
Rhetoric's Demiurgy: from Synesius of Cyrene to Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola

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Abstract: The present work aims to highlight the impact that Synesius of Cyrene had on Ficino and Pico della Mirandola in the formation process of the Renaissance concept of rhetoric and the anthropology connected thereto. Special attention will be drawn to the close link between rhetoric and phantasia, both imaginative and creative forces that are present in all three authors. The master of these forces is the rhetorician, who assumes in this respect an exemplary anthropological function. In fact, if on the one hand he is an ambiguous manipulator of shady speeches, on the other hand he is able to fully express the variety of human nature. This makes him an *alter deus*, that is, a demonic being whose nature is superior to any other. It is no accident that the demigod Proteus is a theme in all three authors and is the symbol of a positive human nature, which reveals itself as amphibious, multiple and, above all, highly characterised on the verbal level and the imaginative level.

Keywords: Synesius of Cyrene, Pico della Mirandola, Ficino, Proteus, *phantasia*, rhetoric.

1. Introduction

When thinking of Italian literature in the Renaissance, the first thought goes immediately to the extraordinary rediscovery of the classics which characterised those centuries. However, it should not be forgotten that humanists mediated the past using the cultural 'lenses' of Late Antiquity, especially in a first instance when many codices were not available nor Greek was as widespread. Late Antiquity is not only one last great moment of splendour for the pagan literary culture but also of elaboration of great classics which will influence their interpretation in the following centuries. When Plato is picked up again in the 15th century, he is read via the eyes of Plotinus, Iamblichus, and Proclus, while Aristoteles is read via the eyes of Alexander of Aphrodisias and Themistius.¹

Therefore, if we want to examine the renewed flourishing of sophistry and ancient rhetoric in the Renaissance, focusing on Late Antiquity musings regarding these topics can unearth new interesting research. We observe a revival of sophistry in Late Antiquity: the debate between rhetoric and philosophy started by Plato and Isocrates, taken up by the Second Sophistry between the 1st and 2nd century, thrives in the 4th century during the restoration of paganism promoted by emperor Julian.²

Among the intellectuals of the 4th century who influence the rhetoric and literature in the Renaissance, Synesius of Cyrene, a Neoplatonic rhetorician and philosopher belonging to school of Hypatia, could play a role which still has not been highlighted by modern studies. This contribution aims to research if the originality of Synesius' thought on rhetoric could have echoes on mainly a theoretical as well as textual level of Renaissance's rhetoric and its anthropology, namely by analysing the thoughts of Marsilio Ficino and Pico Della Mirandola. After having briefly cleared Synesius' position on the Late Antiquity debate on rhetoric, the paper will continue analysing different elements suggesting Synesius influenced the chosen Renaissance authors by analysing the circulation of their texts, intertextuality, and the link between rhetoric and φαντασία/*phantasia*. As we will see, these authors share a specific sensibility towards the power of words and a deep faith towards its *artifex*: man.

2. Synesius and the apology of rhetoric

Synesius of Cyrene is known by Renaissance scholars mostly for his *De insomnis*, a treatise on oneiromancy, the interpretation and divination of dreams, a volume which was widespread in the Renaissance. The essay is important to Neoplatonism in the Renaissance as proved by the Latin translation prepared by Marsilio Ficino around 1488:³ besides touching upon gnoseology and cosmology, he illustrates the traits and functions of φαντασία, man's faculty of imagination which is also responsible for dreaming. However, Synesius is a philosopher, but first and foremost a rhetorician, as proved by some of his works: *Cynegetica*, lost to us but we know it had been criticised for its elegant language and playful nature (*Ep.* 154.11-18);⁴ *Calvitiū encomium*, an exercise in adoxography and rhetoric virtuosity which mocks *In Praise of Hair* by Dio Chrysostom; and the *Dion*, a work where Synesius discusses the relation between philosophy and rhetoric and the epistemological nature of the latter.

Dion is written around 405 AD to counteract *e parte philosophorum* criticisms to Synesius regarding his writing.⁵ He had been accused of being too rhetorically elaborate compared to the severity demanded from philosophers.⁶ Indeed, in Late Antiquity, a certain idea had spread identifying philosophy with silence, taking Plato's condemnation of rhetoric in dialogues such as *Euthydemus*, *Gorgias*, *Sophist* to an extreme: this had created an

overlap between the meaning of φιλόσοφος and μισόλογος (*Ep.* 154.6-7).⁷ In the *Dion*, Synesius however markedly takes his distance from those philosophers, “who despise rhetoric and poetry” (Οὗτοι καὶ ὑπερόπται ῥητορικῆς καὶ ποιήσεως; 5.3; Fitzgerald):

Οὐ γὰρ δὴ τὴν φύσιν ὑπερφρονήσουσι, καὶ πρὸς θεωρίαν ἀτρυπῶς ἔχειν ἐροῦσιν, ἀπαθείς εἶναι ποιούμενοι, θεοὶ σαρκία περικείμενοι· εἰ δὲ λέγοιεν, ἴστων ἀντὶ θεῶν ἢ σοφῶν τε καὶ θείων ἀνδρῶν χαῦνοι καὶ ἀλαζόνες πόρρω γενόμενοι (6.6).

They do not surpass in knowledge their nature, though they will also profess an untiring zeal for contemplation, making themselves out to be passionless gods although clothed in flesh. Nay, if they were to make such profession, let them know that so far from being gods or wise and divine men, they are empty-headed, and boasters into the bargain (Fitzgerald with adaptations).⁸

Synesius opposes this behaviour by defending the value of rhetoric as the most ideal and natural tool for man to express his multiplicity: it should be embraced and not interpreted as a limitation.⁹ Demanding to stay uninterruptedly in the silence of noetic contemplation is a mystification of what should be a philosophical and spiritual exercise¹⁰. This must occur by understanding the nature of man, his median status and his dual polarity: a sensible and intelligible being (8.1), successively trying to “make the multitude into one” (ἐν τῷ πλήθει ποιήσαντα; 5.1; Fitzgerald). This, however, must occur by exercising and expressing said multiplicity and not by negating part of it. As Synesius explains, this does not mean to “go down towards matter, neither dip the mind in the lowest powers” (οὐ βαθύνεται πρὸς ὕλην, οὐδὲ ἐμβαπτίζει τὸν νοῦν ταῖς ἐσχάταις δυνάμεσιν; 6.5; Fitzgerald with adaptations), but means trying to live both sides, finding the middle ground (9.8, 10.6). What better way to express said multiplicity than the art of expressing oneself better, i.e. rhetoric?

Ἐπίσταμαι γὰρ ἄνθρωπος ὢν, καὶ οὔτε θεός, ἵνα δὴ καὶ ἀκλινῆς εἶην πρὸς ἅπασαν ἡδονήν, οὔτε θηρίον, ἵνα τὰς σώματος ἡδοίμην ἡδονάς. λείπεται δὴ τι τῶν ἐν μέσῳ, τί δ' ἂν εἶη πρὸ τῆς ἐν λόγοις τε καὶ περὶ λόγους διατριβῆς; τίς ἡδονὴ καθαρωτέρα; τίς ἀπαθεστέρα προοπάθεια; τίς ἦρτον ἐν ὕλῃ; τίς μᾶλλον ἀμόλυντος; (8.1).

For I know that I am a man, and neither a god that I should be adamant in face of every pleasure, nor a brute that I should take delight in the pleasures of the body. There remains, however, something to seek between these, and what can surpass a life spent in literature and its concerns; what pleasure is purer, what passionate attachment is more free from passion? (Fitzgerald).

