

Is homo unius libri a philosopher? An example of Maria Gondola by Dr. Luka Boršić

Homo unius libri: A man of one book. Aquinas uses it metaphorically in a negative context.

Can a person who wrote only one book be a philosopher?

Maria Gondola: A Croatian woman philosopher who wrote in Italian. Not even men wrote things as provocative and sharp as what (she is attributed to have had) wrote. She was put aside because of the patriarchal hypothesis that she couldn't have done it because she was a woman.

In 1584 her husband (Nikola Vitov Gučetić) published a book, for which she wrote an introductory letter. There was another woman (Fiero Pescioni) who became an object of gossip and a laughing stock when she and her husband fell into financial misfortunes. This was what motivated Maria Gondola to write the letter, to defend her friend. But she also used the opportunity to defend women in general.

The letter generally talks about the virtues of Fiero and the malice of the people who went against her. The book was republished in 1585 with the letter being censored and dated 1582. The praises of women, etc. were preserved, but certain micropolitical insinuations were left out.

She fights arguments which say women are inferior because they are incapable of aggression, etc.

Objection 1: Plato's aesthetics.

P1: The beauty of the soul comes from the beauty of the body

P2: The beauty of women's body is greater than the beauty of men's body

C: Therefore, the beauty of women's soul is greater than the beauty of men's soul

Objection 2: Ontology

If women are mostly loved by men, isn't it proof that they are more perfect than men? The nobility of the final cause, which is more noble than other causes, shows us this clearly.

Objection 3: Linguistico-socio philosophical

Based on the usage of the words "signora" (mistress) and "signore" (mister). Since they sound so similar, men and women must be equal.

Objection 4: Biological

4. argument: biological argument

What is more clear is that our sex has a more disposed mind to receive intelligible forms than men do: it is factually clear that women are of a softer bodily composition. Hence Aristotle said that those who are of soft flesh have a more active mind, because the soul operates according to the instrument of the body, the complexion of which when it is soft, that is, humid and warm or humid and cold, it is more apt to receive than it would be if it were dry and hot or dry and cold, like that of men. From this disposition, therefore, it is concluded that women are more perfect than men; and the truth of this opinion is proven to us by many examples of wise ancient women, both in Rome and in Greece.”

Gondola, „Alla gentil donna Fiore Zuzori“ (1585), f. *4r

After this, she brings a catalogue of famous women from the past.

Three types of (Renaissance) feminism are present here:

1. Explicit feminism: Direct and sustained critique of misogyny.
2. Celebratory feminism: Celebrating the virtues of women
3. Participatory feminism: Whether or not women made a point of the fact that they were doing the same authorial work as men, their participation makes their case.

Her husband published two other books in 1581 (Dialogue on Beauty, Dialogue on Love). They were both prefaced by dedicatory letters written by him towards Fiero's sister. The dialogue was written by Nikola with two opposed speakers: Fiero and Maria.

The argument: They should be read as Platonic dialogues, in which the author presents the genuine teachings and insights of the interlocutors. (So far, they were seen as just works authored and conceived by Nikola who used the names of two women.) Nikola is just a scribe (a writer, as opposed to an author/originator).

The Platonic dialogues are often called after the second-most important interlocuter. Here, it is called "Antos", indicating the second-most important interlocuter, "Fiero": Antos is 'flower' in Greek; Fiero the same in Italian.

In the Renaissance times, these were discussed just as secondary literature on Nikola.

While the dialogues refer to themselves as Platonic, there are yet significant differences: They have no irony, dramatic tension, and differ significantly in structure. They're more *Ciceronian*: The protagonist just exposits their comprehensive knowledge in a systematic manner.

But there remains evidence pointing to Maria as a female Socrates: She asks many "What-is-X" type of questions.