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The letter of Lauro Quirini to Isotta Nogarola: on the right training of the mind

A carta de Lauro Quirini a Isotta Nogarola: sobre o treinamento correto da mente

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ABSTRACT

In his letter to Isotta Nogarola, Lauro Quirini, a humanist scholar of the 15th century, provides advices related to her readings on dialectic and philosophy. Since Isotta has willingly devoted herself to the study of these “higher disciplines”, he composes a detailed curriculum for her, which consists of texts of advanced philosophical language and content, written either in Latin or ancient Greek. He aspires to serve as her teacher in these matters and to guide her through the intellectual path that she chose to follow, “overcoming her own nature”.

Keywords: Isotta Nogarola. Lauro Quirini. Female education. Philosophy. Philogyny.

RESUMO

Em sua carta a Isotta Nogarola, Lauro Quirini, estudioso humanista do século XV, dá conselhos relacionados às suas leituras sobre dialética e filosofia. Como Isotta se dedicou voluntariamente ao estudo dessas “disciplinas superiores”, ele compõe um currículo detalhado para ela, que consiste em textos de linguagem e conteúdo filosóficos avançados, escritos em latim ou grego antigo. Ele aspira ser seu professor nessas questões e guiá-la pelo caminho intelectual que ela escolheu seguir, “superando sua própria natureza”.

Palavras-chave: Isotta Nogarola. Lauro Quirini. Educação feminina. Filosofia. Filoginia.

Introduction

But if women had written the books
 I know that it would have been certainly different,
 Since they know well that they are wrongly accused,
 So the parts are not divided equally,
 Since the strongest take the largest part,
 And those who divide take for themselves the best part.¹

(CHRISTINE DE PIZAN, 1886, vv. 417-422)

In this passage from her poetic work “Letter to the God of Loves”, Christine de Pizan illuminates the injustice imposed on women, since it was considered at least inappropriate for them to enter the male realm of academic education and to engage in activities that were thought to be exclusively masculine; writing books was one of them. Today, it is widely known that for a woman of the Middle Ages and of the higher ranks there were solely two options in life: marriage or convent, with an exception for the royalty or other privileged women who may were fortunate enough to have – limited – access to the classical education. Nonetheless, if they chose this path, they still remained confined, since the concept to live a secular life, unmarried, focused only on studying was inconceivable. “Women enclosed themselves in studious solitude [and in their ‘book-lined cell’] and men applauded” (KING, 1988, p. 66); that was the main idea of the time.

Isotta Nogarola was one of the above mentioned, whose family allowed her to devote herself to the studying of both secular and religious literature, while remaining unmarried and in her family residence. The letter she received from Lauro Quirini² indicates the level of admiration and recognition she enjoyed, coming from her male correspondents and the male scholars due to her great intellect and profound knowledge of important philosophical, religious or other works.

In particular, Lauro Quirini seems to be one of the many scholar admirers Isotta had. He decided to address this encomiastic epistle to her after having read other letters of the Veronese and having been encouraged by her brother, Leonardo, to contact Isotta for further guidance on her studies (KING; ROBIN, 2004, p. 107). Thus, the purpose of this letter was for Quirini to serve as a teacher and advisor for Nogarola, aspiring to guide her through the “higher disciplines” and further train her intellect.

Gliding back to the verses of Christine de Pizan, it looks that the writer expresses clearly the situation of the female education in her time. Women were limited to a life governed by the household activities, producing heirs or opting for a religious retreat. On the other hand, men, who may be “those who divide”, keep for themselves the best part, which could be interpreted as the humanist education. The situation of the society during Humanism and Renaissance, who remained regressive in terms of engaging women in intellectual activities, was unfavorable for the aforementioned to look for an advancement of their educational interests. It is possible to detect some male work that advocated the female education;

¹ Mais se femmes eussent les livres fait/ Je çay de vray que autrement fust du fait,/ Car bien scevent qu’a tort sont encouplées,/ Si ne sont pas a droit les pars coupées,/ Car les plus fors prenent la plus grant part,/ Et le meilleur pour soy qui pieces part. Translated by the writer of the present article.

