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Research Article

Rediscovering Laura Cereta through the Paratexts of Jacopo Filippo Tomasini's 1640 Edition: A Close Reading of Selected Letters

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Summary

This article seeks to reassess the intellectual profile of Laura Cereta (1469–1499) through a two fold analytical framework. First, it examines the paratexts composed by Jacopo Filippo Tomasini for his 1640 Paduan edition of Cereta's works, considering their role in shaping her posthumous reception. Second, it investigates the poetic principles articulated by Cereta in her letter to the reader and offers a close reading of selected passages from her correspondence.

By situating these texts within the broader context of Neo-Latin humanism, the article argues that Cereta's reflections reveal an exceptional degree of erudition and a remarkably forward-looking conception of literary authorship and poetic authority.

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to shed light on the contributions of Jacopo Filippo Tomasini, an Italian scholar and historian (1595-655). I will refer to the paratexts provided by the humanist in his 1640 edition, which is a compilation of Laura Cereta's epistles. The originality of this editor lies in the way he organises and presents the biographical data of the humanist Cereta. In the history of Italian literary criticism, there has been a phenomenon of iconisation of women writers[1]. The stereotyping of women writers determines the ways in which their biographies are constructed, giving rise to a schematic approach that presents them as symbolic figures rather than complex historical subjects. Biographical data collects anecdotal information that illustrates the rarity of a woman writer, leaving gaps in the reconstruction of their works and lives. Tomasini, on the other hand, is innovative in his approach to the biographical tradition of female scholars, which we could say was used as a cliché within the humanistic tradition. As can be seen, Tomasini traces the different stages of the scholar's life and her literary project, but he uses information from passages from Cereta's own letters, which he presents in italics to differentiate them from the information provided by him. By using this first-hand information, he makes Cereta's biography vivid and truthful, as if he were showing us our humanist talking about her life, her dreams, her fears and her adversities. In his quest for truthfulness, Tomasini even includes Cereta's prologue, written in italics, in which she sets out her poetic principles.

1.1. Laura Cereta's work in the context of Humanism and the *Querelle de femmes*

Laura Cereta was born in 1469 in Brescia (northern Italy) and died very young at the age of 30 (1499). She was one of the great humanist and feminist writers of the 15th century in Italy [2].

Cereta came from an upper-middle-class family. She is recognised as one of the pioneering and most prominent authors of the *Querelle de femmes* (15th-18th centuries), an extensive debate in which numerous thinkers discussed moral capacities and the female condition. This movement originated in Italy around 1360, in the Marche region, where several poets began to denounce the inferior status to which women were subjected[3]. The first woman to participate publicly in this debate was the Italian writer Christine de Pizan (1364-1430), who was based in France and published *The City of Ladies* in 1405, a seminal work in the defence of women's dignity, intellectual capacity and moral value[4].

Pizan inaugurated the debate on the intellectual equality of women and the defence of their rights in a deeply misogynistic historical period, which is why her work has traditionally been considered the first manifestation of feminist thought. However, Antonia Víñez Sánchez and Juan Sáez Durán argue that this debate dates back several centuries earlier, specifically to the poetic texts of the *trobairitz* (12th-13th centuries) within the framework of the courtly school, whom they consider to be the precursors of the *Querelle* [5]. The *trobairitz*, also women of letters, belonged to a poetic milieu in which literary creation was understood as an extension of personality and a manifestation of one's own abilities, with art being conceived both as a cultural ornament and a tool for affirmation.

By establishing links both in the case of the troubadours as a whole and in that of Christine de Pizan, the importance of social position becomes evident, an element that is also determining factor in the case of Laura Cereta. In this regard, Jean-Charles Huchet[6] argues that the *trobairitz*'s membership of the aristocracy allowed them to overcome the anonymity to which they would otherwise have been condemned because of their gender.

[1](*Arriaga, 2012, pp.* 85-106, 86).

[2](Ferrer, 2016, p. 76).

[3](Robin, 1997, p. 3; Sánchez, 2020, p. 8).

[4](Malpezzi & Ristaino, 2008, p. 21).

[5](Víñez & Sáez, 2018, p. 11).

[6](Huchet, 1983, pp. 61-62).

However, as early as the 12th century, as Gisela Bock[7] points out, female voices (theologians and mystics) began to be heard, using biblical language and spirituality to formulate their own thoughts and question the prevailing sexual hierarchy. These women, devoted to religious life, managed to carve out their own time and space, the cell, and it is only within this framework that female dedication to study can be understood and legitimised. On the other hand, the *Querelle de femmes*, presented as a debate between the sexes, is part of medieval misogynistic thinking, which questioned women's intelligence and moral value, identifying the feminine with evil, hence its alternation with the name *Querelle des sexes*. Consequently, the space assigned to women was reduced to the domestic sphere, where they had to remain under surveillance, subject to male authority and, above all, excluded from power. In the face of this established order, the *Querelle de femmes* constitutes a profoundly revolutionary proposal of thought[8].

Following Amyrose McCue Gill,[9] Laura Cereta can be considered one of the humanists of the Quattrocento, as she directly addressed the position of women as wives and friends within her extensive and erudite corpus of Latin epistolary prose. By questioning the ideals that shaped the intellectual, social and personal expectations of marriage, Cereta's letters reveal her consciously assumed dual status as a humanist and a wife. Her strong criticism of marriage as a space of oppression and female complicity simultaneously proposes an alternative that requires humanists, husbands and wives to radically rethink marriage in terms of friendship, as well as the very project of humanist epistolary practice. Her letters offer an intimate portrait of the female experience in the Early Modern period, as many are addressed to close family and friends and deal with personal matters, such as her complicated relationship with her husband, Pietro Serina,[10] whom she had married in 1484.

1.2. The biography of Laura Cereta based on Tomasini's paratexts

Next, I will address the biographical data provided by Jacopo Filippo Tomasini in the paratexts that appear in this scholar's edition, published in 1640 in Padua, which will be the reference text for our study of the humanist. The full title of this work is: *Laurae Ceretae Brixiensis Feminae Clarissimae Epistolae iam primum e m[anu]s[criptis] in lucem productae*.

The first letter is entitled: *Illustrissimo ac Reverendissimo D. D.11 Cassiano a Puteo, Abbati S.*

Angeli, Divi Stephani, Equiti et Commendatario. "To the Most Illustrious and Reverend Lord Don Cassianus a Puteo, Abbot of San Angelo and San Stefano, Knight and Commendatory".

The opening introductory epistle is addressed to Cassianus a Puteo (1588-1657), better known as Cassiano dal Pozzo, Abbot of San Angelo and San Stefano; it also mentions his brother Carlo Antonio, who, after his death without issue, assumed responsibility for the collection known as the Museo Cartaceo ("Paper Museum"). In this first paratext, Tomasini contextualises Cereta's work and begins to draft his letter of introduction:

Eruditissima matrona, orta nobilibus Cenomannis, superioribus saeculis orbi universo spectata, rerum vicissitudine longisque patriae dissidiis ingrata oblivione veluti sepulta diuque neglecta latuit, semperque forsitan latuisset, nisi, dum parum notas ac ferme pulverulentas bibliothecas hinc inde excutio, a tineis periclitanteme frequenti ipsorum cumulo, qui nodum typos experti in lucem protulissem. Excitata iam nativo eruditionis suae ornatu, ne denuo exolescat, Romam pergit, ad illam Orbis Dominam, quae literarum emporium, ubi quidquid a barbarie reliquum voluere fata, priscam adhuc maiestatem spirat. Sed quia sexus innocentior Patronum exigit, me parario ad tuos lares accedit, ut benigne tuo more excepta magnis nominibus adsocietur. *Nec ulli verius quam tibi hi labores conveniunt, cui me maiora quam tenue hoc obsequii monumentum debere fateor; quem, una cum fratre Carolo Antonio, mitiorum litterarum omnisque antiquitatis amantissimo, non modo vobiscum commorantem omni officiorum genere ornasti ac prope onerasti*[11].

Our humanist is described as an extremely erudite ("*eruditissima matrona*"), a native of the noble Cenomani tribe ("*Cenomannis*"). Based on this, she is given an ancestral origin, as her dynasty is linked to the Cenomani of Cisalpine Gaul who founded Brixia or Brescia.

On the other hand, Cereta is presented by Tomasini as a figure of notable intellectual prestige in previous centuries, whose reputation had been appreciated worldwide. However, historical vicissitudes and prolonged conflicts in his homeland caused his legacy to fall into historical silence, remaining neglected and almost invisible for a long time. Tomasini emphasises that this situation would have persisted had it not been for her own research in inaccessible and practically forgotten libraries, where she managed to rescue Cereta's deteriorating letters. In short, thanks to Tomasini's work, Cereta's letters, previously lost in historical obscurity, have regained their place in Renaissance culture. In this way, the author, recognised for her remarkable cultural relevance, can finally see how her words deserve to be read and appreciated in Rome, the intellectual epicentre of the Renaissance, where they finally find the resonance that time had denied them and which now, thanks to Tomasini's scholarly care, is ensured to endure for posterity. The author emphasises the restoration of her epistolary work and the importance of its dissemination.

Finally, Tomasini justifies dedicating the letters to the recipient of his preface, Cassiano, pointing out that, like all women of letters, Cereta needs a patron to support her work; in this case, that role falls to Cassiano. Tomasini thus presents himself as a mediator, delivering the letters to the recipient so that, received with benevolence according to custom, they may be associated with illustrious names. This gesture combines personal praise for Cereta with the vindication of her literary legacy, placing her letters as a significant testimony to female scholarship in a highly competitive academic and cultural context.The final part of this letter focuses on the request to Cassiano to include Laura Cereta in his Museo Cartaceo. He also provides him with the quotation to be included in his Museo Cartaceo: "*Ceretam ad aeternae famae securitatem optimo Puteo Tomassinus tradit*"[12]. With this action, Tomasini, the transmitter of Cereta's memory, entrusts dal Pozzo's judgement and prestige to guarantee the intellectual "immortality" of the humanist. It should be noted that the Museo Cartaceo is one of the most significant attempts, before the era of photography, to visually capture human knowledge. The drawings represent ancient art and material culture, architecture, zoology, botany, geology and natural curiosities.

3.2) The second paratext is: *Laurae Ceretae Vita Iacobo Philippo Tomasino auctore* ("The Life of Laura Cereta, by Iacobo Philippo Tomasino"). Tomasini then provides biographical information under the heading: "*Laurae Ceretae Vita*". He begins this paratext by praising Cereta's hometown, Brescia, presenting it as a place renowned everywhere for the healthiness of its climate, the beauty of its location and the nobility of its origins and antiquity; indeed, it appears as the flower and jewel of all Cisalpine Gaul. Furthermore, thanks to its multitude of villages, its particularly pleasant valleys and its abundance of wheat, oil, wine, flax and other goods, it achieved such prosperity that the French gave the name Franca Curta[13] ("Franciacorta") to a considerable part of its territory, forone can feel there as if in a place of delight.

Brixia aeris salubritate et loci amoenitate non minus quam origine et antiquitate spectabilis undique et conspicua, vere totius Galliae Cisalpinae flos est et ocellus. Pagis namque frequentissimis, vallibus amenioribus, frumento, oleo, vino, lino rebusque omnibus ita luxuriat, ut merito Franci, cum iis solum esset in delitiis, non exiguam ipsius agri partem Francam

[7](Bock, 2001, pp. 19-20).

[8](Víñez & Sáez, 2018, pp. 11-14).

[9](McCue, 2009, pp. 1098-1099).

[10](Cereta, 1997, pp. 2-4).

[11]*(Tomasini, 1640, fols. *1r-*2r).*

[12] (Tomasini, 1640, fol. *2r).

[13]"*Territorium divisum est in tres partes praecipuas, Franciam curtam, Pedem montis, seu Pedemontium, et Pianuram, seu Planitiem. Francia curta, sic dicta, quasi* franca corte*, id est tractus, sive paroecia , sive* quadra *libera, quin olim immunis erat ab omnibus tributis et vectigalibus: coelum habet saluberrimum, et quanta quanta est, frugifera est, collibusque apricis ey amoenis referta. Atque haece amabiles dotes eius augentur lacu Isaeo, qui ad hanc partem pertinet. Hic lacus undique piscibus piscatoribusque abundat , eoque adhuc amoenior est*". "The territory is divided into three main parts: the Short France, the Foot of the Mountain, or Piedmont, and the Plain, or Plain. Lower France, so called as if it were free, that is, a territory, parish, or free district, since in ancient times it was exempt from all taxes and duties, enjoys a very healthy climate and is fertile throughout, full of sunny and pleasant hills. And these pleasant qualities are enhanced by Lake Iseo, which belongs to this region. This lake abounds everywhere with fish and fishermen, and is therefore even more pleasant". (Burmannus, 1722, pp. 84).

Curtam appellarent[14].

Tomasini does not describe Brescia merely to inform, but to construct an image of Laura Cereta as a dignified, classical and legitimate figure, whose personal excellence reflects that of her hometown. The bucolic landscape is a rhetorical device that elevates the author and integrates her into the tradition of Italian humanism.Tomasini then refers us to a genealogical reference of his family, where Cereta's elevated position in society is evident. He says that the Cereta family took its name from the ancient settlement of Cereto, located in the territory of Bergamo. Oprandino came from that place and, thanks to his numerous descendants, contributed to the spread of the lineage. Among his descendants, we mention his great-great-grandson Baptista, who achieved a notable reputation in the practice of medicine in the city of Brescia, especially during the period when it was under siege, between 1430 and approximately 1465. Baptista was the father of Silvestro, a prominent figure who held important public offices. He married Veronica de Leno, who belonged to a family of ancient and renowned prestige, in 1469. Six children were born from this marriage (three boys and two girls), Cereta being the first of these descendants:

Ceretae familiae appellationem dedit Ceretum antiquum agri Bergomensis oppidum, cuius incola Oprandinus numerosa progenie nomen dilatans pronepotem habuit Baptistam,quem Medicae artis fama Brixiae, quum obsidione urbs premeretur, Anno 1430 ad annum prope 1465. Claruisse accepimus. Filium is reliquit Siluestrum publicis muneribus conspicuum, qui ex Veronica de Leno antiquissimae familiae splendore clara coniuge Anno 1469. Cum primam suscepisset filiam, Laura nomen ei imposuit […] Filios praeterea habuit ille Basilium, Danielem, ac Hippolytum, binasque. Filias Deodatam, et Dianam[15].

In the preface, the author recounts that when our scholar was born, she was given the name Laura, in memory of the laurel tree that had long since withered in the garden of the house due to the harsh winter. He adds that the author herself, in a letter[16] addressed to a nun named Nazaria Olympica,[17] had described that tree with remarkable expressive mastery, noting, among other things, that "the polished paths of the leafy garden were shaded by its bold branches" ("*quod polituras horti frondentis procacibus ramis umbrabat*")[18].

Cum primam suscepisset filiam, Laurae nomen ei imposuit, in memoriam Lauri, quae in horto domestico iamdudum antea hibernis iniuriis exaruerat, quam ipsa miro eloquii artificio depinxit, dum inter caetera scribit, *quod polituras horti frondentis procacibus ramis umbrabat*[19].

Laura's name in memory of the withered laurel tree in the garden of the house, fulfilling both a symbolic and rhetorical function. The laurel, a classic emblem of victory, fame and literary excellence, links Laura's life with the idea of intellectual glory from birth, as if her talent had been predestined. Its withering due to the harsh winter introduces an exceptional and almost prophetic nuance, showing that greatness can arise from something seemingly fragile or perishable, while connecting the human with the natural and reinforcing the tradition of the **locus amoenus**,[20] a space where virtue and personal splendour are reflected in the harmony of the environment. It also gives the prologue a poetic and emblematic tone, consistent with humanist tastes that sought to relate biography to natural and cultural symbols in order to extol the memory of the character. Taken together, both the praise of Brescia and the explanation of the name function as strategies to present Laura Cereta as a figure of intellectual excellence, embedded in the classical and Renaissance tradition, whose greatness is deeply linked to her origin and destiny.