Rhetoric thus multiplies the expressive possibilities and allows one to express multiplicity. Furthermore, to Synesius, the *ars rhetorica* marries perfectly with man's amphibious nature as it allows him to turn to the intelligible world and to live in the sensible world. By beautifying speeches, rhetoric starts an anagogical journey leading to the contemplation of the intelligible (a similar journey to that expressed by Plato in the *Symposium* upon seeing beautiful bodies);¹¹ yet it is also fundamental for the ‘descent’ as it conveys the objects of philosophical contem-

plation and gives them a beauty which is harbinger of joy. Rhetoric is also an intellectual *divertissement* which would make life unbearable if it were not there:

Εἰ δὲ καὶ ποικίλον ἢ φύσις ἡμῶν, καμείται δῆπου πρὸς τὴν ἐν θεωρίᾳ ζώην· ὥστε ὑφήσει τοῦ μεγέθους καὶ καταβήσεται· οὐ γὰρ ἐσμεν ὁ ἀκήρατος νοῦς, ἀλλὰ νοῦς ἐν ζῳῶν ψυχῇ. καὶ ἡμῶν οὖν αὐτῶν ἕνεκα μετιτέον τοὺς ἀνθρωπινωτέρους τῶν λόγων, ὑποδοχὴν τινα μηχανωμένους κατιούση τῇ φύσει[...]. ὁ γὰρ θεὸς τὴν ἡδονὴν περόνην ἐποίησε τῇ ψυχῇ, δι' ἧς ἀνέχεται τὴν προσεδρεῖαν τοῦ σώματος. τοιοῦτον οὖν τὸ ἐν λόγοις κάλλος (6.4-5).

If our human nature is a variable quality also, it will certainly weary of a life of contemplation, to the point of foregoing its greatness, and of descending; for we are not mind undefiled but mind in the soul of a living creature; and for our own sakes therefore we must seek after the more human forms of literature, providing a home for our nature when it descends. [...] For God has made pleasure to be a fastening for the soul by which it supports the proximity of the body. Such then is the beauty of literature (Fitzgerald).¹²

To Synesius, defending the cause of rhetoric does not only mean justifying a precise cultural model, but also emphasising a precise anthropological model: man is amphibious and multiple by nature. Exercising the art of words allows him to fully embody his multiple potential. This typically humanist sensibility by which Synesius observes man, his ontological status, as well as the creativity used to express himself, leads to the following question: in rediscovering rhetorical traditions, can his thoughts on rhetoric have influenced Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola, staunch Neoplatonist philosophers? Is it possible to determine the presence of formal correspondence, i.e. direct textual echoes, and/or substantial correspondence, meaning the recurrence of concepts and precise musings?

3. From Synesius to the Renaissance: texts and textual echoes

Before addressing the question, we need to verify if the documentary witnesses confirm the circulation of Synesius' texts in 15th century Florence. We have to determine if rhetoric theories written by Synesius could be read by Marsilio and Pico. Therefore, it is necessary to focus on the circulation of the *Dion* as well as on the rest of the *corpus* because musings on the art of words are spread throughout it.¹³ The documentary research yields 63 manuscripts containing the *Dion*: of these, 23 predate the 16th century and are held in Italian libraries and 7 of them were surely available in Florence in the 15th century. Out of them, 4 are Laurentian codices from the 11th-14th century;¹⁴ one of them, Laurentian 60.06 from the 14th century, contains Synesius' essays, including the *Dion*, and 7 orations by Aelius Aristides, including the *Pro rhetorica* and the *Pro quattuor viris* as well as Plato's *Gorgias* and *Phaedo*. The codex proves the interest of humanists for rhetoric as well as proving that Synesius was one of the authors behind this interest. The other 3 Florentine codices are in other libraries today but, thanks to the annotations of the owners, we can rebuild their his-

tory. Of these, one stands out: the Parisian codex 4453 owned by Domenico Grimani, successively owned by none other than Giovanni Pico della Mirandola.¹⁵ The manuscripts prove the circulation of the opus in 15th century Florence, and that it had been certainly read by Pico, and most probably by Marsilio, too.

The paper will now analyse intertextuality. Pico explicitly refers to Synesius, mentioning him by name in a text on rhetoric, the *De genere dicendi philosophorum* epistle to Ermolao Barbaro:

Profecto quod Synesius de adolescente, de oratione dici comode potest, comatam orationem semper cinaedam. Quare nos nostram malumus, capillis hirtam, globosam, inexpeditam, quam cum impuritatis vel nota vel suspicione belle comatam (Garin 1976, 810).

Actually, what Synesius said about adolescence can be said quite fittingly of oratory: a long-haired speech is always shameless. That's why we prefer ours to be shaggy, stuck together, and tangled rather than beautifully kempt, and either known to be or suspected of being filthy (Rebhorn, 60).¹⁶

In this instance, Pico refers to a passage by Synesius (*Calv.* 23) which says it is inconvenient for young men to take care of their hair to demonstrate that it has also become inconvenient for philosophers to beautify their speeches with rhetoric frills.¹⁷ There is one problem, however: Pico refers to Synesius to support exactly the opposite claimed by Synesius in the *Dion* regarding the relation between rhetoric and philosophy. Synesius suggests a synthesis between the two, while Pico claims “the barbarians have had Mercury not on their tongue, but in their breast” (“Habuisse barbaros non in lingua sed in pectore Mercurium”; 808; Rebhorn, 59) and “it is praiseworthy for us have the Muses in our minds, not on our lips” (“laudabile in nobis, habere Musas in animo et non in labris”; Garin 1976, 814; Rebhorn, 62). Pico puts forth the *philosophos-misologos* model that Synesius had tried to disprove.¹⁸ How does one solve this paradox?

Pico suggests a solution in the conclusion of the letter and Ermolao proves he has understood the aim of his interlocutor when he replies.¹⁹ Indeed, Pico suggests that his condemnation of rhetoric is an extremely refined and elegant proof of eloquence (Bausi 1996, 16-20). Pico thus gives us an example of an antilogy, a speech which is a contradiction of terms and ideas. Pico thus relates to the *Δισσοὶ λόγοι*, the double speeches typical of Gorgia and Protagoras' sophist tradition which prove that eloquence allows you to claim anything and the opposite of everything: just like in this case, where eloquence has to be abandoned.²⁰ Moreover, referring to Synesius represents a further demonstration of the very refined rhetoric game staged by Pico, who not only claims that in which he does not believe in, but to support his false condemnation uses models to say the exact opposite of what they normally say, creating a rhetorical game of diffractions and reversals aiming to entertain the erudite reader.

Despite being the only passage on explicit intertextuality discussing rhetorical topics of our authors, it is possible to find other passages in which Synesius' Late Antiquity text and the Renaissance ones by Ficino and Pico seem to implicitly refer to one another. One example is Pico's epistle to Lorenzo the Magnificent in 1484

which praises the form and content of Lorenzo's compositions: Pico says he can “turn amorous lyrics into philosophy and turn those lyrics which are by nature slightly austere into loveable moulding them into the shape of Venus” (“Philosophica facere quae sunt amatoria, et quae sunt sua severitate austerula, superinducta venere facere amabilia”; Garin 1976, 801; my trans.)²¹ To express the grandiosity of this marriage between eloquence and philosophy, he claims that Lorenzo can soar just as Dante despite the fact the content and sweetness of his style, similar to Petrarca's, tend to bring him down.²² Therefore, to Pico, Lorenzo possesses the nature of birds soaring in the sky and the nature of those which remain on the ground to sing. This image depicts the marriage between rhetoric and philosophy which could be reminiscent of a similar image used by Synesius in the *Dion* to talk of the same admirable marriage:

Αετὸν δὲ ἄμα καὶ κύκνον γενέσθαι, καὶ τὰ ἀμφοῖν ἔχειν πλεονεκτήματα, ὄρνιθι μὲν ἢ φύσις οὐ ξυνεχώρησεν ἀνθρώπῳ δὲ ἔδωκεν ὁ θεός, ὅτι καὶ ἔδωκε γλώττης τε εὐ ἦκειν καὶ φιλοσοφίας ἐπιβόλον εἶναι (11.5).