² ABEL, Eugenius (Ed.). *Isotæ Nogarolæ Veronensis Opera Quæ Supersunt Omnia*. Accedunt Angelæ et Zeneveræ Nogarolæ. Volume 2. Budapest: Apud Gerold et Socios, 1886, p. 9. According to the editor of Isotta’s epistolographic corpus, possible dates for the composition of Quirini’s letter are either sometime between 1445-1448 or between 1451-1452, at Padua.

however, the curriculums were constructed in such a way as to maintain the restrictions imposed on women and were aiming to assuring the continuity of the traditional, male dominated and misogynist society (GIBSON, 1989, p. 10). This seems to be another reason why Christine de Pizan, disappointed with the exclusion of women from the privilege of a meaningful education, writes the verses below. The verses portray her bitterness for this female exclusion in her time, which also corresponds to the female status of following periods:

But since I was born a woman,
It was not appropriate for me,
To enjoy some of my father's goods
And I could not access the riches
Of the fountain of great value
To follow a custom rather than justice.³

(CHRISTINE DE PIZAN, 1884, vv. 413-419)

1. Lauro Quirini and Isotta Nogarola

Lauro Quirini is a Venetian nobleman, a humanist and a philosopher, who aspires to be Isotta's teacher, according to his own words⁴. As mentioned, he is already aware of her letters and her writing style, therefore he is able to recognize her high intellect and her potential as a writer and, perhaps, as a female humanist scholar. He represents one of the many male voices that address Isotta, in order to praise her and to provide guidance.

In fact, Isotta was receiving and sending letters from and to several male scholars of her time, such as Ermolao Barbaro, Damiano dal Borgo, Guarino Veronese, and Ludovico Foscarini; all these personalities were prominent noblemen and their correspondence with Nogarola highlights the gradual progress of the writer in terms of enhancing her letters with a literary style, structuring a compelling reasoning related to many different topics and, in general, expressing her thoughts with confidence. Moreover, the reference to these particular personalities takes place, in order to indicate that Isotta was actively engaging in the act of writing and communicating with other scholars, especially men whom she considered colleagues, given the fact that they all, including her, had similar literary interests.

An interesting element of Lauro Quirini's letter to Isotta that should be stressed is that he does not refer to the status of Isotta as an unmarried woman, who chose not to be confined to a convent, neither does he comment on anything related to her personal life. The sole subject of his letter is to recommend a curriculum that complies with her interests and her intellectual skills. This type of recommendations

³ Mais, pour ce que fille fu nee,/ Ce n'estoit pas chose ordenee/ Que en riens deusse amander/ Des biens mon pere, et succeder/ Ne poz a l'avoir qui est pris/ En la fonteine de grant pris./ Plus par costume que par droit. Translated by the writer of the present article.

⁴ KING, Margaret L.; RABIL, Albert, Jr. **Her immaculate hand**. Selected works by and about the women humanists of Quattrocento Italy. Binghamton-New York: Medieval and Renaissance texts and studies, 1992, p.111. Lauro Quirini (ca 1420- 1480/1), was coming from a Venetian family and completed his studies in Padua, where he first studied arts and later law. From 1449 to 1452 he provided the public with lectures on rhetoric and philosophy. Among the works on which he lectured was the Aristotelian *Ethics*. Thus, it seems natural that in his letter to Isotta Nogarola, he advises her to study "diligently" Aristotle's moral books, as it was among the subjects on which he himself had shown great interest and which he considered of great value for a scholar.

without any further comment on the woman's social status is rather rare, but can be explained when considering the fact that he treats her more as a male colleague or, at the very least, as a female that has "overcome her [female] nature"⁵.

Now, reading again the complain reflected in her verses, Christine de Pizan clearly presents a troubling situation, in which women were not allowed to enjoy the fruits of education and if they did, they were definitely not permitted to even project the ambition to be considered as intellectuals equal to male scholars. Men would recognize their intellectual virtues only if women would strip out all their female traits and, in the case of Quirini, this idea seems to be indisputable.

1.1 Content of the epistle

For a better understanding of Quirini's letter and its content, it is useful to proceed with a short introduction on the way he forms his advices. At the beginning, Quirini presents his intentions for writing the letter. In this first part, there is the testimony on why he decided to compose such letter as well as the information related to the person who brought her other letters to his attention. It was the nobleman Giovanni Dolfino who arrived in Padua, carrying a volume of Isotta's letters. In addition, her brother Leonardo, who was a student in Padua as well, urged him to provide his "friendly advice", guiding her on her studies. After praising her for her achievements, her way of living and also her studies on the art of rhetoric and of dialectic, Quirini continues his encomiastic speech, underlining why she should be named among notable women of the past⁶. Furthermore, her intelligence of mind is so great, that she should dedicate her time in studying philosophy, which is the highest of disciplines and require a skillful student.

