

Hildegard Elisabeth Keller

## Seeing “microcosma”

Paracelsus’s Gendered Epistemology

Gerhild Scholz Williams / Charles D. Jr. Gunnoe (eds.)

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# SEEING “MICROCOSMA”

## *Paracelsus’s Gendered Epistemology*

Hildegarde Elisabeth Keller

*Licence my roaving hands, and let them go, Before, behind, between,  
above, below. O my America! my new-found-land, My kingdome,  
safeliest when with one man man’d, My Myne of precious stones, My  
Emperie, How blest am I in this discovering thee!*

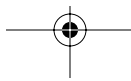
—John Donne (1572–1631), Elegie 19,  
“To His Mistress Going to Bed”



The two words “microcosma” and “seeing” are intended to represent fundamental pillars in the cosmology of the Swiss doctor and lay theologian Theophrast von Hohenheim (1493/4–1541), otherwise known as Paracelsus. *Microcosma* is a term resulting from Paracelsus’s conception of the world, humanity, and the sexes.<sup>1</sup> The first creation, the work of the first five days of Genesis, is the large (first) world or macrocosm. Its child is the male human being (Adam, created from the primal element, *limbus*), who is thus referred to as the small (second) world, or microcosm. Since the woman, or matrix, the smallest (third, or last) world, derives not from the earth but from this “lebendigen fleisch” (living flesh), she is thought to be ruled by an “andere monarchei” (a different monarchy): “this necessitates producing a new theoretical work about woman and dealing with her separately in a separate work of physiology.”<sup>2</sup> This idea underlies Paracelsus’s vehement argument for a new doctrine of seeing in contemporary medicine, which to

1. The expression is found repeatedly in Paracelsus, *Opus Paramirum*, bk. IV, in I, 9, 197. All my quotations of Paracelsus’s works are from Paracelsus, *Sämtliche Werke, I. Abteilung: Medizinische, naturwissenschaftliche und philosophische Schriften*, ed. Karl Sudhoff, 14 vols. (Munich: Otto Wilhelm Barth, 1922–33), 197; *II. Abteilung: Theologische und religionsphilosophische Schriften*, ed. Kurt Goldammer (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1955–). Paracelsus’s works are cited here by Roman numerals to denote the parts of the collected edition of the complete works of Paracelsus (I or II), followed by the volume and page numbers.

2. “[D]as ursacht ein neue theoreticam zu machen von der frauen und sie zu besöndern in ein sondere physicam.” Paracelsus, *De matrice* in *Sämtliche Werke*, I, 9:201.





## HILDEGARDE ELISABETH KELLER

his view is blind. The female cosmos should be considered by itself, quite separately from men and their illnesses, since women have women's brains, women's hearts, and women's hair and, if they are hungry, hunger in a woman's way.<sup>3</sup> Here he is not simply emphasizing the necessity for gynecological specialization. Quite the contrary: the partial differentiation of the woman, or rather of her lower abdomen, would represent the exact opposite of his fundamental principle. The whole woman constitutes a world of her own. Paracelsus proposes an unconventional, gendered medical approach, as comprehensive as possible, which should treat all illnesses as gender-specific: men's ailments and women's ailments.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, he not only speaks of the "sunderen welt" (separate world) of women, but also gives it a new name: "microcosma."

In contrast to earlier as well as contemporary male medical authors who try to advertise their texts by seductively titling them *secreta mulierum* (women's secrets),<sup>5</sup> Paracelsus is not appealing only to his male professional colleagues. In *De Caduco Matricis* he explicitly exhorts women to know themselves:

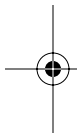
Thus, o women, take notice of yourselves and the nature of your illnesses.... This is why I describe them..., so that you may recognize that you carry a double microcosm within yourselves, since your body is the same as that of men and you are [simultaneously] the world of human birth.<sup>6</sup>

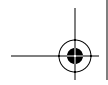
3. Cf. *ibid.*, 179ff.

4. E.g., *ibid.*, 200. Cf. Karl-Heinz Weimann, "Die deutsche medizinische Fachsprache des Paracelsus" (doctoral diss., University of Erlangen, 1951), 86.

5. See Margaret Schleissner, "A Fifteenth-Century Physician's Attitude toward Sexuality: Dr. Johann Hartlieb's *Secreta mulierum* Translation," in *Sex in the Middle Ages: A Book of Essays*, ed. Joyce E. Salisbury, Garland Medieval Casebooks 3 (New York: Garland, 1991), 110–25; *idem*, "Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, 'Secreta mulierum': Ein spätmittelalterlicher Prosatraktat über die Entwicklungs- und Geburtslehre und die Natur der Frauen," *Würzburger medizinhistorische Mitteilungen* 9 (1991): 115–24; Karma Lochrie, *Covert Operations: The Medieval Uses of Secrecy*, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 118ff.; Britta-Juliane Kruse, *Verborgene Heil-künste: Geschichte der Frauenmedizin im Spätmittelalter*, Quellen und Forschungen zur Literatur- und Kulturgeschichte 5 (239) (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1996), 18ff.; and Monica H. Green, "From 'Diseases of Women' to 'Secrets of Women': The Transformation of Gynecological Literature in the Later Middle Ages," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 30 (2000): 5–39. More generally for the wide range of scientific or pseudoscientific texts called *secreta (naturae)* cf. William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature: Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994). As Gérard Genette has pointed out, a text's title affects its reception in significant ways. Cf. Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

6. "Also haben acht ir frauen auf euch selbst, wie eure krankheiten geschaffen sind. ... [D]arum beschreib ichs..., damit zu erkennen wie das ir ein doppeln microcosmum in euch traget, den leib





## PARACELSUS'S GENDERED EPISTEMOLOGY

Paracelsus follows Genesis when he holds that a woman is perhaps not a higher being of increased subtlety (this is true only of Mary, the mother of God, whom Paracelsus does not regard as a generic woman), but instead is an entity apart, who should be considered separately from the other sex. She embodies, in the inimitable Paracelsian formula, “zwo welt in einer haut” (two worlds under one skin).<sup>7</sup>

But the male and female microcosms should not only be considered separately. They should both be regarded in relation to the macrocosm. And what this means for Paracelsus in concrete terms is that creation, both visible and invisible, can help human beings to know and understand themselves. This concept influences Paracelsus's entire practice of medicine, so that these two aspects—both the idea of micro- and macrocosm and that of the separateness of the two sexes—are an essential part of his epistemology. Paracelsus presents this view in two gynecological treatises: first in *De Caduco Matricis* (the second part of his work on epilepsy of 1530, in which he gives a new definition and description of the *suffocatio matricis*),<sup>8</sup> and again in *De Matrice* (the fourth, gynecological, book of his *Opus Paramirum* [1531], about the three principles governing the cosmos).<sup>9</sup> Paracelsus's doctrine of seeing reveals itself as a particularly independent worldview when considered in the context of its time and of the voyages of discovery.

This paper will show how much Paracelsus's concept of knowledge and his training of the physician's eye are informed by his thoughts about the two sexes and their genesis. The first section of this article will explain some basic points about Paracelsus's view of the eye as an organ; in the second section will deal with the physician's gaze, which should penetrate into the visible and the invisible;<sup>10</sup> and the third section will show in concrete terms how Paracelsus differentiates the roles of man and woman.

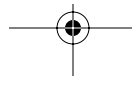
gleich den mannen und seid die welt der geberung der menschen.” Paracelsus, *De Caduco Matricis* in *Sämtliche Werke*, I, 8:345.

7. Cf. Katharina Biegger, “*De invocatione Beatae Mariae Virginis*”: Paracelsus und die Marienverehrung, *Kosmosophie* 6 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1990), 201ff; and Paracelsus, *De Caduco Matricis*, I, 8:356. See below for the Paracelsian interpretation of the account of the first transformation of (earthly) matter into gender-differentiated (bodily) matter in Genesis.

8. Paracelsus, *De Caduco Matricis* I, 8:261–308. See n. 19.

9. Paracelsus, *De Matrice* I, 9:177–230.

10. Cf. also Gunhild Pörksen, “Paracelsus und der Augenschein—Notizen zum ärztlichen Blick,” in *Paracelsus und seine internationale Rezeption in der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Heinz Schott and Ilana Zinguer, Brill's Studies in Intellectual History 86 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 1–12; and Alois M. Haas, “Wahrnehmung im ‘Licht der Natur’: Magie als ein Schlüssel zur Natur,” in *Nova Acta Paracelsica: ... Jahrbuch der Schweizerischen Paracelsus-Gesellschaft* 7 (Bern: Peter Lang, 1993), 3–10.