To be an eagle and a swan at the same time, and to possess the advantages of both, nature has not granted to birds. But to man God has given it, granting him both success with his tongue and mastery over philosophy (Fitzgerald).

Synesius uses this chimerical image to describe man's exceptional nature, whose potential is fully released in the figure of the rhetorician-philosopher: he possesses both the sweet gift that are words like a swan as well as the skill of philosophical self-elevation like an eagle.

4. Φαντασία and ars rhetorica: the demiurgic power of words

To better understand the system of resonances and echoes of these authors it is essential to analyse theoretical matters which allow us to unveil substantial analogies, i.e. what connects these authors on an intimate level. The fundamental question is how does the *ars rhetorica* synthesise the speculative and sensible dimension? What does it mean when we say that rhetoric unites man's different natures and thus expresses the multiplicity of his nature?

Rhetoric, besides being a spiritual exercise with an anagogical and catagogical function, according to Synesius can also transform thoughts in images and images in thoughts, connecting the sensible and intelligible world. Rhetoric exploits sentences to create parallels and antitheses, increases the expressive power of words until it transforms them into verbal images. At the same time the sensible world in which the rhetorician lives is elaborated and transformed into words: “finding words for everything by his rhetorical power” (Τῆ ῥητορεία παντός ἐξευρεῖν λόγους; *Dion* 3.8; Fitzgerald). Rhetoric is thus crucial insofar as it represents a creative bidirectional power. It is the expression of that faculty of imagination and lower-ranking rationality called φαντασία:

Τί δ' ἂν εἴη λόγου νῶ συγγενέστερον; τί δὲ πορθημιον ἐπὶ νοῦν οἰκειότερον; ὡς ὅπου λόγος, ἐκεῖ που καὶ νοῦς· εἰ δὲ

μή, πάντως τις εἶδησις, ἐν ὑστέροις νόησις οὐσα. Καὶ γὰρ ἐνθάδε καλοῦνται τινες θεωρία καὶ θεωρήματα ἔργα ἐλάττονος νοῦ, ῥητορικά τε καὶ ποιητικά (*Dion* 8.3).

Now what could be more allied to mind than speech, or what ferry is more suited to conduct us to mind? For wherever there is speech, there also, I assume, is mind and if not, a different rational knowledge of inferior order which implies intellectual perception. For in this connection certain processes of thinking and their objects get their name as works of a lesser mind, for example the rhetorical and poetical activity (Fitzgerald with adaptations).²³

'Lesser mind' refers to φαντασία itself and the connection between φαντασία and rhetoric is the essential element to understand the connection between Synesius and the Renaissance.

Synesius describes φαντασία as the faculty allowing man to interact with the sensible world and, in turn, for it to stimulate the soul.²⁴ Φαντασία looks towards the shadows of the bodies but has the function of capturing the original light of those very same shadows.²⁵ How does φαντασία express itself? Certainly in dreams but also, as clearly written by Synesius, in rhetoric:

Ἴδοι δ' ἂν τις ὅσον τὸ ἔργον, ἐπιχειρήσας συμπαρατείνειν τὸν λόγον τοῖς φάσμασιν, ὑφ' ὧν χωρίζεται μὲν τὰ φύσει συνόντα, συνάγεται δὲ τὰ φύσει κεχωρισμένα, καὶ δεῖ τῷ λόγῳ τὸν μὴ πεφαντασμένον φαντάσαι [...]. Ὅταν δὲ τῇ φαντασίᾳ ἐξωθῆται μὲν τοῦ εἶναι τὰ ὄντα, ἀντεισάγεται δὲ εἰς τὸ εἶναι τὰ μηδαμῇ μηδαμῶς μήτε ὄντα μήτε φύσιν ἔχοντα εἶναι, τίς μηχανὴ τοῖς οἰκοθεν ἀνενοήτοις παραστήσαι φύσιν ἀκατονόμαστον; [...] ἐν οἷς ἅπασι καὶ τὸ διαγενέσθαι μὴ λίαν ἀσχημονοῦντα, τελειοτάτης ἂν εἴη ῥητορικῆς (*Insomn.*18.3-19.1).

Anyone can see how great the work is, on attempting to fit language to visions, visions of which those things which are united in nature are separated, and things separated in nature are united, and he is obliged to show in speech what has not been revealed. [...] for whenever by fantasy things which are expelled from the order of being, and things which never in any possible way existed, are brought into being [...] what contrivance is there for presenting a nameless nature to things which are per se inconceivable? [...] To survive at all and without cutting a sorry figure amidst all this, would be proof of a masterly rhetoric (Fitzgerald).

Synesius knows that reason has to understand what is not naturally discursive in the sensible and intelligible world, i.e. understand the limitations λόγος has in expressing what ἄ-λογος²⁶ is. Therefore, rhetoric transforms that which does not belong to the world of words into words, i.e. transforms images φαντασία creates from the corporal world into words. Both processes reflect the images of the sensible world onto the world of *logos*, similarly to a mirror, regardless if λόγος is interpreted as 'word' or 'thought'.²⁷ Rhetoric and φαντασία are two specular and corresponding cognitive processes. Rhetoric creates beautiful speeches, φαντασία creates dreams. But what is a καλὸς λόγος, a beautiful speech, if nothing other than a speech with the semblance of a dream. In other words, rhetoric creates daydreams.

The Stoic concept of φαντασία rather than the Platonic one is what defines φαντασία as a creative moment as well as its close tie to rhetoric. Plato generally treats

imagination as a mixture of sensation and opinion that leads us away from the truth (*Sph* 260c-264a, *Thaet* 152a-c); this mental capacity deals with the sensible world and this is the reason why it is not the more desirable form of cognition. Stoic philosophers, however, characterise φαντασία as a creative power. This capacity of the human mind is more powerful than μίμησις, imitation, because it envisions what had never been sensed, i.e. it produces something visible (artist's products) or invisible (rhetorician's speeches) which have never been experienced before by the senses.²⁸ Concomitantly, φαντασία is also an epistemological tool as it was for the followers of Platonism²⁹ because it has to perform mental operations such as ascertaining similarity, transition, and composition, and then transform their results into thought (λόγος) and therefore into speeches (λόγοι)³⁰. Thus, Stoics treat φαντασία as a fundamental human creativity, which allows either to envision things not previously seen or sensed or to elaborate sensations into mental objects.³¹ Flory writes, "it seems a short jump [...] to the creativity theories of the rhetoricians" (155). In Late Antiquity a slow harmonisation process of concepts from different philosophical schools of thought occurs;³² Neoplatonism tends to integrate Stoic and Peripatetic concepts in its system, including the Stoic vision of φαντασία. In this syncretist process, Synesius plays a seminal role because he imports and adapts the Stoic idea of φαντασία to Neoplatonism as well as passing on this idea to the following Platonism tradition.³³ Therefore, he represents one of the crucial points of the evolution of this concept and its tradition. This idea is adopted in the Renaissance by authors such as Pico and Ficino who bring the concept of *imaginatio-phantasia* at the heart of their thoughts and its importance to the work of rhetoricians.³⁴

Regarding the Renaissance, the parallels between oneiric images, products of *phantasia*, and a rhetorician's speeches found in Synesius return in Ficino and Pico. One starting image which ideally ferries us from Late Antiquity to the 15th century is the 'heel/foot of the soul'. Synesius compares the pleasure awoken by reading beautiful speeches, a product of the faculty of imagination, to the heel on which the soul can sustain the weight of the body (ἡδονὴ περὶ τῆ ψυχῆ; *Dion* 6.4). The image of *pes animae* can be found again in Ficino who uses it to indicate the lower part of the soul corresponding to the one closest to the world of sensations and images, i.e. *phantasia* (*Theologia platonica* XIII 2, IV 138-140)³⁵. The image of the 'foot of the soul' is a widespread image in antiquity: however, most authors use it with a negative connotation to indicate the concupiscible part of the soul, therefore as a symbol of dark *cupiditas*.³⁶ Synesius and Ficino are the only ones to use this metaphor positively: the faculty of imagination and rhetoric are a luminous support on which the whole human nature rests.