To begin with, despite the fact that he praises her readings regarding the act of dialectic and philosophy, he urges her to not take into consideration the content of the modern writings produced by these branches of studying, since they don't apply the old method of the ancient and true philosophy; on

⁵ During the 15th century, it is possible to encounter a few names of great female humanists, including Isotta Nogarola, who were distinguished scholars and dared to "cross the threshold from promising student to accomplished practitioner" (JARDINE, Lisa. 'O Decus Italiae Virgo', or the myth of the learned lady in the renaissance. *The Historical Journal*, vol. 28(4), p. 816, 1985). Among them, they were Costanza Varano, Cassandra Fedele, Laura Cereta, and Alessandra Scala, all of them being intellectuals that communicated through correspondence with male scholars. Nevertheless, despite the fact that their education and intellectual abilities were widely admired and also the fact that all of them received praises – from both their male and female scholar contemporaries, they were never really introduced to the humanist circle and never considered as equal by the male community. On the other hand, if a woman managed to draw the attention of male scholars so as for them to consider her as intellectually equal and worthy of entering this realm of powerful scholars, she should be considered as a scholar with male qualities or as an intellectual being with no female qualities. Jardine (ibid.) in her interpretation of Angelo Politician's epistle where he describes the personality and intellectual of Cassandra Fedele, mentions that he does so by "assiduously *mythologizing* Fedele into not-woman: into an emblem of humanistic achievement which avoids confronting her sex as a problem" (p. 804). Excluding the female features and qualities, the male scholars could more easily engage in this type of interaction with women. This pattern emerges in the letters addressed to Isotta Nogarola as well. Apart from Lauro Quirini who writes "virtuem enim veram, quae virorum propria est, singulari industria es consecuta [...]" (ABEL, *ibid.*, p. 12), meaning that she has pursued and attained a virtue that is more appropriate to men, also Guarino Guarini, another notable humanist with whom she corresponded, underlined in his letters that Isotta owns an intellect that is proper for a man; this "manliness" is what makes her great in mind and spirit and only by preserving this trait she would be respected by him. The examples of this *topos* are many and the occasions in which this pattern emerges, vary. To conclude with this reference, it seems obvious that in the case of Lauro Quirini's letter, he clearly treats Isotta as a manly intellectual, to whom he offers his scholarly advices.

⁶ ABEL, *ibid.*, p. 11-12. "An forte lætandum non est, quod inter raras quidem, sed claras certe feminas nomineris, cum prisca tempora gloriari videamus in huiusmodi præclarissimarum feminarum eruditione?"

the contrary, they distort the true meaning in order to appear that they have a great knowledge of things. In this way, they ignore the true philosophical doctrines and they are driven away from the profound knowledge of the philosophical teachings:

[...] to demand as my right not only that you avoid and shun these new philosophers and dialecticians as men without knowledge of true philosophy and dialectic but also that you spurn all their writings. For when they teach dialectic they do not follow the long proven method of this ancient discipline, but they introduce I do not know what kinds of childish sophisms, inextricable arguments, and unnecessary digressions and thus obfuscate the clear and distinct order of this discipline. In order to appear to know much, they distort everything [...].⁷ (KING; ROBIN, 2004, p. 109)

Thus, he advises her to start studying the works of Boethius Severinus, who wrote commentaries on Aristotelian works and will help her understand how the Greek philosophy was interpreted by ancient commentators. She then has to continue with the study of the moral books of Aristotle and finally with mathematics, natural philosophy and metaphysics. After having studied the content of these ancient Greek works, she is advised to skip the reading of the above-mentioned modern scholars, since they deal with the “remains of the philosophy”. However, she should study diligently the Arabs and also focus on the commentaries of Averroes, Avicenna, Thomas Aquinas and Al Ghazali, in order to have a better understanding of the Aristotelian works. Finally, Cicero should be a daily reading.

The Venetian scholar concludes his letter with another encomiastic speech for Isotta and with the promise that they will continue corresponding, provided she wishes to. At the end, he advises her to let philosophy guide her mind and finally he asks that she considers him as a dear friend.

1.2 Lauro Quirini’s praise and guidance to Isotta Nogarola

“Some sort of almost boorish shyness, remarkable Isotta, greatest glory of women of our age, has restrained me to this day from writing to you, whom, although silently, I have certainly cherished most affectionately” (KING; ROBIN, 2004, p. 107)⁸.