HILDEGARDE ELISABETH KELLER

## “CONCORDANZ” OF THE EYE

For Paracelsus it is an irrefutable fact that the eye is the “central organ through which we register the world”<sup>11</sup> and that seeing is the true vocation of human beings: “For the human being’s duty is to experience things and not to be blind to them; for this is why he was created: to talk of the wondrous deeds of God and to hold them up [for admiration].”<sup>12</sup> Part of his doctrine of seeing, which is aimed especially at the physician, is a sort of dual vision. This constitutes a peculiar epistemological situation, for the physician should look outwards and inwards simultaneously: “Because the human being learns from the large world and not from the human being. The concordance makes the physician complete, so that he knows the world, and from the world [he] also knows the human being, as these are one thing and not two as I know from experience.”<sup>13</sup> What makes a good physician, then, is not only that he sees the microcosm in the macrocosm and vice versa. It is rather that he should also—as the etymology of “concordance” suggests—see with his heart: “The heart makes the physician, who proceeds from God; he is [born] from natural light and experience.”<sup>14</sup> Even at this point it becomes clear that the two spheres of Paracelsus’s writings—on medicine and on theology and natural philosophy—should not be viewed in isolation. They constantly interact, complementing and sometimes contradicting one another: “Paracelsus was and remained a physician, though in due course (from 1530 at the latest) he extended his efforts to heal people into the spiritual dimension.”<sup>15</sup> His doctrine of seeing inextricably interweaves the two worlds with one another. But



11. Uwe Pörksen, “War Paracelsus ein schlechter Schriftsteller?” in *Nova Acta Paracelsica: Jahrbuch der Schweizerischen Paracelsus-Gesellschaft* 9 (Bern: Peter Lang, 1995), 25–46, at 41.

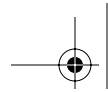
12. Paracelsus, *Das Buch von den Nymphen, Sylphen, Pygmaeen, Salamandern und den übrigen Geistern: Faksimile der Ausgabe Basel 1590*, ed. Gunhild Pörksen (Marburg an der Lahn: Basilisken, 1996), 8 (hereafter *Liber de Nymphis*). See also the English translation of the tract in Paracelsus, *Four Treatises of Theophrastus von Hohenheim*, trans. C. Lilian Temkin et al., ed. Henry E. Sigerist (1941; repr., Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 213–53. This theologically founded predilection for the eye is characteristic of Paracelsus; cf. Alois M. Haas, “Unsichtbares sichtbar machen: Feindschaft und Liebe zum Bild in der Geschichte der Mystik,” in *Konstruktionen Sichtbarkeiten: Interventionen*, ed. Jörg Huber and Martin Heller, *Interventionen* 8 (Vienna: Springer, 1999), 265–86. Of course, there is a cultural context for such convictions; see AUTHOR, *La visione e lo sguardo nel Medio Evo* (View and vision in the middle ages), *Micrologus* 5 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997); and Carl Havelange, *De l’oeil et du monde: Une histoire du regard au seuil de la modernité* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998).

13. “[D]an der mensch wird erlernt von der großen welt und nit aus dem menschen: Das ist die concordanz die den arzt ganz macht, so er die welt erkent und aus ir den menschen auch, welche gleich ein ding sind und nit zwei, daz ich der erfahrung heimsez.” Paracelsus, *Opus Paramirum*, I, 9:45.

14. “Im herzen wechst der arzt, aus got get er, des natürlichen liechts ist er, der erfarenheit.” Paracelsus, *De Caduco Matricis*, I, 8:321. Cf. also “concordieren” in Paracelsus, *De Matrice*, I, 9:210.

15. Biegger, “*De invocatione Beatae Mariae Virginis*,” 28.





## PARACELSU'S GENDERED EPISTEMOLOGY

what does Paracelsus mean when he says that the physician “grows in the heart”?

[AU: SOURCE?]

Even in purely physical terms, the eye is connected with the heart, for the eye moves in tandem with all the movements of the heart. This echo of the stirrings of the heart in the senses (the ear can also be affected) is referred to by Paracelsus as “anatomie des herzens” (the anatomy of the heart).<sup>16</sup> And the connection should be obvious in professional practice, in that it is the physician’s eye which takes in the sick person, but his heart which is moved by his or her misery. Precisely when he mentions the worst of women’s diseases, the “fallende[n] siechtag der mutter” (the falling-womb disease),<sup>17</sup> he urgently appeals to the compassionate eye:

But look at the sick as they labor in paroxysms, and do not shy away from them and share with them your compassion in your eyes, and see their toil, see their misery, see their great need and fear. Let yourself be moved . . . , let that persuade you, since Christ himself says that the sick need a physician and the healthy do not, that the basis of medicine is truthful and arose from God and was given by God so that we should have our heart in God. Pray and beseech him that he may teach us and grant us this.<sup>18</sup>

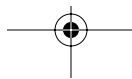
This comprehensive sympathy via the eye is an essential part of visual competence. Paracelsus also makes clear why it is necessary to learn this way of seeing where the anatomy and physiology of women are concerned.<sup>19</sup>

16. Cf. Paracelsus, *De Caduco Matricis*, I, 8:353.

17. Criticizing contemporary humoral medicine and its terminology, Paracelsus here coins a new term for hysteria, which was known by the label “suffocatio matricis and other erroneous names” (suffocatio matricis, und dergleichen auch mit andern irrigen name) (Paracelsus, *De Caduco Matricis*, I, 8:326). He rejects the classical concept of hysteria (in both the pathological and linguistic sense). For Paracelsus, this illness—instead of being the effect of a matrix wandering around in the whole body until suffocating the woman—belongs to the range of epileptic phenomena.

18. “Aber besehen die kranken so sie laboriren in paroxysmo, und scheuen sie nit und teilen mit inen euer barmherzikeit in den augen, und secht ir arbeit, secht ir elend, secht ir groß not und angst. laßt euch bewegen . . . , lasst euch das bewegen die weil iedoch Christus selbst spricht, die kranken bedürfen eins arzts und die gesunden nit, das do der grund der arzney wahrhaftig ist und aus got erstanden und geben, auf das wir in got sollen unser herz haben, bitten und suchen, damit ers uns lern und diselbig gebe.” Paracelsus, *De Caduco Matricis*, I, 8:355. Cf. also the numerous calls for compassion, particularly in the books *De Caducis*.

19. For this special aspect of blindness see also Hildegard Elisabeth Keller, “Speculum-speculatio-agenlehr: Visualitätskonzepte in der (Frauen-) Medizin um 1500,” in *Akten des X. Internationalen Germanistenkongresses Wien 2000*, ed. Peter Wiesinger, vol. 8: *Mediävistik und Kulturwissenschaften*, ed. Horst Wenzel, Alfred Ebenbauer, and Stephen C. Jaeger (forthcoming, Bern: Peter Lang [AU: PUBLISHED DATE?]).





## HILDEGARDE ELISABETH KELLER

First, traditional humoral medicine had failed to recognize this “smallest world,” lumping it together with the “small world” of the man. Since this does the woman an injustice, Paracelsus tirelessly polemicizes against the professional blindness of his colleagues. In concrete terms, he accuses bad doctors (those who practice humoral pathology) of considering and treating the state of the humors, which appears to him “as if Jill were ill and they gave the medicine to Jack.”<sup>20</sup> Here, too, professional competence turns into a question of ethical attitudes. Paracelsus even views this blindness as a betrayal of one’s Christian baptismal vows, since these are obviously at the root of the physician’s power of sight: “Step forward, you false physician, you despairing Judas or whoever you are, since you were born in the baptism of Christ and yet fell from the power of that baptism, namely from the Holy Spirit, as though he were dead and no longer a physician.”<sup>21</sup>

Secondly, essential truths lie hidden in the woman. Paracelsus refers not merely to the medical stereotype of the secrets of women (see below), but to yet another secret. The female body holds within it two worlds. The matrix itself is hidden,<sup>22</sup> and—in contrast to the wish for disclosure and discovery prevalent in his day—Paracelsus is content for it to remain obscure.<sup>23</sup> He introduces several arguments in support of this idea. One argument rests on the fact that it is its nature to remain hidden: “Nobody may search for anything or take anything away from the matrix; it is hidden. And what use is something hidden to the physician?”<sup>24</sup> Like the very first matrix of the world, the female birth organ is invisible to the observing eye. Apart from being able to see one’s own mother as a whole woman, nobody has ever seen the uterus from which he was born.<sup>25</sup> But being by nature invisible constitutes the active principle of the matrix: “But what it is that fabricates the human being, nobody sees.... But the matrix is invisible in its



20. “[A]ls wenn die Greta krank leg und man arznei Hansen [gäbe].” Paracelsus, *De Caduco Matricis*, I, 8:359.