In Ficino, the parallels between oneiric dreams created by *phantasia* and the speeches of rhetoricians are analysed and problematized throughout his work and, specifically, in the *Commentaria in Platonis Sophistam*.³⁷ Consider the commentaries were written considerably later than the translation of the Platonic dialogue bearing the same name and are composed in a moment when Ficino had read and extensively studied Neoplatonic authors, including Synesius.³⁸ When Ficino comments on

the Platonic passage where Socrates explains to Theaetetus what the divine and human creative act is (Pl. *Sph.* 265b-c), he focuses on the creative process of the divine *idola* described by Plato, namely on demonology. However, he also talks of man's creative process: he writes that the divine production of *imagines umbrae* is specular to the human production of rhetoric speeches, beautiful yet misleading. Ficino believes man's *vis imaginativa* equals a semi-divine, or rather, demonic power, whereby man can also create *simulacra* just like a god. This creative process is defined as a "certain demonic contrivance" ("machinatio quaedam daemonica"; in *Sophistam*, 273.9-10; Allen 272).³⁹ These simulacra can be verbal if a rhetorician or sophist creates them: assuming the sensible world is a multiple and shadowy reality, the rhetorician creates 'verbal shadows', thus participating in the demiurgic process of expressing reality.⁴⁰ Therefore, even for Ficino, rhetoric is one of the manifestations of *imaginatio-phantasia*, which elevates man to the status of a demigod. The rhetorician is, so to say, a demonic being because of his skill to imagine and create verbal simulacra: "what imagines in us is in some respects a demon" ("quod in nobis imaginatur est quodammodo daemon"; in *Sophistam*, 271.24-25; Allen, 270). In the conclusion to the comment, the rhetorician and sophist is defined as a "feigner and manipulator of phantasms" ("phantasmatum factor et praestigiator"; 277.28; Allen, 278),⁴¹ labelled as a demon using an *ars quadam phantasticam*:

Sophista circa non ens versatur in tenebris, et arte quadam phantastica pollens non res quidem ipsas veras inspicit, sed simulacra quaedam earum apparentia fingit (in *Sophistam*, 231.21-24).

The sophist deals with shadows in speaking of not-being, and, wielding the power of phantastic art, he does not gaze upon things as they truly are, but fashions certain simulacra and appearances of realities (Allen, 230).

Allen highlighted the significance of chapter 46 (in *Sophistam*, 271-277) because it is here that Ficino seems to claim that the exceptional nature of man is revealed especially by the creative power of his imagination, making him similar to a god.⁴² We find the same esteem for man due to his faculty of imagination in the *Theologia platonica*: Ficino, speaking of man's superiority compared to other living beings, explains this superiority as a result of his fantastical skills. They allow him to master multiple arts thanks to which he can "imitate the creator of the world" ("deum naturae artificem imitari"; *Theologia platonica* XIII 3, IV 170-176), and he also includes the *oratorum facundia* among them.

Even Pico, in the epistle to Ermolao Barbaro, speaks of rhetoric as a magical creative power of phantasm and simulacra:

Demum res ipsas magicis quasi, quod vos iactatis, viribus eloquentiae, in quam liberit faciem habitumque transformare, ut non qualia sunt suo ingenio, sed qualia volueritis [...] (rhetor), fallacem verborum concentum, veluti larvas et simulacra praetendens, auditorum mentes blandiendo ludificet (Garin 1976, 808).

And finally, to transform things themselves, as if by magical force of eloquence, which you boast about, so that they assume whatever face and dress you wish, not appearing what they are in actuality, but what your will wants them to be. [...] [The rhetorician] by producing the deceptive harmony of words, like so many masks and simulacra, it dupes the minds of your auditors while it flatters them (Rebhorn, 59).

Of course, we cannot forget about the Platonic condemnation weighing down on the sophist for being a creator of speeches based on opinion, therefore deceitful.⁴³ To say that Pico and especially Ficino have a positive view of the sophist figure would be incorrect. However, we should also consider that the accusation to rhetoric moved by Ficino and Pico is characterised by extreme stereotypes and should be interpreted, especially in Pico, as a *topos* of Platonic literary tradition rather than an effective ideological and cultural sharing.⁴⁴ Moreover, consider that if in both authors the figure of the sophist is followed by a shadow, the more resplendent the light of the demiurgic and fantastic power projected onto him, the darker the shadow will be. The accusation to the sophist would be secondary to the fascination they feel for his skill of mastering *imaginatio-phantasia*.⁴⁵ We could go as far as saying that the sophist becomes important and acquires depth in Pico and Ficino's work because of the shadows projected by his *ars phantastica*.

The topic of rhetoricians as demon-demiurges found in Ficino and Pico is also found in *nuce* in Synesius who claims the following when speaking of good rhetoricians:

Ἐπειτα ὡσπερ ὁ θεὸς τῶν ἀφανῶν ἑαυτοῦ δυνάμεων εἰκόνας ἐμφανεῖς ὑπεστήσατο τῶν ἰδεῶν τὰ σώματα, οὕτως ἔχουσα κάλλος ψυχὴ καὶ γόνιμος οὐσα τῶν ἀρίστων, διαδόσιμον ἔχει μέχρι τῶν ἔξω τὴν δύναμιν (*Dion* 5.4).

Just as God has conceived clear images of his secret powers, tangible bodies of the ideas, thus a soul possessing beauty and fruitful of the noblest things, possesses the force which is transmissible even to things outside (Fitzgerald).

The idea that the rhetorician's *labor limae* is not that dissimilar, although inferior, to the *κοσμεῖν* of a divinity, already belongs to the Synesian thought. The rhetorician is a model for people wishing to become, to a certain extent, similar to gods. One has to become "that person who knows how to use word in a multiform manner" ("Ὁ παντοδαπῶς ἔχων τοῦ λόγου"; *Dion* 5.5; my trans.).

5. Under the sign of Proteus: anthropology between rhetoric and imagination

We can now analyse a last, particularly important image, as from a theoretical and formal point of view it represents a summary and resolution to the matter: identifying the rhetoric and anthropological model in the figure of Proteus, a marine shapeshifting god with prophetic powers. He is a marine god because he is liquid: he changes and transforms to flee from his petitioners curious about their future. His 'liquid being' manifests more than anything from his σοφιστικὴ θαυματολογία, his sophistic

skill of making slights of hand with words, to always adapt and present himself in differing shapes:

Ἄγαμαι δὲ ἐγὼ καὶ τὸν Πρωτέα τὸν Φάριον, εἰ σοφὸς ὢν τὰ μεγάλα, σοφιστικὴν τινα θαυματολογίαν προὔβλεβλητο, καὶ παντοδαπῶς τοῖς ἐντυγχάνουσι συνεγγίνετο· ὄχοντο γὰρ ἂν τὴν περὶ αὐτὸν τραγωδίαν τεθραυμακότες, ὡς μὴ ἐπιζητήσαι τὴν ἀλήθειαν περὶ ὧν πραγματεύοιτο (*Dion* 5.7).

For my part I admire Proteus of Pharos also because, being wise in great things, he was used to show off the ability, so to speak, of a sophistic illusionist's word and to always show up in a different guise to people who bumped into him (Fitzgerald with adaptations).