Quirini’s letter to Nogarola abounds in praises to its addressee and the above mentioned passage is one of many examples. The writer starts with an encomiastic wording towards Isotta, an introduction that is not only very common for an epistle of the period addressed to a highly esteemed personality but also depicts how much Quirini admired Isotta. He then mentions the true purpose of composing the letter, which is to provide “reliable and friendly advice especially about which authors should guide [her] in these higher disciplines” that are the dialectic and philosophy⁹. Overall, the letter is a mixture of praising and guiding this passionate student.

⁷ ABEL, *ibid.*, p. 13-14. “cupio, inquam, idque meo iure iubeo, ut novos hos philosophos novosque dialecticos tamquam homines minime veræ philosophiæ veræque dialecticæ quidem non viam disciplinæ veteris iam probatæ docent, sed nescio quibus puerilibus captionibus, inextricabilibus circuitibus et scrupulosis ambagibus huiusce disciplinæ claram et dilucidam semitam obfugarunt. Nam ut multa scire videantur, omnia etiam planissima futili quadam subtilitate corrumpunt [...]”.

⁸ ABEL, *ibid.*, p. 9. “Pudor nescio quis pæne subrusticus, Isota insignis feminarum nostri temporis maxima gloria, ad hanc usque, diem me tenuit, ne tibi antea scriberem, quam tacito quidem, sed certe plurimo amore colebam”.

⁹ ABEL, *ibid.*, p. 10. “fidelissime ac amicissime te commonerem, quos præcipue magistros in his altioribus diciplinis sequi deberes”.

Moreover, in order for Quirini to justify his extended praises to Isotta, he uses two different techniques. Firstly, he refers to the ancient scholars who also glorified learned women, among Greeks and Romans; secondly, it looks as if Quirini addresses Isotta as he would be addressing a male disciple:

And should we not greatly rejoice that you can be named among those admittedly few but certainly famous women when we see that the ancients gloried in the learning of such outstanding women? [...] Rightly, therefore, should you also, famous Isotta, receive the highest praises, since you have indeed, if I may speak, overcome your own nature. For that true virtue that is proper to men you have pursued with remarkable zeal – not the mediocre virtue that many men seek, but that which would befit a man of the most flawless and perfect wisdom. Thus Cicero rightly said, ‘You young men have a womanly spirit, but the woman has a man’s spirit’.¹⁰ (KING; ROBIN, 2004, p. 108)

With these references, Quirini manages to acknowledge Nogarola’s learning and to speak highly of her, without being criticized that he praised a woman in such an enthusiastic way. These mentions also seem to provide him with the perfect excuse, in order to propose a very advanced curriculum. Despite the fact that he refers to her lack of knowledge of the Greek letters, he urges her to study other works that may help her acquire a good understanding of the content of the ancient Greek philosophical works. For this purpose, and “just like a teacher moved by the sight of a passionate and committed student, [he] shall teach [her], a virgin deserving of praise” (KING; ROBIN, 2004, p. 109)¹¹.

Another element of Quirini’s guidance is related to the way he presents and describes the proposed works. For example, he encourages Isotta to “read diligently and carefully the moral books of Aristotle, which he writes divinely”; then to “strive unceasingly and determinedly to pursue that philosophy that we call natural” and finally that she should “delve into metaphysics”. Finally, Isotta should read “constantly and assiduously” the Arabs, in order to gain greater knowledge on the Aristotelian philosophy. All these are “the right path and splendid order of truth” (KING; ROBIN, 2004, p. 110-111). The wording he applies in his guidance indicates the necessity for her to follow the curriculum in this order and to study all these works with great attention, aiming at the right training of her mind and also aspiring to attain excellent knowledge of these higher disciplines.

In the final passage of his letter, Quirini uses similar wording to that of the opening, in order to express his admiration for Nogarola’s intellect and personality, gladly offering his service as her teacher, considering the fact that she is worthy of such guidance:

These things, goddess Isotta, of great virtue and honesty, I have freely written, moved by conscience, by duty, and by that marvelous affection I feel toward you, which affection, once I know that you have accepted it gladly and willingly, I shall maintain as long as you wish.¹² (KING; ROBIN, 2004, p. 112)

¹⁰ ABEL, *ibid.*, p. 11-12. “An forte lætandum non est, quod inter raras quidem, sed claras certe feminas nomineris, cum prisca tempora gloriari videamus in hu iusmodi præclarissimarum feminarum eru ditione? [...] Iure igitur es tu quoque, Isota præclara, summis laudibus prosequenda, quippe quæ naturam, ut sic dixerim, tuam superasti. Virtutem enim veram, quæ virorum propria est, singulari industria es consecuta, nec eam quidem mediocrem, ut plerique virorum, sed ut integerrimæ perfectæque sapientiæ virum decet, quare Cicero recte dicebat: Vos iuvenes animum geritis muliebrem illaque virgo viri”.