Ernst Robert Curtius[21] ([1948]1955, 280) had defined the locus amoenus topos as a beautiful, shady spot, whose rhetorical-thematic fabric was characterised by offering a repertoire of main motifs and a varied assortment of secondary ingredients; its essential elements are a tree (or several), a meadow and a fountain or stream; to these can be added birdsong, flowers and, even more, the breath of the breeze. This setting is the basis for pictorial (Sandro Botticelli) and literary (Francesco Petrarch, Garcilaso de la Vega) creations based on the identification of nature with an allegory of the cosmos, a miniaturised paradise or an impregnable Arcadia populated by modest nymphs and melancholic shepherds[22].

On the other hand, Tomasini alludes to Laura's father's interest in her comprehensive education[23]. From a very young age, while learning her first letters at home with her parents, she acquired a deep sense of piety. When she turned seven, she was sent to the consecrated Virgins to be educated. There she began to devote herself to both study and needlework, progressing with surprising speed. After spending two years there, she returned home. As she had shown unusual talent, her father decided that she should receive instruction in grammar and other simpler subjects.

Given her quick and versatile mind, her father believed that, alongside her studies, she should also learn early on how to manage domestic affairs. Diana Robin points out that she continued her studies in her room once her brothers and sisters had gone to bed[24]. She was an obedient woman who complied with the rules established in her home, as was customary at the time, although she never abandoned her love of literature. Once she had firmly established her foundation in the Greek language, she soon embarked on more demanding studies with seriousness, leaving no area of human knowledge unexplored, devoting herself especially to Latin eloquence. She also cultivated moral training and civic prudence, in keeping with her natural disposition.

Pietatem cum primis literarum initiis domi apud parentes imbibit. Septimum postquam attigisset annum, sacris Virginibus informanda traditur. Hic illa iam literis incumbere, iam acu pingere, miranda profectus celeritate. Biennium postquam hic exegisset, domum revocata, cum rara edidisset animi documenta, pater grammaticis caeterisque literis mitioribus erudiendam curat. Ingenio cum esset versatili ac prompto, studiis mature domesticarum rerum administrationem iungendam censuit idem. Paruit illa, sed numquam literarum immemor. Et quidem, iactis probe Graeci sermonis fundamentis, severiores disciplinas mature serioque adiit; nec ullam humanae sapientiae partem intactam reliquit, eloquentiae in primis Romanae dedita. Morum doctrinam et civilem prudentiam suo genio aptam excoluit[25].

As Quinn Griffin points out,[26] it should be added that, unlike most female academics of the time, Cereta continued to study after her marriage to the merchant Pietro Serina in 1484. It is worth noting her correspondence with humanist scholars and religious figures until her death in 1499, reflecting her participation in the intellectual circles of the time.

Tomasini then mentions Cereta's husband, Pietro Serina, noting that he died eighteen months after their marriage from a fever and left no descendants[27]. Regarding this personal aspect, the author cites a letter by our scholar, addressed to Barbara Alberta (Letter LX), in the 1640 edition, entitled **Laura Cereta ad Barbaram Albertam de Instabilitate Fortunae et Gratulatio de Nuptiis**: "Laura Cereta to Barbara Alberta on the inconstancy of Fortune and congratulations on her marriage".

Petro Serinae civi suo, probo et docto Lauram coniugem locat. At nimium brevis humanae felicitatis usura. Vix enim octo et decem menses cum marito exegit, quum ipse dirae febris fatali necessitate sine prole in meliorem vitam avocatur. Eius memoriam sic ad Barbaram Albertam prosequitur *ipsas occurrunt oculis lachrymas*,[28] *et inquieam me habet dolor insignis, quotiens prae me fero memoriam viri defuncti*[29].

I will now turn to a passage from a letter by our scholar, which does not appear in Tomasini's paratexts, where she refers to her husband. I will focus on letter XXXV addressed to the humanist Cassandra Fedele (1465-1558)[30] and later mention this

[14](Tomasini, 1640, fol. *3r).

[15](Tomasini, 1640, fols. *4v-*5r).

[16] "*Arverat iamdudum antea ex nivali saevientis hyemis gelu nostra laurus quae polituras horti frondentis procacibus ramis umbrabat*". "For some time now, our laurel had been dried up by the icy cold of the cruel winter snow, which with its bold branches shaded the polished paths of the leafy garden". (Tomasini, 1640, p. 146).

[17](Vardalà, 2023, p. 73).

[18](Tomasini, 1640, fol. *5r).

[19](Tomasini, 1640, fol. *5r).

[20](Curtius 1955, p. 280).

[21](Curtius, 1955, p. 280).

[22](Bagué-Quílez , 2023, p. 607).

[23](Tomasini, 1640, fol. *5v).

[24](Cereta, 1997, p. 5).

[25](Tomasini, 1640, fol. *5v).

[26](Griffin, 2018, p. 69).

[27](Griffin, 2018, p. 69).

[28]The letter contains the word "*lacrymae*" and does not contain "*ipsas*". (Tomasini, 1640, p. 155).

[29](Tomasini, 1640, fol. *6r; Tomasini 1640, pp. 155-156).

[30]*(Tomasini, 1640; 75-80).*

epistle in relation to Faltonia Betitia Proba (ca. 322–ca. 370), following the method proposed by Tomasini, who uses Cereta's letters as his source.

In the aforementioned letter, the author remembers her husband, now deceased, in the context of a dream in which she recounts her descent into hell. In this letter, she emphasises her husband's total loyalty, describing him as *"fidissimi" ("most faithful"), a superlative that indicates not only fidelity, but also the most absolute and trustworthy devotion. She emphasises that it was a reciprocal love, delicate and full of tenderness*: "*Unum est mihi decretum Insulas Beatorum velle scrutari, in quibus fidissimi consortis illius fata, fortemque sedis invenerim, quem mutuus mihi tenerrimae charitatis affectus, ultra fidem amoris humani, coniunxerat*"[31].

To conclude the paratext dedicated to Cereta's biography, Tomasini evokes the humanist's words about her love of letters, taken from letter number 60, addressed to her friend Barbara. Her words continue as follows: "*Literarum amorem hisce indicat: Mihi sub imo corde literarum solus amor inaestuat, quo maior semper animus in ipsa studendi difficultate adolescit. Sed inter electa voluptatum pocula, dulce est suum unicuique venenum*"[32]. "In the depths of my heart burns only the love of letters, by which the spirit always grows stronger in the very difficulty of studying. But, among the chosen cups of pleasures, each one's own poison is sweet"[33].

In line with the above, it should be noted that the expression "*electa voluptatum pocula*"[34] means that literature is presented as one of the "chosen pleasures". Furthermore, for those who love literature, it can be such an absorbing and passionate experience that it resembles a sweet poison ("*dulce venenum*"). It is the love of the written word, and although it may require effort and sacrifice, it also has the capacity to provide incomparable pleasure. The expression **"dulce venenum"** can also be understood in relation to the experience of writing itself, especially in the case of a female humanist in the 15th century. For Cereta, writing in Latin and expressing intellectual ideas was a sweet activity because it offered her pleasure, recognition and a means of personal and intellectual affirmation. In her letters, she herself speaks of the joy she finds in study and the written word. But at the same time, that sweetness turns into poison: writing attracts criticism, contempt or mockery from men who consider it inappropriate for a cultured woman cultured expressing her opinion or express with authority. Thus, **"dulce venenum"** may reflect the contrast between the pleasure of knowledge and the pain of misunderstanding. In this sense, "*dulce*" refers to intellectual pleasure, the joy of study, the beauty of language; on the other hand, the noun "*venenum*" alludes to social hostility, criticism, misogyny, the price of visibility.

4) The poetry of Cereta: literary principles, identity and vindication

I undertake the poetic programme that appears in the letter *Ad Lectorem* written by Cereta: *Laurae Ceretae Brixianae, in titulum Epistolarum Prologus*. Tomasini presents it after his paratexts and offers the epistle in italics to differentiate Cereta's contributions from his own. Cereta explained that she decided to put her thoughts in writing so that they would have lasting and certain value, rather than being ephemeral or illusory: **"His igitur fateram contenta litteris, quae possint non umbram mihi, vel fumum, sed perpetuo securum aliquid perfectumque largiri"[35].**

The scholar gives an account of the adversities she suffered in her literary work, explaining that her simple and humble speech *In asinarium funus oratio, written in 1485,*[36] provoked the envy of many people. She compares the behaviour of her detractors to that of wolves with a trembling lamb. Despite these attacks, Cereta says that she endured everything with patience for a long time, so as not to appear weak or inconsistent when speaking of the constancy and firmness taught by philosophy.

Hinc primo calamo super Aselli cadavere consolata sum gemitorios ululatus in funere. Haec una, atque humilis oratio, multorum sibi conflavit invidiam. Qui livoris dentes tanquam gladios in me, velut trepidantem inter lupos agnulam, diriter, inhumaniterque pararunt. Hi pleni ludibrio, sputis, non sunt veriti dedecorare me, adactam iniuriis. Sed omnia diu, atque patienter, ideo tuli, ne forte dicerer in delitiis animi fracti, de constantia Philosophiae tractare[37].

[31](Tomasini, 1640, p. 79).

[32](Tomasini, 1640, fol. 8r; Tomasini, 1640, p. 157).

[33]I have translated the Greek and Latin texts myself.

[34](Tomasini, 1640, fol. 8r; Tomasini, 1640, p. 157).

[35]*(Tomasini, 1640, fol. *A 2r)*

[36](Griffin, 2018, p. 69).

[37]*(Tomasini, 1640, fol. *A 2v).*

Erasmus analyses the expression "**ovem lupo commisisti"** in *Adagia*, particularly in the first edition of 1500.[38] The author uses the literary trope of the wolf and the lamb to compare human behaviour with that of these animals. The Dutch humanist attributes the origin of the expression to Terence, in his work *The Eunuch* (Ter. *Eu.* 832), where Thais reproaches Pythias for entrusting a young girl to the dangerous Chaerea. Erasmus explains that the adage teaches the need to choose carefully the person to whom something is entrusted.

He also quotes Cicero (Cic. **Phil.** 3, 11, 27), who presents Marcus Antonius as a wolf (**"lupus"**) facing the people, depicted as sheep (**"ovis"**). Finally, he recalls a passage from the *Iliad* (Hom. *Il.* 22, 262-264), in which Achilles compares his enmity with Hector to the impossibility of agreements between lions and men, or between wolves and lambs. In conclusion, the contrast between wolves and lambs expresses the inequality between the violence of the powerful and the fragility of the innocent, and teaches that placing the vulnerable in the hands of the unscrupulous implies their certain loss. This topic also appears among Christian authors, thus the Gospel of Matthew 10,16 (Mt 10,16)[39] says: "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves" (Latin: "*sicut oves in medio luporum*"). Other authors also use the opposition "*lupus*" / "*ovis*". For example, Ovid reflects on the ferocity of the wolf towards the sheep: "*nympha, mane! sic agna lupum, sic cerva leonem, / sic aquilam penna fugiunt trepidante columbae*" (Ov. *Met*. 1, 505-506); "*nat lupus inter oves, fulvos vehit unda leones, / unda vehit tigres; nec vires fulminis apro, / crura nec ablato prosunt velocia cervo*" (Ov. Met. 1, 304-306);[40] "*mons ibi verticibus petit arduus astra duobus, / nomine Parnasos, superantque cacumina nubes*" (Ov. Met. 1, 316-317)[41].

Based on Quinn Griffin,[42] *In asinarium funus oratio* is a dialogue in Latin written by Cereta, in which the author herself acts as the main interlocutor, consoling the owners of the donkey by referring to ancient philosophy. After an initial invocation to the Muses and several philosophical digressions on the soul of the animal, Cereta gives the floor successively to the two interlocutors, Soldus, the owner of the donkey, and his slave Philonacus, both of whom have no personal connection with her, to whom she responds with consolatory speeches.

The work combines several humanistic and classical genres, such as consolation, satirical praise and dialogue; it also uses the donkey as a central subject to create a safe space that allows a female humanist to express her wit and erudition. Eulogies to animals, usually favourite pets, were common from Antiquity to the Renaissance; notable examples include Lesbia's sparrow, Corinna's parrot, Martial's dog Issa, and Statius' parrot Psittacus. These models served medieval and Renaissance writers to compose memorials to both their own pets and those of wealthy patrons, such as Isabella d'Este, whose dog Aura's death in 1511 inspired an elaborate funeral and numerous letters of condolence from poets and scholars, including Pietro Bembo. Returning to Cereta's *oratio*, the tone of his work, however, departs from the sincerity of these eulogies and falls within the subgenre of satirical praise or adoxography, practised in antiquity by Lucian of Samosata (c. 125-181 AD) in works such as *Muscae Encomium.*

The Syrian rhetorician and satirist, who writes in Greek, achieves his comic effect

[38]The aforementioned adage appears in its first edition (1500): "*Ovem lupo commisisti: τῷ λύκῳ τὴν οἶν i.e. Lupo ovem. Terentius in Eunucho*, Scelesta, ovem lupo commisisti.[=Ter. *Eu.* 832] *De Chaerea ephebo, cui velut Eunucho virgo soli credita est. Donatus admonet proverbium esse, quod contineat foemineam reverentiam, meretricium sensum. Concinne hoc utemur, quoties ei servandum aliquid committitur, cuius gratia custodem magis oporteat adhiberi. Cicero, Third Philippic:* For in his speech he had said that he would be the guardian of the city until the Kalends of May, when the army would be stationed in the city. O illustrious guardian, of sheep, as they say, but of wolves! Was Antonius not the guardian of the city, but rather a plunderer and tormentor? [=Cic. *Phil.* 3, 11, 27] *Unde quadrare videtur, quoties inimico negocium committitur, quique nobis pessime velit: propterea quod lupus et agnus genuino quodam odio diffident. This is also shown by Homer in Iliad X: ὡς οὐκ ἔστι λέουσι καὶ ἀνδράσιν ὅρκια πιστά, / οὐδὲ λύκοι τε καὶ ἄρνες ὁμόφρονα θυμὸν ἔχουσιν, / ἀλλὰ κακὰ φρονέουσι διαμπερὲς ἀλλήλοισιν.* [= Hom. *Il.* 22, 262-264]". (Erasmus, 1500, fol. g1r).

[39]The wolf-lamb opposition is irreconcilable. (Guerra Carrasco, 2017, p. 126).

[40](Ovidio, 1979, p. 34).

[41](Ovidio, 1979, p. 34).

[42](Griffin, 2018, pp. 69-73).

through the systematic application of the topics of epidictic praise to an insignificant object, which generates a parodic value in contrast to traditional encomiums directed at noble realities ("*ἔνδοξον*"). Although it dispenses with an exordium and epilogue, the discourse follows the classical structure of praise, origin, development, physical description, virtues, actions, death and name, ironically adapting it to its subject. Lucian prefers rhetorical argumentation embellished with poetic quotations, myths, proverbs, comparisons and extraordinary stories, rather than logical rigour, seeking the "*suavitas*" recommended by rhetorical theory. The author follows a tradition of paradoxical eulogy that dates back to the early Sophists. Philostratus attributes its origin to Gorgias, especially to the ***Encomium on Helen***. Isocrates also alludes to this type of rhetorical exercise and practises the defence of difficult or discredited causes. Plato, through Eryximachus in *The Symposium*, mentions similar eulogies, such as that of salt. This practice continued in the Second Sophistic, with examples now lost, such as Dion Chrysostom's eulogies to the parrot and the mosquito, confirming that Lucian's text dialogues with a well-established rhetorical tradition[43].

On the other hand, this subgenre of satirical praise is continued by humanists such as Leon Battista Alberti, Teodoro Gaza, and Erasmus. Although humorous and sometimes conceived for entertainment purposes, these works pursued a serious goal: to showcase the author's rhetorical skill. Choosing humble or mundane subjects, such as a fly or a donkey, offered a literary challenge and, at the same time, protected the author from possible criticism, since praising the inanimate or trivial was considered safe and, moreover, the novelty of the subject attracted attention and admiration.

