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Teodoro Katinis

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Enhancing the Research on Sophistry in the Renaissance

Teodoro Katinis

Abstract: This contribution introduces the proceedings of the international conference *The Sophistic Renaissance: Authors, Texts, Interpretations* held in Venice on September 26th, 2016 as part of my Marie Skłodowska-Curie project *Sperone Speroni (1500-1588) and the Rebirth of Sophistry in the Italian Renaissance* at Ca' Foscari University (2015-2016). This introduction briefly presents the *status quaestionis* and the essays collected herein, discusses the challenges scholars encounter while exploring the legacy of ancient sophists in early modern culture, and addresses some promising lines of research for deepening some aspects of the subject in the future.

Keywords: Sophistry, Latin Renaissance, vernacular Renaissance.

1. Introduction

The collection of essays we publish in this issue of *Philosophical Readings* presents the results of the work done by scholars gathered for the conference *The Sophistic Renaissance: Authors, Texts, Interpretations*, which I organized in Venice. The meeting was held at Ca' Foscari University in Venice, in the splendid Aula Baratto on September 26, 2016, with the support of the Department of Philosophy and Cultural Heritage. I intended to organize this conference as the closure event of the first year of my Marie Skłodowska-Curie project *Sperone Speroni (1500-1588) and the Rebirth of Sophistry in the Italian Renaissance* at Ca' Foscari University.¹ This was meant to be the first of two conferences. I scheduled the second one to be held in 2017, at the end of my research project, with the aim of summarizing the most important scholarly results in the exploration of sophistry in the Latin and vernacular Renaissance. I also intended to trace the possibilities of research development in the field over the next years. This second conference was never realized since my current appointment at Ghent University brought my Marie Skłodowska-Curie project to an early end.

According to my knowledge, there has never been a conference on such a subject. Indeed, although the sophists have been the subject of important international meetings, none of them have focused on the presence of ancient sophists in 15th and 16th-century European literature, which is paradoxical when one considers that the ancient sophists were reborn in this period - a time when other ancient traditions, such as Platonism, Aristotelianism and Skepticism, encountered great fortune as well.²

The idea of two conferences was shaped on the structure of my two-year research project that aimed to analyze the works of Sperone Speroni degli Alvarotti (Padua 1500–1588), his re-evaluation of ancient sophistic perspectives and their legacy in the early modern age. Speroni was one of the most important protagonists of the Renaissance debate on language and logic as well as civil and speculative philosophy. Educated as an Aristotelian, he eventually developed a distinctive philosophy and was the first to challenge Plato's condemnation of sophists. Starting with a focus on Speroni, the project proposed an analysis of the 15th-century Latin sources, such as Leonardo Bruni and Marsilio Ficino among others, and the exploration of the debate over sophistry in the Italian 16th-century authors, such as Torquato Tasso, Jacopo Mazzoni, and Gabriele Comanini.³ Considering that Latin literature was the first involved in the rebirth of sophistic traditions, I intended to focus the first conference more on Latin authors and texts and the second conference more on vernacular literatures. That said, I intended to put no strict boundary between the two kinds of literature, which was clearly the spirit of Eric MacPhail's keynote address (Indiana University Bloomington), followed by Lodi Nauta (University of Groningen) – who preferred not to publish his contribution – Leo Catana (University of Copenhagen), and Marco Munarini (University of Padua). The keynote speaker for the second part of the conference was Marc van der Poel (Radboud University), followed by Stefano Gulizia (independent scholar), Jorge Ledo (University of Basel), and myself with some *Closing Remarks*. The conference ended with a Discussion Session in which the following discussants had the role of kindling the debate: Eugene Afonasin (Novosibirsk University), Christopher Celenza (Johns Hopkins University), Glenn Most (SNS Pisa), Carlo Natali (Ca' Foscari University Venice), and Luigi Perissinotto (Ca' Foscari University Venice) – who unfortunately could not attend the Conference. This collection of essays also includes the contribution of Elisa Bacchi (University of Pisa - Ghent University).

The main aim of the Conference was to explore the influence and diffusion of ancient sophistic traditions in early-modern Europe, fostering an interdisciplinary discussion among scholars and enhancing a new network for future interdisciplinary collaboration. The participants examined the ancient sophists' legacy, translations and interpretations of their works in a span of time from the beginning of the 15th century to the first part of the 17th century, and crossing paths with philosophical traditions such as Platonism and Neo-Platonism, as well as major turns in European history, such as the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. I believe the results published in this collection of essays are an important contribution towards fill-

ing the gap in international scholarship and enhancing research in the field.

2. A brief *status quaestionis*

The scholarship on ancient sophists in the Renaissance is relatively recent and, before presenting the papers in these proceedings, it might be useful to recall the studies that have focused on this subject or have been relevant for the development of current and future studies.

One could be tempted to include the study or the sophistic legacy in the contiguous field of the history of rhetoric, but this would be misleading for our understanding of the specificity of the transmission and reinterpretation of the sophists and their works throughout the Western tradition, a specificity that Eric MacPhail's pioneering monograph *The Sophistic Renaissance* (which clearly inspired this conference title) preserved very well. The first feature of the sophists is that they not only use speech as a means of persuasion, but they also imply powerful philosophical approaches which are definitely rejected by the two main streams of Western tradition (i.e. Platonism and Aristotelianism), but embraced and used by other alternative philosophies (i.e. Skepticism).

MacPhail's book, published in 2011, has been the only extended study available on the rebirth of sophistry in early-modern European literature with a focus on Latin authors, in particular the humanists and Erasmus, and French literature, in particular Montaigne and Rabelais. Without summarizing MacPhail's well-known monograph, it is worth recalling that it not only collects and discusses the fortune of ancient sources in the Renaissance, but also explores their reinterpretation in new forms not always immediately recognizable, for example the use of rhetoric to destroy rhetoric in Michel de Montaigne's *Essays*, which is a *topos* that goes back to the conflict between Socrates and the sophists in Plato's dialogues. In other terms, MacPhail's study adopts an historical approach, but also suggests research directions from a theoretical perspective.

The presence of sophists in 15th and 16th century Latin literature has been the subject of other contributions, which have focused on the legacy of a specific sophist (for example the legacy of Protagoras of Abdera studied by Charles Trinkaus in his pioneering essay published in 1976) and the presence of sophistry in authors and texts of the Renaissance.⁴

The relevance of ancient sophists in understanding the vernacular literature of the Italian Renaissance is a growing line of research that has already had several contributions, although a complete exploration is still far from being achieved. Given his explicit defense of the sophists, Speroni Speroni degli Alvarotti, a Paduan philosopher and rhetorician usually labeled as an Aristotelian by historiographers, has been the subject of a number of studies.⁵ As a matter of fact, his "trattatelli" *In difesa dei sofisti* and *Contra Socrate* represent a unique case for the study of the rehabilitation of sophistry in the Renaissance, while other works of his discuss the topic, imitate sophistic rhetoric, or clearly refer to sophistic sources. The debate over sophistry in the works of Torquato Tasso and Jacopo Mazzone has also been discussed in previous scholarship

and we can count on several studies.⁶ Indeed, as it results also from these proceedings, the rebirth of sophistry and the debate over it seems to be particularly vivid and rich in the Italian environment, so that we can expect further discoveries on Italian authors and texts. Important achievements have been reached also for the Spanish literature thanks to Merkl's studies on the reception of Protagoras of Abdera, through Marsilio Ficino's translations and commentaries on Plato, in Miguel de Cervantes.⁷ But we still lack explorations of other vernacular contexts.

Several scholars have warned not to consider sophistry as a uniform movement, or, in other words, they have suggested working on each specific sophist respecting his identity and the specificities of his work and thought. Since the 19th century, thanks to tools like the collection of sophistic fragments published by Diels and Kranz, this is not a difficult task anymore, and although we can still recognize some general common aspects in the authors of both the First and Second Sophistic (as the two major periods of the ancient sophistry are called) we also can clearly see the specificity of each source. For the authors of the Renaissance that was not an easy task, since some of their major sources for knowledge of the sophists, i.e. Plato and Aristotle, tend to identify the nature of sophistry (or the sophist as a kind, for example in Plato's *Sophist*) rather than the specificity of each sophist. I think the Hydra, as a metaphor of sophistry, as it is presented in Plato's dialogue *Euthydemus* (297c–d), expresses quite well this ambivalent identity of sophistry, which is one of the reasons why I chose Antonio del Pollaiuolo's painting *Hercules and the Hydra* (c. 1475) as the icon of our conference: sophists are many different individuals who share important features, for example the use of rhetoric as a powerful mean of persuasion, but also keep their own identity, which allows us, for example, to call both Protagoras of Abdera and Gorgias of Leontini 'sophists' but with a full awareness of their deep differences. It is not my intention to deepen this aspect of the subject, which is a task for specialists of ancient sophistic literature considered by itself and before its impact on the Renaissance culture, but it is worth remarking that this ambivalence between the actual sophists, perceived as different from each other, and their belonging to the same kind, at least in the eyes of classical sources, also affected the Renaissance reception, as this also emerges from the papers here published.

3. The collected papers

MacPhail's essay focuses on the study of religion as a human institution and argues that Niccolò Machiavelli and Michel de Montaigne followed the sophists' approach in addressing religion from a social-thought perspective. Particularly interesting is Montaigne's variation on the fragment of Protagoras of Abdera's *Peri theon*. The essay explores, therefore, a possible use of sophistic perspective by vernacular authors as a response to important questions of their time. We should highlight that even when there is no sign of direct contact between the early modern authors and sophistic literature, the influence of the latter on the former is still worth investigating, as it is in any research of hidden textual sources, and even more.

One may argue, in fact, that because of the *damnatio memoriae* of the sophists, which caused the survival of only fragments and indirect sources and a stigma around them, we should not expect clear references to them as if they were classics of the Western philosophical canon. Even when they were reborn in the 15th and 16th centuries, the sophists were never treated like Plato, Aristotle and all the other well-accepted founders of Western civilization. The history of the sophists and their legacy over the centuries is, so to speak, a telluric tradition, a hidden history, and somehow a “*storia notturna*” (to use the expression of the well-known Carlo Ginzburg’s book title on early modern witchcraft, which also deals with the difficulty of retracing a deceiving cultural phenomenon). One could say that the study of the sophists’ fortune requires quite a divergence from the traditional source-oriented approach. Traditionally (perhaps now less than before) students learn to look at the sources of a text to understand its identity and assess its originality against tradition, but with sophistic sources the historian often cannot proceed in this way. The presence of a sophist or a sophistic approach or argument in an early modern text rarely emerges clearly and very rarely is clearly stated by the author. The legacy of sophistry in literature is a deceiving presence and, for the most part, difficult to detect. Coherently with its nature, sophistry appears in the Renaissance in the most paradoxical ways: for example, the “speaking against speech”, the use of rhetoric against itself to confirm its power (MacPhail 2011, II.3), or the rebirth of sophistry thanks to the rebirth of its worst enemy, i.e. Plato, as it was with the Latin translation of Plato’s entire work by the humanist and philosopher Marsilio Ficino who wanted to reestablish the authority of Plato but, quite ironically, also reintroduced sophistry to Western culture.