¹¹ ABEL, *ibid.*, p. 13. “Itaque tamquam provocatus magister amicæ quidem atque fidelissimæ humanitatis intuitu te venerandam virginem edocebo”.

¹² ABEL, *ibid.*, p.20-21. “Hæc, Isota dia, ampla virtute et honestate, liberius scripsi fretus conscientia, officio et ea quam erga te mirificam benivolentiam gero, quam post quam grato æquoque animo te suscepisse intellexero, quoad voles conservabo”.

2. The curriculum

According to the previous presentation of the content, Quirini advises Nogarola to read a series of difficult philosophical texts, which consists of Latin, Greek and Arabic texts. However, before he starts listing the appropriate works for her studies, he underlines which ones she should avoid – the modern dialectic and philosophical works, as they do not offer the quality of knowledge she should acquire through her readings.

Having discouraged his student from engaging in the reading of such writings, Quirini urges her to start her studies with the works of the philosopher Boethius, especially his treatises and commentaries on the Aristotelian works *Categories* and *On Interpretation*. The treatises are the most reliable and they will guide her on how to read and interpret the ancient Greek philosophical works. These readings will also help her study any other commentary she wants, related to the ancient Greek texts. After she finishes with this part of her studies, Nogarola should continue with the study of the moral books of Aristotle, “in which [she] may unfailingly recognize the essence of true and solid virtue”. These books will also lead her “to the height and extremity of the good”. The study of the Aristotelian moral books should be followed by the study of a threefold of sciences, namely the mathematics “which offers knowledge of such certainty (even though it is very difficult)”, the natural science “in which we are taught about living things and bodies in motion” and the metaphysics “which the Peripatetics call the divine science, so that you may be able to know God and the three substances” (KING; ROBIN, 2004, p. 110-111).

After having finished with all the aforementioned readings, Isotta should focus on the studying of the Arabic works – probably in Latin translation – and the ones of Thomas Aquinas that will help her clarify the notions of the ancient Greek philosophy. Quirini proposes these readings, since there are not neither Latin translations – at least good ones – of the Aristotelian works nor modern commentaries. Finally, he highlights that reading Cicero should be a daily activity, as he considers his writings of great value for his student. With this curriculum, Quirini aspires to help Isotta develop her intellectual skills and acquire an extended knowledge on the philosophical matters and also on the important works of the Antiquity. Moreover, by completing this curriculum, Isotta will have attained excellent knowledge on the content of the proposed books and she may also have a greater motivation to further study the Greek letters, in order to be able to read the texts from the original.

In the final passage of his letter, Quirini explains why he believes that Nogarola should study philosophy very carefully and provides the goals that she will be able reach, after having finished with her studies:

For this is the one most holy discipline that teaches true wisdom and instructs in the right mode of living. Those, consequently, who are ignorant of philosophy, go through life not only having achieved no good but even having committed evil. Accordingly, give your whole heart, as they say, to philosophy alone; for I want you to be not semi-learned, but to have knowledge of all the good arts, that is, to know the art of good speaking and the

discipline of correct disputation, as well as the science of human and divine things.¹³ (KING; ROBIN, 2004, p. 113)

Conclusion – The philogynist perspective

I forbid utterly the reading of secular literature, particularly the works of the poets. For how can I believe that you have renounced the world if you love the things which are of the world? What does it matter what form your love for the world takes? Certainly you love the world if you love worldly literature. Laymen can be forgiven if, having at least given up indecent writers, they continue to study others. [But] a bride of Christ may read only sacred books and ecclesiastical writers. So you must put aside your beloved Virgil, with Vittorino's pardon. Take up instead the Psalter [and], instead of Cicero, the Gospel.¹⁴ (KING; RABIL, 1992, p. 102-103)

The passage above comes from a letter of Gregorio Correr to Cecilia Gonzaga, written in 1443, at around the same time when Lauro Quirini composed his own to Isotta Nogarola. The purpose of this reference is to highlight two different perspectives, when it comes to the advices that these two men give to the young women, which ultimately aim at the same purpose: to help the women involved in the correspondence follow their chosen path. Moreover, it will be used as a good example, in order to discuss the divergence in terms of style and wording of the letters, as well as the overall guidance that the writers offer to their addressees. This particular passage also refers to the works that are suitable for reading, for a woman of chastity. The fact that the two writers have an entirely different point of view is obvious, since Correr urges Cecilia to get away from anything related to the secular life – including the secular sources of knowledge, encouraging her to distance herself from all these temptations that would harm her spirit: “Flee, Cecilia, virgin of Christ, flee, cover your eyes, cover your ears. Flee, if you can, to where neither song nor symphony are heard” (KING; RABIL, 1992, p. 99)¹⁵.

