ In 2021, the first English translation of her letters was published.⁶ In 2020, Sandra Plastina provided an important philosophical and historical analysis of letters on natural philosophy by Camilla Herculiana and Margherita Sarrocchi, demonstrating that women authors contributed to a great extent to science in early modern period, against traditional historiographic and philosophical commonplace assumptions.⁷ In 2016, Maude Vanhaelen discovered two letters sent from the Venetian patrician Sebastiano Erizzo (1525–1585) to Camilla Herculiana in 1584, the same year her book was published.⁸ These letters clearly refer to other works of hers, works that have been lost and as yet remain unknown to us.

At the very beginning of *Lettere di philosophia naturale*, Camilla Herculiana represented the opposition between her domestic life and her intellectual pursuits. On the one hand, there is a sense of privacy from her home and her obligations within this space: running the household, raising children, and taking care of her husband, to whom she needed to be obedient. On the other hand, there is her decision to publish her work, produce knowledge, enter into scientific debates, and enter the sixteenth-century ‘public sphere.’⁹ These two spheres, the private as well as the public are defined and shaped by her female gender and her exposure to the male eye—who might condemn her writings.

Her writings indeed brought forth suspicion. The archival documentation, as shown by Carinci,¹⁰ shows that in the period between 1585 and 1588, Camilla Herculiana was questioned by the Inquisition (probably

⁴ Carinci, *Una speciale padovana*, 202–229.

⁵ See: Ray, *Daughters of Alchemy*; Plastina, 2014a.

⁶ See Carinci, Eleonora. *Camilla Erculiani, Letters on Natural Philosophy: The Scientific Correspondence of a Sixteenth-Century Pharmacist, with Related Texts*. The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe, the Toronto Series 77. Toronto, Ontario: Iter Press, 2021.

⁷ Plastina, Sandra. “Letters on Natural Philosophy and New Science: Camilla Erculiani (Padua 1584) and Margherita Sarrocchi (Rome 1612)”, in eds. Ebbersmeyer, Sabrina, and Paganini, Gianni, *Women, Philosophy and Science, Italy and Early Modern Europe*, 2020, 55–80.

⁸ Vanhaelen, Maude. “Platonism in 16th-century Padua: Two Unpublished Letters from Sebastiano Erizzo to Camilla Erculiani”, *Bruniana & Campanelliana. Ricerche filosofiche e materiali storico-testuali*. Pisa; Roma: Fabrizio Serra Editore, 2016.

⁹ Emden, Christian J., and David Midgley, eds. *Changing Perceptions of the Public Sphere*. 1st ed. New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012.

¹⁰ Carinci, *Una speciale padovana*, 202–229.

Paduan), because of the ideas in her only published book. The trial is documented in a book by Jacopo Menochio, *Consiliorum sive responsarum* from 1604, appearing on four pages under the rubric “Consilium DCCLXVI.”¹¹ The outcome of the process is unknown, although, as it will be shown further, it can be assumed that she escaped this persecution.

This chapter is divided into five parts. In the first part, I provide biographical and contextual data important to better understand the author and her text within its larger historical and sociocultural framework. In the second part, I analyse the paratexts of her book, focusing on Camilla’s approach to gender and knowledge and the rhetoric of modesty. I will juxtapose her knowledge production in contrast to housework, focusing on her self-fashioning as a housewife and mother side-by-side with her framing of herself as a philosopher. The same approach will be applied to the third part of this chapter, dedicated to Camilla’s letters. In the fourth part, I briefly present two unpublished letters by Sebastiano Erizzo, a Venetian humanist and numismatist, to Camilla Herculiana. The last part focuses on the Inquisitional trial, which shows how philosophical and natural philosophy knowledge was received and interpreted when coming from Camilla Herculiana. The aim of this chapter is to show that by applying the historical approach and positioning Camilla and her work in a broader context: geographical (Italy, Padua, Poland), temporal (late Renaissance), familial (educated family), and philosophical (as a natural philosopher in her own right), we can open new lines for the investigation and understanding of domesticity and privacy in the history of knowledge.

HERCULIANA’S PRIVATE LIFE AND CONNECTIONS: BIOGRAPHICAL AND CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK

Camilla Herculiana (Erculiani)¹² was born in Padua, as Camilla (Gregetta) Greggetti. The dates of her birth and death are still unknown. Neither is it known where she was buried. However, the second half of the sixteenth

¹¹Menochio, Jacopo, “Consilium DCCLXVI, 766”, *Consiliorum sive responsorum*, Frankfurt, Andreas Wécheli and Johann Gymnich, 1604–1616, 180–183.

¹²In this chapter, I use the version of her surname as it appears in her book, although the version Erculiani is accepted by the majority of the scholarship. To write female surnames finishing in ‘a’ (Herculiana) was a common practice in the sixteenth century. Camilla signed her dedicatory epistle with the two surnames, Camilla Herculiana é Gregetta.

century should be taken as the timeframe of her life. She was one of the six children of the merchant Andrea Gregghetti.¹³ Gregghetti was a member of the guild of pharmacists, guild of pharmacists as a merchant.¹⁴ Camilla had two brothers (one of her brothers graduated from the Faculty of Law in Padua), and three sisters. The identity of her mother is unknown. Camilla Herculiana was married twice. Her first husband was Alovio Stella, a pharmacist at the Paduan pharmacy ‘Tre stelle’, located in the centre of Padua, close to the university. They had at least one child, a son called Melchiorre (Marchioro). After the death of her first husband (between 1568 and 1572), Camilla married another *speciale* or pharmacist, Giacomo Herculiani, in 1573. He was active in the guild of pharmacists in Padua from 1581 until 1601. They worked together in the pharmacy of her first husband. They had five children born in the period between 1573 and 1581. Her writings appeared in the pauses between her pregnancies, according to the dates on letters and dates of her children’s baptism.¹⁵

Camilla Herculiana did not have an aristocratic background, but she managed to combine her profound interest in philosophy with practical knowledge, which was something that she insisted upon in her writings. It is probably mainly thanks to male members of her family and later, thanks to her two marriages, that she gained access to education and knowledge. Her father, Andrea Gregghetti, was a merchant, a profession that in the early modern period included vast education and different interests, from economy to science. Other early modern women writers had merchant fathers, being the daughters of educated men, such as a Venetian Lucrezia Marinella (1571–1653), English Aphra Behn (1640–1689), and English Mary Astell (1660–1731). Merchants were expected to live an exemplary life, to serve as a model to others, and, as Cox puts it, “their culture often leaned towards the vernacular, rather than Latin. Writing was a key element in the merchant’s skill-set.”¹⁶ As such, educating their daughters was in line with their professional ethos.

Another merchant, the economist, scientist, diplomat, and humanist, Benedetto Cotrugli (1416–1469), in his book about trade and the perfect

¹³ Carinci, *Una speciale padovana*, 205.

¹⁴ See Carinci, *Una speciale padovana*, 206.

¹⁵ Carinci, *Una speciale padovana*, 217. It is unknown if Camilla was a member of the guild.

¹⁶ Cox, Virginia. *A Short History of the Italian Renaissance*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2016, 134.

merchant, *Della mercatura e del mercante perfetto* 1458,¹⁷ apart from instructions on trade and prescribed roles for a merchant, gives advice about other aspects of life, such as education, religious practices, and marriage. He explained in detail the reasons why he decided to educate his daughters. After praising the power of knowledge, calling it “the salt of the soul,” he explains that although many reproached him because of his decision to educate his daughters and provide them with the opportunity to learn grammar and Virgil’s verses in Latin, he decided to do so not only to make them good grammarians and rhetoricians, but to make them reasonable and wise, with a good, solid, and healthy memory, which is the highest dowry one can have.¹⁸ The fact that he needed to defend the act of educating his daughters is not unique; humanists whose daughters were educated explained the importance of Christian reading for them, and not rarely would they send them to the convents where they would gain an education.¹⁹ The rhetoric used by Cotrugli to defend this idea related to the ‘dowry,’ as the literacy and education in women’s cases made it easier to enter into marriage.²⁰ Gregchetti likely followed a similar logic to instill the passion for knowledge in Camilla. Moreover, it seems that Camilla was the eldest of the children, which might be another reason she received a humanist education. It was common for the eldest to receive education in order to help their fathers in household management.²¹

Besides her education as a merchant’s daughter, Camilla’s two husbands were crucial to her intellectual formation. Her identity as a wife and her marriage relationship with both her husbands, in the context of household and pharmacy management, are important in order to understand

¹⁷ Cotrugli, Benedetto (Kotruļj, Benedikt). *Libro del arte dela mercatura: Knjiga o vještini trgovanja* (1573), edited and translated Zdenka Janeković-Romer. Zagreb: HAZU, 2009/1573. Although the book was written in 1458, the first printed version appeared in 1573 in Venice.