To Ficino’s commentary on Plato’s *Gorgias* is dedicated Leo Catana’s contribution. Catana stresses the fact that, although sophistry had been known through Aristotle’s works before Ficino, the translation of Plato gave an identity to the ancient sophists as they act as actual characters in his dialogues and interact with Socrates and other interlocutors on an imaginary stage. Plato let us meet his enemies while he humanizes them – so to speak. Analysing Ficino’s commentary to the *Gorgias*, Catana highlights what we mentioned above: ancient sophists are treated as a homogeneous group, which contradicts the sources, as now scholars know very well. Furthermore, Catana points out that Ficino looked at the sophists, particularly Callicles, as he is depicted in Plato’s *Gorgias*, not only as a rhetorician but also as a thinker with political and natural law theories, which confirms the necessity of studying the sophistic reception as a field different from the history of rhetoric. This brings the author to wonder about the possible impact of the sophistic rebirth in the Renaissance on political theories in the early modern period, which not only brings the reader back to MacPhail’s discussion on Machiavelli in these proceedings, but also to an interesting association with sophistry by political thinkers. To mention only one example, Thomas Hobbes entitled the second part of his *Art of rhetoric* “the art of sophistry”, which witnesses an interest in the subject on the part of one of the most influential political thinkers in the Western tradition. How much does Hobbes rely on the Renaissance interpretative filter

for his knowledge of the sophists? And, even more importantly, did sophistic theories and Renaissance interpretations of them play a role in his thought?

The transmission of sophistic approaches and ideas to Renaissance authors did not happen only through Plato and Aristotle – to mention the major philosophers addressing sophistry – but also thanks to authors of late antiquity who influenced the rhetoric and literature of the Renaissance. As argued by Marco Munarini’s work, Synesius of Cyrene (4th century), a Neo-platonic rhetorician and philosopher belonging to the school of Hypatia, could have had an important part in the development of some aspects of the philosophy of Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola. The demiurge power of speech, the role of imagination, the divine conception of man, and other major aspects of humanist anthropology, in the way in which Ficino and Pico shaped and transmitted it to the following centuries, may have been shaped, or at least inspired by, sophistic rhetoric and philosophy of late antiquity.

The history of sophistry within the Latin literature of the Renaissance does not end in the 15th century and is not limited to Italy. As Marc van der Poel demonstrates in his paper, an interest for sophistry is documented in the work of the Frisian scholar Rudolph Agrippa, while the French Jesuit Louis de Cressolles establishes the first comprehensive history of the Greek ancient sophists in his *Theatrum*, published in Paris in 1620. Interestingly, Agricola’s judgment about the sophists is entirely positive, whereas several parts of Cressolles’ work criticizes the art of ancient sophists from the Platonic point of view. Writing some fifty years after the Council of Trent, Cressolles establishes his survey of sophists to reinforce the doctrine of the Roman Church, as required at his time. Although recognizing the relevance of Fumaroli’s (1994) chapter on Cressolles and the related notion of “*sophistique sacrée*”, Van der Poel goes further and argues that the *Theatrum* is above all a broad collection of testimonies, the first of the early modern age and still useful to be consulted. It is worth mentioning that in so doing Cressolles shares with Ficino the ironic destiny of condemning sophistry while he contributes to its diffusion and legacy. Between Agricola and Cressolles, other authors refer to the ancient sophists. Van der Poel addresses in particular the *De instrumento probabilitatis* of the humanist Juan Luis Vives, who explicitly refers to Agricola’s *De inventione dialectica*. Van der Poel’s contribution opens the path for exploration of the sophistic Renaissance of Europe’s Latin literature during the humanist era and beyond, following the variety of perspectives offered in different times and cultural contexts.

If Cressolles was the first early modern author to build a detailed inventory of ancient sophists, Aldus Manutius printed the first collection of ancient rhetoricians’ texts which also included sophistic pieces: the two volumes of the *Greek Orators* (1513). Gulizia’s contribution focuses on the insertion of the ancient sophist Alcidas in the first volume as a case study for the analysis of the transmission, management, and printing of the materials coming from the Byzantine world to Venice, where printing activity at the time was one of the largest and most intensive in Europe. Indeed, in Venice one detects a concentration of printing initiatives that marked the rebirth of soph-

istry for the entire Western world. As a matter of fact, at the beginning of the 16th century, Manutius published Philostratus' *Lives of the Sophists* in 1503, Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen*, along with other sophistic texts in 1513, and the whole of Plato's works in the same year, to mention only some of the publications that are directly related to the ancient sophists, which fostered their fortune.⁸

Jorge Ledo's broad project of mapping the Latin vocabulary of sophistry in the Renaissance is a different way of looking at the inventory of activities developed at the time, although he does not focus on names, theories or works, but rather on linguistic terms related to sophistry. Indeed, after an extensive introduction to the subject, Ledo discusses different categories of words which rivals use to attack each other in several kinds of intellectual debates and on a variety of subjects. Ledo aims at reconstructing the origin, evolution, and uses of this lexicon, which sheds light not only on the humanist critique of scholasticism but also and more widely on the sophistic sources of disputation in the early modern era. Indeed, the variety of terms analyzed in Ledo's paper includes not only *sophisma*, *sophista*, and others which immediately refer to sophistry, but also terms less directly related to the subject and still overlapping its semantic area, such as *altercationes* and *argutiae*, which Ledo detects in several early modern *logothecae* – a term that he borrows from Guillaume Budé. The linguistic perspective adopted by Ledo's paper suggests looking at the evolution of language (in this case Latin, but future research projects should also address the vernaculars) as the major channel for the diffusion of sophistry. One may wonder how much of an impact the translation (not only literally but also culturally) of sophistic notions, ideas, arguments, and strategies had on the metamorphosis of sophistry, this strange creature (Hydra for Plato, "testuggine" for Speroni, Proteo for others) that had survived all *damnatio memoriae* from ancient Greece to the Renaissance. But one may also wonder the opposite: how much the injection of sophistic elements, and the debate over them, had had an impact on the evolution and transformation of language and culture in the early modern period. In other words, and without overestimating the role that sophistry played in Europe since the 15th century, the assessment of this aspect of the subject may contribute to the understanding of the conflict and debate that had such an important part in numerous aspects of European Renaissance culture.

The use of the Second Sophistic – particularly Lucian of Samosata – for the exploitation of mythological and animal metaphors, and the conflictual climate of the Reformation are discussed in Elisa Bacchi's contribution on Erasmus' ethics and its rhetorical origin. Bacchi argues that Erasmus, influenced also by the Italian humanist Leon Battista Alberti, does not conceive of his aesthetic and rhetorical means as a mere external apparatus, but rather as a substantial part of his ethical discourse. The debate between Erasmus and Martin Luther along with his intellectual and friendly exchange with Thomas More, which are the relationships addressed by Bacchi, give the opportunity to see how Erasmus exploits the sophistic tradition and its allegories to face the urgent issues of his time. This essay demonstrated that MacPhail's book, in which Erasmus plays a major role, has actually opened

and inspired further promising research exploration in the field.

4. Conclusion and future research

We are aware that this collection of essays does not cover some important parts of the history of the Sophistic Renaissance that could have a place here. We are also aware that important connections of sophistry with other traditions and fields are not mentioned. As mentioned above, this conference was meant as a first attempt to gather scholars *to start* enhancing the study of the subject. In the spirit of the Venetian meeting, I believe it is worth at least mentioning some directions we could take in the future to further our exploration.

The relationship between sophistic sources and the rebirth of skepticism in the Renaissance seems to be one of the most promising candidates. Indeed, the connection between skeptics and sophists appears several times and in several forms in the 16th century, for example in Montaigne or even more clearly in Sextus Empiricus' use of Gorgias and Protagoras, as already noted by MacPhail (2011), but also in some important Italian authors, such as Speroni and Jacopo Mazzoni.

Another line of research is suggested by the metaphor of persuasive speech as a *pharmacōn*, in fact, both poison and medicine, depending on the speaker's use and intention, presented by Gorgias in his *Encomium of Helen* – that is, the relationship between the history of sophistic rhetoric and the history of medicine. This topic has already had attention regarding the ancient world, for example in Gleason's study (1995) on oratory in ancient Rome. Here, she refers to the relevance of the physiological knowledge of time for the analysis of sophists' self-presentation. Given the 15th and 16th-century rebirth of ancient sophistic and medical texts, it would be worth exploring if the connection established in the ancient world flourished again in the Renaissance, even in different original forms, considering that both medicine and rhetoric played an important role in university as well as in public life at the time, as it did in the Venetian area.

Furthermore, specific primary sources deserve further study – in particular Cressolles' *Theatrum* (1620) and Dornavius' *Amphitheatrum sapientiae socraticae jocosariae* (1619). Regarding the former, it would be interesting to analyze which sources and scholars he uses. The latter is interesting for its traces of reception of the ancient sophists one might find given the tight connection between the paradoxical *Encomia* and sophistry in the Renaissance: for example, Erasmus' *Praise of Folly* – among the most well-known works – and Speroni's *Dialogo della Discordia* – whose relationship with sophistry is recently an object of scholarly interest (Katinis 2015).

We already mentioned political thinkers and theory related to the Renaissance reception of sophistry (Machiavelli and Hobbes) and we could add others, usually not considered political thinkers, who acknowledge the originality of sophistic fragments on ethics and politics. Speroni, for example, supports an extreme form of relativism in assessing the value of laws in different republics on several occasions. How much of the intense connection between ancient sophists and the city (i.e. the 'natural'

environment of the sophist) was reflected in early modern interpretations? To what extent are Renaissance thinkers interested in sophistry because of the analogy they perceived between their time and the ancient political environment of Greece?

Other directions of research are possible and it is not my intention to make a list of them, yet, in whichever manner the exploration continues, philological and translation enterprises (sometimes not very welcome in the current academic environment) should be considered precious allies of any further research activities.

The contributions collected in these proceedings demonstrate, among other things, that the Renaissance of sophistry and sophists began centuries before the modern philological, historical and theoretical enterprises of Diels and Kranz, Untersteiner, De Romilly, Cassin and others who have aimed at rediscovering this neglected part of Western tradition. The Sophistic Renaissance started in the Latin texts of Italian humanists and was transmitted, through translations and interpretations, over the centuries thanks to the interest of early modern scholars who saw in sophistic literature an ally or an enemy to destroy, a treasure to preserve or a danger to avoid - in any case worthy of investigation.

I do not dare to claim that a new field of study is open - and I would gladly avoid adding a new item to the overproliferation of categories and sub-categories of studies characterizing our time - but I hope this effort of revealing the hidden history of the Sophistic Renaissance will inspire and attract scholars from different disciplines to extend the exploration that started with MacPhail's book in 2011 (aside from a few older and narrower contributions before it).

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Notes

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- ² An important meeting on the legacy of the sophist was held in Germany in 1979, see the proceedings in Kerferd.
- ³ Although my Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellowship had an "early termination" after the first year, my research project was completed at Ghent University and the final outcomes are now published in a monograph (Katinis 2018).
- ⁴ See Struever (chapter I) on Gorgias of Leontini and the Humanism, Bausi on Leonardo Bruni, Nauta (255-260) on Protagoras of Abdera and Lorenzo Valla, Allen and Katinis (2013 and 2018) on Marsilio Ficino, and Giglioli on Gerolamo Cardano,
- ⁵ Pozzi, Girardi, Fournel (216-220), Katinis 2018 (chapters II and III).
- ⁶ Scarpati, Scarpati-Bellini, Russo, Katinis 2018 (chapter IV).
- ⁷ Merkel 2004 and 2011.
- ⁸ MacPhail 2011, 39-40.

Peri Theôn: The Renaissance Confronts the Gods

Eric MacPhail

Abstract: This essay traces the legacy of the ancient Greek sophists in the European Renaissance with particular attention to the study of religion as a human institution. Vernacular writers such as Niccolò Machiavelli and Michel de Montaigne follow the lead of the sophists in their effort to bring religion into the field of social thought. Montaigne himself offers a particularly interesting variation on the sole remaining fragment of Protagoras of Abdera's *Peri theon*. In this way, these thinkers inscribe themselves in a genealogy of sophistic that continues from Classical Greece to the Enlightenment.

Keywords: sophists, religion, atheism, enlightenment, Protagoras, Montaigne, Machiavelli.