The trait of Proteus is ποικιλία, versatility, the multiplicity of colours, being garish. In Greek literary tradition ποικιλία is, starting from Callimachus onwards, first and foremost linguistic versatility, a skill for mixing genres and styles to always create new shapes. In other words Synesius admires Proteus for his rhetoric skills. We could suggest that if Synesius' anthropological model is Proteus and he, in turn, is the image of rhetoric art and, then to fully tap into the human nature one must cultivate the creative and demiurgic power of rhetoric.

This marine god beloved by Synesius returns in Pico and Ficino and is introduced with the same words and for the same goals. Pico in *Oratio de hominis dignitate*, published in 1486 (Bausi 2014, IX-X), uses the renowned metaphor of the chameleon and the analogy with Proteus to explain his own anthropological model:

Quis hunc nostrum chamaeleonta non admiretur? [...] Quem non immerito Asclepius Atheniensis, versipellis huius et se ipsam transformantis naturae argumento, per Protheum in mysteriis significari dixit. Hinc illae apud Hebraeos et Pythagoricos metamorphoses celebrate (31-35, p.14).

Who will not wonder at this chameleon of ours? [...] Not without reason, Asclepius the Athenian said that man was represented in the secret rites by Proteus because of his changing and metamorphous nature. Hence the metamorphoses renowned among the Jews and the Pythagoreans (Borghesi, 123-125).

Busi (289-291) highlights the comparison with Proteus in Pico as unusual. Indeed, Proteus has been treated as a negative figure in the past, a reference to the ambiguous and dark aspects of a word in constant flux as well as a metaphor for treachery. Clement of Alexandria (*Clem. Al. Paed.* 3.1.1-4), Plutarcus (*Plu. Mor.* 97a), Lucian (*Luc. Peregr.* 42), and right up until Gregory of Nazianzus (*Greg. Naz. Contra Iul.* 35.585.5-11), all these authors have used Proteus as an allegory to the dark side of the human soul and its sinister inclination. Therefore, according to Busi, characterising the polymorphic nature of the human soul with positive terms by using Proteus would be innovative for Pico, maybe, as he says, inspired by Orpheus' hymns.⁴⁶ However, as highlighted in this paper, Synesius had already attributed positive traits to Proteus, making him an anthropological and rhetoric paradigm. Is it legitimate to hypothesise that we are witnessing a Synesian echo? To answer the question, we can proceed in the *Oratio* where we find three other elements confirming the validity of this hypothesis. First, shortly after having mentioned Proteus, Pico writes: "Hence that saying of

Chaldeans [...] that is, 'Man is by nature diverse, multi-form and inconstant'" ("Hinc illud Chaldeorum [...], idest homo variae ac multiformis et desultoriae naturae animal"; 44, p. 20; Borghesi, 133). The text features a gap and the Chaldean quote Pico refers to cannot be traced.⁴⁷ However, we do know that in the Renaissance, Synesius was considered one of the main vessels for spreading Chaldean knowledge.⁴⁸ Second, we find an expression in the *Dion* which is very similar both in form and meaning to the above-mentioned quote by Pico in which man is an animal with a "diverse, multiform, and inconstant nature": "multiform is our nature" ("ποικίλον ἢ φύσις ἡμῶν"; *Dion* 6.4).⁴⁹ Last, proceeding in the *Oratio* to the point mentioning the theory of cosmic *sympatheia* (230, p.114), Pico quotes a passage from Synesius' *De insomnis* (2.2) proving Synesius is one of the models he has in mind when drafting the text. Therefore, why exclude that behind the chameleon image in Pichian anthropology we could not find, even implicitly, Synesius' anthropological model based on the creative and demiurgic power of rhetoric?

Even Ficino uses Proteus in the comment on Priscian of Lydia from 1498: "Imagination is like Proteus or a chameleon" ("Imaginatio est tanquam Protheus vel cameleon"; *Opera*, 1825; my trans.). In this case, it is not Synesius who influences Ficino, rather Pico's *Oratio* which had already been published in 1496.⁵⁰ However, we notice a different element when comparing it to Pico: to Ficino, Proteus is not just an image of man, rather his imaginative skill.⁵¹ *Imaginatio* therefore becomes the distinctive trait of Ficino's anthropology and, as we have clearly seen in the comments on the *Sophist*, it is closely tied to rhetoric. Ficino takes a further step compared to Pico in explicating the tie among anthropology, fantasy and rhetoric, ideally closing the circle opened by Synesius: Proteus is rhetorician, artist, and man. Ficino, Pico, and Synesius believe that whoever experiments and dabbles in the creative act represented by *imaginatio/phantasia* creates a positive anthropological model where the skill of moving fluidly between light and shadow is positive and the same applies to freely taking on all the shapes one wishes to, especially if thus occurs using words;⁵² after all, Pico clearly states: "having been born into this condition; that is, born with the possibility to become what we wish to be" ("postquam hac nati sumus conditione, ut id simus quod esse volumus"; *Oratio* 46, p. 20; Borghesi, 135).

Conclusions

The paper has yielded the following conclusions: 1) the manuscripts prove that Synesius' works containing reflections on rhetoric, especially the *Dion*, were read by Pico and Ficino; 2) we can establish intertextual connections among these three authors in passages discussing eloquence; 3) Synesius characterises the rhetoric art as an expression of φαντασία and therefore as a positive tool to express man's multiple nature; 4) even to Pico and Ficino the figure of the sophist, despite being ambiguous, is an extraordinary individual because of his mastery of the fantastical art and his ability to express the multiplicity which dominates his nature; 4) all three authors select

Proteus, god of the shifting word, as an anthropological model due to his fantastical and rhetorical skills.

It is not easy to quantify the significance that Synesius had on developing the Renaissance sensibility. After all, humanists approached the ancient cultural heritage with curiosity and eclecticism, reading whatever they could find on the matter back then, until they made it their own. The result is the development of a synthetic thought in which the borders between one source and the other are so blurred to have become indistinguishable⁵³. The Synesian formulations often refer to other sources which would have been accessible by humanists without necessarily his intermediation. However, he shares a very similar sensibility with these authors both in terms of philosophical and cultural interests, thus making him a more accessible author and an ideal source to tap into.⁵⁴ Moreover, if the concept of *phantasia* inherited by Pico and Ficino is the result of the Late Antiquity syncretic process, it is highly likely that it had been inherited by Synesius who, as we have seen, played a main role in integrating the Stoic *φαντασία* into the Neoplatonic system.

Therefore, we cannot surely guarantee an influence among these authors but, at the same time, we cannot and must not exclude such a possibility. If the data from analysing intertextuality are insufficient to claim a connection in these authors, the topics they discuss and the original and parallel way they are developed indubitably are. Starting from an unequivocally fragmented and stratified textuality we slowly obtain a coherent picture. I believe that we should not exclude the possibility that Synesius' reflections on rhetoric, a 'fantastic' expression of man's multiple nature, could have played a role in developing the Renaissance concept of eloquence so closely connected to the fantastical and verbal characterisation of anthropology. Indeed, I believe it to be significant that the most evident traits of originality in Synesius feature in the works of these two authors. However, the suggestion of a relation between Synesius and rhetoric in the Renaissance represents a suggestion for a further research project rather than an answer to the question on the possible relation between Late Antiquity rhetoric and the Renaissance. To give such an answer would be impossible mostly because of the brevity of this paper, but especially because it would risk stiffening the writing of these authors which is, by nature, multiple and changeable.

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Notes

¹ See Celenza 2002, 73: "Ficino, for example, often stresses how important, indeed central, Plato is in his vision of the *prisca theologia*; but many scholars, too numerous to list, have shown that Ficino's adherence to Plato is far from modern." The importance of the relation between the Renaissance and Late Antiquity was highlighted by Celenza 2012, 1192: "Ficino's world was much closer to the world of the late ancient thinkers, Christian and pagan, he so admired than to that of a post-Newtonian natural philosopher. The same could be said for other Renaissance thinkers, from Bruni and Biondo to Poliziano, whose lives and careers spanned the fifteenth century, a crucial period for the rediscovery, con-

solidation, and eventual absorption of many of Late Antiquity's key textual monuments."