In fact, satirical encomium served as a space where humanists could showcase their rhetorical talent without risk, and the *ioco-seria genre became so popular in the late Renaissance that Caspar Dornau compiled the monumental collection Amphitheatrum sapientiae Socraticae ioco-seriae in 1619, which includes encomiums organised by theme, such as musca, aranea, corvus y asinus. Among the eulogies to the donkey are a short poem by Philip Melanchthon (Gigantes clamore asini dissipati) and a prose eulogy by Cornelius Agrippa, although neither seems to have influenced Cereta, and many are later than his work.*

In summary, Cereta situates her dialogue at the intersection of funeral eulogy, animal praise, and satirical praise, using an unexpected theme to showcase her rhetorical skill, engage with literary tradition, and protect herself from potential criticism, thereby consolidating her originality and authority as a female humanist. Likewise, she presents a series of characteristics in her *oratio* that anticipate the poetic principles that will underpin the Baroque. Specifically, this period encourages the interference and mixing of genres, a result of the open and flexible nature of literary genres, a constant feature of the Baroque. This trend will later continue into Romanticism[44].

Cereta maintained that the true value of the spirit consists in despising critics without responding with anger, practising patience in the face of adversity and avoiding revenge, even when suffering injustice. At the same time, he firmly defended his reputation and that of his family, writing and responding to provocations, while his example attracted the attention and concern of many people.

Didicit enim acrior animi praestantia obiurgatores habere contemptui, ne videatur votum digladiari cum votis, et in irae binis mutuos ictus alter alterum trudere, quod a simplicitate sua, expers terrenae passionis, continentia prorsus eliminat. Nam molestiis nostris patientia, non inquietudo, praestanda est. Aliter obsteri posset aetas nostra semper in poenis: nam quamvis emi posset iniuria; vendi tamen vindicta non debet.Verum, quum tutela nominis nostri strictior charitas indulgeat, non potui esse adeo vili, ut vel semel, totiens provocata, non scriberem. Mox ad me rescribentem, frequens sollicitantium turba scribebat[45].

In the prologue, the humanist assesses her literary creation and considers it to be intimate and personal literature. She does not aspire to be like Amphion, the legendary character who, through his lyre, not only seduced hearts and minds, but also shaped the very landscape of ancient Thebes; nor does she want to emulate Demosthenes or Theophrastus in her writings. These are her words: "*In qua nullus ex graecis Amphion modulanti lyra cantavit, nullus Demosthenes, nullus Theophrastus oravit*"[46]. In light of the above, the author's proposal brings to mind Horace and his *Ars Poetica* (Hor. *Ars* 38-45). In his treatise, he advises poets to choose subjects that are within their reach, that do not exceed their strength or abilities. He recommends meditating at length on what they can sustain and develop without losing control. When the subject is solid, clarity, order and eloquence flow naturally. The poet must manage the rhythm and arrangement of his words. In short, poetic mastery consists of combining the appropriate choice of subject with measure, discipline and harmony in expression.

Sumite materiam uestris, qui scribitis, aequam
uiribus et uersate diu quid ferre recusent,
quid ualeant umeri. Cui lecta potenter erit res,
nec facundia deseret hunc, nec lucidus ordo.

Ordinis haec uirtus erit et uenus, aut ego fallor,
ut iam nunc dicat iam nunc debentia dici,
pleraque differat et praesens in tempus omittat,
hoc amet, hoc spernat promissi carminis auctor[47].
(Hor. *Ars* 38-45)

On the other hand, Cereta explains in the prologue the poetic principles that underpin his literary production. He considers that editions illustrated with figures do not make Aesop more esteemed than Vergil; however, he gives importance to "*ingenium*", which, nourished by the weight of thought, engenders living figures. His words are: "*Non reddunt Virgilio aestimatiorem Aesopum picturatae illae chartae figuris: vivas figuras, ingenium, ex sententiarum pondo, parturit*"[48].

The expression "*Non reddunt Virgilio aestimatiorem Aesopum picturatae illae chartae figuris*"[49]. Cereta would be referring to Aesop's fables and the illustrated editions of this Greek author. One of the most interesting and outstanding aspects of these editions and translations of classical fables is the illustrations that accompany the text. Classical fables, and especially Aesop's fables, have been the most frequently published illustrated text in the last five centuries[50].

The fact that the themes of fables are not set in any specific time or place is an important reason for their enduring popularity among illustrators. Each artist who depicts them has been able to set them in the period that most interests them. This has been influenced by the simplicity of the stories and the absence of a definitive text by Aesop. It should be noted that not only the Greek tradition of fables, but also those of Indian origin, influenced Europe from early on, although Byzantium was always the main point of transmission of their various elements from Greece and India to Europe. It is indeed very strange that around the 13th century there was an isolation between the European (Greek and Latin) and Indian traditions, when it is well known that the latter spread widely through versions in Pahlavi first, and then in Arabic and Syriac. In both the Balkans and Spain, contact between Arab and Christian cultures was close enough in so many areas to support the hypothesis that a genre as popular as the fable could not fail to spread from one side to the other. In that case, the fable would have done nothing more in medieval times than continue its ancient history. The history of the fable is just one example, among many that could be cited, to highlight the role of Byzantium as an intermediary between East and West in the transmission, during the Middle Ages, of so many cultural elements. All this means that the fable genre is unitary. It forms part of wisdom literature, known in Mesopotamia, Egypt, the Bible and especially during the Roman Empire and the Middle Ages, and is a conglomerate that includes maxims, proverbs and edifying stories[51].

Although fables have always been illustrated, it was with the invention of the printing press that there was a proliferation of editions. Before the end of the 15th century, there were about twenty different illustrated editions. The first editions were those of Mondovi, Ulm and Verona, published between 1476 and 1479, and are among the best books of the 15th century. In these early editions, the animals are simply drawn, with a minimal background, a tree, or a group of houses if the setting is urban. The focus is on the central event of the fable. The Aesop of Mondovi, with its clumsy but attractive metal engravings, possibly dates from 1476 and is usually considered the oldest. The woodcuts from Ulm are those of the first German illustrated book, which shows the hand of a unique personality. It was reissued in Augsburg a few years later and was the most popular and most copied version of the 15th century. The Aesop of Verona is very different. The engravings are rougher, as if the engraver had designed them with his knife. The most important edition of Aesop in the 15th century is the one produced in Naples in 1485. Its illustrations, with decorative margins, are very realistic and aesthetically influenced by Italian Renaissance

[43](Gómez, 2006, p. 354).

[44](Robles, 2024, pp. 251, 257).

[45](*Tomasini, 1640, fol. A*2v).*

[46](Tomasini, 1640, fol. *A 3r).

[47](Horacio, 2010, p. 88).

[48](Tomasini, 1640, fols. A 3r-A3v).

[49](Tomasini, 1640, fol. A 3r).

[50](Mckendry, 1964, p. 5).

[51](Rodríguez, 2005, pp. 42, 44, 47, 50).

art[52].

Cereta does not seek to establish hierarchies between genres; on the contrary, she argues that reducing the value of a work to external aspects of the edition, such as its illustrations, is a limited and superficial approach, incapable of capturing its true literary, conceptual and stylistic value. The humanist considers the ability to suggest based on the unity between form and content to be essential, but not from a generic hierarchy. Along the same lines, she also rejects a comparative assessment between genres, unlike Aristotle, who classifies genres in his *Poetica*, although he does not specifically address the genre of fables there. However, in *Rhetoric*, Aristotle explicitly mentions Aesop and his fables, classifying them as a type of example ("*παράδειγμα*") used to persuade:

ἔσται ἢ οὐκ ἔσται, ἔτι δὲ περὶ μεγέθους καὶ μικρότητος τῶν πραγμάτων εἰρήσθω ταῦτα. Λοιπὸν δὲ περὶ τῶν κοινῶν πίστεων ἅπασιν εἰπεῖν, ἐπείπερ εἴρηται περὶ τῶν ἰδίων. εἰσὶ δ' αἱ κοιναὶ πίστεις δύο τῷ γένει, παράδειγμα καὶ ἐνθύμημα· ἡ γὰρ γνώμη μέρος ἐνθυμήματος ἐστίν. πρῶτον μὲν οὖν περὶ παραδείγματος λέγωμεν· ὅμοιον γὰρ ἐπαγωγῇ τὸ παράδειγμα, ἡ δ' ἐπαγωγὴ ἀρχή. Παραδειγμάτων δ' εἶδη δύο· ἓν μὲν γάρ ἐστι παραδείγματος εἶδος τὸ λέγειν πράγματα προγεγενημένα, ἕν δὲ τὸ αὐτὸν ποιεῖν. τούτου δ' ἓν μὲν παραβολὴ ἓν δὲ λόγοι, οἷον οἱ Αἰσώπειοι καὶ Λιβυκοί[53].

(Arist. *Rh.* 1393b4)

The Stagirite recognises fables as an effective resource for discourse aimed at the people; Aesop's example in Samos illustrates how a simple, allegorical narrative can persuade without resorting to complex reasoning, by translating political conflict into clear and accessible images. The effectiveness of fables lies in their appeal to analogy and shared experience, facilitating the audience's acceptance. Consequently, within political rhetoric, fables do not aspire to demonstrate absolute truth, but rather to guide collective judgement, especially in contexts where technical arguments are scarce; their strength lies in their persuasive clarity and their suitability for a popular audience:

δὲ διὰ τί, ὅτι οὗτοι μὲν φάναι ἤδη μου πλήρεις εἰσὶ καὶ ὀλίγον ἕλκουσιν αἷμα· ἐὰν δὲ τούτους ἀφέλῃ, ἕτεροι ἐλθόντες πεινῶντες ἐκπιοῦνταί μου τὸ λοιπὸν αἷμα. "ἀτὰρ καὶ ὑμᾶς," ἔφη, "ὦ ἄνδρες Σάμιοι, οὗτος μὲν οὐδὲν ἔτι βλάψει (πλούσιος γάρ ἐστιν)· ἐὰν δὲ τοῦτον ἀποκτείνητε, ἕτεροι ἥξουσι πένητες, οἳ ὑμῖν ἀναλώσουσι τὰ κοινὰ κλέπτοντες." εἰσὶ δ' οἱ λόγοι δημηγορικοί, καὶ ἔχουσιν ἀγαθὸν τοῦτο, ὅτι πράγματα μὲν εὑρεῖν ὅμοια γεγενημένα χαλεπόν, λόγους δὲ ῥᾴδιον· ποιῆσαι γὰρ δεῖ ὥσπερ καὶ παραβολάς, ἂν τις δύνηται τὸ ὅμοιον ὁρᾶν, ὅπερ ῥᾴδιόν ἐστιν ἐκ φιλοσοφίας. ῥᾴω μὲν οὖν πορίσασθαι τὰ διὰ τῶν λόγων, χρησιμώτερα δὲ πρὸς τὸ βουλεύσασθαι τὰ διὰ τῶν πραγμάτων· ὅμοια γὰρ ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ τὰ μέλλοντα τοῖς γεγονόσιν. Δεῖ δὲ χρῆσθαι τοῖς παραδείγμασι μὴ ἔχοντα μὲν ἐνθυμήματα ὡς ἀποδείξεσιν (ἡ γὰρ πίστις διὰ τούτων), ἔχοντα δὲ ὡς μαρτυρίοις, ἐπιλόγῳ χρώμενον τοῖς ἐνθυμήμασιν· προτιθέμενα μὲν γὰρ ἔοικεν ἐπαγωγῇ, τοῖς δὲ ῥητορικοῖς οὐκ οἰκεῖον ἐπαγωγὴ πλὴν ἐν ὀλίγοις, ἐπιλεγόμενα δὲ μαρτυρίοις, ὁ δὲ μάρτυς πανταχοῦ πιθανός. διὸ καὶ προτιθέντι μὲν ἀνάγκη πολλὰ λέγειν, ἐπιλέγοντι δὲ **καὶ** *ἓν ἱκανόν· μάρτυς γὰρ πιστὸς καὶ εἷς ἀπόχρη. πόσα μὲν οὖν εἴδη* [54].

(Arist. *Rh.* 1394a7)

I take up the expression: "vivas figuras, ingenium, ex sententiarum pondo, parturit"[55]. In his interpretation of the text, Cereta emphasises that thoughts ("διάνοια") must be brilliant and appropriate, capable of expressing intention, ingenuity and strength; likewise, elocution ("λέξις") must enhance and clearly communicate these thoughts. I understand "*figurae vivae*" as those rhetorical devices that give movement, vigour and expressiveness to speech, allowing ideas to be visualised, felt and remembered more clearly. These figures bring discourse to life, whether in terms of content (("τὰ σχήματα τῆς διανοίας", "thought") or form ("σχήματα λέξεων", "language"), generating emotion, clarity and greater persuasive power. In short, the humanist suggests the idea of a lexicon marked by "*ingenium*"[56]. Implicitly, she wants to warn of the need to avoid using empty words in order to achieve this goal; there must be a balance between thought ("διάνοια") and elocution ("λέξις")[57]. In relation to the balance between substance and form, Hugo Grotius (15831645) addresses this issue in one of the paratexts of his volume *Poemata*, published in Leiden in 1617[58]. In particular, in the second letter, written by Grotius himself and addressed to his brother Willem, the editor of the work, the author argues that poetry must "*calefacere*", that is, activate the understanding and senses of the recipient in order to intensify and refine perception. From this perspective, Grotius' notion of "*calefacere*" is complemented by Cereta's contribution on "figurae vivae", insofar as both are articulated in a functional way; while "figurae vivae" concern the expressive procedures of discourse, how something is said; on the other hand, "figurae vivae" designates the perceptual and affective effect that these procedures produce in the recipient. For Grotius, thought and word must advance inseparably; the effectiveness of poetic expression depends on the content that sustains it, just as language acquires meaning when it fully embodies the idea. Hence his warning against the use of empty words, which ultimately weaken the force of poetic discourse. Along the same lines, John Dryden (1631-1700) also favours a balance between the two, i.e. substance and form. In his Apology for Heroic Poetry, published in 1677, he defines the term "wit" ("*ingenium*") as thoughts and words elegantly adapted to the subject: "a propriety of thoughts and words"[59]. Thus, for Dryden, the notion of **"wit" ("*ingenium*")** combines the ability to select the most appropriate thoughts and forms, so that the expression enhances and reinforces the idea, rather than distracting from or overshadowing it. In conclusion, we can say that "*figurae vivae*" transform thought into lively and memorable language. For her, discourse reaches its full expressive and persuasive potential only when form and content coincide, with the author's "*ingenium*" as the backbone, directing each word and figure so that style and thought reinforce each other. **In effect, Cereta does not seek to establish a strict differentiation between genres, but rather to reflect on the appropriate use of each of them, understanding as a common principle the text's ability to suggest and stimulate ingenuity based on a balance between thought and form. From this perspective, the humanist adopts a position that questions and blurs generic boundaries, proposing an integrative conception of genres whose fundamental purpose is the ability to provoke reflection through the harmonious use of content and discursive form. The author reworks poetic principles and attempts to present what she considers to be fundamental.**

In light of the principles proposed by Cereta, it is pertinent to evoke a passage from Aristotle. The Stagirite maintains that the epic, like tragedy, shares its species and essential elements; however, he attaches decisive value to the quality of thought and the excellence of elocution. According to Aristotle, the greatness of a poem is not based solely on its structure, whether simple or complex, pathetic or character-driven, but mainly on the clarity, force, and brilliance with which thought is articulated through language. In this sense, Homer stands as a paradigm of literary perfection, notable both for the conceptual depth of his ideas and for the precision and harmony of his verbal expression:

Ἔτι δὲ τὰ εἴδη ταὐτὰ δεῖ ἔχειν τὴν ἐποποιίαν τῇ τραγωιδίαι, ἢ γὰρ ἁπλῆν ἢ πεπλεγμένην ἢ ἠθικὴν ἢ παθη τικήν. Καὶ τὰ μέρη ἔξω μελοποιίας καὶ ὄψεως ταὐτά· καὶ γὰρ περιπετειῶν δεῖ καὶ ἀναγνωρίσεων καὶ παθημάτων· ἔτι τὰς διανοίας καὶ τὴν λέξιν ἔχειν καλῶς. Οἷς ἅπασιν Ὅμηρος κέχρηται καὶ πρῶτος καὶ ἱκανῶς. Καὶ γὰρ τῶν ποιημάτων ἑκάτερον συνέστηκεν ἡ μὲν Ἰλιὰς ἁπλοῦν καὶ παθητικόν, ἡ δὲ Ὀδύσσεια πεπλεγμένον (ἀναγνώρισις γὰρ διόλου) καὶ ἠθική. Πρὸς δὲ τούτοις λέξει καὶ διανοίαι πάντα ὑπερβέβληκεν.[60]

(Arist. *Po.*1459b8-27)

Cereta takes up these Aristotelian postulates, reinterpreting them from a humanist perspective that particularly values the integration of thought and form as the guiding principle of literary creation. While Aristotle hierarchises the formal and conceptual elements of the poem, she emphasises the work's ability to suggest and stimulate ingenuity, articulating content and expression in a harmonious balance. Thus, the humanist not only dialogues with the Aristotelian tradition, but also reconfigures it, proposing a poetic model in which excellence resides in the dynamic interaction between form and thought, and in the suggestive power of language as an instrument of reflection and creativity.