In *The Greeks and the Irrational*, E. R. Dodds explains that the Enlightenment did not begin with the sophists. "The Enlightenment is of course much older" (180). For students of European history, this chronology of enlightenment is hardly a matter of course. Yet within classical studies and the history of ancient thought, it is standard usage, more so in the Germanic languages than in the Romance languages,¹ to designate the latter half of the fifth century as either the Greek Enlightenment, the Sophistic Enlightenment, or even, in at least one instance, the Euripidean Enlightenment. This usage developed in the wake of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment in order to identify some trans-historical affinities between the leading thinkers of the Periclean Age and the modern Enlightenment philosophers. These affinities are broadly subsumed under the headings of rationalism and atheism. As applied to the ancient world, Enlightenment involves a rationalist critique of traditional values in the context of some political crisis or revolution. Characteristic is the view of Friedrich Solmsen: "The Greek Enlightenment of the fifth century B.C., also known as the Rationalistic Movement or the Age of the Sophists, is generally associated with progressive or revolutionary ideas and even more, perhaps, with their negative correlate, the questioning of time-honored beliefs and values" (3). This paradigm can apply to other times and places than ancient Greece and eighteenth-century Europe, and, at the limit, can serve to organize a comprehensive history of human civilization such as the East German scholar Hermann Ley's multivolume study on Enlightenment and Atheism, whose title is meant to be redundant. The protagonists of the Greek Enlightenment are the sophists, whose collective identity is professional rather than ideological, but whose fame and infamy spring from their corrosive chal-

lenge to traditional values and beliefs and from their exclusive focus on human society and what we may call, in retrospect, the human sciences.

It must be stressed at the outset, not only of this intervention but also of our larger research project, that the unity of the sophists cannot derive from their coherence as a philosophical school or their adherence to any common doctrinal system. Moreover, it was Hermann Diels and Walther Kranz who defined the corpus of the sophists through the successive editions of their monumental anthology, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (DK), even though the sophists are not really presocratic in any meaningful sense of the term. Therefore, the status of the sophists as an object of inquiry meets with some resistance among historians of philosophy. Rather than form a distinct school of thought, sophistic can be understood as the natural expression of a new consciousness of the problems of social life in late fifth-century Greece. The scholar most closely associated with this approach is Mario Untersteiner, a leading editor and commentator of the sophists. Following in the same tradition, Giovanni Reale sees the sophists as the exponents of a new cultural paradigm that supplants the prior cultural paradigm of natural philosophy with a countervailing interest in anthropology (Reale, 17-19). My own point of emphasis is how the sophists, and their heirs and successors in subsequent eras, bring religion itself into the field of social thought.

The paradigmatic figure in this regard is Protagoras of Abdera, who is credited with authoring the first treatise ever written on the gods or *peri theon*. Coming on the heels of a long tradition of natural philosophy represented by works entitled *peri phuseos*, Protagoras' *Peri theon* marks a change of emphasis which is all the more remarkable in so far as Protagoras does not really seem to be interested in theology. The *Peri theon* is a very convenient work to analyze since all that remains is the opening sentence, and, as we know, the shorter the fragment, the longer the commentary. Diogenes Laertius and other doxographers conserve Protagoras' opening words, with slight variations, as "regarding the gods, I do not know if they exist or if they do not exist or what form they have, for human life is short and the subject is obscure" (DK 80B4).² As many scholars have remarked, this is not a very promising beginning for a treatise on the gods, and some have even wondered if Protagoras really wrote a book on the gods that seems to disavow its subject matter from the outset (Fritz, 920). One hypothesis offered by historians of ancient philosophy is that Protagoras must have rehearsed arguments for and against theism or belief

in the gods in accordance with the spirit of his *Antilogiai* or opposing speeches, a work attested in Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of the Philosophers* (9.55).³ Some have even reconstructed these opposing arguments from the doxographic surveys in Cicero's *De natura deorum* and Sextus Empiricus' *Adversus Mathematicos* (Gigon). One weakness of this hypothesis is that Sextus classifies Protagoras among the dogmatic atheists, who argued on one side of the question, not both. I prefer to follow a different but no less authoritative conjecture, which was developed by Rodolfo Mondolfo on the basis of a suggestion by Werner Jaeger.

In 1936 Jaeger delivered a series of lectures in English, which were later published under the title *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers*, of which the last chapter or last lecture is on the sophists. Jaeger recognizes the sophists as, essentially, the first social scientists of religion. For the sophists, the study of religion belongs to the study of man, and so Jaeger declares, "But the real fathers of rational anthropology are the fifth-century Sophists. In this respect they resemble the philosophers of the modern Enlightenment, who perform a similar function and have many close points of contact with them" (175). This is the phrase that caught the eye of Frank Manuel and supposedly gave him the idea for his ground breaking study, *The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods*, to which my own title alludes. "The idea for the study first occurred to me while reading Werner Jaeger's description of ancient rationalistic theory in *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers*. The affinity between Sophist and Enlightenment thought, to which Professor Jaeger there alludes in passing, challenged me" (Manuel, vii). Thus my essay situates itself in a genealogy of sophistic from Classical Greece to the Enlightenment via the Renaissance. Jaeger credits the sophists with reorienting the object of philosophical inquiry from objective knowledge of divine essence, such as the natural philosophers sought, to human subjectivity, by analyzing man himself. In particular, he highlights the role of Protagoras of Abdera, who looks upon religion as an anthropological fact to be understood in the light of its origin and function in human society.⁴

This is the viewpoint that Rodolfo Mondolfo seized upon in his magisterial study of the human subject in classical antiquity, first composed in Spanish and best known in its Italian version, *La comprensione del soggetto umano nell'antichità classica*. In a chapter on the subjectivization of religious representations, Mondolfo rehearses Jaeger's argument and applies it more particularly to Protagoras' enigmatic treatise *Peri theon*, whose first and, for posterity, last sentence seems to foreclose any sequel or even any content. If Protagoras does not want to say whether the gods exist or not or in what form, what is left to talk about? The only thing left to discuss, Mondolfo insinuates, are the motives and the function of religious belief in human society (Mondolfo, 95-96). No more prudent than his fellow classicists, Mondolfo insists that Protagoras must have asked, why do people believe in the gods, and, following the utilitarian bent of sophistic thought, how can society use religion to its own advantage? Other sophists dealt with these same questions, including Critias in the famous Sisyphus fragment conserved by Sextus Empiricus in book nine of his *Adversus*

Mathematicos (DK 88B25).⁵ To confirm Critias's credentials as an atheist, Sextus cites a dramatic poem (elsewhere identified as the tragedy of Sisyphus by Euripides) where one of the characters, perhaps the protagonist Sisyphus, explains the invention of religion as a political expedient. In the beginning men lived a beastly and disordered life, with no reward for virtue or punishment of vice, until laws were passed to punish crime and secure justice. Since law deterred overt but not covert crime, some ingenious and prudent man first invented the fear of gods and persuaded others to believe in an eternal power that sees everything we do, hears everything we say, and even knows our secret thoughts so that no misdeed can escape detection. Moreover, this invention is explicitly acknowledged to be a lie, a ψεύδος λόγος, or *falsa oratio* for Gentian Hervet, the Renaissance translator. Thus the Sisyphus fragment, which enjoyed a fairly wide diffusion in Greek, Latin, and, in condensed form, even in French in the late sixteenth century, represents religion as a surveillance system that supplements the law and limits the scope for undetected crime.⁶ God is assigned the role of the ἐπίσκοπος or *inspector rerum* whose all-encompassing view keeps everyone in line at least until they realize that it's all a hoax. This theory of religion necessarily seems irreligious, since to explain the instrumental value of religious belief is to undermine such belief.

Roman state religion seems to have been the heir to this legacy of sophistic thought, at least according to the testimony of Marcus Varro conserved in Saint Augustine's *City of God*. Augustine quotes Varro to the effect that, as there are some truths which it is not useful for the people to know, so there are some falsehoods which it is expedient to believe, including the belief that some men are born from the gods (Varro 23).⁷ Presumably, Varro would have counted his own understanding of religion as one of the truths best concealed from the people. Cicero largely endorses this understanding of the political expediency of religion in the *De natura deorum* through the role of C. Aurelius Cotta, who, though a priest, allows himself to doubt in private conversation or *in consessu* what he affirms in public speech or *in contione* (1.61).⁸ Apparently Cotta is the better able to perform his functions as a priest because he does not really believe in the gods. Ironically, it is Cotta who denounces the Epicureans as atheists who eradicate religion from the minds of men (*De natura deorum* 1.121). What is the difference, he asks, between Epicurus and other atheists like Diagoras, Theodorus, Protagoras, or the author of the *Sisyphus*:

Li qui dixerunt totam de dis immortalibus opinionem fictam esse ab hominibus sapientibus rei publicae causa, ut quos ratio non posset eos ad officium religio duceret, nonne omnem religionem funditus sustulerunt? (*De natura deorum* 1.118)

Those who have said that the whole idea of the immortal gods was made up by wise men for the sake of the republic, so that those whom reason cannot guide to duty, religion would, have they not completely eradicated all religion?

This is Cicero's paraphrase of the Sisyphus fragment, which he denounces precisely because it is true, and some truths should never be acknowledged in public. Rather than writing a play for the theater, Critias would have

been better off writing a dialogue for his friends. All these figures from Critias to Cicero are precursors to our Sophistic Renaissance.

Following this genealogy, we may ask the question, where in Renaissance literature, in Latin or the vernacular, can we hear an echo of Protagoras' *Peri theon*? Who else, in the wake of Protagoras, thinks that life is too short for theology but just right for the sociology of religion?⁹ I propose to turn first to a figure who took an unseemly interest in how religion was used in Republican Rome and misused in Renaissance Italy, namely Niccolò Machiavelli, my first candidate for the invidious title of Renaissance sophist. In the first book of the *Discorsi*, Machiavelli devotes a series of chapters to a scandalously convincing appraisal of Roman religion as a triumph of statecraft and a complete imposture (*Discorsi* I, 11-15).¹⁰ Machiavelli admires the ancient Romans for using religion to promote civic order and military discipline, and he insinuates that Roman religion was successful because the people believed in it and the ruling class did not (*Discorsi* I, 12). In this way, ancient Rome and its class conflicts exemplify the crucial tension between belief and understanding: religious belief obscures understanding and understanding dissipates belief. In this dichotomy, the author of the *Discorsi* obviously identifies with the interpreters of religion, as John Najemy calls them, rather than with the believers. In short, with Machiavelli we witness the modern instauration of a resolutely non-theological approach to religion.

Where else can we find in Renaissance literature a modern adaptation of the *Peri theon*? Who follows next in the wake of Protagoras? My main candidate for the dubious distinction of Renaissance sophist, and one who certainly knew Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of the Philosophers*, is the French Renaissance prose writer and inventor of the essay form, Michel de Montaigne. The question of Montaigne's relationship to sophistic has already been raised and answered rather categorically by François Rigolot in an article on Montaigne and rhetoric. "La position de Montaigne vis-à-vis de la sophistique ne fait aucun doute," he says. "Chez lui comme chez la plupart de ses contemporains--on pense surtout à Érasme--le terme est toujours pris dans un sens dépréciatif" (80). This is all the more true if we take the term "sophistic" to be a synonym of "scholastic," which I do not.¹¹ Rather, leaving aside the question of Montaigne and rhetoric, which as Rigolot acknowledges is not simply a question of antagonism, I want to situate Montaigne in relation to sophistic social thought. I will begin with Montaigne's essay on custom, "De la coustume et de ne changer aisément une loy reçue" (I, 23), which merits close attention for its contribution to the "functional analysis of religion"¹² which extends throughout Montaigne's essays. Ostensibly devoted to the tyranny of custom and the arbitrary authority of the law, while advocating the strictest adherence to law and custom, before recognizing in civil war an exception to its own rule, "De la coustume" revisits the prototypically sophistic distinction between *nomos* and *physis* or law and nature.¹³ Montaigne could have encountered this familiar topos in the dialogues of Xenophon and Plato if not in the less accessible, or in the case of Antiphon, inaccessible fragments of the sophists themselves.