² Recent critique defined this cultural climate as 'Third Sophistry' (Pernot, 14). The same definition was given to the philosophical and rhetorical approach many European authors share between the 15th and 16th century (Godard, 173-77). For a more information on the political culture of emperor Julian, see Pack.

³ Ficino, *Opera*, 1968-1978. We have two versions of the translation: the first version defined by Ficino in a letter to Aldo Manuzio as "exemplar [...] mendarum plenum" is from 1488 and is contained in the *codex riccardianus* 76, and a definite version published in 1497 in Venice which represents the *editio princeps* (Rabassini, 153-154).

⁴ See also *Ep.* 101.9-15 where Synesius makes the character of literary παίγνιον explicit.

⁵ For more detailed information on the work, see Treu's comment (Treu) and Aujoulat's more recent comment in the relative critical edition (Lamoureux, 116-138).

⁶ *Syn. Ep.* 154.3-11: "[...] ἔφασάν με παρανομεῖν εἰς φιλοσοφίαν, ἐπαίοντα κάλλους ἐν λέξεσι καὶ ῥυθμοῦ, καὶ περὶ Ὀμήρου τι λέγειν ἀξιοῦντα καὶ περὶ τῶν ἐν ταῖς ῥητορείαις σχημάτων, ὥς δὴ τὸν φιλόσοφον μισολόγον εἶναι προσήκον καὶ μόνα περιεργάζεσθαι τὰ δαιμόνια πράγματα. καὶ αὐτοὶ μὲν θεοροὶ τοῦ νοητοῦ γεγονότες: ἐμὲ δὲ οὐ θέμις, διότι νέμω τιὰ σχολῆν ἐκ τοῦ βίου τῶ καὶ τὴν γλῶτταν καθήρασθαι καὶ τὴν γνώμην ἡδῶ γενέσθαι" ("Some of those [...] have maintained that I am faithless to philosophy, apparently because I profess grace and harmony of style, and because I venture to say something concerning Homer and concerning the figures of the rhetoricians. In the eyes of such persons one must hate literature in order to be a philosopher, and must occupy himself with divine matters only. No doubt these men alone have become spectators of the knowable. This privilege is unlawful for me, for I spend some of my leisure in purifying my tongue and sweetening my wit" Fitzgerald).

⁷ Probably even Plotinus' formulations on apophatism as manifestation of reaching the goal of the philosophical journey were a disincentive to confide in the power of words in a Neoplatonic ambient and embrace the idea that it was necessary to proceed ἐπέκεινα λόγου ("Beyond the word"; *Dion* 8.5) to carry out the βίος θεωρητικός.

⁸ Also see *Dion* 10.3-5 and *Ep.* 154.32.

⁹ For more information see Munarini. According to the Neoplatonic thought, the soul is 'one and multiple', where unity joins it to the divine, while multiplicity to the sensible world. See Plot. 4.2.1.65 or 4.7.6.

¹⁰ See for example *Dion* 8.1: "Ἐγὼ δὲ βουλοίμην μὲν ἂν εἶναι τῆς φύσεως ἡμῶν αἰετὸς θεορίαν ἀνατετάσθαι. ἀμυγῶν δὲ ὄντος τε καὶ περηνότος, βουλοίμην ἂν ἐν τῶ μέρει μὲν ἔχεσθαι τῶν ἀρίστων, ἐν τῶ μέρει δὲ κατιῶν εἰς τὴν φύσιν ἄπτεσθαί τινος εὐφροσύνης καὶ ἐπαλείφειν εὐθυμία τῶν βίων" ("Now I should wish it to be a property of our nature to be always lifted up toward contemplation; but as this is obviously impracticable, I should like in turn to cling to the best and again in turn to descend to nature, there to cleave to merriment and anoint life with cheerfulness" Fitzgerald).

¹¹ See *Dion* 4.2: "Ἐπεξίων ἅπανσιν, ὅσα Μουσῶν ἑταίροις ἀνδράσιν ἐρραθύμῃται τε καὶ πέπαικται, πάλιν δὲ τὴν σπουδὴν ἐπιτείνων, ἀναβασμῶ χρήσῃ, τοῖσδὲ τε καὶ ἀδελφοῖς τισι τοῦτων ἀναγνώσασιν" ("Having gone through all things that have been dallied over and played with by men who were comrades of the Muses, until, I say, with increased zeal you again use these and certain kindred writings as a means of moral ascent" Fitzgerald). See also Pl. *Phdr.* 264c 2-5 and Ficino in *Phaedrum*, 178 for the comparison between a beautiful speech and body of a living being. Also see *Dion* 8.5, 9.1, 10.9 and 17.2-3 for the scalability of the philosophical and didactic journey started by practising rhetoric. Motta (2013, 29) highlighted how in late Neoplatonism reading Plato's mimetic dialogues was assimilated as a real school syllabus, taking a person gradually from the visible to the invisible, from the image to the model.

¹² Both Synesius (*Dion* 11.2) and Ficino (*in Phaedrum*, 133) interpret the 'descent' with an unusual optimism compared to Platonic tradition; both use the metaphor of the restorative banquet, which is composed of 'Attic delicacies and poetic sides' for Synesius and 'nectar and ambrosia' for Ficino. Both authors do not interpret the descent as a failure of philosophising, but as an occasion to exercise the lowest functions of intellect, including the faculty of imagination, i.e. rhetoric. See Allen 1984, 163-164: "in doing so, Ficino treats the stopping more as a kind of climax than as an anticlimactic epilogue [...]. In short, it is not the uranian intuitive ecstasy of the charioteer's gazing at the intelligibles nor the saturnian contemplation of the intellectuals that constitutes the figure's conclusion, but rather the jovian activity of rational providing."

¹³ Thoughts on the art of the rhetorician are disseminated in the collection of letters, the *Calvitii encomium*, and the *De insomnis*, which was

certainly known by Ficino, as he translated it, and by Pico, who owned a copy in his private library (Kibre, footnotes 492 and 731).

¹⁴ Codd. Laur. Plut. 55.06 (XI sec.), Plut. 80.19 (XII sec.), Plut. 55.08 (XIV sec.) and Plut. 60.06 (XIV sec.). For all information on quoted manuscripts see Pinakes.

¹⁵ Paris, Bibliothèque Mazarine fonds principal 4453. Out of the other two codices, one (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, gr. 1038) was owned by Janus Lascaris and arrives in Florence around 6 years before Ficino's death, while the other contains all the works of Dio Chrysostom, Synesius' *Dion*, and the margin notes to Dion by Areta Cesareo, belonged to Palla Strozzi and remains in Florence until his death in 1462 when it was transferred to the Santa Giustina library in Padua.

¹⁶ Rebhorn translates *cinaedam* with "sodomitical", but I believe it is more appropriate to translate it with "shameless" considering the context.

¹⁷ The link between the coiffed hair and a non-virile behaviour can also be found in Syn. *Ep.* 104.

¹⁸ Pico, *ad Hermolaum*, in Garin 1976, 812: "Expectamus paucorum potius pro admiratione silentium, introsipientium penitus aliquid aut de naturae adytis erutum aut de caelestium, de Iovis aula ad homines adductum" ("But we do expect instead the silce that comes from the wonder of those few who look more deeply into something, whether that something is extracted from the inner temple of nature or brought down to men from the palace of Jove" Rebhorn, 61).