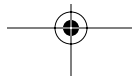
21. “Trit herfür du falscher arzt oder wer bistu verzweifelter Judas, das du im tauf Christi geboren bist, und fellest aus den kreften des taufs, nemlich vom heiligen geist, als sei er tot und sei kein arzt mehr.” Paracelsus, *De Caducis*, I, 8:270.

22. On the semantics of the matrix in the works of Paracelsus, see the study by Lucien Braun, “L’Idée de ‘matrix’ chez Paracelse,” in *Paracelsus und seine internationale Rezeption in der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Heinz Schott and Ilana Zinguer, Brill’s Studies in Intellectual History 86 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 13–23.

23. See pp. below [AU: PLEASE SUPPLY X-REF].

24. “[A]us der matrix mag niemants nichts suchen noch nemen, sie ist verborgen. was nützet dem arzt das verborgen ist?” Paracelsus, *De Caduco Matricis*, I, 8:343.

25. Paracelsus, *De Matrice*, I, 9:190–91, also 177.





## PARACELSU'S GENDERED EPISTEMOLOGY

nature. That which is invisible suffers nothing, which is why we do not wish to speak of invisible things.”<sup>26</sup> Thus, Paracelsus’s representation of women’s mysterious bodies does not invest them with danger and excitement. Nonetheless, he gives to them and to the whole woman (i.e., to both of the worlds she is) a special dignity: they do deserve to be known by women and men. This represents the decisive difference of Paracelsus’s writings from the traditional texts on *secreta mulierum*—by women and men: “Men, by definition, are not secrets, but they must protect themselves against dangerous feminine secrets by *knowing* them.”<sup>27</sup> As we will see more clearly later on, Paracelsus’s position on secrets was different. Small wonder that his professional adversaries and intellectual enemies came from the ranks of his own gender and profession.

Bodily matter itself, which Paracelsus calls the “cadaver,” does not yield any sort of knowledge which he would call anatomical (“thus anatomy does not lie in knowledge of the cadaver”).<sup>28</sup> The matrix as an organ can only be understood fully if it is recognized as a workshop where the future child is formed and receives the stamp (Latin *matrix* = mold, cast) of its character and physical features.<sup>29</sup> Paracelsus shares the traditional medieval view on the shaping function of the uterus.<sup>30</sup> Part of the “anatomie” of the womb is its expansion—to a certain extent incorporeal—far beyond the organ itself, within the body of the woman.<sup>31</sup> As evidence for the presence of the matrix in the whole woman, Paracelsus coins the apparently paradoxical term “anatomie der ungreiflichen körper” (anatomy of intangible bodies).<sup>32</sup> So anyone who wishes to carry out medical research into the uterus should observe the macrocosm, “since the woman’s matrix is described in the book of the stars, their names, their dimensions, their nature and gestures,

26. “[A]ber was das sei das den Menschen fabricirt, das sieht niemandts.... [A]ber matrix ist unsichtbar in seinem wesen; was unsichtbar ist, das leidet nichts, darumb wir von den unsichtbaren dingen nicht reden wollen.” Ibid., I, 9:194.

27. Lochrie, *Covert Operations*, 121.

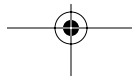
28. “[A]lso ligt die anatomie nicht in erkantnus des cadavers.” Paracelsus, *De Caduco Matricis*, I, 8:337.

29. Cf. the passage in Paragraphus V in which Paracelsus is concerned in the first instance with the (formative and deformative) forces at work in the organs. The matrix is no exception. The forces are not identical with the organ, but are part of its “anatomiey.” Ibid., I, 8:346.

30. Cf. the section on the “genealogic forms” and the “matrix” in Georges Didi-Huberman, *L’Empreinte: Catalogue de l’exposition* (Paris: Éditions du centre Georges-Pompidou, 1997).

31. Cf. the comparisons with the shadow and the disembodied spirit (Paracelsus, *De Caduco Matricis*, I, 8:347).

32. Ibid., I, 8:347.





## HILDEGARDE ELISABETH KELLER

their health and their sickness.”<sup>33</sup> With this plea for exploring the internal through the external (“for what does a human being hope to teach me in that which is not in him?”),<sup>34</sup> Paracelsus reveals himself as a cosmographer among physicians, but particularly among the gynecologists of his time. It can scarcely be coincidental that, particularly in his gynecological writings, Paracelsus advocates and teaches the training of the eye, his so-called doctrine of the [experienced] eye. It seems then that he hopes to solve the question of the physician’s insight into the hidden matrix, as with all that is latent in creation, through training by personal experience, training one’s own eye. Therefore, the female sex seems to provide favorable conditions for improving the physician’s visual competence.<sup>35</sup> In this way, Paracelsus’s theory of seeing has both epistemological and ethical implications since, from the perspective of medieval intellectual culture, knowing and loving are mutually dependent. Goldammer summarizes this as follows:

The decisive factor is above all that human beings in antiquity and in the Middle Ages relate differently to the objects of (in our sense “scientific”) knowledge and research. Even if the same vocabulary is used, their conception of knowledge is different. . . . Viewed descriptively, in the ideal case it is an act of loving devotion, even of dedication to the other, of union with it, which is reminiscent of the intuitive aspects of knowing and the way it is passed on in gnosis (which of course also finds expression in the use of “to know” for the act of procreation in Hebrew, and also partly in Greek *gignoskein* and Latin *cognoscere*). Even for Paracelsus, love and loving are the prerequisites for the process of cognition, which occurs in the interplay of faith, love, knowledge and understanding; and this is also true of scientific cognition (*Labyrinthus medicorum errantium*, c. 9).<sup>36</sup>

33. “[D]an dieweil der frauen matrix beschriben stehet im buch der gestirn, ir namen, ir lenge, ir weise und geberd, ir gesuntheit und ir krankheit.” *Ibid.*, I, 8:343.

34. “[D]an was wil mich der mensch leren in dem, das in im nit ligt?” *Ibid.*, I, 8:363.

35. For Paracelsus’s ideal of the physician, in which he is a kind of cosmographer, see Hildegard Elisabeth Keller, “Zwo welt in einer Haut: Paracelsische ‘Augenlehr’ am Beispiel der Frau,” in *Nova Acta Paracelsica: Jahrbuch der Schweizerischen Paracelsus-Gesellschaft* 14 (Bern: Peter Lang, 2000): 41–78; Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature*, 161ff. An overview on the contemporary relationship between medicine and cosmography is given in Hannes Kästner, “Der Arzt und die Kosmographie: Beobachtungen über Aufnahme und Vermittlung neuer geographischer Kenntnisse in der deutschen Frührenaissance und der Reformationszeit,” in *Literatur und Laienbildung im Spätmittelalter und in der Reformationszeit. Symposium Wolfenbüttel 1981*, ed. Ludger Grenzmann and Karl Stackmann, Germanistische Symposien, Berichtsbände 5 (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1983), 504–31.





## PARACELSU'S GENDERED EPISTEMOLOGY

## "ARZNEISCH AUGEN"

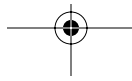
What constitutes this particular ability which makes the eyes of the physician into "arzneisch augen" (physician's eyes)? Paracelsus defines it as follows: "Just as outer seeing is suited to the farmer, inner seeing, which is secret seeing, is suited to the physician."<sup>37</sup> "Inner" here does not refer to anatomical dissection (which was taking hold in Italian universities during Paracelsus's lifetime), which penetrates the bodies of dead men and women. Rejecting the sort of insights gained by Andreas Vesalius (1514–1564) with his dissecting knife, Paracelsus takes the living as his starting point—"the foundation emerges from the living."<sup>38</sup> Thus, "inner" here refers to the inner, hidden, invisible side of life. The key term associated with it is "heimlich," or the synonymous noun "heimlichkeiten"—German expressions for the arcana, the secrets which have been planted in macro- and microcosmic creation.<sup>39</sup> Whether a physician can fathom this hidden side

36. Kurt Goldammer, *Der göttliche Magier und die Magierin Natur: Religion, Naturmagie und die Anfänge der Naturwissenschaft vom Spätmittelalter bis zur Renaissance; mit Beiträgen zum Magie-Verständnis des Paracelsus*, Kosmosophie 5 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1991), 8–9. Goldammer points to a very important issue in medieval spirituality, which seems to pass over, as a kind of early modern adaption, to Paracelsus's epistemology; cf. Gustav Adolf Wyneken, *Amor Dei intellectualis: Eine religionsphilosophische Studie* (Greifswald: Julius Abel Verlag, 1898); Robert Javelet, *Psychologie des auteurs spirituels du XIIe siècle* (Strasbourg: Muh-Leroux, 1959), esp. 114–73; idem, *Image et ressemblance au douzième siècle: De Saint Anselme à Alain de Lille*, 2 vols. (Strasbourg: Editions Letouzey & Aney, 1967), esp. 368–450; Gisbert Kranz, *Liebe und Erkenntnis: Ein Versuch* (Munich: Pustet, 1972), PAGES; Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual 1050–1200*, Medieval Academy Reprints for Teaching 19 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), PAGES. Authority in mystical literature is based fundamentally on the erotic interaction between a human being and a transcendent partner, disclosing divine mysteries to the former; see Hildegard Elisabeth Keller, *My Secret Is Mine: Studies on Religion and Eros in the German Middle Ages*, Studies in Spirituality Supplements 4 (Louvain: Peeters, 2000), esp. chaps. 1 and 2.