On the art of expressing ideas, Aristotle (Arist. *Po*. 1450B 12-15) in his *Poetica* addresses "λέξις" and defines it as the expression of thoughts through words. It is not just a matter of choosing beautiful words, but of ensuring that the words correctly reflect what the characters think or feel. The Stagirite clarifies that its function is the same in

[52](Morales, 1991, pp. 287-288).

[53](Aristotle, 2020, p. 270).

[54](Aristotle, 2020, p. 274).

[55](Tomasini, 1640, fols. A 3r-A3v).

[56]The term "*ingenium*", understood as thoughts and words elegantly adapted to the subject, was widely debated during the Baroque period. (Robles, 2024, pp. 246-247).

[57]Let us recall Hermogenes of Tarsus (c. 160 - c. 225), who organised all the elements involved in achieving a style, from content to number, into eight parts: 1 content ("ἔννοια"/ "*sententia*"); 2 method or treatment, figures of thought ("*μέθοδος*" / "*ductus*"); 3 diction, lexicon ("*λέξις*" / "*dictio*"); 4 figures, specifically figures of diction, ("*χήματα λέξεως*" / "figurae dictionis"). (Grau, 2005, pp. 149-150).

[58]"*Adde, quod quae nunc est hominum severitas, non mala tantum poesis displicet, sed ipsa poesis ut mala: multoque gravius videtur et πολιτικώτερον, forum aleatorium calfacere, quam libera verba vinculis includere non necessariis*". (Grotius, 1617, fols. **1r-**1v).

[59](Paton, 1900, p. IX).

[60](Horacio, 2010, p. 121).

both verse and prose; the important thing is that the words communicate ideas correctly and contribute to the verisimilitude of the work. Thus, diction becomes a fundamental tool for character construction and for the emotional and rational effect sought by the literary work: "*Τέταρτον δὲ τῶν μὲν λόγων ἡ λέξις· λέγω δέ, ὥσπερ πρότερον εἴρηται, λέξιν εἶναι τὴν διὰ τῆς ὀνομασίας ἑρμηνείαν, ὅ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἐμμέτρων καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν λόγων ἔχει τὴν αὐτὴν δύναμιν*" (Arist. *Po.* 1450b 12-15)[61]. In Rome, on this same aspect, expounded by Aristotle, I refer to Horace. The Roman poet emphasises that a good poet or critic does not limit himself to composing, but also constantly evaluates and corrects his verses. The thought, that is, what is said, must be clear, profound and precise; while the elocutio, or manner of expression, must be appropriate and elegant, without being excessive or confusing. In other words, poetic excellence depends as much on content as on form, and only careful revision can achieve a worthy result, such as that achieved by Aristarchus with ancient texts.

Vir bonus et prudens uersus reprehendet inertis,
culpabit duros, incomptis adlinet atrum
transuorso calamo signum, ambitiosa recidet
ornamenta, parum claris lucem dare coget,
arguet ambigue dictum, mutanda notabit,
fiet Aristarchus[62].
(Hor. *Ars* 445-450)

5) A critical approach to the commentary on a miscellany of letters by Laura Cereta

I have made a brief selection of letters in which Cereta clearly demonstrates her skill in literary creation, revealing her mastery of epistolary writing and her ability to construct a solid, effective and carefully crafted personal discourse, through which she affirms her intellectual voice and her place within the humanist tradition. She follows the poetic principle established in the paratext intended for the reader throughout the composition of her letters: **vivas figuras, ingenium, ex sententiarum pondo, parturit**[63].

5.1) Commentary on Epistle II entitled: *Sigismundo de Buccis, LL. Doct. [=Legum Doctor] Laura Cer.[eta] S.[alutem] Epist.[ola] II.*

I will now focus on the letter addressed to Sigismundus de Buccis, the text of which is as follows:

Quanquam in praeturam hanc patris otii gratia devenerim; nulla tamen umquam vel parva respiratio, vacuum mihi tempus exhibuit; velut quae paternae indulgentia familiaris non minus quam maritali cura distringar. For the former constantly calls me, as opportunities arise, and the latter distracts me. I am solicited by both pursuits in turn. I cannot give myself any leisure for writing at all, unless I sleep very lightly, for such is the parsimony of time among those who devote themselves to their own affairs with no less diligence than to their labour. But the thief of hours, vigilance, finds the whole space of the day divided, in which, after the long night, I begin again in the morning; for the first darkness of the day never deceives the letters; but when the first light of dawn returns, it is given, painted with a sharp brush. Thus, the tenacious ratio of labour distinguished this thread with the interplay of colours[64].

"Although I have accepted this responsibility in order to give my father some free time, he has never, however, granted me even the slightest respite or a moment of free time; as if, through my father's indulgence, I were bound not less by domestic concerns than by marital ones. For the former call me constantly, as circumstances require; the latter draw me away. On both sides, I am troubled by alternating commitments. I cannot devote any leisure time to literature, except when I sleep, and I sleep as little as possible; so great is the economy of time among those who devote themselves to their families, as well as to themselves, with no less care than they devote to themselves. But the thieving vigilance of the hours finds a space spread throughout the day, in which, after the lamp of a long night, I will once again devote myself to my affairs in the morning; for the darkness of the first decline of the day never deceives the letters, and the first ray of the morning sun is granted to me, when a veil embroidered by the needle creates an illusory image. Thus, the firm discipline of tireless work has woven this fabric, distinguishing it with alternating colours".

In the aforementioned missive, Cereta uses the image of weaving or embroidering as a sophisticated metaphor for literary creation. The comparison with embroidery is not accidental; it is part of a classical tradition that links intellectual work with traditionally feminine textile crafts, especially when a woman claims authority in the field of letters. So close was this association between embroidery and femininity that mastery of it served to weigh the worth and honesty of a great lady. In the Middle Ages, preachers and moralists indicated that women needed custody, which meant watching over them and cloistering them to protect and care for them. The weapons to combat vice and temptation are the spindle, the spinning wheel, the needle and the thread[65]. Among the compliments paid to a woman of high birth, mastery of embroidery was one of the most commonly used. This is the case of Catherine de Medici (1519-1589) and Mary Stuart (1542-1587), whose needlework skills have been recorded in the chronicles[66].

In the letter, Cereta describes how her time is constantly fragmented between family and marital obligations. The author deploys a series of metaphorical images that unequivocally refer to the act of writing and creating literature, more specifically to poetic and intellectual creation, rather than to a material or practical activity. The carefully selected vocabulary, together with the symbolic opposition between night and day, places the discourse in the realm of humanistic writing, where reflection, contemplation and vigilance are essential conditions for literary production. The explicit reference to "*litterae*" ("letters") is the first decisive clue. In humanistic Latin, "*litterae*" does not refer to mere graphic signs, but to literary texts, epistles and intellectual production as a whole. When Cereta states that "the darkness of the first decline of the day never deceives the letters" ("**nunquam enim primae labentis diei tenebrae litteras fallunt"**),[67] declares that his written work is not disturbed by the confusion or false clarity of daylight. The night, illuminated by the "lamp", thus appears as the **privileged** time of creation. This lamp does not function as a descriptive element, but as a metaphor for the inner clarity, silence and contemplation necessary for poetic composition. Opposite it, dawn ("**prima fax orientis**") arrives through the illusory image of embroidery ("**illuso acu picta veliculo**")[68] ("a veil embroidered by the needle that creates an illusory image"). In line with the above, the author establishes a metapoetic identification, reflecting how her epistolary work is carried out with the same patience, meticulousness and delicacy as embroidery. By using the form "*illuso*", understood as 'the illusory' (embroidery that looks real but is not), the humanist addresses the issue of verisimilitude. Hesiod speaks of verisimilitude in his Theogony: "*ἴδμεν ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγειν ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα*"[69] **(Hes. *Th. 27)*** ("we know how to tell many lies that appear to be truths"). Giselle von der Walde[70] states that Hesiod is referring to literary or fictional truth in this verse. Thus, she considers that the Muses were capable of creating fiction. Venusinus elaborates a Latin version of Hesiod's verse: "*aut sibi convenientia finge*" (Hor. *Ars.* 119)[71]. The poet teaches about the creation of stories and characters characterised by the verisimilitude that arises from mimesis ("*μίμησις* ")[72], making the events narrated credible. Aristotle, in his *Poetica* (Arist. Po.1451b9), considers the poet's activity from the point of view of the plot in relation to reality. The poet's task is to describe not what has happened ("*οὐ τὸ τὰ γενόμενα λέγειν*")[73] but what could have happened ("*ἀλλ' οἷα ἂν γένοιτο*"),[74] that is, "things that are possible according to verisimilitude or necessity" ("*καὶ τὰ δυνατὰ κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς ἢ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον*")[75]. The historian and the poet do not differ in that they speak in verse or prose. Herodotus' work could be translated into verse, and it would still be "history". The difference lies in the fact that the historian recounts what has happened, and the poet what could have happened:

Ὁ γὰρ ἱστορικὸς καὶ ὁ ποιητὴς οὐ τῷ ἢ ἔμμετρα λέγειν ἢ ἄμετρα διαφέρουσιν (εἴη γὰρ ἂν τὰ Ἡροδότου εἰς μέτρα τεθῆναι, καὶ οὐδὲν ἧττον ἂν εἴη ἱστορία τις μετὰ μέτρου ἢ ἄνευ μέτρων)· ἀλλὰ τούτῳ διαφέρει, τῷ τὸν μὲν τὰ γενόμενα λέγειν, τὸν δὲ οἷα ἂν γένοιτο. Διὸ καὶ φιλοσοφώτερον καὶ σπουδαιότερον ποίησις ἱστορίας ἐστίν· ἡ μὲν γὰρ ποίησις μᾶλλον τὰ καθόλου, ἡ δ' ἱστορία τὰ καθ' ἕκαστον λέγει.Ἔστιν δὲ καθόλου μέν, τῷ ποίῳ τὰ ποῖα ἄττα συμβαίνει λέγειν ἢ πράττειν κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς ἢ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον, οὗ στοχάζεται ἡ ποίησις ὀνόματα

[61](Aristóteles & Horacio, 1987, p. 11).

[62](Horacio, 2010, pp. 110, 116).

[63](Tomasini, 1640, fols. A 3r-A3v).

[64](Tomasini, 1640, pp. 12-13).

[65](Casagrande, 2018, pp. 122-138).

[66](Ágreda, 2018, p. 214).

[67](*Tomasini, 1640, p. 13).*

68(*Tomasini, 1640, p.* 3).

[69](*Pucci,* 2007, p. 26).

[70]Von Der Walde 2010: 71.

[71](Horacio, 2010, p. 94).

[72]The subject of "*μίμησις*" was already addressed by Aristotle in his *Poetica* (Arist. *Po.* 1452a).

[73](Aristóteles & Horacio, 1987, p. 107).

[74](Aristóteles & Horacio, 1987, p. 107).

[75](Aristóteles & Horacio, 1987, p. 107).

ἐπιτιθεμένη· τὸ δὲ καθ' ἕκαστον, τί Ἀλκιβιάδης ἔπραξεν ἢ τί ἔπαθεν.
(Arist. *Po.*1451b9)[76].

Following Luz Aurora Pimentel,[77] it can be concluded that literature does not reflect reality directly, but rather constructs an effect of reality through language. This effect can be so intense that the reader perceives the narrative as a faithful reflection of the world, even with a sense of visuality, although it is a discursive construction based on previous conventions and codes that make it plausible. In this way, a referential illusion is produced, since the text seems to point to an external object, but in reality it constructs an object that exists within the discourse itself. I will now focus on the expression "*furatrix horarum vigilantia*" ("vigilance", "thief of hours"), as it represents the personification of time and reinforces the image of a creative subject who steals time from sleep and the day to devote himself to writing. This figure, widely established in the humanist literary tradition, identifies the poet with the night watchman, who, when the world is silent, finds the space and truth necessary for intellectual creation. Finally, the humanist conceives of her poetic work through the metaphor of embroidery, an activity that involves patience, composition and skill, and which becomes an emblem of intellectual creation. In this context, the author states: "*Sic tenax laboris improbi ratio telam hanc interfilari colorum reciprocatione distinxit*"[78]. The translation can be expressed as follows: "Thus, reason, steadfast in tireless effort, wove this text like a fabric (symbolising her ideas), intertwining colours (figures and stylistic devices) so that each element dialogues with the others and contributes to the harmony of the work".

Firstly, our scholar emphasises that writing is not the result of sudden inspiration, but of sustained effort, "*laboris improbi*", of tireless effort. Continuing with her metapoetic work, the author compares her letter to a "fabric" ("**telam**") in the expression "**ratio telam hanc distinxit**"; in this way, she does not refer to a literal object, but to her own text and the ideas that structure it, emphasising the careful elaboration and interrelation of its elements.

The fabric symbolises the set of organised thoughts, while the colours represent the rhetorical figures and stylistic devices that alternate and dialogue with each other, creating a harmonious and balanced intellectual fabric. At all times, the humanist follows the poetic principle established in her letter to the reader: "**vivas figuras, ingenium, ex sententiarum pondo, parturit"**[79]. This analogy with embroidery is linked to Horace's principle "*Ut pictura poesis*" (Hor. *Ars* 361); however, in this context it is appropriate to expand Horace's idea of "*poesis*" by incorporating the clarifications of Cereta, who uses the expressions "*acu picta*"[80] ("the drawing made by the needle") and "*pro acu ad picturam trahendo*"[81] ("tracing an image with the needle") to emphasise the artisanal and visual dimension of literary composition.

As a synthesis of the idea conveyed in the letter, the creative instrument ceases to be the brush and becomes the needle, so that visual art is transformed into a craft and rational endeavour, highlighting female intellectual authority and sustained dedication as pillars of poetic creation.

In the context of humanist culture, which was strongly masculine, the scholar appropriates a domestic symbol, traditionally feminine, and reinterprets it as an emblem of intellectual authority. She does not deny her status as a woman, but rather turns it into a productive force; from the loom (a symbol of domesticity), she claims her right to write and produce knowledge. Thus, she establishes the cliché: "my loom is writing".

In her letter to Nazaria Olympica, Cereta recounts her life and comments on how the nun who educated her in literature also taught her to "draw images" using an embroidery needle. Let us recall the expressions already cited: "*acu picta*";[82] "*pro acu ad picturam trahendo*"[83]. She relates that she learned with attention and perseverance, under the delicate guidance of her teacher in the monastery. After nights of practice in front of her embroidery, she acquired the rudiments of the art, and no technique, however difficult or delicate, escaped her efforts, even though at first she lacked experience and recognition:

Per hoc ergo tempus, ut primum prima vix elementa in primas litterarum syllabas mittere didici. Feminae, consilio et religione electissimae, credor, a qua erudienda, morum exercitiique disciplinam haurirem intentius. Haec me, in penetralibus monasterii referatis perstrictisque vectibus centum admissam, delicate semper apud se habuit, licet pro acu ad picturam trahendo transfigere noctes insomnes me prima docuerit: non multo ad tempus spatio fidelis satis, obediensque filis manus rudimenta deposuit, nec fuit ulla tam difficilis textu policies, quae tenuuius, molliusque disereta me fugeret, adeo mens, tantae agnitionis inops[84].