There are two main comments that can be mentioned here, the first related to Correr's focus on the status of virginity of his addressee and the second related to his advice that Cecilia must avoid studying the ancient secular literature and especially the poetic works and solely focus on the reading of religious works. However, if one examines the letters and the reasoning that the writers use to guide these two women, the common element that may come to the surface is the fact that both writers have a philogynist perspective on the female education, despite the fact that the proposed studies and their approach of the secular education in general differ entirely.

¹³ ABEL, *ibid.*, p.21-22. “Hæc enim unica, sanctissima disciplina est, quæ veram sapientiam edocet et rectum vivendi modum instruit, ex quo fit, ut ignari huius non modo turpiter sed etiam perniciose per vitam obirent. Proinde huic uni rei, toto, ut aiunt, pectore incumbere, volo enim te non semidoctam esse, sed cunctarum bonarum disciplinarum peritiam habere, id est et bene dicendi artem et recte disputandi disciplinam et humanarum atque divinarum rerum scientiam noscere.

¹⁴ CONTARINI, Giovanni B. *Anecdota Veneta*. Volume 1. Venice: Petrus Valvasensis, 1757, p. 41-42. “Restat ut cibi sæcularium litterarum lectionein penitus interdiciam; maxime Poetarum. Quomodo enim sæculo renunciesset crediderim, si quæ sæculi sunt amas? Quid refert qua ex parte sæculum diligas diligis certe sæculum, si sæculi litteras amas. Danda venia Sæcularibus, ut, rejectis tantum obscænis Scriptoribus, cætera discant. Sponsa Christi nihil aliud legat quam sacra volumina, & Scriptorum Ecclesiasticos. Proinde illum tuum dilectum Maronem, vel cum Victorini pace, dimitto. Sumc pro eo Psalterium, pro Cicerone Evangelium”.

¹⁵ CONTARINI, *ibid.*, p. 38. Fuge, Virgo Christi Cecilia, fuge, contine oculos, contine aures: fuge, si potes, quo neque cantus, neque symphonia exaudiri possint.

Correr's advices to Cecilia are those who were the most common ones for that period of time. Cecilia Gonzaga, according to Correr's acknowledgment, is a learned woman and an accomplished poet, who received an excellent education. Her expressed intention to enter a convent can be attributed to either her own desire to dress the monastic garb and devote herself to the religious life or to find a shelter, where she could dedicate her hours in studying. As Correr writes, remaining in her father's house would alienate her from her purpose, as she will be obliged to attend the family's gatherings, where the danger of becoming vulnerable to the secular life is greater. The mention of her status as a virgin woman is highly frequent in the letter, as the writer projects the common concept of the virgin woman who must enter the convent to remain chaste. The alternative, namely remaining in her father's house, unmarried, solely studying literature, is not acceptable by him – or anyone else. For this purpose, he advises her to pursue the monastic life and fulfill her desire, because he is truly convinced that her virtues will be enhanced and that she will be able to follow her chosen path away from the daily distractions (KING; RABIL, 1992, p. 92-93).

On the other hand, Lauro Quirini is not concerned with Nogarola's virginity or social status. He also gives her advices that comply with her wish to commit to the studying of literature and guides her on how to benefit from these studies, in order to reach her own goals. Thus, despite all differences, both men are eager to compose a reasoning that they believe it will help their addressees follow the right path, train their mind correctly and avoid all other pointless activities, including the studying of works that the two male scholars consider useless and harmful.

To conclude, Correr's letter and his advices related to the life choices and the works that a woman should study – if she is allowed to do so – represents the norm, whereas Quirini's letter is the exception. Both scholars, with respect to the female nature and intellect, propose works that would elevate their spirit and mind and also enhance their skills. The only difference is that with Correr's curriculum, Cecilia will never manage to exceed the traditional educational plan imposed on women, whereas Isotta will be fortunate enough to study different works from several writers in different languages and will rightly claim her place next to other distinguished scholars.

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