37. "[A]lso das eußer zusehen, ist dem pauren beschaffen, das inner zusehen, das ist das heimlich, das ist dem arzt beschaffen." Paracelsus, *Opus Paramirum*, bk. I, 9:46. Paracelsus here relates the internal and the external to the three basic principles of the cosmos: *sal*, *sulphur*, and *mercurius*; in *Opus Paramirum* he treats of their effects in both worlds.

38. Cf. Barbara Duden, *Anatomie der guten Hoffnung: Von der Sichtbarmachung des ungeborenen Lebens* (Habilitationsschrift, [AU: WHAT INSTITUTION, DATE?]), 141ff.; see also idem, *Disembodying Women: Perspectives on Pregnancy and the Unborn*, trans. Lee Hoinacki (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), PAGES.

39. This terminological and semantic field is central for Paracelsus. For discussion of its use in the context of mystical literature in the late Middle Ages, see Hildegard Elisabeth Keller, "Absonderungen: Mystische Texte als literarische Inszenierung von Geheimnis," in *Deutsche Mystik im abendländischen Zusammenhang: Neu erschlossene Texte, neue methodische Ansätze, neue theoretische Konzepte: Kolloquium Kloster Fischingen*, ed. Walter Haug and Wolfram Schneider-Lastin (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2000), 195–221.





## HILDEGARDE ELISABETH KELLER

depends on how experienced he is (“*Arcanum* is mainly to be fathomed through experience”),<sup>40</sup> and particularly how experienced his eye is, as Paracelsus emphasizes pleonastically: “sichtige erfarenheit vor den augen” (seeing experience for the eyes).<sup>41</sup> While the eye of the farmer is bound to the visible, the “physician’s eye” penetrates the surface and “das Heimliche” (the secret).<sup>42</sup> This perspective (in an etymological sense) is the professional secret of the physician.

What is behind “das Heimliche” and its Latin equivalents? “Das Heimliche” is the invisible, the hidden, the latent and concealed, in modern terms also the uncanny. It represents one of the greatest challenges to medieval and early modern epistemology and science. Talking of “secrets” (of nature or of women) “organizes our view” (of nature or of women). William Eamon has pointed to the different thinking about secrets before and after the invention of printing, emphasizing their special discourses on the distribution or the divulging of knowledge.<sup>43</sup> In the teachings of Paracelsus, “das Heimliche” lies hidden in the darkness of life since life constitutes a mantle which cloaks all that happens within it: “[D]asselbig ist also ein solcher deckmantel der die ding verbirgt.”<sup>44</sup> However, it is exclusively the human being, male and female, which constitutes the book, over and beyond all other books, “in which all secrets are written.”<sup>45</sup> For the human being consists of the visible (the physical body made of the four elements) and the invisible (the astral body). Moreover, the terminology of sexual anatomy is also among the “Heimlichkeiten”: Paracelsus terms the genitalia of man and woman “gemechte der heimlichkeit” (organs of secrecy) or “heimliche Zeichen” (secret signs).<sup>46</sup> This terminology is in accordance with the linguistic usage of the time. In investigating documents in the archives of Augsburg, Lyndal Roper finds

40. AUTHOR, “*Arcanum* ist ein hauptstück durch die erfarenheit zu ergründen.” *Von des Bades Pfäfers Tugenden, Kräften und Wirkung, Ursprung und Herkommen, Regiment und Ordnung. Pfäfers, 31.8.1535*, I, 9:658.

41. Paracelsus, *De Matrice*, I, 9:185.

42. *Ibid.*, I, 9:46, 196.

43. for the terminology of secrecy and its powerful use cf. Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature*, 38–90.

44. Paracelsus, *Opus Paramirum*, bk. I, 9:49.

45. “[D]arinnen alle Heimlichkeiten geschrieben stehen.” *Liber Azoth sive de ligno et linea vitae*, in Huser, *Opera* [AU: FIRST MENTION—GIVE FULL CITATION], 9:29, quoted in Alexandre Koyré, *Mystiques, spirituels, alchimistes du 16ième siècle allemand*, Collections idées 233 (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), 85 n. 3.

46. Paracelsus, *Liber de honestis utrisque divitiis* in *Sämtliche Werke*, II, 2:29: “[W]as ist dann, dass du aus deiner Hand [= Erwerbsfähigkeit] (sie sei im kopf, in füssen, in der zungen, in augen, in den gemechten der heimlichkeit) vil gewinnest dein notdurft, darinnen dich dann gott nicht verlasst” (What is it then that you may gain all that you need by your own hand (whether it be in your head, in the feet, tongue, eyes, or the organs of secrecy), in which God does not desert you).





## PARACELSU'S GENDERED EPISTEMOLOGY

examples of this expression that are used for the genitalia of both sexes, though more often for the female genitalia, probably because they are less visible and thus potentially less public. The expression is therefore also a stronger reflection of the taboo, the secret and hidden character of the corresponding part of the female anatomy.<sup>47</sup> When Sigmund Freud in his article “The Uncanny” (1919) explains the concept of *das Unheimliche* (literally, “unhomeliness,” or sense of estrangement and alienation), he is elaborating on a concept already familiar to the Middle Ages. Medieval surgery was the first to see the female genitalia as the “archetype of the hidden.”<sup>48</sup> Like Freud’s idea of the “Unheimliche,” this archetype is spatial (both bodily and architectural) but it nevertheless is different from his specifically modern idea of the “dedomesticated subject.”<sup>49</sup> During Paracelsus’s lifetime the surgeon Ambroise Paré (1509–1590) put it this way: “Women have as much hidden inside as men discover outside.”<sup>50</sup>

It is in this context of “heimlichkeit” that one can see that Paracelsus’s gender-specific discourse of secrecy stands out from the male discourse on women’s medicine of his day. It does not refer primarily to what, by a gynecological or obstetrical textual tradition from the Middle Ages into the early modern period, were known as the “Heimlichkeiten der Frauen” (women’s secrets), the so-called *secreta mulierum*.<sup>51</sup> Paracelsus’s view of physical anatomy and the “secrets” associated with physiological processes is very matter-of-fact: this obvious, physiological, anatomical “surface” of the woman must also be known to the farmer, he states,

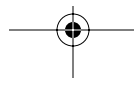
47. For further examples of the expression *heimliche ort* or similar formulations in contemporary documents in the Stadtarchiv Augsburg, see Lyndal Roper, “Will and Honor: Sex, Words, and Power in Augsburg Criminal Trials,” in *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality, and Religion in Early Modern Europe*, [AU: EDITORS?] (London: Routledge, 1994), 53–78, esp. 56–59.

48. “Les secrets des femmes représentent pour ainsi dire l’archétype du caché.” Marie-Christine Pouchelle, *Corps et chirurgie, à l’apogée du moyen âge: Savoir et imaginaire du corps chez Henri de Mondeville, chirurgien de Philippe le Bel* (Paris: Flammarion, 1983), 224.

49. Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), x. For medieval and early modern patterns how to organize (architectural and social) space and gender cf. Jan Hirschbiegel and Werner Paravicini, eds., *Das Frauenzimmer: Die Frau bei Hofe in Spätmittelalter und früher Neuzeit. 6. Symposium der Residenzen-Kommission der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen*, Residenzenforschung 11 (Stuttgart: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 2000), esp. Peter Strohschneider, “Kemenate: Geheimnisse höfischer Frauenräume bei Ulrich von dem Türlin und Konrad von Würzburg,” 29–45; Margarete Hubrath, ed., *Geschlechter-Räume: Konstruktion von “gender” in Geschichte, Literatur und Alltag*, Literatur-Kultur-Geschlecht 15 (Cologne: Böhlau, 2001); for medieval (gendered) concepts of secrecy in literature see Lochrie, *Covert Operations*.