¹⁹ Pico, *ad Hermolaum*, in Garin 1976, 822: "Sed exercui me libenter in hac materia tamquam infami [...] ut veluti Glauco ille apud Platonem iniustitiam laudat non ex iudicio, sed ut ad laudes iustitiae Socratem extimulet, ita ego ut concitatus eloquentiae causam a te agi audiam in eam licentius repugnante paulisper sensu atque natura investus sum, quam si vel negligendam vel posthabendam barbaris existimarem, non ab illis ad eam, quod nuper feci, ad graecas litteras [...] defecissem" ("But I have engaged myself freely in this subject, as in something disreputable [...] My aim has been like that of Plato's Glaucon who praises injustice, not out of conviction, but to goad Socrates into praising justice. Similarly, so that I might hear you plead the cause of eloquence, I have inveighed against it rather boldly for a little while, though my feelings and nature fought against doing so. If I thought it right for eloquence to be neglected by the barbarians, I would not have almost totally deserted them for it -something I did recently- or for Greek letters" Rebhorn, 66-67). In the answer of Ermolao Barbaro see *ad Ioannem Picum Mirandulanum*, in Garin 1976, 844-846. For a detailed study on the epistolary exchange between Pico and Ermolao Barbaro on eloquence see Bausi 1998 and Grassi, 108-116.

²⁰ The aim of antilogic speeches in sophistry is to prove the relativity of all things and highlight the centrality of man who at the same time dismantles absolute truths and becomes the only measure of comparison. For a study on ancient sophistry and its traits see Kerferd 1988. For the resurgence of Gorgia's ideas in the Renaissance see MacPhail, 65-71.

²¹ For a detailed study of the epistle see Bausi 1997.

²² See Pico, *ad Laurentium Medicum*, in Garin 1976, 800.

²³ In this passage, it emerges that Synesius does not clear if the rhetoric skill belongs exclusively to the rational discursive dimension or to *φαντασία*. He does so mainly for two reasons: first, the *Dion* is not a philosophical comment where philosophical categories are systematically determined, rather a mixed genre with the main aim of backing rhetoric as a form of philosophical exercise; second, rhetoric moves effectively on a rational and discursive plane as well as a fantastical one when it transforms paratactical representations of imagination into syntactical propositions.

²⁴ For Synesius' concept of *φαντασία* see Susanetti, 14-17 and Lamoureux, 205-214. See also Sheppard, 201: "*Phantasia* occupies a key position at the 'joint' of the soul where rational and irrational meet."

²⁵ *Phantasia* as *umbra naturae aemulatrix* will also be developed by Giordano Bruno. See Tirinanzi, 243-292.

²⁶ See *Insomn.* 19.2: "νεανιεύεται δὲ ἡμῶν καὶ κατ' αὐτῆς ἡδὴ τῆς γνώμης, ἐνδιδοῦσά τι πλεόν τοῦ οἴεσθαι [...] ἡδὴ δὲ τις ἄμα καὶ νικᾷ, καὶ βαδίζει, καὶ ἵπταται, καὶ χωρεῖ πάντα ἢ φαντασία· πῶς δ' ἂν λέξεις χωρήσειε;" ("Fantasy conducts itself jauntily even against our understanding itself, becoming the cause of something more than thought [...]. Now in dreams one conquers, walks, or flies simultaneously, and the imagination has room for it all; but how shall mere speech find room for it?" Fitzgerald with adaptations).

²⁷ Ficino writes the same; see Allen 1989, 198: "The radial images, being purely visual, can be reflected by the naturally magical power of a plane mirror or focussed by one that is convex or concave. The simula-cra, however, can only be reflected or focussed in "the animate and phantastic spirit" (275.32), that is, in the *spiritus phantasticus* of Neo-

platonian pneumatology and more particularly for Ficino of Synesian oneirology".

²⁸ See for example Philostr. *VA* 6.19.23-29: "φαντασία [...] ταῦτα εἰργάσατο σοφώτερα μιμήσεως δημιουργός· μίμησις μὲν γὰρ δημιουργήσεται, ὁ εἶδεν, φαντασία δὲ καὶ ὁ μὴ εἶδεν, ὑποθήσεται γὰρ αὐτὸ πρὸς τὴν ἀναφορὰν τοῦ ὄντος, καὶ μίμησιν μὲν πολλακτὶς ἐκκρούει ἄεπληξιν, φαντασίαν δὲ οὐδὲν, χωρεῖ γὰρ ἀνέκπληκτος πρὸς ὃ αὐτὴ ὑπέθετο" ("*Phantasia* [...] wrought these works, a wiser and subtler artist by far than imitation. Imitation can only fashion what it has seen; *phantasia* what it has never seen as well. It can conceive it by referring to ideal reality. Imitation is often restrained by fear. Phantasy, however, is never limited in the production of its creation" my trans.). The main difference with Platonic epistemology is that the Stoic philosophy is fundamentally material and does not admit there is knowledge beyond our perception of the sensible world. Therefore, *phantasia* in Stoicism is a fundamental cognitive tool as it is directly involved in elaborating sensible data and organising them in proposition-like structures, a function attributed to νοῦς, intellect, by the Platonism (Flory, 151).

²⁹ See also Flory, 158: "It was quite probably the result of Stoic-Platonic amalgamation, which brought out a creative feature of the human mind that Stoically influenced theories of knowledge required about our perceptions of the world, language, and thinking in general". See also Aujoulat, 123: "Il est probable que les néo-platoniciens ont été influencés par les stoïciens dans l'élaboration du concept de *phantasia*."

³⁰ See Longin. 15.1.3-5: "καλεῖται μὲν γὰρ κοινῶς φαντασία πᾶν τὸ ὁπωσοῦν ἐννόημα γεννητικὸν λόγου παριστάμενον" ("Generally *phantasia* is called any thought present in the mind and producing speech" my trans.).

³¹ See Flory, 149: "*phantasia* as a mental capacity that allows one to both envision and make others aware of realms not seen; and from this capacity allegedly arose art, poetry, and oratory."

³² See Hadot for the process of harmonisation between Platonic and Aristotelic thoughts of the school of Alexandria, which Synesius also referred to.

³³ Watson, 91 claims: "The transformation of *phantasia* into a term for creative art was due to Platonic-Stoic syncretism." For a comparison between Stoic *φαντασία* and Synesius' see also Aujoulat, 128-132. Synesius develops a typically Neoplatonic process of integration of Stoic elements and harmonising the two doctrines. See Brancacci, 158-160 on this.

³⁴ For the role of *phantasia* in relation to gnoseology and anthropology in Ficino and Pico, see the recent work by Fellina (9-53). For Ficino's description on the functioning of *phantasia*, see *Theologia platonica* VIII 1, II 262-272. For the difference between the two different gnoseological moments constituted by *phantasia* and *vis imaginativa* see Katinis 1998, 75-76 and Katinis 2002. I should highlight that Fellina (16, footnote 26) believes there to be no Synesian influence in the constitution of the concept of *phantasia* in Ficino, or that it is secondary to the one in Proclus. Regarding the success of the Synesian concept of *φαντασία* in the Renaissance, see for example Bruno, *Opera*, II, 3, p. 220: "Synesii Platonici sententiam in medium afferamus, qui de potestate phantasiae spiritusque phantastici ita disserit: in vigilia doctor est homo, somniantem vero Dues ipse sui participem facit" ("We hereby refer to the statement by Synesius the Platonist on the power of phantasia and the fantastic spirit. He claims: when awake man is wise, but when he dreams God makes him part of himself" my trans.).

³⁵ Ficino, based on the Platonic *Timaeus* and its tradition in Plotinus, Proclus and in the Pseudo-Dionysius, proposes the theory of the tripartition of the soul: the upper part of the soul is called *animae caput* and is the part of the *anima rationalis* in contact with the intelligible world, i.e. the *anima angelica* or *mens divina*, and they both share the same ontological nature. The lower part is *animae pes* and is in contact with the sensible world: it livens the body and therefore is the centre of *phantasia*. It is also called *idolum* and collects material from the five sense and elaborates it as fantastical images. In the middle we have *mens*, which with its dianoetical process multiplies and disassembles the subjects of noetic contemplation and unites in blocks of meaning the images from the sensible world. See Kristeller, 350-368.