¹⁸ Cotrugli, *Libro del arte*, 309: “Et pero multi me anno ripresso peche io faccio imparare le mee figliole gramaticha etrecitare multi versi di Virgilio a mente. Faccio non solamente per farle perfecte gramatiche et retoriche, ma per farle prudente, savie, e di bona, salda et sana memoria, dele qual cosse nulla po essere maggior dote a chi a sentimento, beato lo giovene chi visse abate”.

¹⁹ See Whitehead, J. Barbara, ed. *Women’s Education in Early Modern Europe. A History 1500–1800*. New York: Garland Pub., 1999.

²⁰ See “Learning the Virtues: Convent Schools and Female Culture in Renaissance Florence,” in *Women’s Education in Early Modern Europe: A History, 1500–1800*, ed. Barbara J. Whitehead. New York: Garland, 1999, 3–46.

²¹ See Whitehead, *Women’s Education*.

her public acting. Herculiana's work in the apothecary shop, close to the University of Padua, offered a unique place for a woman to exchange knowledge in a public space. Sixteenth-century Padua was indeed a hub of knowledge, and Italian culture "showed an openness towards the participation of women in intellectual discourses that was hardly matched in any other European country of the period."²² Already one century before Herculiana's book appeared, Cassandra Fedele gave a public speech in praise of arts and sciences at the University of Padua in 1487.²³ A century after Herculiana's book, Elena Lucrezia Cornaro (1646–1684) became the first woman to receive a doctoral degree in philosophy in 1678.

As a *specialia* working at such a well-located apothecary shop, Camilla was in a great position to collect and share knowledge. The usual English translation of the word *speciale* and the feminine form *specialia* is 'apothecary,' but the meaning of this noun is broader, and it refers to "spicer-apothecaries, indicating those who made and sold botanical and pharmaceutical remedies (which often included spices)."²⁴ *Gli speciali*, in fact, needed to possess a vast education, from botany to Latin, and today there is the expression in Italian "to write using letters of *speziali*,"²⁵ which means to write and to express ideas clearly.

Camilla took pride in her knowledge, and in her book, she presented herself as a natural philosopher. Natural philosophy at the time was the phrase used to denote the study of nature and the physical universe, closer to science, physics, biology, and philosophy. In its broader sense, it was dominated by Aristotelianism and influenced by Hippocrates's humoral theory—and Galen's reinterpretation of it. It also included the philosophy of Plato, and some occult sciences, such as cabala, magic, astrology, and alchemy. *Philosophia naturalis* was taught for the first time at the University of Padua in 1577, and Professor Giacomo Zabarella (1533–1589) held it until his death.²⁶ Camilla Herculiana enters directly into the philosophical discussion on natural philosophy with her contemporary Alessandro

²² Ebbersmeyer, Sabrina, and Gianni Paganini, eds. *Women, Philosophy and Science: Italy and Early Modern Europe*. Vol. 4. Women in the History of Philosophy and Sciences. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020, vii.

²³ Fedele, Cassandra. *Oratio pro Bertucio Lamberto*. Modena: 1487.

²⁴ Ray, *Daughters of Alchemy*, 115.

²⁵ In Italian: "Scrivere a lettere da *speziali*".

²⁶ See: Wallace, William A. "Zabarella, Jacopo," in *Encyclopedia of the Renaissance* (Vol. 6), edited by Paul F. Grendler. New York: Scribner, 1999, 337–339.

Piccolomini and with, in Camilla's words, the "second part of his natural philosophy" in the second book.²⁷

CAMILLA HERCULIANA É GREGETTA, *LETTERE DI
PHILOSOPHIA NATURALE* (1584)

The book *Lettere di philosophia naturale* (1584) was published in Kraków, Poland. The reasons for publishing the work there most likely relate to the cultural connections between Padua and Poland. According to Carinci,²⁸ it might also be the strategic authorial decision to escape the censorship. Herculiana's book was published at the printing house Stamperia di Lazaro, which was also known under the name Officina Lazari. It was run by Jan Januskowski, a former Paduan student.

The responsibility for the title of the book was mainly in the printer's hands in the early modern period. However, it is unknown how the title of "Letters of Natural Philosophy by the *speciala* Camilla Herculiana" came to be. Such a framing emphasized how she entered the public space as a female author, philosopher, and apothecary. It became a statement that Herculiana's knowledge was recognized beyond the apothecary shop where she worked with her husband and that she had an intellectual presence as an author dedicated to scientific and philosophical issues. Her book managed to meaningfully contribute to several different debates, from the *querelle des femmes*²⁹ (debate about gender roles and identities) to natural philosophy.

As the title implies, the core of the book consists of epistolary writings. Herculiana corresponded on philosophical and scientific subjects with Giorgio Garnero (1577), a learned Frenchman who lived in Venice (according to the closure of the letter), and with the Hungarian intellectual Martino di Berzevicze (1581) Márton Berzeviczy (1538 – 1596).

²⁷ Herculiana, no pagination: "Come benissimo dichiara Alessandro Piccolomini nella seconda parte della sua philosophia naturale nel secondo libro".

²⁸ Carinci, *Una speciala padovana*, 215.

²⁹ Literature concerning women and their roles within the society appeared in Italian context mainly in the sixteenth century. For general ideas about *querelle des femmes*, see Zimmermann, Margarete. "The *Querelle des Femmes* as Cultural Studies Paradigm" in *Time, Space, and Women's Lives in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Anne Jacobson Schutte, et al. Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2001, 23. Currently is underway an important project on male voices in the debate *querelle des femmes*, see: <https://menforwomen.es/en> (last accessed 1 November 2021).

The book consists of four letters, three of them written by Herculiana. While she decided to exchange philosophical letters with men, she chose to dedicate her book to another woman, the Polish Queen, Anna Jagiellon, in her dedicatory epistle.

Paratextual Analysis

Herculiana's *Lettere di Filosofia* consists of several different parts. It starts with the dedicatory poem "To Students of Philosophy." The poem is followed by a two-and-a-half-page dedicatory epistle dedicated to Queen Anna of Poland, dated 25 February 1584. Next comes two pages of the dedicatory text "to the reader," which can be read both as a dedicatory epistle and a preface. Then, there is another poem, a Latin encomiastic writing by Andreas Schonaeus (Andrea Eumorphus Glogovicen), a Silesian scholar who studied philosophy in Padua. Finally, we have the four letters, of which three are signed by Herculiana.

The book's first poem is an unsigned dedicatory of ten verses called "To Students of Philosophy," following the rhyme scheme ABA ABC BB BB. Although there is no claim of authorship, it might be assumed that it was written by Camilla Herculiana, as was common in the case of dedicatory verses at the beginning of books. The prefatory function of this poem should be highlighted, as already the first page of the book limits its readership—students of philosophy. If we consider that students of philosophy were mainly men, then the male readers are requested to acknowledge the significance of Camilla Herculiana, and to spread the fame, to "make praises to be heard, such as are worthy of Camilla, and of you too."³⁰ If the addressees are students of philosophy, it indicates that the author is actually one of them, as she goes on to write on such topics.

After the dedicatory poem, there follows a two-and-a-half-page long dedicatory epistle signed by Herculiana entitled "To the Most Serene Queen Anna Queen of Poland, Grand Duchess of Lithuania, etc."³¹ It was signed in Padua on 25 February 1584. The dedicatee is a woman, Anna Jagiellon, who was Queen of Poland and Grand Duchess of Lithuania,

³⁰ Herculiana, Camilla. *Lettere di philosophia naturale, di Camilla Herculiana, speciala alle tre stelle in Padoua, indirizzate alla serenissima Regina di Polonia: nella quale si tratta la natural causa delli diluuij, et il natural temperamento dell'huomo, et la natural formation.* Cracovia: stamperia di Lazaro, 1584, no pagination: "Fate che di Helicona, e fonti suoi, / Da gli Hesperii, a gli Eoi / Lodi si sentan poi, / Di Camilla che sien degne, e di voi".