Following a long enumeration of diverse and, for a European audience, perverse customs illustrative of the relativity of cultural values, Montaigne argues that our very morality or the distinctions we draw between right and wrong are conventional rather than natural. "Les loix de la conscience, que nous disons naistre de nature, naisent de la coustume: chacun ayant en veneration interne les opinions et moeurs approuvées et receuës autour de luy, ne s'en peut desprendre sans remors, ny s'y appliquer sans applaudissement" (I, 23, 115 C).¹⁴ This issue continued to preoccupy Montaigne as he revised his essay on the Exemple de Bordeaux until his death in 1592, adding the concrete example of a virtue that is conventional rather than natural: "la pudicité" or *pudicitia*. Writing in the margins of his own copy of the 1588 edition of the *Essais*, after attributing to Plato himself the notion that sexual mores are conventional rather than natural, Montaigne declares: "De vrai, la pudicité est une belle vertu, et de laquelle l'utilité est assez connue: mais de la traiter et faire valoir selon nature, il est autant malaysé, comme il est aisé de la faire valoir selon l'usage, les loix et les preceptes" (I, 23, 117 C). Here Montaigne renders the second term of the *Physis* / *Nomos* dichotomy with three vernacular terms: "l'usage, les loix et les preceptes." Like the sophists, then, Montaigne classifies law and morality under the heading of *nomos*. However, as Aldo Magris reminds us in his article on Greek Enlightenment, to recognize that morality is conventional is not to minimize its importance, nor is it, by any means, subversive: "Anche la morale, dunque, è una costruzione umana, ed una convenzione, ma ciò non toglie per nulla la sua importanza, dato che questa importanza si misura sulla sua utilità sociale" (248). Jacqueline de Romilly makes very much the same point in her analysis of the sophistic critique of the law (93). For Montaigne, as a sophist, the law is valid because it is conventional; it is a convention entered into for the mutual benefit of society. This can explain, I believe, why such a caustic critique of custom yields such a classic expression of conservatism in "De la coustume": "Car c'est la regle des regles, et generale loy des loix, que chacun observe celles du lieu où il est" (I, 23, 118 A).¹⁵ The only general law he recognizes is the need to obey our own laws and to honor our own customs.

Moreover, the convention that most appeals to Montaigne, and that he most strongly urges his audience to respect, is the Catholic religion. The French are Catholic by convention, and they would do well to remain so, is the burden of his essay on custom. When he does speak of Christianity in this essay, he offers a very unorthodox endorsement: "La religion Chrestienne a toutes les marques d'extreme justice et utilité; mais nulle plus apparente, que l'exacte recommandation de l'obéissance du Magistrat, et manutention des polices" (I, 23, 120 B). Here the criterion of utility completely displaces the question of truth.¹⁶ In that respect, Machiavelli and Montaigne invoke the same criterion but arrive at opposite conclusions in their evaluation of Christianity.

Montaigne further inscribes himself in the sophistic tradition through his very keen insight into what we may call the psychology of superstition, which is related to the faculty of the imagination. In his essay, from the first book, on the force of the imagination (I, 21), Montaigne compiles a leisurely sequence of anecdotes involving

what we might call psychosomatic ailments, illustrative of the power of the human imagination. The initial version of the essay includes a rather categorical statement of rationalism, the feature most emblematic of the sophistic enlightenment. “Il est vray semblable que le principal credit des miracles, des visions, des enchantemens et de tels effects extraordinaires, vienne de la puissance de l’imagination agissant principalement contre les ames du vulgaire, plus molles. On leur a si fort saisi la creance, qu’ils pensent voir ce qu’ils ne voyent pas” (I, 21, 99 A). It is most likely, Montaigne declares, that the credit we give to miracles, visions, enchantments, and other extraordinary effects comes from the power of the imagination acting primarily on the minds of the common people, whose credulity is so far preoccupied, “si fort saisi,” that they think they see what they do not see. Therefore the category of the supernatural is a subjective representation rather than an objective reality. In revising his essay, Montaigne added a comic anecdote about a friend of his who suffered from sexual impotence on his wedding night and who was cured by a psychological ruse, which Montaigne does not hesitate to call a “miracle” (I, 21, 100 C), that exploited the friend’s belief in sorcery and more particularly in the type of magic spell that the French call “les nouements d’aiguillettes.” It is clear that the essay on the imagination inscribes itself in a very specific ideological context, namely, the vogue of demonology and the persecution of witches in late Renaissance Europe (Nakam, 377-97). In this context, Montaigne’s aristocratic friend was no more able than the common people to resist the lure of superstition.

The very same year that Montaigne published the first two books of *Essays* in 1580, Jean Bodin published his fanatical treatise *De la démonomanie des sorciers* where he strenuously rebuts the kind of rationalist arguments that Montaigne uses to explain belief in witches. Among other details, he adds juridical testimony to defend belief in “les nouements d’aiguillettes” that Montaigne demystifies (Bodin, 182). Moreover, Bodin draws a very imprudent connection between religious orthodoxy and demonology. In the appendix to his work that he calls “Réfutation des opinions de Jean Wier,” aimed at the physician Johann Weyer, whose treatise *De praestigiiis daemonum* appeared in 1563, supplemented by the *De Lamiis* in 1577, Bodin insists that to refute sorcery, as Weyer and Montaigne and some others do, is to refute religion. If sorcery isn’t real, then god isn’t real (Bodin, 469, 475). Bodin goes so far as to assert, against Weyer, that lycanthropy is just as certain as holy scripture: “Et en assurant que le changement des Sorciers en loups, et autres bestes est fabuleux, et que c’est une illusion, il fait une conclusion que l’histoire sacree est une fable et illusion, car s’il est fait en l’un, il se peut faire és autres, attendu que la puissance de Dieu n’est point diminuee” (475). This was immediately recognized as a dangerously inept approach to Christian apologetics, in fact so inept that it was open to suspicion of clandestine atheism.¹⁷ Whatever his secret motives may have been, Bodin does profess an absolute, literal belief in sorcery and witchcraft. For Bodin, who was primarily a jurist, what counts in this debate is the legal procedure used to prosecute witches. The guilty verdict is the goal of his book.

By contrast, Montaigne remains an agnostic on the objective question of guilt or innocence. Rather than render a verdict on the truth status of the examples he adduces, Montaigne prefers, in uncertain cases like the famous trial of Martin Guerre, to follow the model of the Areopagus, which, according to Valerius Maximus, deferred judgement on a capital case for one hundred years in order to avoid an “inexplicabilem cunctationem” (8.1.2) or insoluble dilemma. In witch trials, Montaigne wishes the court could simply declare, “La court n’y entend rien” (III, 11, 1030). In this way the essayist shuns what Andrea Frisch has called “the tribunal of history” and seeks instead to defuse the prosecutorial zeal of his contemporary French historians.

In his essay on the force of the imagination, Montaigne takes a rather casual attitude to the veracity of the anecdotes which he recounts, including the one about the falconer who made a bird fall from the sky merely by staring at it, “à ce qu’on dit” or according to hearsay (I, 21, 105 A). In revising his essay, Montaigne magnified this aspect of hearsay, insisting that he does not care if his examples of the power of the imagination are true or false. Verification and falsification are not the purpose of his book, which he defines as follows, in a key passage for understanding the essays: “Aussi en l’estude que je traite de noz moeurs et mouvemens, les tesmoignages fabuleux, pourveu qu’ils soient possibles, y servent comme les vrais. Advenu ou non advenu, à Paris ou à Rome, à Jean ou à Pierre, c’est tousjours un tour de l’humaine capacité, duquel je suis utilement advisé par ce recit” (I, 21, 105 C). First of all, the project of Montaigne’s essays is anthropological: he studies human *mores* (*nomoi* we might say) and movements. Primary among these “mœurs et mouvemens” is human credulity, our impulse to believe in the supernatural and the divine. It is indifferent to this study whether our beliefs are true or false, as long as they are useful, and as long as we grasp the use to which they are put in society. Therefore, he dismisses the objective question: do witches exist, are they guilty or innocent, “advenu ou non advenu”? In this question, that Montaigne refuses to answer, that he leaves in suspense at the end of his essay on the force of the imagination, I propose to hear an echo of the question that Protagoras puts aside at the outset of his *Peri theon*: the question of whether the gods exist. We do not know what Protagoras said next, because his text has been lost and perhaps suppressed by subsequent orthodoxies. However, we do know what our Renaissance authors wrote, and through our collective efforts, we may be able to retrieve some of the fugitive legacy of the sophists from the substantial remains of the European Renaissance.

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- ⁶ Sextus's *Adversus Mathematicos*, including the long version of the Sisyphus fragment, was first printed in Latin translation in Paris and Antwerp in 1569 while the shorter version of the fragment, attributed to Euripides, was found in the *De placitis philosophorum* included in Plutarch's *Moralia* and thus translated into French in 1572 by Jacques Amyot. The *editio princeps* of the *Moralia* was published by Aldo Manuzio in Venice in 1509.
- ⁷ Montaigne paraphrases Varro's opinion in the "Apologie de Raymond Sebond": "Voicy l'excuse que nous donnent, sur la consideration de ce subject, Scevola, grant pontife, et Varro, grand theologien, en leur temps: Qu'il est besoin que le peuple ignore beaucoup de choses vrayes et en croye beaucoup de fausses" (II, 12, 535).
- ⁸ On this point, see André.
- ⁹ Magris paraphrases the end of DK 80B4 as follows: "la vita umana è troppo breve e troppo preziosa per sprecarla in tali questioni; meglio dunque impiegare il proprio tempo nella soluzione di problemi più utili" (221).
- ¹⁰ For an analysis of these chapters, see Sasso, 549-560. Sasso anticipates, in order to contradict, my thesis when he argues that Machiavelli's concept of religion has only extrinsic connections with ancient sophistic: "E come il concetto che egli ne costruisce ha riscontri soltanto estrinseci con, poniamo, le antiche teorizzazioni sofistiche, così non ne ha alcuno con l'atteggiamento che predominò nel periodo della Controriforma" (553-554).
- ¹¹ For the use of the term *sophist* to designate the scholastic philosophers and professors of dialectic, see MacPhail 2011, 52-58.
- ¹² The term is taken from Machiavelli criticism, especially Preus. Before Preus, Tenenti focused his discussion of Machiavelli's religion on "la sua analisi funzionale delle credenze religiose" (715). MacPhail 2014 studies Montaigne's functional analysis of religion with particular reference to the essay "De la gloire" (II, 16).
- ¹³ For a general treatment of the theme, see Heinimann as well as Guthrie, 55-134.
- ¹⁴ The essays are cited by book, chapter, and page and also layer: A, B, or C for 1580, 1588, or the *Exemplaire de Bordeaux*.
- ¹⁵ See Langer for the tension between conservatism and critique in I, 23.
- ¹⁶ Similarly, Mathieu-Castellani: "l'utile se trouve privilégié par rapport à l'authentique" (10).
- ¹⁷ The seventeenth-century libertine Guy Patin bears an interesting testimony to Bodin's posthumous reputation for atheism and religious hypocrisy in a letter dated November 16, 1643: "La Démonomanie des Sorciers de Bodin ne vaut rien du tout. Il ne fit ce livre qu'afin qu'on crût qu'il y croyait, d'autant que, pour quelques opinions un peu libres, il fut soupçonné d'athéisme, parce qu'il favorisa les huguenots" (304).

Notes

- ¹ The usage is not unknown in the Romance languages. See Saitta as well as Magris.
- ² The fragment is conserved in Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers* 9.52; Eusebius of Caesarea, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 14.3.7; and Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos* 9.56.
- ³ This hypothesis was first proposed by Gomperz, 133-34. Untersteiner 1, 55 considers *Peri theon* to be the first section of the *Antilogiai*.
- ⁴ Summarizing Jaeger, 189, Babut says of Protagoras, "il est vraisemblable qu'il y appréciait positivement le fait religieux en tant que phénomène social et élément important de la culture humaine" (56).
- ⁵ See Davies for text, translation, commentary, and bibliography.