In accordance with Cereta's statement, it should be remembered that embroidery, together with other means of popular expression such as artistic manifestations in paintings or carvings and the oral tradition of a people, their stories, songs, legends and proverbs, constitute a faithful expression of the idiosyncrasies of a people, their life, customs, philosophy of life and ethical sense, and therefore represent an important cultural heritage[85].

It is known that since the 8th century, nuns taught the art of embroidery in monasteries to ladies and girls from high society. While noble and wealthy women practised it as a pastime in their free time, women of humble origins resorted to embroidery to meet their own needs or contribute to the family's livelihood. Needlework techniques thus became a job opportunity for many of them, and the manuals of the time focused mainly on production for religious purposes and the making of trousseaus[86]. Within the limits that society imposed on women, embroidery offered a unique space for expression, allowing them to organise and transmit the imagery of ancient traditions and project personal aspirations towards the future. Each embroidery sampler[87] tells a story of effort and achievement; it speaks of identity, of desires linked to education and of the dream of starting a family. Although embroidery training was widespread in various regions and social classes and was often imposed on young women as part of their education, it also became a means of presenting and representing themselves, as well as a testimony to their interests and daily experiences. Through these images, the history of women between the 16th and 20th centuries has been woven together[88].

A notable example of its value can be found in the inventory of Queen Joanna I's possessions, which lists around fifty samplers, some embroidered in silk and gold. Similarly, the case of Mary Stuart shows how embroidery could transcend the domestic sphere; during her captivity in England, she used embroidered panels, now preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum, as a means of symbolic communication and political resistance. Inspired by books of emblems and treatises on natural history, she constructed a coded visual narrative with which she expressed her identity, her legitimacy and her hope of regaining the throne[89]. Mary Stuart[90] applied Horace's principle of "*Ut pictura poesis*" (Hor. *Ars* 361) as Cereta had done before her: "*pro acu ad picturam trahendo*"[91]. This fact highlights the association of embroidery with women and their form of

[76](Aristóteles & Horacio, 1987, p. 107).

[77](Pimentel, 2001, pp. 9,11, 36, 241).

[78](Tomasini, 1640, p. 13).

[79](Tomasini, 1640, fols. A 3r-A3v).

[80](Tomasini, 1640, p. 13).

[81](Tomasini, 1640, p. 148).

[82](Tomasini, 1640, p. 13).

[83](Tomasini, 1640, p. 148).

[84](Tomasini, 1640, pp. 147-148).

[85](Omatos, 1986, pp. 259-273, 259).

[86](González & Friederike, 2025, p. 37.

[87]A needlework sampler is a piece of embroidery or cross-stitching produced as a specimen of achievement, demonstration or a test of skill in needlework. It often includes the alphabet, figures, motifs, decorative borders and sometimes the name of the person who embroidered it and the date. The word sampler is derived from the Latin exemplum, which means example. S.v. "Needlework". (Banham, 1997, p. 858).

[88](González & Friederike, 2025, p. 18).

[89](González & Friederike, 2025, p. 25).

[90]Susan Frye analyses the political texts created by two women destined to occupy a central place in history: Elizabeth Tudor (**Elizabeth I of England**) (1533–1603) and Mary Stuart. Both asserted their position and authority through writing and embroidery. From a young age, they were educated to translate, write sentences, letters, speeches and poems. They also learned to use portraits, clothing, and other commissioned objects to project their image and reinforce their political influence. In addition, they developed remarkable skills in needlework, which served as another form of personal and symbolic expression. (Frye, 2010, pp. 30–70).

[91](Tomasini, 1640, p. 148).

expression, a resource used as a literary trope. In his work *Politica*,[92] Lipsius compares his work to a tapestry woven by Phrygian craftsmen ("*Phrygiones*"),[93] made with threads of multiple colours to form a single image, a tapestry ("*aulaeum*").[94] This metaphor clearly expresses the idea of structured composition, in which the diversity of sources and voices is integrated into a single work with a defined form and internal harmony: *e mille aliquot particulis uniforme hoc et cohaerens corpus*"[95]. Lipsius has not only compiled and organised his work, but also embellished it, endowing it with style, rhetorical figures and linguistic variations so that the reader perceives not only the content, but also "the colour, spirit and life" ("*non colorem solum, sed quasi spiritum et vitam*"),[96] that is, he wants to give the work a soul, so that it is not only beautiful, but also alive, animated, effective, with formative power: "*Ad summam, ut Phrygiones e variis coloris filo unum aliquod aulaeum formant: sic nos e mille aliquot particulis uniforme hoc et cohaerens corpus. Quod ipsum figuris etiam et vario sermonis ductu ornare ausus sum: ut non colorem solum, sed quasi spiritum et vitam*"[97].

Continuing with our humanist epistle, Cereta describes her embroidery ("*panniculus*") using ekphrasis ("*ἔκφρασις*"), a literary device that consists of describing a visual work of art in great detail. As Pimentel notes,[98] some literary texts describe objects with such precision that readers can almost "see" them in their imagination; this is, in effect, what is meant by ekphrasis.

Originally, ancient masters of rhetoric, such as Hermogenes (Hermog. *Prog.* 10), defined it as a long, precise and vivid description that made the reader feel as if the object were in front of them. Over time, these descriptions focused especially on visual or artistic objects, and ekphrasis came to mean mainly describing in words an object that is normally seen with the eyes, a verbal description of a plastic object[99]. Based on Cereta's description of the metaphorical embroidery, we can speak of a notional ekphrasis, since the object described is not a real material object that the reader can directly access, but rather a construction created by the text itself. As noted by Claus Clüver[100] and Pimentel,[101] it is possible to distinguish between referential ekphrasis, when the visual object described has an autonomous material existence, and notional ekphrasis, when the object represented exists only in and through language, that is, the object exists only in the literary description, as in the case of Achilles' shield (Hom. *Il.* 18, 483-608).[102] Achilles' shield is the most famous example of ekphrasis, even though the object does not exist outside the poem. Along the same lines are Vergil's verbal description of Aeneas' shield in the *Aeneid* (Verg. *Aen.* 8, 626-731), the recreation of Jason's cloak in the *Argonautica*, which belongs to Apollonius of Rhodes (A.R. 1, 730-767), and the representation of the blanket covering the bed of Peleus and Thetis in Catullus' poem 64 (Catul. 64, 50-256).

Notional ekphrasis creates the sensation that there is a real, silent object that "asks" to be described. In other words, there is a paradox in that the object only exists because it is being described, and at the same time, that description gives it meaning. For example, Achilles' shield in the *Iliad*, Jason's cloak in the *Argonautica*, the blanket covering Peleus and Thetis' bed in Catullus' poem 64, and the description of Cereta's embroidery do not exist outside of language, but when described, they feel like real, autonomous objects belonging to a sensible world that we want to understand.

Through ekphrasis, a bridge is established between the verbal description and the object to which it refers. However, this relationship does not occur automatically, but requires the active intervention of the reader, who, based on the clues provided by the discourse, reconstructs the object described. In other words, the relationship between text and object is not given in advance, but is configured in the very act of reading[103]. All verbal representations contain clues that point to what they can be linked to and that constitute the elements of their contextualisation and recontextualisation. From the perspective of reception, the reader can only focus on the object-referent in the terms proposed by the object-text. Thus, verbal representation does not simply reproduce a previous object, but constructs a textual object, mediated by language and the conditions of interpretation. One of the clues can be found in the expression: "**nunquam enim primae labentis diei tenebrae litteras fallunt"**[104], ("the darkness of the first decline of the day never deceives the letters") declares that his written work is not disturbed by the confusion or false clarity of daylight.

Another hint in Cereta's letter ends by revealing that the embroidery she has described is her volume of epistles: "***Haec ea sunt, quae ante illucescentes diei radios meis manibus feci: quas autem ante primam quietem recensuerim Musas, testis est Epistolarum grande volumen, quod libraria nunc elementatim format impressio".***[105] "These are the things I did with my own hands before dawn; and the great volume of Epistles, my Muses, which I reviewed before my first rest, testifies that the printing of books is part of libraries in their elemental state".

Cereta identifies her poems with the Muses,[106] again using a metaphor, in this case a mythological one, to talk about her poetic creation. From a syntactic point of view, the humanist has used a particular structure of the relative subordinate clause, where she presents a special relationship between the antecedent and the relative. In this case, the antecedent, inserted in the relative clause, is Muses, used as a synonym for epistolae.

This syntactic construction of the inclusion of the antecedent in the relative clause is quite frequent in archaic Latin and in legal language to avoid ambiguities, also in classical language, especially Caesar, then it falls into disuse in literary language, but not in popular speech or in legal language[107].

[92](Lipsius, 1599, fol. *B1v).

[93](Lipsius, 1599, fol. *B1v; Robles, 2026, p. 6).

[94](Lipsius, 1599, fol. *B1v).

[95](Lipsius, 1599, fol. *B1v).

[96](Lipsius, 1599, fol. *B1v).

(Lipsius, 1599, fol. *B1v).

[98](Pimentel, 2003, p. 205).

[99]Pimentel argues that, in notional ekphrasis, the object exists only within the text, allowing it to be fully reinterpreted by literary discourse. Conversely, in the description of a real visual object, the object retains its own "voice" and meanings, limiting the possibility of total reinterpretation by literature. (Pimentel, 2003, p. 209).

[100]*Clüver asserts: "Ekphrasis is the verbal representation of real or fictive configurations composed in a non-kinetic visual medium". (Clüver, 2017, p. 33).*

[101]I quote Aurora Pimentel's contribution verbatim: "podemos hablar de *ecfrasis referencial*, cuando el objeto plástico tiene una existencia material autónoma, o de *ecfrasis nocional* cuando el objeto "representado" solamente existe en y por el lenguaje, como en el caso del escudo de Aquiles". (Pimentel, 2003, p. 207).

[102]This practice of ekphrasis can be found in both Greek and Roman literature. (Oyarzún, 2018, p. 9).

[103](Pimentel, 2001, pp. 114-115).

[104]*(Tomasini, 1640, p. 13).*

[105]*(Tomasini, 1640, p. 16).*

[106]In light of the above, I base my translation on one of the teachings proposed by the Venusian in his *Epistula ad Pisones*, specifically referring to the expression "*callida iunctura*" (Hor. *Ars* 46-48) linked to "*verba nova*". Following Brink, a contemporary scholar, explains that *callida iunctura*" causes commonly used terms to become, through juxtaposition, something non-prosaic and memorable, that is, how a hackneyed term ("*verbum notum*") acquires a new meaning ("*verbum novum*"); on the other hand, the "*usus*" ("*genitor produxerit usus*") (Hor. *Epist.* 2, 2, 119) creates terms, and it will be the judgement of learned poets that authorises the invention of new words ("*arbitrium est et ius et norma loquendi*") (Hor. *Ars* 70-72). (Brink, 2011, p. 39; Robles, 2020, pp. 44-66).

[107]*(Bassols, 1987, pp. 240-241).*

I present some examples from Vergil's *Aeneid*[108] which deal with the use of the relative in which the antecedent is included. In the following verses, the antecedent, inserted in the relative clause, is "*tela*", a synonym of "*sagittae*":

Constitit hic, arcumque manu celerisque sagittas
corripuit; fidus quae tela gerebat Achates.
(Verg. *Aen. 1, 187-188*)[109]
"He stood firm here and grasped the bow and the swift arrows in his hand;
but these throwing weapons were borne by the faithful Acates".

ad caelum undabat vertex turrimque tenebat,
turrim compactis trabibus quam eduxerat ipse
subdideratque rotas pontisque instraverat altos.
(Verg. *Aen. 12, 673-675*)[110]
"A whirlwind billowed into the sky and reached the tower,
which he had raised with logs assembled together,
to which he had put wheels and set up high bridges".

In line with the above, I will now comment on the description of the embroidered image, paying attention to the poetic principles that structure the practice of ekphrasis. In this context, the text does not merely accompany the image, but also interprets it, treating it as an object susceptible to analysis.

In this sense, we can speak, first of all, of an intersemiotic relationship, insofar as two different sign systems are connected: verbal and visual language. Secondly, an intertextual relationship is established, since the verbal discourse approaches the image as if it were another text with which it dialogues[111].

In this way, image and word configure a space open to multiple readings, in which the receiver not only accesses the literal meaning, but also perceives the cultural, historical or poetic relationships that are woven between the two. Thus, layers of meaning are generated that would be difficult to discern if image and text were considered separately[112]. Although Cereta appears to be describing a manual task traditionally associated with the female sphere, the meticulousness with which she details threads, figures and compositions reveals an operation parallel to writing itself. Embroidery and writing are presented as analogous activities, both involving selection, order, composition and harmony. Each thread is equivalent to a word; each motif, to a rhetorical figure; each scene, to an intellectual construction. Thus, embroidery functions as a metaphor for her own literary work.

In this way, the tangible object transcends its materiality and becomes a self-reflective vehicle. Cereta not only displays technical skill, but also asserts her ingenuity and authority as an author. By transforming a manual activity into a symbol of intellectual creation, she shifts the boundaries imposed on women and turns the visual into a space for discursive legitimisation.

This strategy is continued in the subsequent scenes described, in one of which a kite defends its position at the top with its beak and claws while a dark-feathered eagle descends rapidly to attack it. The tension between these animal forces intensifies the drama of the description and takes on a symbolic dimension, reinforcing the ethical and creative reflection that runs through the text. Thus, ekphrasis is not limited to embellishing the discourse, but articulates a meditation on creation, conflict and the affirmation of the author's own voice.

Oblongulus igitur cohoperturae panniculus torvam in medio pantheram et conspicua satis macularum varietate distinctam, ostendit. At levam tenet intortus, cristatusque draco, quem lingua divisim tremula, et picturatae squammae, radiantesque oculi, parata crudelitate nobilitant. Has contra bestias, iubatus et feritatis aspectu febriens leo, propatulas in dexteram hiatu fauces adaperit: quasi subvivi omnes irritatim secum infremant, minitantesque vicissim. Altius, in resupinum, et rostro atque unguibus propugnante per inane milvum, nigricans pennis aquila devolat[113]**.**

In light of the above, we can speak of an intertextual dialogue between the visual and the verbal, in which the image and the word respond to and enrich each other. In this context, it is worth recalling the Greek tradition in which the presence of animals is a characteristic feature of fables. Homer presents us with eagles and vultures with their prey (hares, lambs and other birds), lions and their victims, bulls, deer, donkeys, snakes, horses, wolves, wild boars and even flies[114]. The passage from Cereta that we are going to discuss refers in part to these classical motifs and evokes, in its narrative and symbolic arrangement, some verses from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which also allude to animals and the double-peaked Mount Parnassus. Thus, Cereta's text not only dialogues with literary tradition, but also reinterprets familiar images, creating an intertext that connects mythology, fable and personal poetics. Next, I refer to the verses from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*:

nat lupus inter oves, fulvos vehit unda leones,
unda vehit tigres; nec vires fulminis apro,
crura nec ablato prosunt velocia cervo.
(Ov. *Met. 1, 304-306)*
mons ibi verticibus petit arduus astra duobus,
nomine Parnasos, superantque cacumina nubes.
(Ov. *Met. 1, 316-317)*

Both Greeks and Romans were convinced that the gods revealed their wishes to them through birds. Isis takes the form of a kite when she carries the body of Osiris. The eagle is considered in the poetry of almost all ancient cultures to be the king of birds; it is not surprising that it is the bird that accompanies kings in Babylon and princes and legions in Rome. Therefore, the main gods are also linked to this majestic animal, which is attributed with exceptional powers. Porphyry,[115] a third-century author, lists these divining birds and identifies them with the deities in his treatise *De Abstinentia ab Esu Animalium* (specifically, book three deals with the intelligence of animals and their relationship with the divine). Porphyry argued that although the gods sometimes remain silent, they still send us signs. Birds grasp these revelations more quickly than humans and, once they understand them, they communicate them to us as best they can, acting as messengers of the gods. For example, the eagle is the messenger of Zeus; the hawk and the raven, of Apollo; the stork, of Hera; the rail and the owl, of Athena; the crane, of Demeter; and similarly, other specific birds represent other gods[116].