³¹ Herculiana, *Lettere*, no pagination: "Alla serenissima regina Anna, Regina di Polonia, Gran Duchessa di Lihuania etc".

from 1575 to 1586. The public dedicatee³² becomes the guarantor of the quality of the book and the protector of her work, ready to “defend this work from malevolent people.”³³ Moreover, the protector is also the monarch, as Herculiana mentions that her previous intention was to dedicate the book to his Majesty the King, Queen Anna’s husband, but “knowing that he was occupied in the wars, I did not want to give him this labour.”³⁴ Using the topoi of the gift and modesty at the same time, she writes how she decided to recommend to her “these few efforts of mine, believing in your generosity, which will not despise this small gift: being by a woman who wants to illustrate those contemporary women, which is, in fact, my wish.”³⁵ In Herculiana’s words, her intent was to show that women are as capable as men in *science*.³⁶ In order to prove her statement, what follows is a rhetorical strategy of exempla of significant women.³⁷ Herculiana refers to Mirthis as a giant woman, mentioning that she is put together with seven Lydian kings because of her eloquence and knowledge. She further mentions Nicostrata, Evander’s wife, for her erudition, Cornelia (c.189–110 B.C.), Roman princess, mother of Gracchi brothers, Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus, for her doctrine. In fact, Nicostrata was Evander’s

³² Genette, Gerard. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. Translated by Jane E. Lewin. Literature, Culture, Theory. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, 131. Genette distinguishes two types of dedicatees: private and public. “By private dedicatee I mean a person, known to the public or not, to whom a work is dedicated in the name of a personal relationship, or other [...] The public dedicatee is a person who is more or less well known but with whom the author, by his dedication, indicates a relationship that is public in nature—intellectual, artistic, political, or other”.

³³ Herculiana, *Lettere*, no pagination: “a difendere questa opera da malivoli”.

³⁴ Herculiana, *Lettere*, no pagination: “ma conoscendo la occupata nelle guerre, non ho voluto darli questo travaglio.”

³⁵ Herculiana, *Lettere*, no pagination: “Ho voluto raccomandargli queste mie poche fatiche, fidandomi nella generosità sua, che non sprezerà il piccolo dono: benché di donna che desidera di illustrare quelle de suoi tempi, che tale in vero è il desiderio mio.”

³⁶ Herculiana, *Lettere*, no pagination: “far conoscere al mondo, che noi siamo atte a tutte le scientie, come gli huomini.”

³⁷ Lists of exemplary women both past and contemporary were usually taken from previous texts, such as Boccaccio and his *De claris mulieribus* (c.1380), who in turn based his work on Valerius Maximus, Livy, Hyginus, Tacitus, and Plutarch’s *Mulierum virtutes*. Herculiana refers to Mirthis, Nicostrata, and Cornelia, all elevated because of their knowledge, wisdom, and erudition. Likely source for these exempla might be *Rejox de Principes and Libro Aureo*, by Antonio de Guevara. The Italian translation appeared in 1544, under the title *Vita, gesti, costumi, discorsi, lettere di M. Aurelio imperatore, sapientissimo filosofo & oratore eloquentissimo*, Vinegia, 1544.

mother. They are elevated because of their *knowledge, wisdom, and erudition*. By using classical examples of women as carriers of knowledge, Herculiana demonstrated that she was not alone in claiming the space for women in the intellectual milieu. Together with the exempla, the *topos* of the offering works as a gift, typical in a dedicatory genre, also served as a performative act. The offering of the book as a present to a person who had some kind of power was often highly important for the author, as it was difficult to guarantee the outcome of the book.³⁸

The *narratio* continues with the *topos* of the gift: “I wanted to send under the shadow of your majesty these my *few eyes*, being convinced by *many of your compatriots*, that you would like it, as you are very virtuous and a lover of sciences.”³⁹ She refers to her work as her “few eyes” or later “my efforts”, hoping that if the dedicatee reads it, she would find in this book “things worthy of beautiful intellects,”⁴⁰ where the reader can learn much about “*the truth* of the flood, *the reason* why people mutated, and *the true reason* for the appearance of the rainbow.”⁴¹ However, all these themes should be considered by “illustrious persons and those who reign the world.”⁴² The attempt to justify the book’s publication by reference to the truth was one of the most frequently employed strategies in the early modern period, together with the rhetoric of modesty.

Camilla refers to her work, in line with the rhetoric of modesty, as few badly composed lines, few lines, small gift, few efforts, few eyes, and she portrays herself as a knowledgeable woman who discussed with Polish intellectuals (“your compatriots”). She is the one who produced the scientific work, with the knowledge that it might be found inappropriate by authorities and, as such, it was strategically double-protected by the Queen and King of Poland. The rhetoric of modesty was based “on a simple inversion: the less physical, social, or political power one presents oneself

³⁸ Braida, Ludovica. *Stampa e cultura in Europa tra XV e XVI secolo*. Roma; Bari: Laterza, 2000, 72: “da questo punto di vista, la dedica se iscrive in una logica di restituzione di un dono (elargito dal mecenate) e rivela i rapporti di potere e le modalità attraverso le quali si regge l’ancora fragile repubblica delle lettere”.

³⁹ Herculiana, *Lettere*, no pagination: “Ho voluto mandare sotto l’ombra di V.M. queste mie poche viglie, essendo fatta certissima da molti delli suoi creati, che li seranno grate, per conoscerla virtuosissima, et amatrice delle scinetie.” Italics are mine.

⁴⁰ Herculiana, *Lettere*, no pagination: “Li troverà cose degne di belli intelletti.”

⁴¹ Herculiana, *Lettere*, no pagination: “Della verità del diluvio, della causa della mutatione delli huomini, et la vera causa dell’apparitione del arco celeste” (emphasis mine).

⁴² Herculiana, *Lettere*, no pagination: “cose tutte degne da essere considerate da persone illustre, et che reggono il mondo.”

as having, the more rhetorical power one has.”⁴³ Gender, however, has implications for this rhetorical power. For women, modesty was an expected quality, so downplaying her own work served a double function to Herculiana, at the same time latching to the recognizable rhetoric of modesty and showing that she understood her place as a woman stepping into a territory in which she might be seen with suspicion. Threading carefully was crucial for her argument, as Camilla Herculiana entered in the debate of *querelle des femmes* with this dedicatory letter, taking the position of the defender of female equality with men in the sciences, exposing herself and the dedicatee as examples of women of her time, as a logical continuation to the list of learned women from the past.

The dedication “To the readers”⁴⁴ is the most intriguing part of Herculiana’s paratext in the context of privacy and knowledge production. The dedication to the reader, that is, to the real private addressee of the work, has two functions in this case: it is a dedicatory epistle while still fulfilling the prefatory function. This peritext, almost two pages long, opens with a clear use of the rhetorical device *causa scribendi*, and the *topos* of modesty regarding the work. It shows us how Camilla Herculiana understood the female public role and how she positioned herself and her work within the relation private/public:

It will without doubt marvel somebody that *I, a woman*,⁴⁵ decided to *write and publish* things which do not belong (*according to customs of our time*) to a woman: but if *they* want to consider, with good judgement and without any affection, *the change with the times and states, and people, and the material of which they are made*; they will understand that the woman *does not lack those providences and virtues which it is possible to find in men*: and it is clear that they can marvel a lot that I *without seeing the books*, decided to publish these few badly composed lines, beginning from the middle of the subject.⁴⁶

⁴³Dunn, Kevin. *Prettexts of Authority: The Rhetoric of Authorship in the Renaissance Preface*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994, 6.

⁴⁴Herculiana, *Lettere*, no pagination: “A lettori”.

⁴⁵Emphasis mine.