Marsilio Ficino's Commentary on Plato's *Gorgias*

Leo Catana

Abstract: Plato's *Gorgias* sets out to discuss the nature and aim of rhetoric. The dialogue was held in high esteem among late ancient Platonists and it resurfaced in Renaissance discussions about ethics. Olympiodorus (6th century) produced an extensive commentary on the dialogue, emphasising its ethical content. In 1409, Leonardo Bruni (1369-1444) provided the first complete Latin translation of the *Gorgias* with preface and annotations. Later in the Renaissance we find direct and indirect commentaries by George of Trebizond (1395-1472/1473) and Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499). I argue that Ficino's translation of, and commentary to, Plato's *Gorgias* was a significant, but perhaps also unintended, contribution to the dissemination of ancient sophists in the Italian Renaissance. Ficino's commentary to the *Gorgias* defends a legitimate and philosophical use of rhetoric, including the one we find in Plato's own writings. Furthermore, Ficino treats the character Callicles – together with several other sophists in Plato's dialogues – as an enemy of the Platonic-Pythagorean ethical ideal, maintaining that the sophists were wrong. Moreover, he treats ancient sophists as a fairly homogeneous group, unlike some of the ancient sources.

Keywords: Plato's *Gorgias*, sophists, Marsilio Ficino, rhetoric, philosophy.

1. Ficino and Renaissance sophistry

This article examines the Florentine humanist and philosopher Marsilio Ficino and his contribution to Renaissance sophistry. At first sight this may appear as an unpromising topic, since Ficino, an important Plato translator and Platonist, generally sided with Plato in his criticism of ancient sophistry: How could Ficino possibly have made a contribution to Renaissance sophistry?

The writings of ancient Greek sophists were lost in antiquity, and their ideas were mainly known through reports made by a variety of ancient authors. Plato was one of these authors, and he was the most important one, since he portrayed several sophists and their ideas in a series of his dialogues. As is well known, Plato did not do so in order to provide a detailed and objective account of the sophists' ideas, but in order to refute their ideas. Hence we have good reasons for believing that his account was biased.

To the Medieval Latin tradition, Plato's works were inaccessible with the exception of his *Timaeus* (up till 53b), which was available in Latin throughout the Medieval period. His *Meno*, *Phaedo* and his *Parmenides* were

translated in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, but, apart from the *Meno*, none of the dialogues conveyed much about ancient sophists. In the *Timaeus* we find the speaker *Critias*, whose relation to the speaker with the same name in the Plato dialogue entitled *Critias* is disputed, but the central point is that Critias in the *Timaeus* did not convey theories under the banner of sophistry.¹ In *Meno* 93c, Meno had related that sophists (*sophistai*) promised to teach virtue (*aretē*), adding that he admired Gorgias (probably a reference to Gorgias of Leontini), for his refusal to make such a promise; all he did was to teach oratory. Gorgias of Leontini (485-380) was a historical figure, who went to Athens on a diplomatic mission in 427, and Plato's *Gorgias* was clearly a reaction to his influence on Athenian rhetoric and politics.² In *Meno* 75e, Socrates had referred to Prodicus, but without linking his name to the sophists. In short, in the Medieval period there was no Plato dialogue available in Latin in which a sophist featured as a speaker, incarnating and articulating sophistic theories and arguments in an elaborate manner. This situation meant that little, apart from names and brief assertions, were known about the ancient Greek sophists in the Medieval period through the texts of Plato, the chief exponent of ancient Greek sophists.

It should be noted, however, that even though Plato's dialogues offered the most elaborate (though biased) account of ancient sophists and sophistry available to posterity, non-Platonic accounts of ancient sophists and sophistry existed in antiquity, and some of these were transmitted to the Latin Medieval tradition well before Ficino's 1484 translation of Plato's works. Notably, Aristotle had dealt with sophistry and sophisms in his logical as well as in his non-logical works, and these works had been available in Latin translation for several centuries before Ficino's Plato translation came out.³ It should be observed, however, that Aristotle rarely referred to individual sophists, so even though Medieval, Latin translations of Aristotle's works proceeded Ficino's Latin translation of Plato's dialogues and letters, these translations of Aristotle's works conveyed very little about the ancient sophists themselves, implying that to Medieval authors the 'sophist' was a virtually empty category, whereas 'sophistry' and 'sophism' denoted fairly well-known logical categories. Albert the Great (ca. 1200-1280), for instance, was familiar with the sophist name Gorgias through Aristotle's *Sophistical Refutations* (183b37), where Aristotle had criticised Gorgias for not conveying the art (*technē*) of rhetoric itself to his pupils, only its results; Albert's knowledge about Gorgias did not transcend these and other scattered notes found in Aristotle's work.⁴

There is, however, another important source to an-

cient sophists that pre-dated Ficino's Latin translation of 1484, namely ancient doxographer Diogenes Laertius. In 1433, the Florentine humanist Ambrogio Traversari completed a Latin translation of Laertius' *Lives*, which subsequently circulated in manuscript form before it was printed in Rome in 1472. In general, this work became a major source of information of ancient Greek philosophy in the Renaissance, but it was almost silent as regards the ancient sophists. In 9.50-56, Laertius presented a short entry on the life of one prominent ancient sophists, namely Protagoras. In 8.58, in the section on Empedocles, he made a brief note on another ancient sophist, Gorgias of Leontini: Laertius claimed that Gorgias was a pupil (*mathētēs*) of Empedocles, an accomplished orator, and the author of a manual on the art of rhetoric.⁵

In 1484 Ficino published the collected works of Plato, containing a number of dialogues portraying some of the most influential ancient sophists. Given the restricted knowledge about sophists in the medieval period, this was a major event. We normally think of Ficino as the one who transmitted Plato's ideas to the Latin tradition, but we should reckon that by doing so Ficino also played an important role in the transmission of ancient sophistry. Ficino did so by providing Latin translations of Plato's dialogues discussing sophists and by writing commentaries to these dialogues — commentaries, that were printed together with the dialogues themselves in the 1484 publication and in many subsequent publications of Plato's collected works. Even though Ficino by and large sided with Plato in his rejection of the sophists, he inadvertently promoted their ideas in the Renaissance. For this reason I think Ficino's translations of, and especially his commentaries to, Plato's dialogues on the sophists is a promising topic, if we want to understand the uses of the ancient sophists in the Renaissance. It may be useful to clarify the historiographical concept of sophists before I examine Ficino's discussion of ancient sophists.

2. Who counted as sophists to Ficino?

Who should be included in the group of ancient sophists, and can one legitimately speak of them as one unified group?⁶ This is an acute problem in modern scholarship dedicated to ancient Greek sophistry, but it is also a problem when dealing with Ficino's stance towards the sophists as they were presented in Plato's dialogues. As regards the first question — who should we count as sophists — we may, at least for a start, consult the 1952 list in Diels-Kranz' sixth edition of their *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, section D, entitled *Ältere Sophistik*.⁷ Their list includes the following early Greek sophists: Protagoras, Xenias, Gorgias, Lykophron, Prodicus, Thrasymachus, Hippias, Antiphon, Critias and the anonymous Iamblichus. We should be aware, however, that Diels-Kranz' list is premised on historiographical assumptions that can be debated, and that the identification of the group among ancient Greek and Latin authors was a contentious issue. Given this situation, combined with our limited knowledge about the reception and interpretation of ancient sophists in the Renaissance, I prefer to be cautious and to refrain from establishing a list of ancient thinkers perceived as sophists in the Renaissance. To Renaissance

authors, including Ficino, the tag 'sophist' denoted a battle field rather than a well-defined profession. For this reason my second question — were ancient sophists a unified group — becomes even harder to answer, and I shall leave it open.

The present article is on Ficino's commentary on Plato's *Gorgias*. Was the protagonist Gorgias regarded as a sophist by Plato and Ficino? Let me first turn to Plato. In his *Gorgias*, the character Gorgias presents himself not as a 'sophist' but as an orator (*rhētōr*) (449a6) mastering rhetoric (*rhētorikē*), whose status as a craft (*technē*) is subsequently contested by Socrates. The fact that Plato has Gorgias presenting himself as an "orator" (*rhētōr*) does not exclude, of course, that he is regarded as a sophist in other of Plato's dialogues. Besides, the orator and the sophist may well co-exist in one person. This possibility is affirmed in some of Plato's other dialogues. In the *Apology* 19e, Socrates groups Gorgias of Leontini together with other sophists (*sophistai*) like Prodicus of Ceos and Hippias of Elis: They were itinerant teachers of young people. In the *Meno* 95c, Meno asserts that Gorgias differs from (other) sophists by not promising his pupils that he can teach virtue; he only teaches rhetoric. In (pseudo-)Plato's *Greater Hippias* 282b4-5, Gorgias of Leontini is spoken of as "Gorgias of Leontini, the famous sophist" (*Gorgias te gar houtos ho Leontinos sophistēs*). Now let me turn to Ficino: Did he regard Gorgias as a sophist?

Ficino, in his *Gorgias* commentary, describes sophists as those who, under the guise of truth, divert men towards what is false.⁸ Gorgias of Leontini, the portrayed speaker in Plato's *Gorgias*, did not aim at truth and justice, but conformed with popular opinion, which prefers what has the appearance of truth and likelihood, Ficino says.⁹ In his *Phaedrus*, Ficino continues, Plato criticised Lysias, in the *Gorgias* he criticised Gorgias of Leontini.¹⁰ Ficino affirms in his *Protagoras* commentary that Plato has Socrates criticising the "sophists" in the dialogue *Gorgias*, though in an elegant manner.¹¹ The sophists referred to here probably includes Gorgias himself, but possibly also the two other speakers in the *Gorgias*, namely Polus and Callicles. Callicles, however, may simply have been a fictitious character and not a historical person.¹² At any rate, Gorgias features as a sophist in Plato's *Apology* 19e, and Ficino perceived Gorgias in this manner. For this reason, Ficino's *Gorgias* commentary is a contribution Renaissance debate over ancient sophists.

3. The reception of Plato's *Gorgias*

I now pass on to the reception of Plato's *Gorgias*. The dialogue was held in high esteem among late ancient Platonists, some of whom considered it as a work on political virtue.¹³ Olympiodorus, active in the 6th century, produced an extensive commentary on the dialogue, emphasising its ethical content. In 1409, Leonardo Bruni (1369-1444) provided the first complete Latin translation of the *Gorgias* with a preface and annotations.¹⁴ Later in the Renaissance, still in the fifteenth century, George of Trebizond (1395-1472/1473) and Ficino made important uses of the dialogue. In his *De laudibus eloquentiae*, George of Trebizond cited approvingly Gorgias' definition of rhet-

oric in Plato's *Gorgias* 456c-457c as part of his anti-Platonism.¹⁵ Ficino composed a commentary on the *Gorgias* that took up six folio pages in his 1576 *Opera*.¹⁶ In the sixteenth century, Girolamo Cardano wrote a dialogue against Plato's *Gorgias*, namely his *Antigorgias dialogus sive de recta vivendi ratione (Anti-Gorgias, or On the Right Way to Live)*, published in 1566.¹⁷ Given this material, the reception of Plato's *Gorgias* in the Renaissance is a promising starting point for studying the reception of ancient sophistry in the Renaissance and early modern period.

Ficino, in his 1484 publication of Plato's collected works, did not only write commentaries to Plato's *Gorgias*, but also to a number of other Plato dialogues that were given sophist names, and which presented sophist speakers, for instance the dialogues *Euthydemus*, *Protagoras*, *Hippias* and *Critias*. In addition, Ficino wrote a commentary on Plato's *Sophist*, and he dealt with several of the ancient sophists included in Diels-Kranz' 20th-century list of ancient sophists in these and other dialogues.