50. “[L]es femmes ont autant de caché dedans que les hommes découvrent au-dehors.” Ambroise Paré, *Des monstres et des prodiges* [AU: FIRST MENTION, FULL CITATION], quoted in Pouchelle, *Corps et chirurgie*, 227.

51. See n. 6.





## HILDEGARDE ELISABETH KELLER

since he knows that she menstruates.<sup>52</sup> Certainly Paracelsus also discussed such secret subjects as menstruation, pregnancy, fetal nutrition, and lactation partly because he felt that there were so very many erroneous views in circulation about them.<sup>53</sup> Here Paracelsus reveals his remarkably different attitude. Paracelsus's discourse on female secrecy is free of polemics against the female sex. He polemicizes against men, against "blind" professionals looking at women's bodies. For Paracelsus, to consider only the restricted areas of women's medicine, those "classical" areas, would be the wrong way of looking. This is also true if a physician examines the uterus, "which lies in the lower body" (so unden im leib ligt), but treats the rest of the woman as if she were a man; such a physician "has a skin before his eyes" (ihm hängt ein Fell vor den Augen).<sup>54</sup>

A concealing mantle cloaks the nature of things; a "skin" hangs before the eyes of most physicians. The way Paracelsus expresses himself reveals his affective epistemology: the human being must find his way to fundamental sight, which is sight that knows phenomena at their very core. Though this observation may sound mundane, this sort of natural science, this way of considering the world, presupposes first that creatures have a fundamental core, and secondly that a human being must command a specific skill to be able to "read" himself and other creatures. First comes the question of human competence with regard to signs, which is twofold: it concerns the designation and the reading of signs. In Paracelsus's view it is a basic principle of human behavior that human beings designate the things around them, that is, provide them with signs. The human being is a *signator* if, for example, he gets Jews to wear "gelbe Flecklin am Rock" (yellow patches on their garments) for identification. The womb is a more involuntary designator, which may stamp "monstrosische Zeichen" (monstrous signs) onto unborn children as a result of fright and *imaginatio*; it too is a powerful signator.<sup>55</sup>

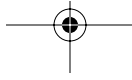
The fact that the human being constantly allocates signs, both with his semiotic instruments and within his own body, so that he himself becomes a signifier,

52. Paracelsus, *De Matrice*, I, 9:181.

53. See *ibid.*, I, 9:197–99.

54. *Ibid.*, I, 9:194.

55. Paracelsus, *De Natura Rerum: Liber nonus: De Signatura Rerum Naturalium*, in *Avreoli Philippi Theophrasti Bombasti von Hohenheim Paracelsi... Opera, Bücher und Schriften, ... durch Ioannem Hvserum Brisgovium in zehen unterschiedliche Theil, in Truck gegeben: Jetzt von newem mit vleiß ubersesehen* (Strasbourg: Lazarus Zetzner, 1653), 908–21, at 908–10. Regarding this edition of Paracelsus's works, see Karl Sudhoff, *Versuch einer Kritik der Echtheit der Paracelsischen Schriften*, pt. 1 (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1894), reprinted as *Bibliographia Paracelsica: Besprechung der unter Hohenheims Namen 1527–1893 erschienenen Druckschriften* (Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1958), no. 256.





## PARACELSU'S GENDERED EPISTEMOLOGY

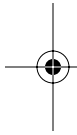
shows that he too is subject to a fundamental cosmic principle. In an optimistic view, this is perhaps the basis for his being able to learn to read the macro- and microcosm as a network of signs, an exercise which allows him to gain access to secrets which start on the surface of things but are not limited to that. On all that he created, God imprinted an expression of its (otherwise hidden) inner self, whether in its form, face, gestures, or reactions. The “Antlitz” (countenance) of the creature therefore provides the perceiver with a key with which he may unlock the innermost “Heimlichkeiten der Natur” (secrets of nature). *One* creature thus becomes the key to *another*—everything can be perceived and known from everything else. This chain of cognition leads to the human being and his understanding of himself. In contrast to the medieval interpretation of the world, which uses allegory to relate all created things beyond the world itself to their transcendent creator, early modern people begin to see the invisible in the creature itself. It is in terms of this medieval doctrine of signs, the so-called “Signaturenlehre,” that Paracelsus views himself as the innovator of a doctrine, drawn from nature itself, of “verborgnen heimlichkeiten der natur” (the hidden secrets of nature).<sup>56</sup>

In this way, Paracelsus becomes an expert witness to the fact that from the Middle Ages to the early modern period there is an unbroken epistemological tradition of searching in what is latent, despite the undoubted hermeneutic differences. His confidence in the eye as the instrument of deeper knowledge, and in the revelation of the hidden in the small as well as the large cosmos, remains as important for our understanding of his person as his often noted solitude: “the lonely, wandering scholar seeking secrets of nature from empirics everywhere.”<sup>57</sup> In the framework of his doctrine of signs, this confidence extends far beyond the things designated as “heimlichkeiten”: it embraces the whole created world. Methodologically Paracelsus proceeds entirely in accordance with his time. He develops an empirical (in his sense) experience of the world by using “experientz” to get to the bottom of things. Thus he does make a reference to the newly discovered world (Paracelsus was born ca. 1493!), the “verborgenene insulnen” (hidden islands) and their mysterious inhabitants. But he does not reflect any more intensely on the “neue insulen” such as America, Japan, and China than he does on mermaids and other elemental spirits. They are all mysteries, of equal value, which are “noch verborgen” (still concealed) and must be fathomed.<sup>58</sup> It is in this

56. Cf. Friedrich Ohly, *Zur Signaturenlehre der Frühen Neuzeit: Bemerkungen zur mittelalterlichen Vorgeschichte und zur Eigenart einer epochalen Denkform in Wissenschaft, Literatur und Kunst* (Stuttgart: Hirzel, 1999), 52 ff.

57. Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature*, 143, 161 ff.

58. Cf. the preface to Paracelsus, *Liber de Nymphis*, 8 ff.





HILDEGARDE ELISABETH KELLER

comprehensive system of knowledge that the question of the sexes has its place. And this is where the issue of the otherness of microcosma becomes relevant. Precisely in microcosma does that which is latent meet the eye. Only this optimism can explain why in the fourth book of his *Opus Paramirum* Paracelsus concentrates so much on opening people's eyes to the differences between the sexes.

### MICROCOSMA'S MONARCHY

The fact that two sexes exist is seen by Paracelsus as rooted in the divine Trinity, particularly in God the Father. He explains the incarnation of Jesus Christ in the context of a division of the first person of the godhead: "He left his divinity whole, but divided the persons within the divinity from himself a woman, so that he and she are just one God."<sup>59</sup> The generation of the sexes from inside the Trinity leads, via the intermediary concept of creation in the image of God, to the creation of human beings as man and woman. Consequently, what is recounted in Genesis about the origin of the sexes, that each had its own generative nature, is also as God intended. But God also intends, and this is of central importance in the present context, that the very first "birth act" of man and woman will be repeated in human procreation. In Paracelsus's writings on Genesis, he explains how he sees human beings coming into existence in both a male and a female variety. The sexually defined human being is made of *massa*, which is "an extract from all creatures in heaven and earth."<sup>60</sup> This extract is what constitutes the human being as a "kleine welt, das ist microcosmus" (small world, that is, microcosm).<sup>61</sup> In the man it is the prime element, *limbus*; in the woman it is itself already an extracted and materially transformed substance: "But so that she may rule another monarchy, she is made subsequently from living flesh, which has



59. "[E]r hat sein gottheit ganz gelassen, aber die personen in der gottheit geteilt von ihm ein weib, also daß er und sie nur ein gott seindt." Paracelsus, *Sämtliche Werke*, I, 3:244 ff., quoted from Alois M. Haas, "Paracelsus der Theologe: Die Salzburger Anfänge 1524/25," in *Paracelsus und Salzburg: Vorträge bei den internationalen Kongressen in Salzburg und Badgastein anlässlich des Paracelsus-Jahres 1993*, Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft für Salzburger Landeskunde, supp. vol. 14 (Salzburg: Gesellschaft für Salzburger Landeskunde, 1994), 369–82, at 376.