I will now explain one of the animals mentioned, the dragon. It is curious to note the similarity in different languages regarding the name of this animal; the term "*δράκων*" in Greek and *draco* in Latin has few variations in all the common names in European languages (dragón, dragon, Drache, dragio, dragone, drac, etc.). It is astonishing that, under such an unchanging word, such a varied and metamorphosing visual reality flows and pulsates. If a Greek, a Roman or an educated person of Late Antiquity, or even of the 8th century, were asked what a dragon looks like, their answer would be clear and unambiguous: a dragon is a type of snake. Some would say that the word "dragon" should be applied to snakes that appear in a religious context.

It is easy to understand why a creature with such characteristics would be laden and even overloaded with connotations: it is enormous, closely associated with storms and fire, inhabits caves in exotic countries and guards treasures, while also concentrating the evil power of its lethal force. But, as if that were not enough, other even more negative connotations come from a field outside that of naturalists; the Bible presented it as a symbol of evil and the devil, and the Holy Fathers constantly insisted on the same idea. For early Christian minds, it was impossible not to merge zoological and doctrinal views; for the faithful, the dragon concentrates all the brutality of the unleashed natural elements (earth, air, fire, perhaps water) and presents itself as an obstacle to finding good; it therefore constitutes a living symbol of the animal force of matter that the spirit must confront in order to find the treasure of Good and Salvation. As a result of this mentality, the different versions of the *Physiologus*, that primitive bestiary compiled from the 2nd century AD onwards, deal with the dragon only as a perverse enemy of various animals considered positive. In various passages, we witness its defeats against the ichneumon, which defeats it by hiding in the mud; or its hatred and fear of the panther, whose roar and scent terrify it[117]. Next, I will focus on Philippe de Thaü's *Bestiaire*.

Le Bestiaire is a typical example of how zoology, allegory and religious teaching were combined in the Middle Ages, using animals to convey moral messages to readers. Firstly,

[108]*(Robles, 2023, pp. 70-71).*

[109]*(Burmannus, 1746, pp. 2, 61-62).*

[110]*(Burmannus, 1746, pp. 4, 76-77).*

[111](Pimentel, 2003, p. 206).

[112](Pimentel, 2003, p. 208).

[113]*(Tomasini, 1640, p. 14).*

[114](Rodríguez, 1979, p. 209).

[115](Porphyry, 1667, pp. 226–227).

[116](Almodóvar, 2019, pp. 401–402).

[117] (Elvira, 1997, pp. 420-421).

it is known that Philippe incorporated certain Latin glosses into his *Bestiaire*. Philippe was undoubtedly inspired by Latin treatises, but it is not believed that he translated or closely imitated any of these writings, at least none of the best known ones, such as those by Bede, Helperic and Gerland[118].

Below are examples of animals that Cereta mentions in his letter and which appear in the aforementioned author's work.

The panther represents Christ: "*De panthera et ejus natura, quae Cristum significat*"[119]. The dragon represents the devil: "*Hic columbae in arbore sedentes et draco insidians pinguntur. Haec arbor Cristum significat, et aves gentes, et draco diabolum*"[120].

The lion represents Christ: "*Hic leo pingitur et quomodo pingit se supra pectus hominis. Iste leo Cristum significat et ira eius*"[121]. It is also the king of animals, symbolising greatness: "*Leo quoque omnium / Est rex animalium, / De quo liber loquitur, /Ideo preponitur; /Et eius formatio /Et compaginatio / Magnum quid significat*"[122]. The eagle represents Christ and the sun represents God: "*Hic pingitur aquila Solis cernens lumina, Pulli, pisces, equora. Et haec aquila Cristum significat et sol Deum, pulli angelos et pisces gentes et equora secula*"[123].

In conclusion, in the symbolic ensemble proposed by Cereta, each animal fulfils a specific moral and allegorical function. The dragon represents the destructive force of evil, rooted in centuries of tradition that identify it with the primordial serpent and the devil. Opposing it are animals associated with Christ in bestiaries: the lion, emblem of greatness, royalty and protection; the eagle, symbol of spiritual elevation and divine vision; and the panther, whose sweet breath and ability to attract other creatures make it a benevolent figure that embodies Christ as a conciliatory and luminous presence. The kite, in a defensive posture against attack, introduces human fragility into this symbolic combat. Thus, the scene as a whole recreates a moral landscape in tension, where the forces of evil attempt to prevail but find their counterweight in a constellation of animals representing Christian virtues, spiritual guidance and the possibility of salvation. The scholar does not limit himself to describing animals, but draws on a shared cultural repertoire to articulate a reflection on the ethical conflict that permeates human existence.

In keeping with his symbolic framework, Cereta continues the description of the images that make up his metaphorical embroidery, now raising his gaze to a scene of greater dynamism and verticality. Above, a kite appears upside down, defending its position in the air with its beak and claws, while a dark-feathered eagle descends swiftly to attack it.

Above this confrontation, the radiant Phoebus, at the highest point of the firmament, illuminates with his rays the figure of the Moon, both silvery and horned, which is partially crossed by sunlight. Beyond the beasts, the majestic height of a mountain with two peaks (Parnassus) rises; from the valley between them, a river springs forth which, contrary to expectation, flows as if climbing its own course.

Sed aureus in summo Phoebus argenteam corniculatamque Lunam intercurrentibus radiis illustrat. Ultra feras celsitudo bicipitis montis ascendit: ab cuius interiacente valle emissus amnis adverso cursu defertur. At vero utriusque iugi paria intervalla implexae crates curvo nexu perstringunt: sed alterum nuda solum et Prominentia saxa, saxiis aliis atque aliis super imposita, compingunt: e quorum proscisso vertice flammigerum, intersumansque globatim eructatur incendium. Alterum circumvestiunt prata florea, et viridius monticulatim omni herba virentia. Montis utrumque latus umbrosis operculis nemus opacat, ubi pomantes hinc suos inter ramos esculi, inde vero leniter dependulae baccis olivae confruticant[124].

In her own Parnassus, the humanist reinterprets the Greek mountain of Parnassus, and it is precisely this reinterpretation that allows us to identify the intertexts suggested by her embroidery. Returning to classical tradition, Apollo and the Muses embody the pinnacle of artistic and poetic inspiration. Parnassus, the mythological home of the god of the arts and his nine muses, symbolises the source of creativity and the aesthetic ideal to which poets and artists aspire.

However, the peaks of Parnassus were also the scene of Dionysian rites, celebrated in the open air, where the thiasos reached ecstasy. Nature was shown in its purest state and the god, guiding the thiasos, mingled with it, dressed in deer skin and carrying the thyrsus, a symbol of strength and ritual energy[125]. A review of literary, epigraphic and iconographic sources confirms the presence of the thyiads in Delphi and their connection with Dionysus from archaic times until the 2nd century AD. Pausanias, in his work *Description of Greece* (10,32,7), refers to the thyiads as a female group[126] that celebrated Bacchic rites in Delphi. They climb to the peaks of Parnassus, dance by torchlight, sway with impetus, enter into ecstasy and worship Dionysus in the "*λίκνον*"[127].

The term "thyiads" reflects violent and frenetic movement, associated with ecstasy ("*ἔξτασις*") and "*μανία*". Under this influence, women released their emotions, united with the god, and were temporarily exempt from earthly obligations. The mountain represented the wild in contrast to the city ("*πόλις*"), a space where normally marginalised women could play a leading role and move freely thanks to the temporary legitimisation of ecstasy.

During the Renaissance, humanists reinterpreted this duality as two essential forces in art, Apollo symbolises form, moderation and classical perfection, while Dionysus embodies energy, enthusiasm and "poetic fury". The combination of the two generates artistic greatness. Andrea Mantegna's painting Parnassus[128] illustrates this coexistence between Apollonian order and Dionysian passion according to humanist ideals, and becomes a visual intertext that dialogues with Cereta's reinterpretation.

In his embroidery, the scholar offers a personal interpretation of Parnassus. Although she does not explicitly mention Dionysus or the thyiads, he alludes to them symbolically through a violent fire that emerges from a crack in the earth. The work articulates the two forces that shape human and creative experience: on one side, brute force, represented by fire; on the other, ideal beauty, culture, music and poetry, which she longs for and embodies. Between the two mountains lies a valley that symbolises her own path. The embroidery conveys the central idea that the human soul is situated between two mountains, that of fire and that of inspiration.

The reference to the Castalian Spring, which in mythology flows naturally from Parnassus as a symbol of inspiration and purification, is transformed into an ascending river that defies gravity. This inversion symbolises inspiration conquered, the intellectual ascent of women in an adverse world, and the tension between the sublime and the beautiful represented by the two mountains. In this interpretation, Cereta does not passively receive inspiration; she seeks it and works for it, becoming herself a river, an active force ascending towards Apollo and the Muses.

The animals that populate the embroidery represent the obstacles, passions, and violence of the world, contrasting with the stability of the mountains and the serenity

[118](Meyer, 1911, p. 71).

[119](De Thaün, 1900, p. CV).

[120](De Thaün, 1900, p. CXI).

[121](De Thaün, 1900, p. CIII).

[122](De Thaün, 1900, p. CIII).

[123](De Thaün, 1900, p. CIX).

[124](*Tomasini, 1640, pp. 14-15).*

[125](Jiménez, 2023, pp. 30-31).

[126]Dionysus Liknites was awakened by the Dionysian women, in this case called thyiads, in a cave on Mount Parnassus, above Delphi; the god is associated with mystery religions and the agricultural cycle. (Kerenyi, 1996. p. 44).

[127](Jiménez, 2023, p. 40).

[128]Parnassus, a mountain in central Greece, was considered in ancient times to be the home of the nine muses who belonged to the retreat of the god Apollo as goddesses protecting the arts. Thus, the importance of a sanctuary of music, painting and literature was attributed to Parnassus. As the artist was Italian, he probably named the gods by their Latin names rather than their Greek ones. Above the rock arch are Mars, the god of war, and Venus, the goddess of love, whose figure is based on ancient sculptures. On the right, in a cave and wearing only a red cloak, is Vulcan, goddess and husband of Venus, in a desperate pose. In his rather dignified representation, Mantegna forms a clear contrast to the majestic Mars. Anteros, the avenger of unrequited love, points a firearm at Vulcan's genitals. In front of the arch, the nine muses dance to Apollo's playing of the lyre. In the foreground of the image, Mercury, the messenger of the gods, leans against the winged horse Pegasus. Small animals such as rabbits and a frog appear in the background behind the people. (Rossetti, 1911, pp. 602–603).

of the locus amoenus,[129] reminding us that creation and elevation require facing the constant struggle of life. The work is thus configured as an encrypted autobiography, she is the river that fights against the current, ascends and reaches the summit, transforming her embroidery into a personal manifesto.

Certa's letter ends, as we noted earlier, by revealing that the embroidery she has described is her volume of epistles: "***Haec ea sunt, quae ante illucescentes diei radios meis manibus feci: quas autem ante primam quietem recensuerim Musas, testis est Epistolarum grande volumen, quod libraria nunc elementatim format impressio*"[130].**

In the above text, the humanist identifies his poems with the Muses, indirectly bringing to mind Hesiod and his work Theogony, who alludes to the Muses in his first verses (Hes. *Th.* 1-103). In Hesiod, the Muses are external deities who grant inspiration and authority to the poet. Their song allows him to narrate the genealogy of the gods, praise the order of the cosmos, and legitimise his word before men. Hesiod depends on them; without their favour, he could not access knowledge or exercise his poetic function. The Muses also inspire other poets and bards, and even indirectly influence the justice of kings and the consolation of mortals. They are a link between the divine and the human, and their authority is superior and external to the poet.

In Cereta, the Muses function metonymically, they are not external deities, but are identified with his own writings, especially his letters. Her texts bear witness to her effort, discipline and creativity, and legitimise her intellectual authority. Unlike Hesiod, Cereta does not depend on divine power for inspiration; inspiration comes from her constant work and study. In this way, her Muses are internal, a symbol of female autonomy and tangible evidence of her knowledge. Hesiod, on the other hand, places poetic authority outside himself, granted by divinities.

Proh curae mulierum inanes, quibusnam desideriis, quo trito tempore, ab Opia lege[131] refugimus, quae elaboratae hac arte vestes probro fucantur! Velut quae auri et argenti, ardentisque purpurae discoloribus filis sub tam inutili eruditione discurrunt. Ob hoc P. Sulpitius Gauis a P. Africano reprehenditur; ob hoc a L. Torquato Hortensius appellatus est histrio. Sed esto, ita forte aetatis huius plecti mores expostulent. Haec ea sunt, quae ante illucescentes diei radios meis manibus feci: quas autem ante primam quietem recensuerim Musas, testis est Epistolarum grande volumen, quod libraria nunc elementatim format impressio. Ego sane omnem gloriam meam in litterarum delectatione reposui, ne dum alii pro caducis divitiis maria pertranseunt, ego domi sub parentis studiosi documento, pro immortali possessione, tabescam ignava. Possesio namque virtutis grandes animos ad eso famae fructus accendit, qui sunt cum transeunti labore perpetui[132].

In summary, the text contrasts the vanity of feminine adornments and ostentation (luxurious dresses, useless pursuits) with the value of intellectual work. Cereta cites figures and events from antiquity to show that even then, affected erudition, that is, displayed with vanity or exaggeration, was censured. In contrast to these vices, she presents herself as someone who studies and writes before dawn, devoted with discipline to the arts. In conclusion, the humanist alludes to her **labor limae**[133] and informs us that she revised her letters until dawn. In her final words, she argues that true wealth is not material, fleeting and deceptive, but the enduring glory of virtue and knowledge, the fruit of constant effort.

The contrast is not decorative, but programmatic. In her embroidery, the scholar represents the two forces that shape human and creative experience. As an intellectual woman renegotiating her place in the Renaissance, she embroiders the symbolic setting of her own inner life.

Let us recall the historical context in which Cereta wrote, one example being that of Heinrich Kramer (ca. 1430-1505) (Institoris) and Jakob Sprenger (ca. 1436-ca. 1495). These two authors wrote a treatise entitled *Malleus Maleficarum*[134] in 1486. This work clearly shows the attitude of men towards women in Cereta's time.

This manual for Dominicans argues the supposed intellectual inferiority of women and their propensity for evil, especially for being witches. The *Malleus Maleficarum* helped to create the right breeding ground for the persecution of thousands of people, mostly women: witches, sorcerers, healers, midwives and doctors until the 17th century. Between 1450 and 1750, the so-called witch hunt took place, one of the most terrible events in European history. Witches, mostly women, were accused of being responsible for all the evils of society[135].

5.2) Study of Cereta's Letter: **Ad Augustinum Aemylium, Contra Muliebrem Cultum Imprecatio** (Epistle XXXI).

In the aforementioned Letter XXXI,[136] addressed to Aemilius Agustinus, Cereta paints a social portrait of how men and women were perceived in his time:

Humanitas autem ad id, quod vel prodesse potest, vel delectari semper inclinat. Imperfectius nos animal sumus et pauculae vires nostrae fortia proelia non sustinent. Vos tantae auctoritatis supereminentissimi viri, in quos rerum summa devenit, et qui iure consilii tot modernos Brutos habetis, tot inter vos Curios, Fabritios, Catones, Aemylios, videte cautius ne compositae huiusmodi elegantiae visco capiamini. Nam ubi consilium maius, maior ibi culpa gravatur[137].