Ficino's *Gorgias* commentary is mainly organised according to the characters in Plato's dialogue and their respective discussions with Socrates as they unfold within the compositional structure. Ficino introduces his commentary by a general distinction between good and bad uses of rhetoric and poetry, after which he largely follows the composition of the dialogue.¹⁸ He sets out reporting Socrates' discussion with Gorgias and his follower Polus about the nature of rhetoric, that is, the first part of the *Gorgias* (*Gorgias* 447a1-481b5).¹⁹ It should be noted that Plato did not discuss rhetoric in conjunction with poetry in his *Gorgias* — it is Ficino who introduces poetry into Plato's examination of rhetoric in his *Gorgias*. In the second part of Plato's dialogue (481b6-522e8), Ficino comments on Socrates' discussion with Callicles about temperance. The final part of Ficino's commentary is a rather independent interpretation of Socrates' after-life myth, which we find in the third part of the *Gorgias* (523a1-527e7).²⁰

4. Roadmap

In the remaining part of this article I single out a few aspects in Ficino's commentary, where he departs from a simple summary of the *Gorgias* and advances his own interpretation or views. In section five I summarise Socrates' and Gorgias' respective views on rhetoric and sophistry in the first part of Plato's *Gorgias* (447a1-481b5), which is discussed in the first and longest part of Ficino's commentary.²¹ In section six I examine Ficino's analysis of different uses of rhetoric, especially the rhetoric employed by Socrates in his refusal of orators and sophists. I point out that Ficino draws on Plato's *Phaedrus* and its theory of rhetoric as a key to understand Plato's own use of rhetoric in his *Gorgias*. In section seven I focus on Ficino's explicit statements on sophists in his *Gorgias* commentary: Who and what are they, and how do Ficino's identifications fit into his historical context? In section eight I offer a brief account of what I see as the second part of Plato's *Gorgias* (481b6-527e7), where Callicles introduces a new theme, ethics, and I ar-

gue that Socrates' rejection of rhetoric entails an affirmation of a certain way of living, which Callicles finds problematic, and a denial of another way of living, linked to the mastery of rhetoric, which Callicles defends. Socrates argued, against Callicles, that temperance (*sōphrosynē*) in the human soul should lead it to emulate the structure of the universe. In section nine I examine Ficino's commentary to this second part of the *Gorgias*, arguing that Ficino accommodates Plato's ethico-cosmological agenda to his own astronomy and ethical ideas, and that Ficino thereby connects his discussion of Callicles to his *De vita coelitus comparanda* and to his *Timaeus* commentary.

5. Plato on orators and sophists (*Gorgias* 447a1-481b5)

Socrates asks what kind of craft rhetoric is, what it is able to accomplish and what it makes claims about and teaches (447c1-4). Gorgias defines rhetoric as the art of producing persuasion (*peithein*) by means of speeches (*logoi*) in the following contexts: "judges in a law court, councillors in a council meeting, and assemblymen in an assembly or in any other political gathering that might take place." (452e14, trans. Zeyl.) Hence Gorgias divides rhetoric according to its operative contexts, that is, forensic and political rhetoric.

Socrates argues that if rhetoric is to be regarded as a genuine craft (*technē*), it has to fulfil three requirements: (a) a *technē* must aim at what is best (*beltiston*) for the object processed by the *technē*. That is, *technē* is governed by some sort of teleology (464c3-d3, repeated 503d5-e5); (b) the craftsman mastering a certain *technē* is able to provide an account or definition (*logos*) of the nature (*physis*) of the object pertaining to the *technē* (465a2-5). Socrates clarifies that this *logos* regards the nature and the cause of the object (500e4-501a3); (c) the craftsman mastering a *technē* is able to indicate the cause (*aitia*) determining the state of the object falling under the *technē* in question (465a4-5). Rhetoric does not fulfil these three requirements, for which reason it does not qualify as a *technē*. If rhetoric is no craft, then what is rhetoric? It is in his answer to this question that Socrates defines the sophist and distinguishes him from the rhetorician.

According to Socrates, the opposite to craft (*technē*) is a knack and routine (*empeiria kai tribē*), producing flattery (*kolakeia*) and pleasure (*hēdonē*). Rhetoric and sophistry, Socrates continues, both belong to the category of flattery. His use of the Greek term *kolakeia* may allude to Eupolis's comedy named *Kolakes (The Flatterers)*, the plural form of the Greek word for a flatterer, *kolax* — a comedy that was staged in 421 BCE and which targeted sophists like Protagoras.²² In Plato's *Gorgias*, Socrates deploys an analogy to explain the difference between craft and flattery: In the case of the body, gymnastics (*technē gymnastkē*) and medicine (*technē iatrikē*) are *technai* for the body, since they provide what is best for the body. Reversely, cosmetics and pastry baking are forms of *kolakeia* for the body, since they do not provide what is best for the body, but only what gives pleasure. In the case of the soul, legislation and justice are *technai* providing what is best for the soul; legislation corresponds to gymnastics, since they both procure what is best,

that is, they are prophylactic crafts; similarly, medicine corresponds to justice.

These two *technai* of the soul, legislation and justice, are opposed to two forms of *kolakeia* for the soul, namely sophistry and rhetoric: Just like the pastry chef, with his pleasing dishes, pretends to procure what is best for the body and hence to appear more attractive to common people than the doctor, who actually knows about medicine and what is best for the body, likewise sophists and rhetoricians pretend to procure what is best for the soul without offering anything else but pleasure; in the realm of politics, sophistry pretends to do this in the context of legislation (*nomothetikē*), rhetoric in the context of justice (*dikaiosynē*). Hence, both sophistry and rhetoric are pleasing, but deceptive. Socrates admits, however, that people tend to confuse sophists and rhetoricians, because they work in the same field (463a5-465c8).

Plato proposed different characterisations of sophists in different dialogues, depending on his philosophical agenda, and it would be difficult to reduce his characterisations to one single formula, e.g. sophists professing falsehood. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates' depiction of sophistry is keyed to a forensic and political context, and his criticism of sophistry targets the sophists' aim to flatter (i.e. to produce *kolakeia*) rather than to seek what is best for its object, the citizens of the *polis*. What characterises *Gorgias*' speeches, we are told at the beginning of the dialogue (447a-c), is *epideixeis*, that is, rhetorical show-pieces intended to impress and dazzle his listeners. Socrates wants nothing of it, but insists that Gorgias leaves behind his lengthy monologues and commits himself to a dialogue structured on questions and answers, that is, dialectics.

There is some subtlety involved on Plato's part. He has not Socrates proclaiming that sophists are uttering statements which are false and which the sophists themselves know are false when they utter them: It may well be the case that the statements are false, but not necessarily that the statement-making agents themselves, the sophist employing rhetoric at forensic and political contexts, *know* that the statements are false when they utter them. Instead, Socrates argues that the sophists' desire to flatter and please an audience, combined with their ignorance about the object of their discourse, enables them to affect the beliefs of the audience, but also that these beliefs, if put into practice, turn out to be false and potentially disastrous to the audience itself. Of course, it may also be the case that the sophist knows that he is uttering false statements when he utters flattering and pleasing words, which would make the case even more problematic, because of the moral purpose, but this is not the issue in the *Gorgias*: The issue is the desire to flatter and please an audience with words, without having real knowledge about the object in question.

6. Ficino on good and bad uses of rhetoric

In his commentary on the *Gorgias*, Ficino first summarises Socrates' position on rhetoric and sophistry, partly reported in the previous section.²³ However, Ficino is eager to avoid what he sees as a potential misunderstanding of Plato, namely that Plato downright rejected rhetoric. He did not do so, and Plato himself was very elo-

quent. In order to substantiate these points, Ficino takes recourse to Plato's *Phaedrus* and its positive evaluation of rhetoric. Ficino says as follows in his *Gorgias* commentary:

But anyone who may think that Plato, by far the most eloquent of all, is comparing legitimate rhetoric [*eloquentia*] to pastry baking, must read the *Phaedrus*, in which he approves of it [rhetoric] and speaks of its aim, function and rules in a precise manner, claiming that it is similar to medicine [*medicina*].²⁴ (My trans.)

The important word in this quotation is "legitimate". As explained in section one, in Plato's *Gorgias* we find Socrates claiming that pastry baking is a form of flattery, *kolakeia*, for the body, representing the deceptive nature of rhetoric and sophistry. In the *Gorgias*, pastry baking is not regarded as a *technē*, but as an *empeiria*, a knack. In the above quotation from Ficino's *Gorgias* commentary, however, Ficino juxtaposes this negative view of rhetoric with the positive view of rhetoric found in the *Phaedrus*, where, so Ficino points out, legitimate rhetoric is compared not with pastry baking, but with medicine (*medicina*). In Plato's *Gorgias*, medicine, in Greek, *technē iatrikē*, is regarded as a genuine craft, namely a craft whose object is the body's health and care. Clearly, Ficino refers to this reverse evaluation of rhetoric in the *Phaedrus*, partly in order to give a fuller interpretation of Plato's view on rhetoric, partly in order to justify the fact that Plato, though critical of rhetoric, valued rhetoric and was very eloquent himself.

What does Plato say about rhetoric in his *Phaedrus*, and can Plato's eloquence be defended on this score, as Ficino thinks? I shall leave out the last question, since it is too broad, but I shall address the first. In his *Phaedrus* 266b-272b, rhetoric is compared with medicine, and Socrates states explicitly in 270b1-2 that the craft of rhetoric is very much like that of medicine (*technē iatrikē*).²⁵ Compared with Plato's *Gorgias*, this is a notable statement, because in that dialogue Socrates had denied that rhetoric was anything but knack and routine (*empeiria kai tribē*) and he had denied that it was a *technē*.

Admittedly, in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates repeats the accusation that rhetoric is nothing but knack and routine (270b1-9), but he adds that rhetoric may qualify as a craft, if and only if, it fulfils three requirements. The good orator must: (1) possess knowledge about the nature (*physis*) of the object under discussion; (2) prescribe a certain action to be carried out and towards what or whom it is directed; (3) possess adequate taxonomies of the audience's souls and of the different kinds of speeches. Besides, he will know when to deploy a certain kind of speech when facing a certain kind of audience in order to produce the desired effects (271a4-271b5). The overall function of rhetorical speeches, thus understood, is to lead souls to persuasion (*psychagōgia*), Socrates adds (271c10-d2).

These three requirements to rhetoric as a craft, stated in the *Phaedrus*, largely correspond to the requirements to any craft laid down by Socrates in the *Gorgias*, as reported above. His second requirement in the *Gorgias* regards the orator's ability to provide an account of the nature (*physis*) of the object considered; this requirement corresponds to the first requirement in the *Phaedrus*. His

third requirement in the *Gorgias* regards the orator's knowledge about causal connections pertaining to the object discussed; this requirement corresponds to the third requirement in the *Phaedrus*. Socrates' comparison of rhetoric with medicine in the *Phaedrus* is premised on the assumption that the doctor too must know the nature of the body and the causes leading to health and disease (270c3-5).

An orator and politician like Pericles, Socrates continues in the *Phaedrus*, qualified as such a speaker, because he had knowledge about the nature, the *physis*, of his object, that is, the Athenians (270a3-8). The problem with those who now write treatises on rhetoric, Socrates continues, is that they conceal the nature of their object, the human soul, even though they know it well; until they bring out this knowledge in the open and conform with the requirements mentioned by Socrates, they do not comply with the precepts of a genuine craft (271c1-4).