⁴⁶Herculiana, *Lettere*, no pagination: “Parrà senza dubio meraviglia ad alcuno, ch’io donna mi sia posta a scrivere e dare alla stampa cose che non s’appartengono (secondo l’uso de’ nostri tempi) a donna, ma se vorranno, con buon giuditio, e senza affettatione considerar la mutatione de tempi, e delli stati, e de gl’huomini, e con qual materia sian creati; troverà che non è la donna priva di quelle providenze e virtù che si sian gli’huomini: è vero che si potranno molto maravigliar ch’io senza veder libri, m’abbia posta a dar fuori queste quattro mal composte righe.”

Just in this quote, different relations can be traced: public/private divide, gender, power, Camilla's positioning within the certain system, and the notion that "every individual can tackle philosophical speculation if it is expressed in language that she or he knows "beginning from the middle of subject," as expressed by Sandra Plastina.⁴⁷

Being a woman, Camilla Herculiana needed to defend her appearance in print, and she included this statement in the *exordium*. The gendered language is obvious; she highlighted her belonging to the female sex. What is interesting here is the rhetorical usage of the parenthetical device in order to point out the fact that it was according to the custom of the present day, of the contemporary moment, and it might mean that before it was not like that, and also it might introduce hope that in the future it would be different. Her female agency is defended, and she answered to the cultural shift of the contemporary moment when the female-authored book was seen as a rarity. Following the rhetoric of *querelle des femmes*, she opposed 'me—a woman' to 'them'—men, who hopefully will understand that the context changed and that women, too, have their own right to knowledge production. Applying the *topos* of modesty typical for the dedicatory epistle, she demonstrated her limitations, but even "without seeing the books," Herculiana nevertheless decided to publish this book.

At the same time, she felt the need to defend the very idea of this publication. Herculiana explained that she would prefer not to print her book at this specific moment. She would rather wait and publish it when God wanted it to be done. But she introduces her act of justification by claiming a private reason which prompted her to publish this book. The person she trusted and sent her work to decided to print the work under his name.

I would not have chosen to send these letters to the press now, but I had trusted and shown them to someone who then went elsewhere (so I hear) to print them under his name, something that vexed me since if I had not been able to publish these, I would have lost all my labours. And I would not be so bold as to publish these works if doing so did not give me the opportunity to affirm the intellectual worth of the women of our times, which in truth I greatly desire.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Plastina, *Letters*, 59.

⁴⁸ Herculiana, *Lettere*, no pagination: "Le quali piacendo alla Maestà d'Iddio voglio quando sarà tempo mandar' in luce; ne avrei poste hora queste alla stampa, s'io non mi avessi fidata di farle vedere a persona che poi e sta arove (come odo) a stampare sotto suo nome, cosa ch'a me è molto spiaciuta, perciò ch'io non potrei dar fuori il rimanente, ma havrei perso

The same explanation can be found in many contemporary works, and it should be understood as the modesty *topos*—the “reluctance to appear in print.”⁴⁹ She fashioned herself as naïve and having only good intentions. But she also decided to bring out her work because, with book publishing, she has the possibility to prove the intellectual value of women’s knowledge production.⁵⁰ Immediately after these words, she introduces the important information about the work on the soul she is preparing and that she will publish once this book is accepted.

And I would also like to explain what is the nature of the soul, if it pleases God, and in other letters to expound what, and where, and when, and with which characteristics our soul is generated. It will seem without a doubt difficult to prove this to anyone, though to intelligent people, it will not seem a thing beyond truth. And this other work will be published a short time after the present letters, if it happens that these few lines are acceptable to you and received with the same goodwill that I bring to their publication.⁵¹

Offering her work as a gift to the reader but saying that she also provides some ideas which are not so easy to understand, Herculiana wanted once again to present herself as an educated woman. And in undertaking this intellectual endeavour, she was often interrupted by “*travails*.” She refers to her roles as mother, housewife, and wife, adding that her health was not good. In this last paragraph, the transition from private to public

tutte le mie fatiche: Ne di queste fatiche farei io molta stima, se non mi si togliesse l’occasione di far conoscere il buon animo delle Donne de nostri tempi, cosa invero da me molto desiderata.”Herculiana translated in Carinci, *Camilla Erculiani*, 111.

⁴⁹Eckerle, Julie A. “Prefacing Texts, Authorizing Authors, and Constructing Selves: The Preface as Autobiographical Space” in *Genre and Women’s Life Writing in Early Modern England*, Michelle M. Dowd and Julie A. Eckerle, eds. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007, 101. For example, the same ‘excuse’ we find in Castiglione’s dedicatory epistle to Don Michel de Silva. Castiglione writes that some people in Naples who saw the manuscript tried to publish it. See Castiglione, Baldassare. *Il Libro del Cortegiano*. Milano: Garzanti, 2013, 4.

⁵⁰Herculiana, *Lettere*, no pagination: “Di far conoscere il buon animo delle donne di nostri tempi, cosa invero da me molto desiderata”.

⁵¹Herculiana, *Lettere*, no pagination: “et a fine che si conoschi, come ancor noi sappiamo che cosa sia Anima, voglio piacendo a Dio, nell’altre mie dirvi, che cosa, e dove, e quando, et, in qual virtù, si generi l’anima nostra: Parrà senza dubbio difficile il provar questo ad alcuni, ma agl’intelligenti non parerà cosa fuori della verità; e questo si darà in luce poco dappoi queste, secondo che mi parrà, che queste poche righe siano tenute et accettate con quel buon’animo che io le dò in luce hora a voi et insieme darò con altre bellissime dechiarationi d’authori non molto facili ad intendersi.” Translated in Carinci, 2021, 112).

life becomes obvious, as well as the function of the dedicatory epistle as a metaphorical bridge between private life and published word:

The work of *caring for my children*, the burden of *running my household*, *my obedience* to my husband, and *my fragile* health—none of these weighs on my decision to *publish* so much as the knowledge that many malicious minds will condemn my efforts, and writings, and consider them *frivolous and worthless just as they consider women of our age to be such*.⁵²

Her tasks as a good and devoted mother and obedient housewife, and the struggles of a woman of poor health, modest and caring, are contrasted with the image of the writing woman, a woman who takes decisions and publishes. Traditionally excluded from the public realm and power, she needed to defend her appearance in print by showing that she did not neglect her expected work as a woman. In doing this, she illustrated imposed limits, both culturally and historically, to female intellectual accomplishments. In this context, gender becomes an important category, as the personal female *ethos* depends on the social *ethos*, and if she wanted to be taken seriously, a woman needed to accept the values of her society. In other words, to “be treated as credible, a woman is expected to exemplify the community conception of femininity.”⁵³ Traditional roles imposed on women—“the angel in the house”⁵⁴—were used to compromise her agency in the public realm.

This dedicatory epistle is a clear example of entering the *querelle des femmes* with a positive approach, knowing that there are readers (men) who would understand that women are also capable of contributing to culture, science, and knowledge in general. Knowing that her work is something new, she finishes with the hope that she will be accepted. This valuable testimony on gender hierarchies shows “the stands taken in the relevant areas of the discussion that were topical during each period,”⁵⁵ and it offers a rich terrain for understanding the private sphere, gender, and the practice of sixteenth-century knowledge production.

⁵² Herculiana translated in Ray, *Daughters of Alchemy*, 120–121. Italics are mine.

⁵³ Enos, Theresa, ed. *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric and Composition: Communication from Ancient Times to the Information Age*. New York: Routledge, 2009, 263.

⁵⁴ Woolf, 1931: “Killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer.” See Woolf, Virginia. “Professions for Women”, in *Death of A Moth and Other Essays*, University of Adelaide, Australia, 2017.

⁵⁵ Zimmerman, *The Querelle*, 19.

The closure of the dedication to readers is significant, as she mentions the other contemporary women, and she hopes that her writings will stimulate their intellect (“sarò forse una causa a svegliamento agl’intelletti loro”):

But despite all that, I do not want to stop working to recuperate some of the honour of superficial women, and perhaps I will be a cause of the awakening of their intellects. And I am certain that if these women did strive for intellectual achievements, foreign adventurers would not dare to invade this renowned city of Padua to try, with sword and lance, to accuse us of imperfection. Moreover, I am certain that many wise and intelligent readers of this work will not mock its originality, and they will admire the intention and the desire of my ideas.⁵⁶

From the opening of the book until the very end, Camilla Herculiana did not adopt any kind of submissive role apart from using a *topos of modesty* typical for dedicatory epistles. Instead, she “had proudly claimed her intellectual independence,”⁵⁷ her practical knowledge, and her position as a natural philosopher. As we will see further, also at the Inquisitional trial, there is no proof of any kind of submissive rhetoric.