60. "[E]in auszug aus allen geschöpfen in himel und erden." Cf. the informative overview in Gerhild Scholz Williams, *Defining Dominion: The Discourses of Magic and Witchcraft in Early Modern France and Germany*, Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Civilization (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 45–65, esp. 54–57.

61. Paracelsus, *Sämtliche Werke*, I, 10, 648, quoted in Kilian Blümlein, *Naturerfahrung und Welterkenntnis: Der Beitrag des Paracelsus zur Entwicklung des neuzeitlichen, naturwissenschaftlichen Denkens* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1992), 147. Blümlein (148 n. 20) points out that "Auszug" can mean both "extract" and "selection."





## PARACELSUS'S GENDERED EPISTEMOLOGY

been flesh, but which has made another flesh out of the flesh. . . . For that reason the woman comes from the flesh of the man."<sup>62</sup> Thus, we learn about the metamorphosis to which the male sex and even more the female sex owe their existence. The repetition of the word "flesh" demonstrates not only the principle of extraction, but a principle of physical appropriation also active in digestion, which Paracelsus calls "transmutation": the first woman can "transmute" the flesh of Adam into woman's flesh, thus making her sex into the quintessence embodied by Adam.<sup>63</sup> Interpreting Genesis, Paracelsus teaches his readers a basic fact, a primary condition of mankind: both sexes live with "the fundamental fact that something can become something else."<sup>64</sup> This Paracelsian interpretation of the *massa* at the beginning of creation which has been transformed into men's flesh and, in a second act, into women's flesh makes evident how essentially material change and (gendered) identity are intertwined, even centuries after the time analyzed by Bynum.<sup>65</sup>

There is a second aspect linking Paracelsus's concept of (divine) creation and (human) procreation: his "homuncular ruminations," as William Newman calls Paracelsus's innovative conceptions. They represent a decisive historical step in answering the complex question whether it is possible to generate a homunculus by alchemical means. Newman traces the interaction between the (male) seed and the female matrix or any other place in which it develops its creative power. For Paracelsus, the female womb is crucial for the procreation of human beings, that is, *homines*, not *homunculi*:

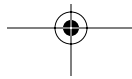
Paracelsus has extremely ambivalent views on the matter of generating seed. . . . If one does in fact generate seed, he or she must look very carefully to its ultimate resting place. Once the sperm has been produced, neither abstinence nor emission per se is acceptable, since both can result in the generation of uncontrolled and dangerous monstrosities. According to Paracelsus' *De homunculis*, the only proper destination for male sperm is the female womb, the one environment guaranteed not to produce a homunculus. The *De natura rerum*, on the other hand, whether

62. "[D]arumb aber das sie ein ander monarchy füren sol, so ist sie nachfolgend gemacht aus eim lebendigen fleisch, das fleisch gewesen ist, und aber aus dem fleisch ein ander fleisch gemacht. . . . [A]lso ist die frau aus des mannes fleisch." Paracelsus, *De Matrice*, I, 9:201.

63. Cf. *ibid.*, I, 9:189–90.

64. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity* (New York: Zone Books, 2001), 18. Cf. her definition of "change" at 19 ff.

65. A similar conclusion could be drawn if we considered Paracelsus's reflections on the digestion and assimilation of food or his concepts on resurrection and the respective bodily conditions.





## HILDEGARDE ELISABETH KELLER

genuine or not, has turned the pangenerative vice of human seed into a virtue. By means of the “alchemical” technique employed in incubating a flask at moderate heat, one can isolate the male seed from the female and thereby produce a transparent, “bodiless” homunculus. In this fashion, human art can generate a being unimpeded by the materiality of normal female birth, hence surpassing the artifice of nature.<sup>66</sup>

In this context one may place a passage from *De Matrice* where Paracelsus aims to draw attention to the “besondere monarchey” (separate monarchy) of the microcosma and the man, respectively, by relating the generative nature of man and woman to the creation of the first human couple according to Gen. 2:7.<sup>67</sup> In principle, the conception of a human child follows the example of the hand of God forming the earth. Paracelsus’s argument begins in the Garden of Eden. Human beings should know “that the world has a hole in it, through which God’s hand reaches from heaven and does whatever he wishes in the world, and that he made women for a world in which the human being would be born.”<sup>68</sup> In this way the whole woman has become the matrix and “aus allen iren glidern ist des menschen acker genomen” (the human being’s seedbed is won from all her limbs). The child growing within her draws “alle Kräfte der Welt” (all the forces of the world) from her—just like a fruit growing on a tree.<sup>69</sup>

The role of the man, on the other hand, “der mit der frauen handlet” (who has dealings with the woman) (i.e., has sexual relations with her), is associated with the literal “intervention” of God. Just as God “reached from his kingdom into the world of the heavens and earth and took the limbus and made the human being... the man must also have this grasp.”<sup>70</sup> Although Paracelsus here sees the man as “an der

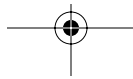
66. William Newman, “The Homunculus and His Forebears: Wonders of Art and Nature,” in *Natural Particulars: Nature and the Disciplines in Renaissance Europe*, ed. Anthony Grafton and Nancy Siraisi, Dibner Institute Studies in the History of Science and Technology (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999), 321–45, esp. 335–36. The power of male sperm plays an important role in more than the generation of proper human beings and homunculi; male sperm has another sacramental and even quasi-divine power: in sexual intercourse it can infuse a soul into an originally soulless “Naturgeist,” or nymph; see Hildegard Elisabeth Keller, “*Homo medietas*—*homo mediator*: Eine Aufstiegs-idee im paracelsischen Zoom,” in *Homo Medietas: Festschrift Alois M. Haas*, ed. Claudia Brinker-von der Heyde und Niklaus Largier (Bern: Peter Lang, 1999), 207–20.

67. Paracelsus, *De Matrice*, I, 9:179, 197 ff.

68. “Das die welt ein loch hat, dadurch gottes hant aus dem himel in sie greift und macht in ir was er wil, und das er also die frauen zu einer welt gemacht hat, in der der mensch geboren sol werden.” *Ibid.*, I, 9:195.

69. *Ibid.*, I, 9:195, 209–10.

70. “[So wie Gott] von seinem reich in die welt der himel und erden griffen hat und den limbus genomen und den menschen gemacht... muss der den griff auch haben.” *Ibid.*, I, 9:195.

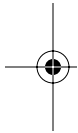




## PARACELSU'S GENDERED EPISTEMOLOGY

stat gottes" (in God's place) making evident the quasi-divine creative power of his sperm, he does not seem to be concerned with the traditional question of measuring the contribution of the man and the woman respectively in fertilization and conception. Rather, what fascinates him is the emergence of life in the invisible matrix—a process involving both sexes in the still ongoing creation. His crucial question is "aber was das sei, das den menschen fabriciert" (what it is that fabricates the human being). When he answers "das sicht niemants" (nobody sees this),<sup>71</sup> he alludes to the function of the *imago Dei* in Genesis, which affects both sexes.

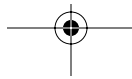
These images are symbols of the invisible mystery of the beginning, which is perpetuated in the conception of all human children, "because just as God created man in his own image, the same is still happening."<sup>72</sup> In linking the moment of the first creation with that which is constantly repeated in human procreation, Paracelsus can switch almost at will between the different levels of the time of Genesis and his own time. In the passage immediately following he again summarizes his view of the creative "Geist des Herrn" (spirit of the Lord), which moved over the waters and created life. Paracelsus seems to see God imprinting his own image on human beings in the process of creation as mirrored in the process of procreation as well as in its central locus, the matrix, where the child receives its stamp, as described above. The difference from Genesis is revealed to be that, in place of the "large world," the "smallest world" has now become the seat of life, and man can thus intervene in the sexual transmission of life. Both sexes cooperate in this human continuation of divine creation by sexual means. This linking of Genesis with *genus/sexus* presents what is arguably the most demanding task for the visual competence of the physician and the gynecologist. Paracelsus seems to be aware of this and advocates—at the very least—that the physician should see that there *are* "gendered secrets," gendered in two senses: secrets associated with the human genus and with the sexes.



There is a synchronicity that seems more than coincidental. Paracelsus's demands for a doctrine of seeing informed by Christianity came at a time when, in the context of a newly legitimated curiosity, the eye reached and penetrated ever further

71. *Ibid.*, I, 9:194.

72. "[D]an zu gleicher weise wie got den menschen beschuf nach seiner bildnus, derselbige tuts noch." *Ibid.*, I, 9:194.