When Ficino, in the above quotation from his *Gorgias* commentary, brings forth Plato's claim in the *Phaedrus* that rhetoric may qualify as a craft, he does so in order to give a broader and more comprehensive account of Plato's stance towards rhetoric, as mentioned already, but he also does so in order to justify Plato's eloquence: Plato is eloquent, that is true, but his eloquence is supported by a solid knowledge of the nature of his object, the human soul, and he discloses this knowledge in an open and truthful manner.

Relying on the *Phaedrus* as a key to understand the examination of rhetoric in the *Gorgias*, Ficino explains rhetoric and its parts as follows in his *Gorgias* commentary:

In order to understand clearly what follows, it should be noted that rhetoric may be considered either in its genus or in its species. In its genus it is defined as a diligence that is indeed ready to produce persuasion in civic matters, either by means of a critical skill or by means of a high degree of eloquence. For this reason rhetoric has been founded as the craft of speaking and the craft of poetry. Considered so far, rhetoric is good for the intellect [*intellectus*]; to the will [*voluntas*] however, it is neither good nor evil.

There are two species of rhetoric. One is philosophical, the other is agreeable to the common people [*popularis*] or flattering [*adulatoria*]; the first is good, the second bad. The aim of the first is to lead the audience to a common good by stating the reasons of things, words and moral traditions. This species of rhetoric he praises as the highest in the *Phaedrus*, and it is derived from philosophy and serious poetry. The aim of the second species of rhetoric is to succeed, in whatever way it fancies, in obtaining agreement through plausible conjectures and excitements of the souls in a crowd. We place this form of rhetoric between sophistry and popular poetry, since it is a mixture of these two, which he denounces in this dialogue.²⁶ (My trans.)

The division of rhetoric into two species in the second paragraph may well refer to Plato's distinction in the *Phaedrus* between two kinds of rhetoric, one that fulfils Socrates' requirements to rhetoric (dubbed the 'philosophical' in the *Gorgias* commentary), and one that does not fulfil these requirements, but which may still be agreeable and flattering to the audience; the Latin adjective *adulatoria* picking up on the Greek noun *kolakeia*.

In the first paragraph of the above quotation, we find the following sentence: "rhetoric is good for the intellect

[*intellectus*]; to the will [*voluntas*] however, it is neither good nor evil." The dichotomy between the concepts 'will' and 'intellect' is not advanced in Plato's *Gorgias* or in his *Phaedrus* — it is Ficino's own addition. It may feed into the late Medieval discussion of intellectualism and voluntarism, to which Ficino contributed by means of his *Symposium* commentary, *Da amore*: If the individual human soul is to have a unificative experience with the divine, the human intellect is insufficient in itself, it needs the will as well. The will, in turn, is to be understood as the human soul's *amor*, its love, which is moved by beauty.

7. Ficino on sophists and philosophers

In my last quotation we saw Ficino divide rhetoric into two, one philosophical and one "agreeable to the common people (*popularis*) or flattering (*adulatoria*)". The latter he placed between sophistry and popular poetry. This predominantly negative view of sophistry occurs elsewhere in his *Gorgias* commentary. At the very beginning, Ficino proclaims that there are two great powers in the human soul, namely cognition (*cognitio*) and affection (*affectus*), of which the "sophists, under the guise of truth, turn [the crowd's] cognition towards what is false."²⁷ Hence Plato condemns sophists completely, Ficino notes.²⁸ Poetry, which sophistry resembles, as we have just seen, is not condemned in the same absolute manner: Popular poetry agitates the affections and as such it may pose a danger to youngsters who are led by emotions and ignorant of the allegorical meaning in poetry. For this reason, Ficino continues, Plato condemns popular poetry from the city (*urbs*), referring to the *Republic* for this view.²⁹

In his *Gorgias* commentary, however, Ficino makes the following general statement about sophists and philosophers:

Understand that the [charges] which Callicles raises against philosophers [i.e. *Gorgias* 484c-486d] do not target genuine philosophers, but [a] partly the most sluggish of the sophists, and partly those [b] who misuse the study of philosophy when they pursue logic alone, thereby by-passing the other areas of speculation; or [c] when they attach themselves to speculation alone, thus ignoring the philosophical precepts of tradition and the civic institutions.³⁰ (My trans.)

It is hard not to read this statement as Ficino's comment on Plato's *Gorgias* as well as on contemporary philosophers, especially scholastic philosophers. In Plato's *Gorgias* 484c-486d, which Ficino probably comments upon by these words, we find no explicit references to philosophers pursuing logic alone, i.e. [b], which would indeed be hard to find at that time, given that logic was only developed after Plato, namely by Aristotle. Those philosophers charged by Callicles in Plato's *Gorgias* 484c-486d are not boys or youngsters taking an interest in philosophy as part of their education, but those men who persevere and study philosophy well into their adulthood, and who lose the skill to make persuasive speeches in political assemblies and court rooms. Socrates is one case in point, and Callicles scorns him and encourages him to abandon his interest in philosophy.

To whom, then, may Ficino refer by the two groups [b] and [c]? Group [b] may refer to scholastic philosophers in general. In the fourteenth century, one of the founders of humanism, Petrarch, had identified dialecticians at the University of Oxford as sophists, and Ficino may allude to this wide-spread humanist criticism of scholastic philosophers dedicating themselves to logic exclusively.³¹ Group [c] may partly refer to the same group, but it may also refer to scholastic philosophers working within natural philosophy and metaphysics, thus ignoring ethics and political philosophy, areas that were part of and ancient philosophy and dear to Renaissance humanists.

8. Plato's Callicles: desire and greed (*Gorgias* 481b6-527e7)

In the second and third part of Plato's *Gorgias* (i.e. 481b6-527e7), Callicles enters the scene and changes the theme from rhetoric to ethics; Callicles objects that Socrates' rejection of rhetoric entails an ethical ideal about a certain way of living, which Callicles contests.

According to Callicles' theory of natural law, the stronger is allowed by nature (*physis*) to have a greater share than the weaker and to exert his power over the weaker (488b-491c). Callicles develops his ethical view by adding a theory of hedonism, supporting his theory of natural law. According to nature, happiness consists in the fulfilling of one's desires (*epithymiai*). Self-control (*sōphrosynē*), on the other hand, is a hindrance to this aim. However, the majority of people is impotent and unable to pursue the kind of happiness prescribed by nature, for which reason they perversely praise self-control as an ideal. The truth is, Callicles triumphs, that a lack of self-discipline (*akolasia*) is an ethical ideal according to nature (491d-494a). Socrates disagrees with Callicles, and he argues that the soul able to experience happiness is a soul characterised by self-control, allowing it to curb its desires (*epithymiai*), and that this idea is reflected in the order of the universe.

9. Ficino against Callicles: the ethical ideal of the self-controlled soul

Ficino, in his *Gorgias* commentary, seems to misrepresent Callicles' theory of natural law, since he attributes to Callicles, and to Thrasymachus (a noted sophist, depicted in Plato's *Republic*) "and many others" the view that customs and laws are not based on the order of nature (*naturae ordo*), but on men's opinion (*opinio*) and imagination (*ficitio*).³² This view was, perhaps, more typical of an early Greek sophist like Antiphon than of Plato's character Callicles; Antiphon had stated a conflict between laws (*nomoi*) and nature (*physis*), whereas Callicles in Plato's *Gorgias* claimed that laws ought to conform with nature, though he admitted that present-day democratic Athens did not do so.³³ However, Callicles did in fact base his concept of justice on his notion of nature.³⁴ It seems to me that this is one example of Ficino lumping together some early Greek thinkers into one single group entitled sophists, which was in fact a quite diverse group of thinkers.

These are Ficino's words on Socrates' reply to Callicles, who scorned the value of self-control:

Socrates, however, girds up his loins to prove that self-control is not founded on human opinion, but on the order of nature. In fact, the natural order requires that the lower parts of the soul obey the higher parts and the whole soul is in harmony with itself in all respects, and that it is beautiful and does not act randomly, but pursues the proper aim. This is the moral disposition and life of the self-controlled human being. In the human being lacking self-control, on the other hand, reason [*ratio*], the queen of the human being, caters for servile lust, and [such a human being, or its reason] is marked by disturbance and weakness, struggling in its endeavour to fulfil, always pursuing fleeting pleasure [*voluptas*], despite incomparable trouble.

All this Socrates explains by means of the views of the Pythagoreans, especially Philolaus and Empedocles, using the two-fold method of fable [*fabula*] and example [*exemplum*], in which it is being discussed whether the soul within the body is entirely dead: The soul lacking self-control being condemned to the lower [world], where it is miserably afflicted by vain and relentless toil, as it continuously struggles with the leaky jar, that is, depraved and false judgement, to refill the other jar, that is, insatiable desire [*concupiscentia*], with the water of delights [*oblectamenti*].³⁵ (My trans.)

In the first paragraph, Ficino argues that Socrates bases his argument on the value of self-control on the order of nature. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates does so in his rejection of Callicles — for instance, in his famous cosmological passage (507e3-508a8), where he argues that there is an analogy between the parts of the human soul and the parts of the universe. At the end of his commentary, Ficino spells out a cosmological order, which does not appear in Plato's *Gorgias*, but which introduces the familiar Ficinian cosmology with the planets Saturn ruling over Jupiter, Neptun and Pluto, thereby engrafting a universal law into the order of nature.³⁶ Ficino's elaboration of the cosmological element connects his *Gorgias* commentary to some of his other works on natural philosophy, in particular his *De vita coelitus comparanda* and his *Timaeus* commentary. Here too, the human soul is part of a cosmic order, and its ethical value is largely determined by its conformity with this order.

In the second paragraph of the last quotation, Ficino refers to the two images of the water carriers and the leaky jars in the *Gorgias* 492e-494a, illustrating Socrates' theory of the undisciplined soul, illustrating Callicles' ethical ideal.³⁷ Plato himself did not reveal his sources to these images, but Ficino clearly hold that Plato is drawing on Pythagorean ideas, especially those advanced by Philolaus and Empedocles.³⁸ In Diogenes Laertius' *Lives* 8.33, however, Pythagoras is attributed the following view, which may play a role in the first paragraph of the above quotation: "Virtue [*aretēn*] is harmony [*harmonian*], and so are health [*hygieian*] and all good [*agathon*] and God himself; this is why they say that all things are constructed according to the laws of harmony [*kath' harmonian synestanaī ta hola*]. The love of friends is just concord [*isotēta*] and harmony [*enarmonion*]." This passage does not mention Philolaus and Empedocles, but it does affirm that the theory of the soul's harmony was central to Pythagoreans.

The upshot is, however, that in the eyes of Ficino, sophists like Callicles, Thrasymachus and many others

were up against the Platonic-Pythagorean ethical ideal, and that the sophists were terribly wrong.

Concluding remark

There is no doubt that Ficino's *Gorgias* commentary played a significant role in the reception of ancient sophistry. As my brief account of Ficino's commentary on Plato's *Gorgias* makes clear, sophists not only discussed the nature and legitimacy of rhetoric, they also discussed ethics and political theories, e.g. Callicles in the *Gorgias*. Ficino was sensitive to this dimension of sophistry and responded to it. I tend to think that he got Callicles' political theory wrong, as mentioned earlier, but that is less important in this context: The important point is that ancient sophists were perceived by a Renaissance thinker like Ficino as having views outside the realm of rhetoric, in this case political theory, natural law theories in particular.

This opens up for another line of research: Did the Renaissance introduction of ancient sophistry have any impact on political theories in the early modern period? Perhaps the answer is a blunt 'no', partly because Aristotle's account of sophistry (falseness presented as truth) was more influential than Plato's intricate discussion in his sophist dialogues, partly because ancient sophists were perceived as having outrageous views that were not taken seriously by political thinkers in the early modern period. To me, however, it remains an open question.