³⁶ For example Aug. *Enar. in Ps* 9.15 "pes animae recte [...] vocatur cupiditas aut libido". The negative image of the *pes animae* is also present in Pico *Oratio* 78, p. 32: "Profecto pes animae illa est portio despiciatissima, qua ipsa materiae tanquam terrae solo innititur: altrix - inquam - potestas et cibaria, fomes libidinis et voluptariae mollitudinis magistra" ("To be sure, the foot of the soul is that part which is most despicable, that which leans upon matter as if on earthly soil; it is the faculty, I say, that feeds and nourishes; it is, I say, the kindling wood of lust and the teacher of sensual weakness" Borghesi, 145).

³⁷ Even in the comment to the Theaetetus (Ficino *Opera*, 1274), Ficino relates Protagorean gnoseology, and generally the rhetoric and sophist perspective, with the fantastic and creative activity. See Katinis 2013, 50-51.

³⁸ See Allen 1989, 31: "After he had translated it between 1464 and 1466 and written his introduction with his Proclian preface, Ficino did not return to the *Sophist* for several decades [...] When he did take it up again in earnest towards the very end of his career, it was only after he had translated [...] a number of important Neoplatonic treatises and fragments, including Iamblichus' *De mysteriis*, Porphyry's *De abstinentia*, Synesius's *De insomnis*, and Proclus *In Alcibiadem*."

³⁹ See also Katinis 2003.

⁴⁰ See Trinnanzi, 43: "Shadows, according to Ficino, are a knot between souls and bodies, and the principle allowing sensible constructs to receive and express impulses through vital acts whereby the superior powers trickle down into their inferior nature. At the same time, multifarious traits of the explained universe germinate from the shadows: hence, in the comment to the *Sophist*, Ficino uses topics and images of Neoplatonic tradition to shed light on the radical shadowy element of nature."

⁴¹ This expression translates the Greek ἐν λόγοις τὸ θεοματοποιικόν (Pl. *Sph.* 268d 2). See also in *Sophistam*, 217.7: *idolarum fictor*.

⁴² See Allen 1989, 176-177: "Ficino suggests that in us what does the imagining is, so to speak, a demon. [...] Ficino is apparently speculating with the notion that we become demons in the limited sense that our imaginations create their own realm of images and shadows and do so usually independently, though on occasion they may merely replicate that of the demons who temporally possess them." To know more about the similarity between man's *ingenium* and God, the *artifex*, based on the interpretation that Ficino gives to the Platonic myth of the demiurge in the *Timaeus*, see Allen 1987.

⁴³ See Ficino, in *Sophistam*, 269.15-18: "Ars imaginaria est duplex: altera quidem assimilativa quae ad rei alicuius existentis exemplar aliquid exprimit; altera vero phantastica simulachra fingens non existentium. In genere phantastico sophista versatur et fallit" ("The imaginary art is twofold. One kind is assimilative and it portrays something according to the model of something that actually exists. The other kind is phantastic and it feigns phantastic simulacra of what do not exist. The sophist is busy beguiling us with the phantastic kind" Allen, 268). For the accusation against sophists of the antiquity until the Renaissance see MacPhail, 45-58.

⁴⁴ Katinis (2013, 50-55) highlights that to Ficino, criticising sophistry is functional to highlight the analogies between Platonism and Christianity as opposed to the anthropocentric relativism channelled by the sophist thought, i.e. is part of the Platonic and Christian process of harmonisation at the heart of Ficino's philosophy.

⁴⁵ The comparison with Ficino in *Phaedrum*, 168 is important: "non esse turpe scribere sed male scribere [...] Similiter qui orationum conscriptionem verbis damnant tanquam rem levem aut ambitiosam contraria loquuntur atque sentiunt; ipsi enim interim tanquam re praeclara mirifice delectantur" ("To write is not shameful in itself, only to write badly. [...] Similarly, those who verbally condemn the writing down of speeches as something frivolous or ostentatious are voicing the opposite of what they think and feel; for in the meantime they are wonderfully delighted themselves as with something excellent" Allen, 169). Even in his *De sole IX* (*Opera*, 992-993) Ficino invites the reader to experiment the potential of imagination, independently from the fact that it works with shadows suspended between the sensible and intelligible, as long as it is done consciously and usefully for the soul.

⁴⁶ See *Orph. H.* 25, 1-3: "Πρωτέα κικλήσκω, πόντου κληῖδας ἔχοντα, / πρωτογενῆ, πάσης φύσεως ἀρχὰς ὅς ἔφηνεν / ὕλην ἀλλάσσων ἱερὴν ἰδέαις πολυμόρφους." ("I pray to Proteus, who has the keys of the sea / primigenial, who unveiled all the principles in nature / and transformed the sacred material in multiple forms"; my trans.).

⁴⁷ Maybe *Orac. Chald.* Fr. 106: "τολμηρὰς φύσεως, ἄνθρωπε, τέχνασμα"; "O man, product of a bold nature". See Bausi 2014, 20, footnote 44. Regarding the missing text and the different hypotheses on its content, see *ibid.* 241-242 and Busi, XXVII-XXX.

⁴⁸ For more information see Copenhaver.

⁴⁹ Also see Ficino, in *Phaedrum*, 182: "Perfectus orator scire debet animam quamlibet humanam intrinsecus esse suapte natura multiplicem (habere enim rationem, imaginationem, sensum, irascendi atque concupiscendi vires). [...] Nosse preterea debet qualibus sermonibus qualia moveantur ingenia, et suos cuique sermones accomodare" ("The perfect orator must know that any human soul is intrinsically and naturally multiple (for it has reason, imagination, sense, and the powers of wrath and desire). [...] Moreover, he ought to know what kind of natural dispositions are moved by what kind of speeches and accommodate his speeches to each person" Allen, 183).

⁵⁰ Even though the work was written between 1486 and 1487, it only circulates among Pico's closest friends at first. It was published posthumously and is part of the Bologna anthology of Pico's works edited by his grandson, Gian Francesco, and published under the title *Oratio quaedam elegantissima*. See Bausi 2014, IX-XII, for information on its date and composition.

⁵¹ See Katinis 2003, 93: "Ficino [...] usa Proteo e il camaleonte come figure per descrivere non più l'uomo in modo generico, ma piuttosto la sua facoltà immaginativa, che diviene, quasi per proprietà transitiva, ciò che fa dell'uomo un essere eccezionale."

⁵² Regarding Ficino see Allen 1984, 170: "This implies a mind at odds with the extremer manifestations of Plato's dualism, one drawn to envisaging the human condition not in the shadows of unending ἀγωνία, of ceaseless war between the animate prisoner and his inanimate bars, but rather in the light of intellect and body partaking together in a unitary reality". Also see Katinis 1998, 221: "L'attività immaginativa è il veicolo che permette la relazione tra i due piani del composto essere umano".

⁵³ See for example Petrarca, *ad familiares* 22.2.

⁵⁴ For example, Ficino has a better affinity with philosophers who were Platonists and Christian, just like Synesius, than with pagan ones, as he shares with them the attempt at reducing Christian doctrine and Plato's thought to a synthesis (*Opera*, 925): "Amo equidem Platonem in Iamblichō, admiror in Plotino, in Dionysio veneror" ("I love Plato in Iamblichus, I admire him in Plotinus, but I venerate him in Dionysius" Trans. Allen 1998, 67). Also see Celenza 2002, 84: "Ficino is at his most non-Plotinian when post-Plotinian Platonists presented theories that were more congruent with Christianity, themselves the result of similarities of mentality between fourth- and fifth-century Platonism and the Christianity of the same period. It is not just a question of sources, but of mentalities."