In the missive, she states that humanity always leans toward what can provide profit or pleasure. She adds that women are very imperfect beings and that their limited strength cannot withstand hard wars: "*Imperfectius nos animal sumus et pauculae vires nostrae fortia proelia non sustinent*"[138]. Cereta thus follows the Aristotelian tradition in her conception of women.

First, Aristotle, in his *De Generatione Animalium*, says that the female is like a deformed male: *τὸ γὰρ θῆλυ ὥσπερ ἄρρεν ἐστὶ πεπηρωμένον* (Arist. GA 737a)[139].

Aristotle, in his work *Politica*, says: *ὁ ἄρρην φύσει ὑπέρτερος, ἡ δὲ θῆλυ ὑποδεέστερον· ὁ μὲν ἄρχων, ἡ δὲ ὑποτακτικὴ* (Arist. *Po*. 1, 1254b13-14)[140] ("The male is, by nature, superior, and the female inferior; the one is lord, the other is subject"). This passage appears in Aristotle's discussion of the natural hierarchy in human relations, especially within the home and society, where he argues that gender differences have a natural basis and justify a hierarchical organisation. Here a natural hierarchy is established: man as ruler ("*ἀρχή*") and woman as subordinate ("*ὑποταγή*"). This distinction is not the result of social convention, but of essential nature, and justifies their place in the structure of the home and the polis. In chapter XV of his *Poetica*, the Stagirite discusses the construction of characters in tragedy. He says that characters must be plausible ("*εἰκός*") and consistent with their type. In his work, he mentions women only tangentially, within the context of plausibility in dramatic characterisation, considering women inferior, even though they may have virtue. Furthermore, according to him, attributing courage to a woman is contrary to what is expected:

Περὶ δὲ τὰ ἤθη τέτταρά ἐστιν ὧν δεῖ στοχάζεσθαι, ἓν μὲν καὶ πρῶτον, ὅπως χρηστὰ ᾖ. Ἔξει δὲ ἦθος μὲν ἐὰν ὥσπερ ἐλέχθη ποιῇ φανερὸν ὁ λόγος ἢ ἡ πρᾶξις προαίρεσίν τινα <ἥ τις ἂν> ᾖ, χρηστὸν δὲ ἐὰν χρηστήν. Ἔστιν δὲ ἐν ἑκάστῳ γένει· καὶ γὰρ γυνὴ ἐστιν χρηστὴ καὶ δοῦλος, καίτοι γε ἴσως τούτων τὸ μὲν χεῖρον, τὸ δὲ ὅλως φαῦλόν ἐστιν. Δεύτερον δὲ τὸ ἁρμόττοντα· ἔστιν γὰρ ἀνδρείαν μὲν τὸ ἦθος, ἀλλ' οὐχ ἁρμόττον γυναικὶ οὕτως ἀνδρείαν

[129](Curtius, 1955, p. 280).

[130](*Tomasini, 1640, p. 16).*

[131]The *Lex Oppia,* passed in 215 BC, a few months after the disaster at Cannae, had imposed severe restrictions on female luxury and ostentation which, in the peace and prosperity of twenty years later, women considered apparently unbearable, so much so that they were incited to mobilise publicly and en masse in favour of repealing the law, even going so far as to coerce the magistrates who opposed it, an exceptional event which, as will be seen later, provided invaluable ammunition, albeit ultimately ineffective, to those in favour of keeping the law in force. Cuena 2017: 157. The debate on the repeal of the *lex Oppia* is cited by Titus Livius (Liv. 34.1-8). Other sources on the lex Oppia: Val. Max. 9.1.3; Tac. *Ann*.33-34.

[132](*Tomasini, 1640, pp. 16*-17).

[133]In his *Ars Poetica* (Hor. *Ars* 289-294), Horace favours the use of technique over natural genius (*ingenium*) when it comes to creating poems. (Segura, 1989, p. 114).

[134]The *Malleus maleficarum* is probably the most important treatise ever published in the context of witch hunts and witchcraft hysteria during the Renaissance. It is an exhaustive book on witch hunts which, after being published in Germany in 1486, was reprinted many times. (Zaffaroni, 2012, p. 44).

[135](Rey, 2006, p. 37).

[136](Tomasini, 1640, pp. 66-71).

[137](Tomasini, 1640, pp. 70-71).

[138](Tomasini, 1640, p. 70).

[139](Aristotle 1942, p. 174).

[140](Aristóteles, 2018, p. 8).

ἢ δεινὴν εἶναι.

(Arist. *Po.*1454a15-24)[141]

Continuing with the letter, Cereta alludes to men, mentioning figures of authority comparable to Roman heroes such as Brutus, Curius, Fabius, Cato, and Aemilius, who make decisions of great importance. In this context, the humanist warns them against external and artificial attractiveness that seduces but impoverishes, recommending caution, which she metaphorically describes as being trapped in "the slime of this particular elegance": "*Videte cautius ne compositae huiusmodi elegantiae visco capiamini*"[142]. The slime also symbolises the earthly, the rudimentary, that from which the spirit must rise through reason and education. Finally, the text suggests a warning to men, for the greater their capacity for judgement and reflection, the greater their moral responsibility. Those who act after deliberation cannot excuse themselves on the grounds of ignorance: "*Nam ubi consilium maius, maior ibi culpa gravatur*"[143].

5.3) Observations on Letter XXXV: *Cassandrae Venetae, Laura Cereta, S. Epist. XXXV*

In Epistle XXXV,[144] addressed to Cassandra from Venice, also known as Cassandra Fedele,[145] Cereta recounts a dream set in Hades. In Epistle XXXV,[146]. This letter reveals the influence of two great models from classical tradition, Vergil's *Aeneid* and Homer's *Odyssey*. Specifically, Book XI of The *Odyssey* recounts the "*nekyia*" ("*ἡ νέκυια*"), that is, the rite by which the souls of the dead are evoked or invoked. In this passage, the hero Odysseus summons the shadows of the dead to question them[147]. His main objective is to consult the seer Tiresias and obtain from him instructions on how to return to Ithaca. To carry out this communication with the dead, Odysseus performs a ritual sacrifice and other acts typical of this type of practice, allowing Tiresias to drink the blood of the victim, which gives him the ability to prophesy.

Furthermore, in Book VI of The *Aeneid*, Vergil recounts Aeneas' catabasis (*κατάβασις*), or descent into the underworld, guided by the Cumaean Sibyl. This episode is one of the most influential models in Latin literature on the visit to Hades. In this way, the dream narrated by Cereta dialogues with both Greek and Roman traditions, recreating the encounter with the world of the dead in literary form. I now turn to the passage in which Cereta, following classical tradition, arrives at the gate of horn and consults Tiresias, who was sitting atop a dragon. He tells her that the person she seeks is no longer there, but dwells as a happy shadow in the Elysian Fields[148]. Upon hearing this, Cereta begins to feel comforted. The depiction of Tiresias riding a dragon can be interpreted metaphorically as the triumph of wisdom over evil. Tiresias embodies knowledge and the ability to perceive the truth beyond the visible. In medieval Christian symbolism, the dragon[149] is associated with the devil and represents evil, deceit and temptation:

Ex his pulsatis fractisque tonitruis deveni ad corneam portam, propter quam insidens Draconi Tyresias consulentibus canebat oracula: accessi, licet exanimata formidine ait hinc abest, aliena consule regna; iam tenet Elysios umbra beata locos. Haec ubi vates response nuntiavit, coepit vaga et fluxa mens praedivinationis voluptate, fruisci[150].

"After those thunderclaps that had struck and shattered me, I arrived at the horned gate, near which Tiresias sang oracles to those who came to consult him, seated on a dragon I approached, though almost breathless with fear; and he said: 'He is far from here; seek out other realms: a blessed shadow now dwells in the Elysian Fields'. When the seer gave this answer, my mind, wandering and unsettled, began to take pleasure in the prophecy".

In this context, Cereta recreates the setting of the underworld and gives Tiresias the prophetic role in her story: "*deveni ad corneam portam, propter quam insidens Draconi Tyresias consulentibus canebat oracula*".[151] "I arrived at the horned gate, near which Tiresias sang oracles to those who came to consult him, seated on a dragon".

In light of the above, it should be noted that the gate of horn refers to the motif of the two gates in the dream described in Virgil's *Aeneid* (Verg. *Aen.* 6, 893-896), which in turn was inherited from Homer's *Odyssey* (Hom. *Od.* 19, 562-567). According to this tradition, true dreams come out through the gate of horn, while deceptive ones come out through gate of ivory. Therefore, the fact that Cereta depicts the scene by the gate of horn in her letter suggests a realm linked to revealed truth and access to knowledge of the afterlife. It should be noted that in the ancient world, both in Greece and Rome, dreams were considered much more than a simple manifestation of physical rest; they were a privileged means of understanding the nature of reality, the soul, and the relationship between human beings and the divine.

In The *Odyssey*, Penelope says to Ulysses: "Nevertheless, ambiguous and obscure dreams are my guests, and not everything shown in them comes true in life, for their faint visions escape through different doors. One is made of ivory, the other of horn, and those that come to us through the carved ivory deceive us, bringing words that do not come true; the rest, however, which pass through the polished horn, come true" (Hom. *Od.* 19, 562-567).

δοιαὶ γάρ τε πύλαι ἀμενηνῶν εἰσὶν ὀνείρων·
αἱ μὲν γὰρ κεράεσσι τετεύχαται, αἱ δ' ἐλέφαντι·
τῶν οἳ μέν κ' ἔλθωσι διὰ πριστοῦ ἐλέφαντος,
οἵ ῥ' ἐλεφαίρονται, ἔπε' ἀκράαντα φέροντες·
οἱ δὲ διὰ ξεστῶν κεράων ἔλθωσι θύραζε,
οἵ ῥ' ἔτυμα κραίνουσι, βροτῶν ὅτε κέν τις ἴδηται.
(Hom. *Od.* 19, 562-567)[152]

Homer's influence appears in Vergil (Verg. *Aen.* 6, 893-896) when Anchises speaks to his son Aeneas and says: "There are two gates of Sleep, one of horn, through which true visions have easy passage; the other of pure white ivory, exquisitely carved, but through which the manes send false images to earth".

Sunt geminae Somni portae, quarum altera fertur
cornea, qua veris facilis datur exitus umbris,
altera candenti perfecta nitens elephanto,
sed falsa ad caelum mittunt insomnia Manes.
his ibi tum natum Anchises unaque Sibyllam
prosequitur dictis portaque emittit eburna,
ille viam secat ad navis sociosque revisit.
(Verg. *Aen.* 6, 893-896)[153]

Next, taking as a reference Cereta's mention of Tiresias,[154] to whom he attributes a prophetic role, one of the passages from the *Odyssey* in which this figure appears is discussed. Specifically, the epic poet (Hom. *Od.* 11, 90-96) describes the appearance of the soul of Tiresias, the famous Theban seer, who appears before Odysseus holding a golden sceptre. The story indicates that Tiresias recognises the hero and asks him why he has abandoned the light of the sun to descend into the world of the dead and contemplate that gloomy place. He also orders him to step away from the pit and withdraw his sword, for it will be he who drinks the blood of the sacrifice first; only then will he be able to momentarily regain consciousness and truthfully reveal to him what he wishes to know. In this episode, Homer emphasises the close relationship between the blood of sacrificial victims and the possibility of mortals understanding the voice of the souls of the underworld[155].

[141](Aristóteles, 1987, p. 112).

[142](Tomasini, 1640, p. 70).

[143](Tomasini, 1640, pp. 70-71).

[144](Tomasini, 1640, pp. 75-80).

[145](Sánchez, 2020, p. 88)

[146](Tomasini, 1640, pp. 75-80).

[147](Ribes, 2019, p. 103).

[148](Hom. *Od.* 4, 563; Verg. *Aen.* 6, 743-744).

[149](De Thaün, 1900, p. CXI).

[150]Tomasini 1640: 78-79.

[151](Tomasini, 1640, p. 78).

[152](Homero, 214, p. 338).

[153](Virgilio, 2006, p. 143).

[154](Tomasini, 1640, p. 78).

[155](Ribes, 2019, pp. 107, 110).

ἦλθε δ' ἐπὶ ψυχὴ Θηβαίου Τειρεσίαο
χρύσεον σκῆπτρον ἔχων, ἐμὲ δ' ἔγνω καὶ προσέειπεν·
διογενὲς Λαερτιάδη, πολυμήχαν' Ὀδυσσεῦ,
τίπτ' αὖτ', ὦ δύστηνε, λιπὼν φάος ἠελίοιο
ἦλυθες, ὄφρα ἴδηι νέκνας καὶ ἀτερπέα χῶρον;
ἀλλ' ἀποχάζεο βόθρου, ἄπισχε δὲ φάσγανον ὀξύ,
αἵματος ὄφρα πίω καί τοι νημερτέα εἴπω.
(Hom. *Od.* 11, 90-96)[156]

Blood also allows souls to recover their memory, as in the case of Anticlea, who recognises her son after drinking the blood from the pit (Hom. *Od.* 11, 153-154). It seems that it is the blood of the ritual victims that makes the voices of the dead understandable to the living[157]. In contrast, in Vergil's *Aeneid*, Anchises' great prophecy is found mainly in Book VI, in verses 756-892, where the parade of Roman heroes and Rome's historic mission are described.

Throughout her letter, she refers to several mythological heroes such as the helmsman Palinurus, who is mentioned by Vergil in the *Aeneid*: "*Ecce gubernator sese Palinurus agebat*" (Verg. *Aen.* 6, 337),[158] in search of burial: "*eripe me his, invicte, malis: aut tu mihi terram*" (Verg. *Aen.* 6, 365)[159].

In her letter, Cereta faithfully follows Vergil in mentioning the encounter between Aeneas and the spirit of Palinurus, who asks the Trojan hero for burial; the passage is reworked by the author as follows: "*ex quibus Palinurus Aeneam, pro corporis sui proiecti sepultura, rogabat*". "Of whom Palinurus asked Aeneas for the burial of his abandoned body". In this way, the scene reflects how the spirit of Palinurus, deprived of burial, begs Aeneas to grant him rest and a proper burial, a gesture that, according to ancient beliefs, was essential for life after death.

Cereta draws on Greek and Roman sources, reworking and adapting them to the epistolary format to construct her description of the afterlife. The humanist simultaneously proclaims her loyalty to a literary tradition and her independence from it. It should be noted that characters appear who are not present in either the *Aeneid* or the *Odyssey*, such as the legendary Queen Tomyris, queen of the Massagetae;[160] according to Herodotus in his *Histories* (Hdt. 1, 214, 4-5), Tomyris defeated King Cyrus the Great and bathed his head in a wineskin filled with blood.

Herodotus says that Tomyris filled a leather wineskin with human blood and then searched for the enemy king's corpse on the battlefield. When she found it, she dipped his head in the blood, saying that although she was alive and had defeated him in battle, he had destroyed her by taking her son away through deception; but just as she had threatened him, she gave him enough blood. (Hdt. 1, 214, 4-5).