Paratexts, and especially dedicatory epistles, are marked by strong authorial self-promotion. They stand in between the public and the private and provide us with more insight into understanding the role of the author/writer. The self-promotion by Camilla included her socially accepted female roles—being a mother, wife, and housekeeper, which are connected with domesticity—as well as her public persona—a natural philosopher, a pharmacist, Camilla Herculiana e Gregetta who spoke with educated men and considered herself equal to them.

Letters’ Analysis

After Schonaeus’s poem, in which he compares Herculiana to the Amazon queen Hippolyta and Penthesilea, and to Semiramis, Queen of Babylon,

⁵⁶Herculiana, *Lettere*, no pagination: “Ma con tutto ciò non voglio restar d’affaticarmi per ricuperar in parte l’honor delle spensierate, e sarò forse una causa e svegliamento agl’intelletti loro. E son sicura che s’attendessero a questo, non avriano ardire i Cavalieri esterni di venir’ in questa inclita città di Padova e volere con spada, e lanza provar e tassar noi d’imperfezione: Oltre che son sicura che molti savii et intelligenti lettori di questa opera non si faranno beffe dell’inventione di quella, et ammiraranno la volontà mia, insieme con il desiderio de i miei pensieri.” Translated in Carinci, 2021, 112.

⁵⁷Plastina, *Letters*, 58.

we find the four letters on natural philosophy. As the letters are dated and signed, following the proper letter-writing protocols, we can assume that letter exchange indeed existed. The title of each letter contains information about the subject of it. The first letter, signed by Herculiana on 7 August 1577, on “the natural cause of the Flood, and the natural temper of man,”⁵⁸ is addressed to the French physician, and medical writer, Giorgio Garnero (1550–1614). It is followed by the second letter, Garnero’s answer to Camilla, on the “negation of the Flood.”⁵⁹ He was also the addressee of Camilla’s second letter (the third in the book) about “the truth of the flood, the natural formation and appearance of the rainbow,”⁶⁰ which remained without a published answer. The importance of choosing Garnero as one of two addressees is twofold. Firstly, Giorgio Garnero published a book about the plague, which was popular at the time,⁶¹ and secondly, he was a student at the Paduan university in 1576. That Camilla Herculiana had contacts with the university through the apothecary and through her husband’s and brother’s connections is also proved by Carinci.⁶²

The fourth and last letter is signed by Camilla Herculiana from home on 9 April 1581. The addressee is a Hungarian, Martino di Berzevicze (1538–1596), the chancellor of King Stephen, Queen Anna Jagiellon’s husband and *jure uxoris* King of Poland. Across the letters, Herculiana discusses the structure of the soul, the influence of planets, and the causes of the flood, resting on Aristotelian, Platonic, Galenic, and astrological ideas, and provides us with her own observations. For example, the human body, according to Herculiana, should be understood as “the small world” or microcosm, inseparable from the macrocosm of the world. This was the doctrine inherited from humoral theory and was popular in the Paduan context at the time. In order to convince the reader of the truthfulness of

⁵⁸ Herculiana, *Lettere*, no pagination: “All’Eccelletis. Sig. Giorgio Garnero, nel’laquale si tratta la natural causa del Diluivio, et il natural temperamento dell’huomo.”

⁵⁹ Herculiana, *Lettere*, no pagination: Lettera dell’eccellentissimo Sig. Girogio Garnero a D. Camilla Herculiana, nella quale si tratta la negation del Diluivio.

⁶⁰ Herculiana, *Lettere*, no pagination: “Lettera di Camilla Herculiana all’Eccellentis. Sig. Giorgio Garnero, nellaqual si tratta della verità del diluivio, e della natural formatione et apparitione dell’arco celeste.”

⁶¹ This book is lost, but it is mentioned in de Renzi, Salvatore. *Storia della medicina italiana*, Napoli: Filliatre-Sebezio, 1845, 584. Giorgio Garnero, *Liber de peste quae grassala est Venetiis* (1576).

⁶² Carinci, *Una speziala*.

her words, she frequently uses indirect speech. For example, she quotes Marcus Aurelius mentioning that the person who wants to have good thoughts should have an undefiled brain and healthy bowels, and also she uses Latin when she refers to the Bible:⁶³

Herculiana alludes in her letters to Plato's philosophy, and his theory of recollection expressed in *Phaedo*. As pointed out by Maude Vanhaelen, this is an important testimony that a woman used Platonist ideas, which were different from the most popular ideas of love and beauty.⁶⁴ That fact "invites us to reconsider the importance of the direct (rather than 'eclectic') transmission of a *Platone volgare* in sixteenth-century Italy, particularly in the context of female medical and scientific writings."⁶⁵ She read Plato in Erizzo's translation, but in her first letter to Garnero, she draws directly from Plato's *Phaedo*.⁶⁶

Following a dialogical structure, she narrates the facts as they happen (i.e. "I told him and then he replied to me"). Therefore, all letters can be read as a kind of indirect dialogue between Herculiana and the unknown "illustrious sir." For example, when she agrees with Plato's theory of recollection, she provides the reader with the testimony of her discussion with an illustrious sir who mentioned Plato's theory of reminiscence and used this theory to explain why some people are better at doing one thing than the other.

And one learns the same doctrine in Plato. According to him, all souls are wise at some point, but forget everything as soon as they are imprisoned in the veil [of the body], and then through continuous contact [with the body] they remember...In this way, my opinion is confirmed, i.e. that since man does not remember all things, but only one thing or two, all this occurs and derives from a defect of matter, which has more kinship with one element than with another, so that one person excels in one thing, whilst another excels in another.⁶⁷

⁶³Herculiana, *Lettere*, no pagination: "Nisi granum frumenti cadens in terra mortuum fuerit, ipsum solum manet: si autem mortuum fuerit multum fructum assert."'

⁶⁴Vanhaelen, *Platonism*, 140.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Herculiana, *Lettere*, no pagination: "Et il simile s'intende secondo Platone, il qual vuole che tutte siano sapienti a un modo, ma che per esser subito rinchiusi in questo velame, si dimenticano, e poi per il longo habitar insieme si ricordano. E così viene a confermar la mia opinione, essendoché, non si ricordando l'huomo tutte le cose, ma solo una o due, il tutto

Herculiana refers to one error she made which Garnero corrected, saying that she knows “intuitively, without looking to either Galen or Aristotle.”⁶⁸ Direct experience, observation, and empirical authority were mainly privileged over theoretical knowledge. In the same line, in her letter to Martino di Berzevicze, she claims her originality in writing: “I reply that I have not read this in the works of any author. I do not believe that it is a praiseworthy thing to claim the opinion of other authors as one’s own.”⁶⁹ Regarding her writing and attempts to provide the best picture of herself, she mentions that what she does is read other authors in order to understand and consequently to develop her own ideas. “I do not deny that I read various authors, considering their explanations...whence, marvelling at their ingenuity and the range of their opinions, I determined that I, too, should write down my own.”⁷⁰

Interestingly, Camilla Herculiana introduces some private complaints in every letter at the end. In the first letter, she first described her disagreement with a certain mister Montagnana about the movement of the Sun,⁷¹ the treatise she is writing about theriac,⁷² and its “nature, properties, and qualities of the ingredients used [in it], and how they act favourably against

aviene e procede da difetto della materia, che tiene più d’un elemento che de l’altro, e così succede ch’uno è eccellente in una cosa et un altro in un’altra.” Translated in Vanhaelen, 2016.

⁶⁸Herculiana: “e questo lo conosco naturalmente, senza guardare Galeno ne Aristotele.” Translated in Carinci, *Camilla Erculiani*, 137.