## HILDEGARDE ELISABETH KELLER

into the undiscovered darkness of both the large world and the small world.<sup>73</sup> His vehemence and his unconventional solution to a fundamental epistemological problem can be seen more clearly in this scientific and cultural context.

Long before and during Paracelsus's lifetime, the sphere called "microcosma" (in physical terms, the lower abdomen of the woman) was considered a taboo subject. The eye was excluded, shut out, from it. Even in the late Middle Ages the female genitalia were not accessible to the eyes of those responsible for medical practice, particularly obstetric practice. Obstetrics was literally in the hands of the midwives.<sup>74</sup> The extent of their practical and theoretical knowledge can scarcely be determined any longer, either in absolute terms or in relation to the university-trained, Latin-speaking male physicians, who, from the fifteenth century onwards, also practiced anatomical dissection. It is certain, however, that direct visual and tactile contact with the lower abdomen of the woman developed into a gendered matter of dispute and a power struggle between 1500 and 1800.<sup>75</sup>

Only men were trained and permitted to perform dissections. Indeed, in the early modern period men wielding the surgeon's knife gained access to women below the skin, probed ever deeper into the mystery of the female body, mapped it and named it for themselves (e.g., the fallopian tubes were named after university professor Gabriele Falloppio [1523–62]); essentially, male anatomists in the early centuries of modern medicine colonized women's bodies.<sup>76</sup>

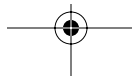
Like his colleagues in the profession who polemicized against the incompetence of midwives, Paracelsus offers his opinions on gynecological questions from a very different point of view, but also as a physician who is primarily academically

73. Hans Blumenberg, "Der Prozeß der theoretischen Neugierde," pt. 3 of *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit*, rev. ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996).

74. For the interplay of eye and hand, text and image, male professionals and female midwives in late medieval gynecological literature, see Keller, "Speculum-speculatio-augenlehr."

75. For this important dispute and its context cf. Evelyne Berriot-Salvadore, "The Discourse of Medicine and Science," in *Renaissance and Enlightenment Paradoxes*, vol. 3 of *A History of Women in the West*, ed. Georges Duby et al. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1993), 348–88; idem, *Un corps, un destin: La femme dans la médecine de la Renaissance*, Confluences—Champion 5 (Paris: Champion, 1993); Danielle Jacquart, "La morphologie du corps féminin selon les médecins de la fin du moyen âge," *Micrologus: Natura, scienze e società medievali: I discorsi dei corpi* 1 (1993), 81–98; Manuel Simon, *Heilige, Hexe, Mutter: Der Wandel des Frauenbildes durch die Medizin im 16. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: D. Reimer, 1993); Monica H. Green, *Women's Healthcare in the Medieval West: Texts and Contexts* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000) and the literature quoted in n. 5.

76. Lynne Tatlock, "Speculum Feminarum: Gendered Perspectives on Obstetrics and Gynecology in Early Modern Germany," *Signs* 17 (1992): 723–60, 733.





## PARACELSUS'S GENDERED EPISTEMOLOGY

educated and not involved in obstetric practice. The embittered struggles about it began around Paracelsus's day, and he was involved in them. As a radical theorist of gendered medicine, he advocated the theory that the sexes were differentiated from the very beginning: from the beginning, men and women exist as gendered entities through a fundamental change, the transmutation of their flesh.<sup>77</sup>

In the mid-sixteenth century the trenches were dug that characterize the history of gynecology, obstetrics, and anatomical dissection of the female genitalia in the early modern period. One of the central disputes was over the methodology of cognition: concretely, the question of whether manual palpitation by an experienced woman was inferior in its diagnostic potential to visual examination by the male physician.<sup>78</sup> The eye becomes the instrument of power by acquiring both perspective and insight. This can be proven not only in the exploration of women's inner sexual anatomy but also in its outer details. Charles Estienne, who (re)discovered the clitoris, shows this expansion of the male interest in the frontispiece of his *De la dissection des parties du corps humain*: "En ce protraict / t'est assez confusement remonstré ce qui appartient en partie au membre honteux de la femme / qui depend de la description de la matrice."<sup>79</sup> The clitoris and its function moved into the center of disputes between surgeons and anatomists in Latin and vernacular publications.<sup>80</sup> One of them, the Paduan anatomist Mateo Renaldo Colombo,<sup>81</sup> recently had his ambivalent revival in *El Anatomista* (The



77. Paracelsus's medico-theological writings are an ideal starting point for a differentiated revision of Thomas Laqueur's *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990). Psychoanalysis attempts to visualize the difference between the sexes in ways very different from Paracelsus's medical theology. The result, at least in Jacques Lacan's work, is that the signifier of this difference is the phallus, leaving the signification of the female sex a blank. Monika Gsell, in turn, has pointed out that visualizations of the female genitalia have a rich cultural history, to which the Middle Ages made a significant contribution. Monika Gsell, *Die Bedeutung der Baubo: Kulturgeschichtliche Studien zur Repräsentation des weiblichen Genitales*, Nexus 47 (Frankfurt am Main: Stroemfeld, 2001).

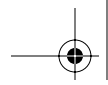
78. See Tatlock, "Speculum Feminarum," and for the feminization of the geographical space by the strategy of appropriation by naming discoveries see Monika Wehrheim-Peuker, "Die Konstruktion eines kolonialen Raumes: Die Feminisierung Amerikas," in *Geschlechter-Räume: Konstruktion von "gender" in Geschichte, Literatur und Alltag*, ed. Margarete Hubrath, Literatur-Kultur-Geschlecht 15 (Cologne: Böhlau, 2001), 163–78.

79. Charles Estienne, *De la dissection des parties du corps humain* (Paris: Simon de Colines, 1546), quoted in Katherine Park, "The Rediscovery of the Clitoris," in *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, ed. David Hillman and Carla Mazzio (New York: Routledge, 1997), 171–93, 170.

80. For the different positions, see the lucid analysis by Katherine Park, "The Rediscovery of the Clitoris," 175–79.

81. Mateo Renaldo Colombo, *De re anatomica* (Venice, 1559).





## HILDEGARDE ELISABETH KELLER

anatomist) (1997), by Federico Andahazi,<sup>82</sup> a “Eurotrashy period piece,” as one critic called it.<sup>83</sup>

What is interesting for our present purposes about this commercially successful and—at least in certain Argentine circles—scandalous novel (which “mocks its own historical pretensions,” as Lisa Zeidner writes) [AU: CITATION?] is the author’s use of the invasive male eye as an emblem of colonial power. The preface, entitled “The Dawn of Observation,” contains a sketch that typifies the author’s same-old-story approach to the epoch: “[N]ot a single map is left unchanged. The cartography of Heaven changes as well as that of Earth and that of the body. Here now are the anatomical maps that have become the new navigational charts of surgery.”<sup>84</sup> Andahazi’s plot concerns two parallel discoverers, Columbus and Colombo, devoted respectively to the exploration of the macrocosm and the microcosm. The latter (echoing *De re anatomica*) exclaims, “O my America, my new-found-land!”<sup>85</sup>

However one-dimensional his portrait of the first decades after Paracelsus, Andahazi does show a sensitivity to the burning issue which seems to be a key to the intellectual climate of the time: the eye, an eye, travels the world, looking both inwards and outwards, and charts this world afresh.<sup>86</sup> In the combination of these two factors—knowing the outer through the inner and vice versa—lies the epistemological “central concept of the epoch”: “not only that which bordered on the known world in the old *mappae mundi* was viewed as ‘terra incognita,’ but also that which lay hidden in the inner space of the human being.”<sup>87</sup>

Geographical conquest and self-empowerment become mutually supportive. Here the epistemological horizon of this and the following centuries opens up: the initial discovering eye is not yet necessarily the truly seeing eye. How far the one has to travel to meet the other has been demonstrated impressively by Barbara

82. Federico Andahazi, *El anatomista: La historia del descubrimiento que pudo revolucionar el amor* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1997); trans. by Alberto Manguel as *The Anatomist* (New York: Doubleday, 1998); subsequent references are to the English translation.

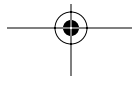
83. Review by Lisa Zeidner, “Private Parts,” *New York Times Book Review*, 13 September 1998.

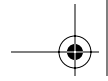
84. Andahazi, *El anatomista*, 4.

85. Andahazi, *El anatomista*, 3.

86. Despite her understandable skepticism regarding the literary language (“trumped-up, breathless language”) and the frequent historical reductiveness, Lisa Zeidner’s rejection of Andahazi’s reconstruction of the history of anatomy (“So Andahazi does not waste much time on credibility”) seems too absolute if one considers what Katherine Park has had to say about the subject.