ἀσκὸν δὲ πλήσασα αἵματος ἀνθρωπηίου Τόμυρις ἐδίζητο ἐν τοῖσι τεθνεῶσι τῶν Περσέων τὸν Κύρου νέκυν, ὡς δὲ εὗρε, ἐναπῆκε αὐτοῦ τὴν κεφαλὴν ἐς τὸν ἀσκόν, λυμαινομένη δὲ τῶι νεκρῶι ἐπέλεγε τάδε· «σὺ μὲν ἐμὲ ζῶσάν τε καὶ νικῶσάν σε μάχηι ἀπώλεσας, παῖδα τὸν ἐμὸν ἑλὼν δόλωι· σὲ δ' ἐγώ, κατά περ ἠπείλησα, αἵματος κορέσω.» τὰ μὲν δὴ κατὰ τὴν Κύρου τελευτὴν τοῦ βίου, πολλῶν λόγων λεγομένων, ὅδε μοι ὁ πιθανώτατος εἴρηται.
(Hdt. 1, 214, 4-5)[161]

Valerius Maximus, in his *Facta et Dicta Memorabilia*, describes her dipping her rival's head in blood while criticising him for "his insatiable cruelty", thus achieving revenge for her son's fate. This scene is the one most remembered by later artists and chroniclers because of its impact, remaining linked to the memory of the queen:

Clarae ultionis utraque regina, et Tomyris, quae caput Cyri abscisum in utrem humano sanguine repletum demitti iussit exprobans illi insatiabilem cruoris sitim simulque poenas occisi ab eo filii sui exigens, et Berenice, quae Laodices insidiis interceptum sibi filium graviter ferens armata currum conscendit persecutaque satellitem regium, crudelis operis ministrum nomine Caeneum, quem hasta nequiquam petierat, saxo ictum prostravit ac super eius corpus actis equis inter infesta contrariae partis agmina ad domum, inqua interfecti pueri corpus occultari arbitrabatur, perrexit[162].
(Val. Max. 9, 10)

In Cereta, the story of Tomyris is modified, as she appears drinking the blood from the wineskin, while in Herodotus it is Cyrus' head that is submerged in the wineskin. as he says in his letter: "*Sed exedit super omnia penetratam animam timor, ubi Thomyris inhorruit utre cruento, ex quo caesum Cyri sanguinem, velut in furorem acta, sorbebat*"[163]. "But above all, after penetrating her, fear consumed my soul when Tomiris bristled with her bloody wineskin from which she drank, as if shaken by madness, the blood of Cyrus after having murdered him".

In contrast to the ritual and cognitive significance of blood in Homer,[164] the scene of Tomyris, reinterpreted by Cereta, takes on a different meaning.

While in Homer's episode the ingestion of blood allows access to knowledge and communication between the living and the dead, in Cereta's version Tomyris' gesture of drinking the blood of Cyrus the Great is presented as an extreme image of revenge. In this way, blood ceases to be a means of revelation and becomes a symbol of unbridled passion and loss of reason, reinforcing the moral interpretation proposed by the humanist on the dangers of allowing oneself to be dominated by the desire for retaliation.

After analysing this letter, we can conclude that Cereta uses the epistolary genre to recreate elements characteristic of epic poetry in her letter. To do this, she employs paraphrase or free imitation, taking ideas, motifs and scenes from The *Odyssey* and The *Aeneid* and reworking them in her own style. In this way, Cereta reinterprets both the action and the characters, preserving the epic echo of the classical models, but adapting them with complete expressive freedom within the epistolary framework.

5.4) Annotations on Cereta's Letter: **In Bibulum Sempronium de liberali Mulierum Institutione In Bibulum Sempronium De liberali Mulierum institutione Defensio** ("A Defence of the Liberal Education of Women") (LXV).

Below, I will discuss Cereta's letter to Bibulus Sempronius[165]. In this missive, our scholar defends liberal education for women. Cereta recalls examples of illustrious women, attempting to establish a genealogy of women's history:

Satis me animat Philiasia et Lasthenia Graeculae illae foemellae, litterarum iubar eximium, quae totiens captiosis argumentorum cavillationibus, nodosos Platonis delusere discipulos. Cecinit autem in saxeum amantis animum flebiles versus Lesbica Sapho, quos ego ex tacta Orphei Lyra, vel Phoebi plectro resonuisse crediderim. Surrexit postmodum Graeca, et plena musis lingua Leontii quae ausa est in Theophrasti divinum eloquium commendata vivacitate scribendi acerbius inuehere. Non omiserim Probam insigni utriusque linguae cognitione conspicuam, quae ex Homericis Virgilianisque fragmentis compositas historias veteris testamenti contexuit[166].

She begins by naming Filiasia and Lastenia as a powerful stimulus for the spirit, presenting them as an eminent brilliance of letters who repeatedly knew how to ridicule, through subtle and specious argumentative sophistry, the tangled disciples of Plato. The humanist also recalls Sappho of Lesbos, whose mournful songs were able to move the hardened heart of her lover, verses that could well be believed to have been born from the strumming of Orpheus' lyre or Phoebus' plectrum. She then mentions Leontius, whose Greek language, filled with Muses, stands out for its singular audacity, daring, with a commendable liveliness of style, to attack with greater harshness the eloquence considered divine of Theophrastus. Finally, the scholar mentions Faltonia Betitia Proba (c. 322–c. 370), a Christian poet and author of *Cento Vergilianus de laudibus Christi*, a paradigmatic work of Christian appropriation of classical cultural heritage[167]. refers to Proba as a woman distinguished by her mastery of both languages, who knew how to weave together stories from the Old Testament using fragments from Homer and Vergil[168]. Cereta refers, on the one hand, to a poem composed by Proba in Greek based

[156](Homer, 1929, p. 406).

[157](Ribes, 2019, pp. 110-111).

[158](Virgil, 1916, p. 556).

[159](Virgil, 1916, p. 558).

[160](Tomasini, 1640, pp. 77-78).

[161](Herodotus, 1920, p. 268).

[162](Maximus, 2000, p. 356).

[163](Tomasini, 1640, pp.77-78).

[164](Hom. *Od.* 11, 90-96; Hom. *Od.* 11, 153-154).

[165](Tomasini, 1640, pp. 187-195).

[166](Tomasini, 1640, p. 190).

[167](Cortijo, 2012, p. 203).

[168](Vardalà, 2023, pp. 74–75).

on verses from Homer's *Iliad* (*Cento Homericus*),[169] although it has not been preserved; on the other hand, to her *Cento Vergilianus*, composed in such a way as to create in the reader the illusion of a narrative that recreates or addresses the life of Christ as if it had been written by Vergil himself, with the exception of a few initial verses added by the author. The poem was considered apocryphal, though not heretical, by Pope Gelasius I[170].

According to La Fico Guzzo,[171] the characteristic procedures of the centon, such as grammatical, lexical, and phonetic modifications; the enjambment of verses by means of a "*vox communis*"; condensation; the use of recurring formulas; and the deliberate search for polysemy, respond to three fundamental principles: the primacy of content over form, the incorporation of signs characteristic of the epic genre, and a marked interest in the semantic plane and polysemic relationships.

Based on these principles, Proba relates traditional Vergilian images to Christian content, producing a new reading of the pagan model by inserting it into a new ideological framework. Thus, for example, the link between the Sermon on the Mount and the Descent into Hades narrated in *Aeneid* VI has been pointed out, as well as the use of so-called "analogical imitation", which allows him to condense biblical scenes using Vergilian fragments with similar content. An illustrative case is Jesus' walk on water, recreated from episodes of storms present in Vergil's poem[172].

Along the same lines, Vidal[173] observes that in the technique of centon, certain passages from Vergil are used not only for what they express in their original context, but also for what they can come to mean in a new interpretative framework. These passages are particularly suitable for Christian reinterpretation because they develop themes related to Christian sensibilities and because long stretches of verse, suitably manipulated, can be transformed into doctrinally acceptable formulations. For this reason, the centon abounds with references to scattered verses within these "Christianisable" passages, whose reinterpretation constitutes the core of Proba's poetic and ideological exercise. Of the *Aeneid*, which is the most widely used work and the one that carries the most weight in the centon, the books that appear most frequently are IV, VI, VII, and X. Proba's centon reuses verses from different books of the *Aeneid* to express a Christian message. Many come from Book VI, especially from scenes in the underworld, where there is an analogy and contrast. Verses linking Christ's temptation with heroic combat are taken from Book X, while Book VII provides references related to the serpent and the underworld without altering their original meaning. From Book IV, a hexameter from the confrontation between Dido and Aeneas is reused, transformed into the words of Christ[174]. Overall, Proba uses Vergil's verses to spread Christian doctrine through parallels and contrasts with pagan characters.

Cereta then refers to other female scholars whom she considers to be of great stature, emphasising the greatness of their actions and works:

Pari et inexhausto elegiantiae praeconio celebratae est Hortensia, Hortensii filia, et oratrix, cui gratia dicendi tanta fuit, ut trium viros ab exoluenda exactione talionis in foeminas maternis illis piisque lacrimis miseranda conflexerit. Addo Cornificiam Cornificii Poetae germanam, cuius natus in litteras amor tantas artes acquisiit, ut et diceretur Castaliolatice nutrita, et epigrammata descripserit Heliconiis floribus omni loco semper amoena. Praetereo Tulliolam hic Ciceronis, Terentiam, Corneliamque Romanas in grandioris scientiae apicem elatas: cum quibus Nicolosa Bononiensis, Isotaque Veronea, et Cassandra Veneta sub silentii corasca luce transibunt. Plena est et ornata his exemplis omnis historia[175].

She then goes on to recall other women who left their mark on antiquity. Cereta says that Hortensia, daughter of Hortensius and an outstanding orator, was renowned for her elegance and eloquence, to the point that she moved the triumvirs to tears with her maternal tears and persuaded them to exempt women from a punitive tax. Hortensia's education must have been influenced by her curious father; Valerius Maximus, in his work *Factorum et dictorum memorabilium* (8,3,3), points out that the orator followed her father's style so closely that she seemed to bring him back to life in her speech[176].

She also mentions Cornificia, sister of the poet Cornificius, who, thanks to her love of literature, acquired great skills and created epigrams that were always pleasant, cultivating the poetic tradition with refinement. It is noteworthy that among the women included in Giovanni Boccaccio's catalogue, only two others are writers, the well-known poet Sappho and the lesser-known Cornificia (ca. 85-ca. 40 BC), whose work has been lost to us but is mentioned in Eusebius' [St. Jerome] *Chronicon*, in which, when writing about her brother, the famous poet, he says that her sister was called Cornificia, of whom excellent epigrams have been preserved[177].

She also mentions Tulia, daughter of Cicero, as well as Terencia and Cornelia, Roman women who rose to the pinnacle of knowledge. Terencia was a woman committed to her husband's causes, even becoming involved in politics, and her extraordinary financial management, both in her own sphere and in that of her husband, has made her a particularly interesting historical figure to this day.

Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi brothers, was revered in later literature as an example of feminine virtue. Her status as a widow and, therefore, her predominant role inside and outside the home, allowed her to act as a manager. Her education was such and her wealth so great that she did not need to remarry[178].

Once Cereta has cited the list of Greek and Roman female authors of different literary genres, she goes on to name scholars of her own time, indicating that they are under a discreet shadow of silence. First, she cites Nicolosa Sanuti[179] (?-1505). Catherine Kovesi Killerby analyses Sanuti's 1453 treatise, which calls for the repeal of Bessarion's sumptuary law. It stands out as the most extensive protest of the Italian Renaissance and the only one to question the ideological foundations of the law.

In addition, the treatise uses the theme of the sumptuary law to argue about the merits and value of women, especially noblewomen, becoming the first public defence of women in Italy written by a woman and an early female contribution to the humanist debate on their social status. It is surprising that Cereta quotes her, as Sanuti is a defender of women's adornment, whereas Cereta condemns it[180].

Secondly, she mentions Isotta Nogarola (1418-1466). In this regard, Holt N. Parker[181] considers Isotta perhaps the most famous of the humanists, a reputation that has been largely cemented by the studies and scholarship of Lisa Jardine, Margaret L. King, and other researchers. Her mother, Bianca Borromeo, after being widowed, hired a tutor, Martino Rizzoni, to supervise the education of her two daughters, Isotta and Ginevra. At the age of eighteen, Isotta made her first forays into the open and competitive field of humanistic knowledge with letters addressed to some of the most prominent figures of the time, such as Ermolao Barbaro, Iacopo Foscari, Girolamo di Guarino, Ludovico Cendrata, Giorgio Bevilacqua, Damiano dal Borgo, Ognibene Leoniceno, Giovanni Corner, Niccolò Venier, and Niccolò Barbo. These letters circulated throughout the scholarly world and led to an exchange of compliments and dedications. It ends with a reference to Fedele,[182] a friend of Cereta's with whom she establishes a personal dialogue. Both feel they belong to a group of privileged women with strong emotional ties.

Within the framework of Italian Humanism, the figure of Fedele was also subject to distortions by later critics. As with other women writers of her century, interest focused more on the fact that a woman stood out as an orator and on the impact of her presence in the society of the time than on the analysis of her texts, which were practically ignored.

Giuseppe Betussi, when translating Boccaccio's treatise *De mulieribus claris* (1362) into Italian, decided to add forty-nine biographies of contemporary women, including Fedele, along with other writers such as Angela Nogarola (1380-1436), Veronica Gambara (1485-1550) and Vittoria Colonna (1490-1547). The words Betussi dedicated to Fedele, describing her as "a rare and excellent woman, praised in letters by numerous learned

[169](Cortijo, 2012, p. 205).

[170]Cortijo 2012: 205.

[171](Carrera, 2015, p. 342).

[172](La Ficco, 2012, pp. 35–36).

[173](Vidal, 1973, pp. 61–62).

[174](Carrera, 2015, p. 346).

[175](*Tomasini, 1640, p. 191).*

[176] "*Reuixit tum muliebri stirpe Q. Hortensius uerbisque filiae aspirauit, cuius si uirilis sexus posteri uim sequi uoluissent, Hortensianae eloquentiae tanta hereditas una feminae actione abscissa non* esset" (Val. Max. 8, 3, 3). (López, 2016, pp. 322-323).

[177](Cortijo, 2012, p. 10).

[178](Ferrer, 2014, p. 23).

[179](Kovesi, 1999, pp. 256-257).

[180](Kovesi, 1999, pp. 271-272).

[181](Parker, 2002, pp. 13–14).

[182](Arriaga, 2021, p. 99).

men and scholars", anticipate the model that other biographers and anthologists would later follow in presenting her work[183].

Conclusion

I would like to begin by highlighting Laura's father's interest in ensuring that she received a comprehensive education oriented toward the study of Greek and Latin models, as evidenced in Tomasini's paratexts. Thanks to this refined education, it can be argued that our scholar gained access to the intellectual world; however, this circumstance does not diminish her merit or her ability to assert herself within a predominantly male environment. Furthermore, the analysis of Laura Cereta's biographical data, reconstructed from fragments of her letters and drawn from both the paratexts and the letters included in Tomasini's 1640 edition, allows us to appreciate the profound literary and self-reflective awareness that permeates her epistolary work. In these texts, Cereta not only articulates her life experience but also formulates a precise conception of her intellectual activity.

In the paratext addressed to the reader, conceived with a clear timeless vocation, Laura Cereta expounds her poetic principles and justifies the legitimacy of her voice. This text is not limited to a personal defence, but functions as a programmatic statement on women's writing. Through it, Cereta seeks to transcend her immediate historical context and project her work towards future readers.

Similarly, in her letters she attempts to establish a genealogy of women writers that dates back to ancient Greece and Rome and extends to her own time. This reconstruction of a female tradition of knowledge and writing is particularly significant when one considers that Cereta starts from Aristotelian principles that conceive of women as naturally inferior beings. Although she accepts this postulate at a theoretical level, her discursive practice implicitly dismantles it, since the erudition she displays and the intellectual authority she exercises effectively contradict any claim of such inferiority.

Particularly significant is the letter in which Cereta describes embroidery as a metaphor for her writing. The ekphrasis of this embroidery shows how literature creates an effect of reality: verbal description does not allow access to the material object, but rather constructs a textual image that generates an illusion of visuality and meaning. Particularly significant is the letter in which our humanist describes embroidery as a metaphor for her writing. The ekphrasis of this embroidery highlights how literature is capable of producing an effect of reality. In this passage, the scholar also demonstrates a broad knowledge of the literary tradition linked to the practice of ekphrasis, already cultivated by Greek and Roman authors in their works.

On the other hand, her letter about the descent into hell refers to a Greek and Roman literary tradition. Cereta thus demonstrates her mastery of classical models and her ability to engage with them from a female perspective, as well as reworking and innovating on classical models.

In conclusion, Cereta's epistolary work shows a conscious strategy to assert herself as an intellectual. Through the use of the letter addressed to the reader as paratext, together with metaphors and the construction of a female literary genealogy, she engages in a dialogue with the classical tradition to question and challenge the limits it has imposed on female writing.

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