⁶⁹Herculiana, *Lettere*, no pagination: “Rispondo e gli dico non havere apresso autore alcuno letto, né credo che sia cosa lodevole il scrivere l’opinione d’altri autori come sua propria: non nego che io non legga diversi autori speculando le diffinitioni loro, in quanto può passare il senso nostro, dove meravigliata de gl’ingegni e varie opinioni loro, mi son posta anch’o a scrivere il parer mio.” Translated in Carinci, 2021, 143.

⁷⁰Translated in Ray, *Daughters of Alchemy*, 128.

⁷¹Herculiana, *Lettere*, no pagination: “e altre cose che lascio di dire per non essergli più tediousa; riservandomi molte cose per un’altra mia, nella qual ho da dire la risposta, che mi diede l’Eccel. Montagnana, Medico eccellentissimo, sopra il moto del Sole, che lui dice, che riceve il calore dalla terra per il moto che fa in lei: *et io lo nego*”.

⁷²Theriac (and mithridate) “two prodigious antidotes against poisons and serious illnesses devised in the ancient world and popularised by Galen, which required eighty-odd ingredients of global provenance and often uncertain appearance, such as Indian amomum and Himalayan costus”, in Pugliano, Valentina, “Natural History in the Apothecary Shop”, in *Worlds of Natural History*. In H A Curry, Nicholas Jardine, James A Secord, and E C. Spary. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018, 51. It was one of the most popular remedies revived during the Renaissance.

poison,”⁷³ to finally conclude with a complaint about her lack of time. She writes about her stressful life and the impossibility of writing as much as she would like, adding that together with that letter, her husband Giacomo sends to Garnero a “small jar of theriac, which *me*⁷⁴ prepared this year.”⁷⁵ Her involvement in theriac’s production has a personal and familiar importance. She sends it as a gift to a friend, mentioning her experience and practical knowledge. The theriac was difficult to prepare, it was subject to many controls, and it was considered the most popular medicine against the plague while also used as a preventive drug.⁷⁶ The juxtaposition of the lack of time with the gift of a very laborious medicine shows how Herculiana had to navigate between her professional duties, which she took pride in, and her private commitments as a housewife. When communicating with other scholars, she made sure to stress her busy life but also emphasized how much of her time was consumed by her studies and practical developments in the apothecary. Again, highlighting personal experience provides her with a level of intellectual authority, but she still acknowledged her private duties and the partnership with her husband.

Also in the second letter to Garnero, at the very end, she complained that she did not have enough time to dedicate to writing. At the same time, she expressed her wishes not to rush opinions, wanting to dedicate time to study the subjects in order to write her answers to relevant topics.⁷⁷ She also mentioned that she wrote something about the sun, but that she did not have enough time to copy it and send it in this letter.⁷⁸ Here Herculiana pointed out another aspect of women’s knowledge production: having enough time to copy one’s ideas becomes much harder when one had to compromise between fulfilling the gendered expectations of a woman of her status and engaging with the practical and intellectual endeavours of a professional apothecary. Camilla highlighted that she had

⁷³Herculiana, *Lettere*, no pagination: “Hora m’affatico con il nostro Galeno, perch’io scrivo la natura, proprietà, e qualità degli ingredienti che entrino nella Teriaca, et con quali proprietà siano loro giovevoli contro i veleni.”

⁷⁴My emphasis.

⁷⁵Herculiana, *Lettere*, no pagination: “M. Giacomo le manda un vasetto di Teriaca et è di quella istessa ch’abbiamo fatto quest’anno”.

⁷⁶Fabbri, Christiane Nockels. “Treating medieval plague: the wonderful virtues of theriac”, *Early Sci Med.* 12, no. 3 (2007): 247–83.

⁷⁷Herculiana, *Lettere*, no pagination: “Et hora è l’hora tarda, per il corriero che si parte, ne ho io tempo d’haverla potuta leggere più d’una volta, con poco tempo di considerarla, ma dimani vi prometto di studiarla bene, e darvene l’altra risposta.” [my translation]

⁷⁸Translated in Ray, *Daughters of Alchemy*, 227.

much more ideas than she was able to communicate in the Republic of Letters of the time, as she was not able to make the necessary copies to distribute her intellectual insights. Herculiana writes: “Concerning the letter about the Sun, I wrote it, but I do not have time to copy it, and I do not want to send it, as I do with this letter, without keeping a copy and correcting it when there is a need.”⁷⁹

Besides juggling private and professional duties, Camilla also had to deal with the limitations of her own body. In the last letter, she explains that she decided to write to her addressee because she cannot speak, “being bothered by *terzana* (tertian fever)⁸⁰ for three months already.”⁸¹ Besides illnesses, she also had to deal with pregnancies, which could be extremely time-consuming, and sometimes debilitating to the point of preventing women’s work. Writing letters, however, seems to have been a way of continuing her knowledge production even when she would not be able to perform her apothecary endeavours, providing a window to continuously interact with the intellectual environment when her body did not allow for a physical engagement.

The subjects of the letters are scientific and philosophical, but some private, everyday themes appeared in both the peritext and in the letters. Metatextual data provided at the end of all of Herculiana’s letters represent an important testimony on private networks and private issues, information regarding her lack of time for writing, her stressful life, the production of theriac, and also her illness. She also provided *excusatio* for not being able to write as much as she wanted. In Herculiana’s letters, all the interlocutors are males, mainly addressed as friends, which is also part of the portrayal and the impersonation of the concept of *amicitia*, and another strategy to legitimate her work. Camilla Herculiana, with this letter collection, identified herself as somebody who does belong to the Republic of Letters.

The importance of this letter exchange can be seen in the subject of the woman who writes and takes responsibility for her words. Her insistence on epistolary dialogue might be understood in line with the *topos* of work exchange and the letter as the means of securing the image of being an educated, knowledgeable woman who enters into discussions with

⁷⁹ Herculiana translated in Carinci, *Camilla Erculiani*, 143.

⁸⁰ Terzana (Lat: tertianus) is the fever which appears every third day, see: tlio.ovi.cnr.it/ TLIO [last accessed 1 January 2022].

⁸¹ Herculiana, no pagination: “per esser molestata d’una terzana già tre mesi”.

intellectuals. She was completely aware of the possibility that she, because of her book, might be questioned before the Inquisition, and because of that, she chose a powerful dedicatee and clearly defined her audience: students of philosophy. Initially, her book was approved by the Inquisitional authorities. However, this approval was suspended later.⁸²

The two still unpublished letters by Sebastiano Erizzo (1525–1585), the Venetian humanist and numismatic, are preserved in manuscript in the Biblioteca Bertoliana in Vicenza.⁸³ The letters are written in the same year her book appeared, 1584. The first letter is dated 11 January, and the second 18 February. In the first letter, Erizzo thanks her for sending him one of her letters, along with “your very learned philosophical work,” which might be the book of letters or perhaps some other work still unknown to us. He, like Garnero, admires her ability in philosophy, stating that he “would not have easily believed that there would be in our time a woman with such expertise in the study of philosophy, had I not read your letters.”⁸⁴ What follows is Erizzo’s expression of gratitude, where he states: “I should thank you for the high esteem in which you hold me and for writing that you have learnt in my works all you know about the Platonic doctrine.”⁸⁵ This is evidence supporting Vanhaelen’s conclusion that Herculiana read Plato from Erizzo’s 1574 translation, though she did not quote it from there.

The second letter provides us with Erizzo’s comments on Herculiana’s ideas on the woman question, which this letter positions in the context of the *querelle des femmes*. Erizzo refers to her observations, not found in the book of letters, regarding the idea that women should only be connected with the identity of the mother, as the Bible states, that women should be treated as goddesses and not be bound to any law and that women should also be able to inherit some possessions. He defends female equality, stating that:

⁸²In 1515, the institute of the imprimatur was approved, the obligation that all manuscripts needed to be approved before being printed by the “Magister Sacri Palatii” in Rome. If a book appeared without an imprimatur, the author needed to pay 500 ducats as penalty, would be suspended for one year from the activity of writing, and the printers would be excommunicated. See Frajese, Vittorio. *La censura in Italia: Dall’Inquisizione alla Polizia*. Bari: GLF Editori Laterza, 2014, 14–15.

⁸³Vanhaelen, *Platonism*, 138. Manuscript G 3 8 7 (277) in the Biblioteca Bertoliana di Vicenza.

⁸⁴Translated in Vanhaelen, *Platonism*, 139.