87. Jürgen Schlaeger, “Der Diskurs der Exploration und die Reise nach innen,” in *Weltbildwandel: Selbstdeutung und Fremderfahrung im Epochenübergang vom Spätmittelalter zur Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Bachorski and Werner Röcke, *Literatur-Imagination-Realität* 10 (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 1995), 135–45, at 135.





## PARACELSU'S GENDERED EPISTEMOLOGY

Duden looking at anatomical drawings of the unborn human being (between 1493 and 1799). The process goes through many stages in which the anatomy of the pregnant woman is redefined over and over again, from the stage of discovery (in the sense of the physical revelation of the embryo) to the stage of seeing the actual fact.<sup>88</sup> Strikingly, in her context of optical history, she too parallels the events on the coasts of Hispaniola and in Italian anatomy, since in both discoveries one sees attempts to grasp the unknown using known categories: “[J]ust as the caravels transported the classically educated eye across the oceans of the world, the dissecting knife opens up the inside of the body to the gaze.”<sup>89</sup>

Paracelsus evidently shares his contemporaries’ interest in the undiscovered, the invisible and mysterious, in the macrocosm and the microcosm. He participates in the discourses of discovery, anatomy, and magic, which lead outwards to America and to Nature and inwards into the human, particularly female, anatomy of the woman.<sup>90</sup> He views the latent as a divine challenge to humanity, to the human powers of cognition. Humankind is challenged to know God and know itself, says Paracelsus: “God does not wish anything to remain secret or hidden, but rather that everything should be made manifest that he has created in nature, that this same should be experienced.”<sup>91</sup> With his intention to see as deeply as a human being can, he participates in early modern attempts to “toughen up” the eye by sending it out into obscure, mysterious, unfamiliar, and unknown fields.

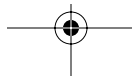
However, Paracelsus’s participation is subtle. His ideal of the eye sharpened for “heimlichkeiten,” provides a counterbalance to his contemporaries’ instruments of conquest and colonization—“Kulter und Karavelle” (dissecting knife and caravels), as Barbara Duden puts it—even if, as history in Paracelsus’s own lifetime and beyond has shown, these instruments did conquer the world. To what school, then, does Paracelsus send the human eye, particularly the physician’s eye? It must differ both from the haptic school of the Italian anatomists and the cartographic school of the conquistadors (charting the known in the unknown). Briefly, one can say that the physician has to develop a sort of X-ray eye if he wants to track down the “heimlichkeiten der natur.” He should therefore not merely “die Augen sättigen” (feast his eyes), but should be filled with wonder and embark on

88. Cf. Duden, *Anatomie der guten Hoffnung*, PAGES; and idem, *Disembodying Women*, PAGES.

89. Duden, *Anatomie der guten Hoffnung*, 141.

90. See Williams, *Defining Dominion*, 3–12 and 45–65; also Wehrheim-Peucker, “Die Konstruktion eines kolonialen Raumes,” 163–78.

91. “[D]as got nicht will, das ichts heimlich oder verborgen bleib, sonder alles offenbar werde, was er in der natur geschaffen hat, das das selbig erfahren wird.” Paracelsus, *Sämtliche Werke*, I, 12:123.





## HILDEGARDE ELISABETH KELLER

research.<sup>92</sup> Paracelsus supports the school for deciphering and reading the books of the micro- and macrocosm. Paracelsus conceives of what the eye must learn there in a manner completely removed from the contemporary idea of delight for the eye. The eye must learn to read the world—the large world, the smaller, and the smallest world—by penetrating into the spiritual and thus divine dimension of each one.

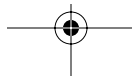
Paracelsus leaves it to each individual to develop this visual competence. Only the physician who has sharpened his *own* eye and in this way deepened his *own* level of experience does not have to rely on books and medical traditions (which are wrong anyway) and can instead depend on himself: “Let each person himself look to his own skill and experience...look to yourself; I experience things for myself, not for you. If I give you some of my experience, then you should experience it as much as I; in that way you will be my equal.”<sup>93</sup> Here Paracelsus remolds his own personal motto, “Alterius non sit qui suus esse potest” (Let no man belong to another if he may belong to himself), as a professional creed. One could demonstrate with quotations from throughout his works that here Paracelsus is speaking with the particular vehemence of autobiographical experience. The idea of training the eye, including training his own eyes, can be shown to be a sort of *basso continuo* underlying both his professional ethics and his theology. Visual competence also proves (and this must be judged in light of Paracelsus’s lifelong wanderings, which, to a great extent, required him to leave material things behind) to be a personal possession which cannot be lost: “Had I not put myself in the way of experience, if I had had to rely on the old authors, I would have been born completely blind in medicine, without eyes.”<sup>94</sup> He who learns to see with his own eyes thus not only makes experience his own, but also—in light of Paracelsus’s life motto—takes possession of himself.

Deciphering and reading in Paracelsus’s sense contain an additional dimension which is quite new in relation to “schools of vision” of his time: the aspect of the inchoate, the nonfinite. Against this theological background, seeing becomes a process which is intended to be emotional and which constantly begins afresh, since the mysteries of God inscribed in the cosmos are always hidden from

92. Cf. the foreword to Paracelsus, *Die Bücher von den unsichtbaren Krankheiten / De Causis Morborum Invisibilium* (The books on the invisible illnesses), in *Sämtliche Werke*, I, 9:251–58.

93. “[S]chau ein ietlicher auf sein kunst und erfarnheit selbst...schau du auf dich selbst; ich erfarn mir, dir nichts. gib ich dir von meiner erfarnheit, so erfars als wol als ich, so stest du mir gleich.” Paracelsus, *De Matrice*, I, 9:246. For such references to the individual experience and authority in early modern history of science cf. Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature*.

94. “[H]et ich mich selbs in die erfarnheit nicht geben, von den alten [scribenten] wer ich stockblind geborn in der arznei, on augen,” quoted in Pörksen, “Paracelsus und der Augenschein,” 4.





## PARACELSU'S GENDERED EPISTEMOLOGY

human interpretation. This means that the human being is not in pursuit of a particular “something” which he can then reveal, discover, label, name, or dismiss in whatever way he chooses. He is not looking for any individual phenomenon, but rather he seeks to visualize the mystery of the Living itself, the “signs” of which are merely inscribed onto individual phenomena: “There is nothing so secret in the human being that it does not have an outward sign.”<sup>95</sup>

In addition, and this is important for Paracelsus, in this way the human being undertakes a journey of knowledge and experience which will lead him to himself. This does not mean only the individual *nosce te ipsum* (know thyself), mentioned above, and the expansion of one’s treasury of experience. Via the individual dimension, this sort of seeing leads to the gender-specific conditions of both sexes and to generic humanity: seeing is, for Paracelsus, the most elevated, the most truly human office.<sup>96</sup> He who follows the chain of wonders and tracks down their signatures is fulfilling his true vocation.<sup>97</sup> If he sees properly, then, the physician also serves humanity *sub specie aeternitatis*. His eye service is a sort of service to God, “in which lie the secrets which should be revealed by a doctor; in this God is praised.”<sup>98</sup> With this end in view, Paracelsus’s training of the eye—using the object of the sexes and particularly the special case of the woman or microcosma—is revealed also to provide instruction in serving God in worship.



Acknowledgments: All translations were provided by me in collaboration with the translator of this article, Dr. Maria C. Sherwood Smith. I would like to thank her very much for her commitment.

95. “[N]ichts is so heimlich im menschen, das nit ein auswendig zeichen an im hat.” Paracelsus, *Von den natürlichen Dingen*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, I, 2:59–386, at 86.

96. Cf. the introduction to Paracelsus, *Liber de Nymphis* and Alois Maria Haas, “Hohenheims dynamisches Sehen,” in *Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim genannt Paracelsus: Standpunkt und Würde. II. Dresdner Symposium* (Dresden: Deutsche Bombastus-Gesellschaft, 1999), 12–21; and idem, “Unsichtbares sichtbar machen.” For exploring issues of the male and especially the female sex in his special and original way, Paracelsus should have been mentioned in the *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. James A. Brundage and Vern L. Bullough, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities 1696 [AU: PLEASE VERIFY SERIES NO. 1696] (London: Garland, 1996).

97. See n. 13.

98. “[D]arin dan ligent die heimlichkeit die in einem arzt offenbar sollen sein, dardurch got gelobt wird.” Paracelsus, *De Caducis*, I, 8:272.