⁸⁵Ibid.

Therefore, how will we be able to reasonably argue that God's law prescribed women to devote themselves to nothing else than bearing and giving birth to human beings, and that His divine majesty exempted them from any other human preoccupations and activities? This opinion is contrary to the Sacred Scriptures, which give woman part of the dominion over the sensible world, so that she may act together with man; neither would the supreme Providence give to one of its creatures such an idle role, nor does women's exemption from any worldly activity appear to be expressed by any law in the Sacred Scriptures.⁸⁶

Invoking the authority of Plato and his *Republic*, Erizzo states that women are and should always be considered equal to men, adding that it is known that somewhere in the north, women do the same things as men, such as in the Flanders. For the second doubt expressed by Herculiana, he writes:

I then read in this letter [he refers to Herculiana's letter sent to him] another argument that states the following: "This being well known to these divine men, they wrote laws and statutes in favour of women, as they did not wish to force them to respect any additional theological precepts, but letting them as if they were goddesses, they did not dare to bind these women to any law." On this point, I would rather think that you are kidding me and that this is not your own opinion: but if it were, I would ask you to let me know which author, ancient or modern, has expressed this idea in his writings, and quote him as proof that what you say is true.⁸⁷

Following this statement, he quotes words that, according to him, Camilla Herculiana wrote elsewhere that women "have decided to no longer be subjugated to man's yoke unless they are given a good part of their possessions; and they have done so to force men to treat them fairly."⁸⁸ And he answers that he would be very happy if such a law existed anywhere. Vanhaelen suggests in her latest study that the obvious lack of regard for religious propriety that can be seen in this letter might be the additional reason Herculiana was interrogated in front of the Inquisition: "The arguments she appears to have put forward to Erizzo, absent from her published work, suggest that she had little concern for religious orthodoxy. This might also explain why the Inquisition later questioned her."⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Translated in Vanhaelen, *Platonism*, 143.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Vanhaelen, *Platonism*, 144.

INQUISITIONAL TRIAL

After the publication of her book, Herculiana was suspected of heresy and interrogated by the Inquisition. Trial documents are not extant, but there is an account by a very influential contemporary jurist, Giacomo (Jacopo) Menochio. Menochio was famous and very influential, president of the “Magistrato delle entrate straordinarie,” and a member of the senate from Milan.⁹⁰ The fact that he gave his opinion about Herculiana’s case, and moreover defended her, is highly important and probably depended on her private connections. Herculiana’s brother, Giorgio Greghetto, was a jurist in Padua, and archival documents show that Menochio was together with him at some meetings.⁹¹

Camilla Herculiana, in Menochio’s narrative, was accused of heresy, and he selected nine parts of her book on which the accusation was based. In general, she claimed that man would still die, with or without original sin and that the Flood happened as the consequence of constantly growing numbers and bodies of people. Moreover, she accepted the Platonic theory of recollection. She also claimed that from nothing, anything could be produced. Her statement that souls are equal in sciences and that the soul of the child has the same perfection as that of an old person was also selected by Menochio as one of the reasons for the Inquisitional trial. He analyses especially the accusation regarding astrology and her ideas that “astrologers know future things, in historical periods and in human nature.”⁹²

What is highly valuable in Menochio’s written testimony is the fact that some of Herculiana’s answers are written in Italian in the form of direct speech. She defended herself, insisting on the fact that she wrote philosophically. We read that she accepted her guilt, as that was the only way to start the procedure. According to Menochio, Herculiana stated: “I answer to these words that, man being made of four elements, he could not live eternally, speaking in the way of Natural philosophy,” or “speaking philosophically, I tell you, that it is impossible to claim anything to be truthful [...] In Theology, always relying on Sacral the Sacred scriptures, I confess

⁹⁰ See Frajese, *La censura*, 86.

⁹¹ See Carinci, *Una speziala*, 222.

⁹² Menochio, *Consilium*, 183: “che l’Astrologi sanno le cose future nei regni, nell’età e nella natura dell’homini”. [my translation]

that the Biblical Flood and the death happened because of sin.”⁹³ In this narrative, Menochio adds:

And a little later, when she was asked whether she held the same opinion about the death of man she responded: *I tell you that, in philosophy, I do not hold any of these things to be true. In theology, I turn always to Sacred Scripture, and I affirm that the Flood and Death came about because of sin.* And she repeated the same thing after: *As I have already said, speaking theologically I affirm that sin was the cause of the death of man.*⁹⁴

Menochio used a different argumentation and different authorities to defend her,⁹⁵ but his main defence consists of the fact that she wrote in a philosophical way and not a theological one. Among other things, according to Menochio, Camilla, being a woman, was weaker and could not think properly, as “ignorant people and women are easier to be excused.”⁹⁶ This argument was quite popular at the time. When the heretical ideas were proven, three things were taken into consideration: “the quality of the person, the quality of the books, and length of retention.”⁹⁷ If the person was considered more intelligent, that increased their culpability, and the danger of the book would increase with the education of the author or the reader.

Paradoxically, maybe the fact that her ideas were not treated as being as important as those expressed by men just saved her life. Camilla Herculiana probably escaped punishment by the Inquisition. Usually, if the case was very complicated, and if the death sentence was considered, it would be sent to Rome. As there is no evidence that Herculiana’s case reached Rome and the Sant’Uffizio Romano, it may be concluded that Camilla was soon freed. However, this interrogation should be seen in the broader

⁹³ Menochio, *Consilium*, 182: “Io rispondo a queste parole ch’essendo l’huomo fatto di quatro elementi non potea vivere in eterno, parlando per via di Philosophia naturale [...] Parlando Philosophicamente, io vi dico, che non si può mai affermare una cosa per vera [...] In Theologia, reportandomi sempre alle sacre scritture, io confesso, ch’il Diluvio & la morte sono venuti per il peccato [...] “Io he esposto parlando naturalmmente, ch’anco un diluvio possi esser universale, et naturale, et anco miraculoso”. [my translation]

⁹⁴ Translated in Carinci, *Camilla Erculiani*, 162.

⁹⁵ See the English translation of *Consilia* in Carinci, *Camilla Erculiani* 168.

⁹⁶ Menochio, *Consilium*, 181: “Quae sententia multo magis locum habet in idiotis & mulieribus, qui facilius solent excusari”.

⁹⁷ Mentioned in Frajese, *La censura*, 52: “Poi si considerano principalmente tre cose: la qualità delle persone, la qualità de’ libri e diuturnità della retentione”.

context, as in the same period, in Venice, it is possible to find more apothecaries accused of heresy, as “the Council of Trent and Venetian Inquisition closely observed pharmacies known as centres of political and religious dissent,”⁹⁸ even though these apothecaries were males.

Before the Inquisition, Camilla Herculiana did not accept the strategy of many other women to invoke the traditionally ascribed feminine characteristics, such as ignorance, weakness, and irrationality in order to defend herself. However, Menochio used it on her behalf. A similar example is found in the defence by Giulia Gonzaga, who invoked her traditionally ascribed feminine characteristics, saying that as a woman, she was not so intelligent. Similarly, Vittoria Gonzaga and Isabella Frattina used ‘ignorance’ as an argument in front of the Inquisition (1568). When accused of reading heretical writings and being educated and curious, Frattina replied: “Because I am a woman who has to take care of her home, it is not convenient for me to do these studies, but rather to refer as I do, to my superiors.”⁹⁹ She adopted the strategy that, as a woman, she was not meant to think about theological things. She knew Latin, but she claimed that she read only the *Little Office of Our Lady*—a popular devotional book and prayed. Such rhetoric is not possible to find in Camilla’s case, who also was accused of writing a heretical book, as she defended herself stating: “I answer to these words...speaking in the way of Natural Philosophy”.

CONCLUSION

The self-narrative present in the paratext and the text by Camilla Herculiana is connected with some historical developments in the second half of the sixteenth century. She thought about her self-representation and provided a picture of Camilla Herculiana é Gregghetta, the *speciala* who lived in Padua and who lived off her work. Three identities can be read as important to her: woman, philosopher, and apothecary—the basis of her practical knowledge. Herculiana highlights her female identity and gender

⁹⁸ Carinci, *Camilla Erculiani*, 17. Carinci refers to the book Martin, John J. *Venice’s Hidden Enemies, Italian Heretics in a Renaissance City*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993. Martin mentioned 23 Venetian apothecaries accused of heresy between 1547 and 1586.

⁹⁹ Frattina: “perché son donna che ha da tender alla cura di casa mia, ne mi si conviene far questi studi, ma riportarmi come faccio alli miei superiori”, mentioned in Rambaldi, Susanna Peyronel. *Una gentildonna irrequieta: Giulia Gonzaga fra reti familiari e relazioni eterodosse*. Roma: Viella, 2012, 324–325.

consciousness frequently within the text. She defended herself as a philosopher and, at the same time, was defended by the fact that she was a woman.

The case of Camilla Herculiana is particularly important when gender, privacy, and knowledge production in the late sixteenth century is taken into consideration. Despite the overall ideas of scarce female contribution to philosophy, archival materials prove, in fact, that women did contribute to knowledge production in an original way, which, regardless of the common representation, did not obligatorily include the submissive or modest rhetoric. The Italian Renaissance culture offered more possibilities for women's participation in the production of culture than it is possible to find in some other countries. However, conceptions of gender, women's roles and culture varied from region to region, and it can be said that especially Veneto in the Renaissance context offered a fertile terrain for the birth of texts on *querelle des femmes* both by men and women. It was during the sixteenth century that the debate on women and their role in society (*querelle des femmes*) was blooming.

However, the publicity and entering into the public realm obtained by printing this book should be taken with reserve. On the one hand, we know that only four copies of her book have been found, and it might be considered that it was meant only for small audiences. But, on the other hand, the questioning in front of the Inquisition proves that, in fact, Camilla Herculiana and the publication of her book received attention from the public. In this context, my chapter has shown that the domestic sphere is not connected only with women and should be understood as a space where private and public coexist. Expanding our understanding of domesticity allows for a better understanding of women's contributions to early modern culture and politics, and Camilla Herculiana is only one example. Camilla Herculiana was affected by cultural and political shifts of the Italian sixteenth century, she questioned the social order and used her book, but also inquisitional trial to make herself heard: "make praises to be heard, such as are worthy of Camilla, and of you too."¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰Herculiana, *Lettere*, no pagination.

REFERENCES

PRIMARY SOURCES

- de Guevara, Antonio. 1568. *Libro di Marco Aurelio con l'horologio de principi*. Venetia: Francesco Portonaris Secondo.
- Fedele, Cassandra. 1487. *Oratio pro Bertucio Lamberto*. Modena.
- Herculiana, Camilla. 1584. *Lettere di philosophia naturale, di Camilla Herculiana, speciale alle tre stelle in Padoua, indirizzate alla serenissima Regina di Polonia: nella quale si tratta la natural causa delli diluuij, et il natural temperamento dell'huomo, et la natural formatio*. Cracovia, stamperia di Lazaro.
- Menochio, Jacopo. 1604–1616. Consilium DCCLXVI, 766. In *Consiliorum sive responsorum*. Frankfurt: Andreas Wécheli and Johann Gymnich.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Becker, Anna. 2017. Gender in the History of Early Modern Political Thought. *The Historical Journal* 60 (4): 843–863.
- Braida, Ludovica. 2000. *Stampa e cultura in Europa tra XV e XVI secolo*. Roma-Bari: Laterza.
- Carinci, Eleonora. 2021. *Camilla Erculiani, Letters on Natural Philosophy: The Scientific Correspondence of a Sixteenth-Century Pharmacist, with Related Texts*. The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe, the Toronto Series 77. Toronto: Iter Press.
- . 2013. *Una speciale padovana: Lettere di philosophia naturale di Camilla Erculiani (1584)*, 202–229. Manchester: The Society for Italian studies.
- Castiglione, Baldassare. 2013. *Il Libro del Cortegiano*. Milano: Garzanti.
- Cotrugli, Benedetto (Kotrulj, Benedikt). 2009. *Libro del arte dela mercatura: Knjiga o vještini trgovanja*, edited and translated Zdenka Janeković-Romer. Zagreb: HAZU.
- Cox, Virginia. 2016. *A Short History of the Italian Renaissance*. London: I. B. Tauris.
- Dunn, Kevin. 1994. *Pretexts of Authority: The Rhetoric of Authorship in the Renaissance Preface*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Ebbersmeyer, Sabrina, and Gianni Paganini, eds. 2020. *Women, Philosophy and Science: Italy and Early Modern Europe. Vol. 4. Women in the History of Philosophy and Sciences*. Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Eckerle, Julie A. 2007. Prefacing Texts, Authorizing Authors, and Constructing Selves: The Preface as Autobiographical Space. In *Genre and Women's Life Writing in Early Modern England*, ed. Michelle M. Dowd and Julie A. Eckerle, 97–113. Aldershot: Ashgate.

- Emden, Christian J., and David Midgley, eds. 2012. *Changing Perceptions of the Public Sphere*. 1st ed. New York/Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- Enos, Theresa, ed. 2009. *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric and Composition: Communication from Ancient Times to the Information Age*. New York: Routledge.
- Fabbri, Christiane Nockels. 2007. Treating Medieval Plague: the Wonderful Virtues of Theriac. *Early Science and Medicine* 12 (3): 247–283.
- Frajese, Vittorio. 2014. *La censura in Italia: Dall'Inquisizione alla Polizia*. Bari: GLF Editori Laterza.
- Genette, Gerard. 1997. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. Trans. Jane E. Lewin. Literature, Culture, Theory. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Martin, John J. 1993. *Venice's Hidden Enemies, Italian Heretics in a Renaissance City*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Pender, Patricia. 2012. *Early Modern Women's Writing and the Rhetoric of Modesty*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Plastina, Sandra. 2014. Considerar la mutatione dei tempi e delli stati e degli uomini»: Le Lettere di philosophia naturale di Camilla Erculiani. In *Bruniana & Campanelliana. Ricerche filosofiche e materiali storico-testuali*. X. Pisa/Roma: Fabrizio Serra Editore
- . 2020. Letters on Natural Philosophy and New Science: Camilla Erculiani (Padua 1584) and Margherita Sarrocchi (Rome 1612). In *Women, Philosophy and Science, Italy and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Sabrina Ebbersmeyer and Gianni Paganini, 55–80.
- Pugliano, Valentina. 2018. Natural History in the Apothecary Shop. In *Worlds of Natural History*, ed. H.A. Curry, Nicholas Jardine, James A. Secord, and E.C. Spary, 44–60. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Rambaldi, Susanna Peyronel. 2012. *Una gentildonna irrequieta: Giulia Gonzaga fra reti familiari e relazioni eterodosse*. Roma: Viella.
- Ray, Meredith Kennedy. 2015. *Daughters of Alchemy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Strocchia, Sharon T. 1999. Learning the Virtues: Convent Schools and Female Culture in Renaissance Florence. In *Women's Education in Early Modern Europe: A History, 1500-1800*, ed. Barbara J. Whitehead, 3–46. New York: Garland.
- Vanhaelen, Maude. 2016. Platonism in 16th-century Padua: Two Unpublished Letters from Sebastiano Erizzo to Camilla Erculiani. In *Bruniana & Campanelliana. Ricerche filosofiche e materiali storico-testuali*. Pisa/Roma: Fabrizio Serra Editore.
- Whitehead, J. Barbara, ed. 1999. *Women's Education in Early Modern Europe. A History 1500-1800*. New York: Garland Pub.
- Wallace, William A. 1999. Zabarella, Jacopo. In *Encyclopedia of the Renaissance*, ed. Paul F. Grendler, vol. 6, 337–339. New York: Scribner.

- Woolf, Virginia. 2017. Professions for Women. In *Death of A Moth and Other Essays*. Australia: University of Adelaide.
- Zurawska, Jolanta, ed. 1994. *Il Rinascimento in Polonia: atti dei colloqui italo-polacchi 1989–1992*. Napoli: Bibliopolis.
- Zimmermann, Margarete. 2001. The *Querelle des Femmes* as Cultural Studies Paradigm. In *Time, Space, and Women's Lives in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Anne Jacobson Schutte et al., 17–29. Kirksville: Truman State University Press.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