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Notes

- For Critias in Plato's dialogues, see Nails 2002, 106-111.
- For Gorgias of Leontini and his impact in Athens, see *ibid.* 157.
- For instance, Aristotle, *Topics* VIII 162a12-18; *Sophistical Refutations* 1 165a22, 11 171b27-34, 34 183a37-183b6; *Metaphysics* III.2 996a32-

996b1, IV.2 1004b17-26, VI.2 1026b15, VII.6 1032a6-7, IX.8 1049b33; *Nicomachean Ethics* IX.1 1164a30-35, X.9 1180b35-1181a13; *Politics* V.5 1307b36; *Rhetoric* I.1 1355b20, III.2 1404b38, III.18 1419a14. For the reception of Aristotle's works, see Steenberghen 1955.

⁴ Anzulewicz 2002, 222.

⁵ For the reception of Laertius' *Lives*, see Gigante 1988; Tolomio 1933. Laertius' *Lives* not only served as a source of information about ancient thinkers — it also served as a model of narrating philosophy's past. For this theme, see Baker 2017.

⁶ These and related questions have been addressed in Guthrie 1969; Jarratt 1991; Vegetti 1999; Lloyd 2002.

⁷ Diels and Kranz 1951-1952, vol. 2, section C, 'Ältere Sophistik', 252-416.

⁸ Ficino, *In Gorgiam*, 1315.1-4.

⁹ *Ibid.* 1315.19-20.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 1315.25-29.

¹¹ Ficino, *In Protagoram*, 1297.14-16: "Idem in Gorgia elegantissime. Facere admonendum et urbane in Hippia. Scite et argute in Euthydemo. Artificiose etiam in Protagora, saepeque similiter." I owe this observation to MacPhail 2011, 47. For Protagoras in the Renaissance, see Trinkaus 1976.

¹² See Dodds 1959, 12-15. For a discussion of the political forms of rule represented by Callicles, see Kerferd 1974.

¹³ [Anonymous]. *Prologomènes a la philosophie de Platon*, §26.

¹⁴ For Bruni's translation, see Hankins 1990, 53-57, 394-396.

¹⁵ For George of Trebizond's uses of Plato's *Gorgias*, see Monfasani 1976, 242-243, 258-259; Hankins 1990, 169-170.

¹⁶ For Ficino's *Gorgias* commentary, see Allen 1998, 996-107, 111; MacPhail 2011, 13, 21, 39-40; Katinis 2013, 53-55. For Ficino's commentary on Plato's *Sophist*, which is also relevant to his *Gorgias* commentary, see Ficino, *In Sophistam* and Allen 1989.

¹⁷ For Cardano's use of Plato's *Gorgias*, see Giglioni 2012, 176, 186-191.

¹⁸ Ficino, *In Gorgiam*, 1315.1-30.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 1315.30-1320.18.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 1320.18-1320.46.

²¹ *Ibid.* 1315.1-1318.6.

²² I owe this reference to Nightingale 1995, 186.

²³ Ficino, *In Gorgiam*, 1316.48-1317.7. For rhetoric in the Renaissance, see Vickers 1988.

²⁴ Ficino, *In Gorgiam*, 1317.9-12: "Sed nequis existimet Platonem longe omnium eloquentissimum legitimam eloquentiam coquinariae comparare, legat Phaedrum, in quo et eam probat, et finem officiumque et praecepta eius subtilissime tradit, asserit que ipsam esse similem medicinae."

²⁵ The noun *iatrikē* mentioned in Plato's *Phaedrus* 268a-b, 268c.

²⁶ Ficino, *In Gorgiam*, 1316.37-48: "Caeterum ut quae sequuntur, plane intelligantur, advertendum est, oratoriam vel in genere, vel in speciebus, posse considerari, atque in genere quidem definiri, industriam ad persuadendum in materia civili promptissimam, tum quadam probationis facultate, tum vel maxime eloquii gratia. Ideoque inter artem quandam disserendi, poeticamque esse quodammodo constitutam. Hactenus oratoria intellectui quidem bonum est, voluntati vero neque bonum est, neque malum.

Huius autem duae sunt species, philosophica et popularis, sive adulatoria, illa bonum, haec vero malum. Illius quidem finis est, certis rerum, verborum, morum rationibus, audientes ad commune bonum perducere. Quam maxime laudat in Phaedro ex philosophiae poesique graviore compositam. Alterius autem finis est, per coniecturas turabae verisimiles, concitationesque animorum, quodcumque libuerit impetrare. Hanc inter sophisticam vulgaremque poesim ponimus, ex utrisque permixtam, quam in hoc dialogo detestatur."

²⁷ Ficino, *In Gorgiam*, 1315.1-2: "Cum due quaedam in animo potissima sint, cognitio et affectus, conitionem quidem sophista sub veritatis specie ad falsa detorquent."

²⁸ *Ibid.* 1315.5-9.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 1315.4-15. For Ficino on the popular poets, see Allen 1998, 93-123, 213-217, especially 96-107, 111, which discusses Ficino's views on poets in his *Gorgias* commentary.

³⁰ Ficino, *In Gorgiam*, 1318.9-15: "Quod vero afferre videntur Callicles contra philosophos, intellige non contra legitimos philosophos esse dicta, sed partim adversus ignavissimos sophistarum, partim adversus eos, qui philosophiae studio abutuntur, dum vel ita solam logicam sectantur, ut partes speculationis alias deserant, vel ita solam speculationem capesunt, ut philosophica morum praecepta instituta que civilia negligant."

³¹ Vasoli 1968, 11-39. For instance, Ficino 1990, 100, 176, characterises Aristotelian philosophers as "vain sophists" (*sophistae leviculi*).

³² Ficino, *In Gorgiam*, 1318.6-8.

³³ For Antiphon, [*Fragments*], 812.

³⁴ For Callicles' notion of justice based nature, see Plato, *Gorgias* 481b-484c.

³⁵ Ficino, *In Gorgiam*, 1318.40-53: "Socrates autem mox ad demonstrandum sese accingit, temperantiam non opinione humana, sed ordine naturae constare. Profecto naturalis ordo requirit, ut inferiores animae partes superioribus pareant, totusque animus consonans undique sit et pulcher, neque agat frustra, sed finem propositum consequatur, qualis est habitus vita que temperati. Contra vero in homine intemperato ratio regina hominis servili servit concupiscentiae, dissonat quoque et languet, opusque in explebile molitur, incomparabilique molestia volentem sequitur voluptatem."

Id totum Socrates Pythagoraeorum praesertim Philolai et Empedoclis sententiis explicat, duplici praecipue via, scilicet per fabulam et exemplum, in quibus ipse considera, animam in hoc corpore omnem quidem esse mortuam, intemperantem praeterea inferis deputari, irritato asiduoque labore miserbiliter agitatam, dum quodam perforato vase, id est, depravato fallacique iudicio continue machinatur perforatum quoque vas alterum, id est, concupiscentiam inexplebilem fluentibus oblectamentis implere."

³⁶ *Ibid.* 1320.21-28.

³⁷ For a discussion of this passage in Plato, see Carone 2004.

³⁸ For a discussion of Plato's sources to this passage, see Doods' note to the *Gorgias* 493a2-4.

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

Marco Munarini

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 προσηπάθεια; 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 δήπου πρὸς τὴν ἐν θεωρίᾳ ζώην· ὥστε ὑφήσει τοῦ μεγέθους καὶ καταβήσεται· οὐ γὰρ ἐσμεν ὁ ἀκήρατος νοῦς, ἀλλὰ νοῦς ἐν ζῳῷ 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, ὄρνισι μὲν ἢ φύσις οὐ ξυνεχώρησεν· ἀνθρώπῳ δὲ ἔδωκεν ὁ θεός, ὅτι καὶ ἔδωκε γλώττης τε εὐῆκειν καὶ φιλοσοφίας ἐπήβολον 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 παρόνη τῇ ψυχῇ; *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 προὔβελβητο, καὶ παντοδαπῶς τοῖς ἐντυγχάνουσι συνερίγνετο· ὄχοντο γὰρ ἂν τὴν περὶ αὐτὸν τραγῳδίαν 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 γλώτταν 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 bios 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 αἰεὶ πρὸς θεωρίαν ἀνατετάσθαι. ἀμηχάνου 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 τὸν βίον" ("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 ἅπασιν, 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 δημιουργήσει, ὃ εἶδεν, φαντασία δὲ καὶ ὃ 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 aliquid 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 ἀλλάσσειν 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."

Observations on the Reception of the Ancient Greek Sophists and the Use of the Term Sophist in the Renaissance

Marc Van der Poel

Abstract: This paper presents some material for a history of the reception of ancient Greek sophistic in the Renaissance. First, it discusses what knowledge the dialectician and rhetorician Rudolph Agricola (1483-1485) may have had about the ancient Greek sophists by analysing two passages where Agricola explicitly mentions the ancient sophists. Second, it explores the meaning and use of the word ‘sophista’ in the context of the humanist-scholastic debate of the early 16th century and in the first comprehensive history of the Greek sophists in antiquity, Louis de Cressolles’ *Theatrum veterum rhetorum, oratorum, declamatorum quos in Graecia nominabant sophistas* (1620). It will be observed that Agricola’s views on the early Greek sophists, in so far as they can be reconstructed, stand in strong contrast with those of Cressolles.

Keywords: ancient Greek sophists, Rudolph Agricola, Louis de Cressolles, dialectic, rhetoric, ‘sophista’ in the Renaissance.

1. Introduction¹

Since the landmark essays of Hannay Gray and Paul Oskar Kristeller it is well known that the study and reception of the ancient Greek and Roman rhetorical theory and practice by the humanists constituted a major contribution to the intellectual culture of the Renaissance.² Nevertheless, this is still an area of studies where much is left to be explored. In this essay I will look into the question what knowledge the Frisian scholar of dialectic and rhetoric Rudolph Agricola, whose work has attracted much attention in recent decades, may have had about the early Greek sophists and their place in the ancient history of dialectic and rhetoric.³ This discussion will lead us to explore the wider context in which the word ‘sophista’ was used in Agricola’s time and later in the Renaissance. In this connection, we will look at Louis de Cressolles’ view on the ancient sophists in his *Theatrum veterum rhetorum, oratorum, declamatorum quos in Graecia nominabant sophistas* (1620).

2. Ancient Greek sophists

‘Sophist’ was a term used in antiquity for a number of wandering scholars in the ancient Greek city states during the second half of the fifth and the first part of the fourth century BCE. These scholars, among whom Protagoras of

Abdera, Gorgias of Leontini, Prodicus of Cos, and Hippias of Elis were prominent, taught eloquence and the art of debating, but also linguistics, esthetic, moral philosophy and other branches of knowledge. Although the sophists never formed a coherent group or movement, their biographer Flavius Philostratus (c. 165-c.250 CE) labelled their art with the generic term ἡ ἀρχαία σοφιστική (‘ancient sophistic’), which he says must be considered as ῥητορικὴ φιλοσοφοῦσα (‘philosophical rhetoric’) because, as Philostratus explains, the sophists discoursed about general and philosophical subjects such as courage, justice, the heroes and the gods, and the universe. This distinguishes them, according to Philostratus, from the sophists of his own time, because these sophists dealt only with specific subjects such as the types of the poor man and the rich, princes and tyrants, and historical subjects; in other words, they did not discuss philosophical subject matter.⁴ The original meaning of the word ‘sophist’ (σοφιστής) is ‘sage’,⁵ but it obtained a pejorative force as a result of Plato’s and Aristotle’s criticism of the logical tricks and the relativism of some sophists, Protagoras and Gorgias in particular.

3. Agricola and the ancient Greek sophists

Rudolph Agricola (1443-1485), born in Frisia, was trained in the late-medieval arts curriculum at the universities of Erfurt and Louvain, where he graduated as *magister artium* in 1465. He became thoroughly acquainted with Italian humanism during a lengthy stay in Northern Italy between 1469 (perhaps earlier) and 1479. For several years he was active at the university of Pavia and contributed to the humanist movement there. In 1475, he went to Ferrara, where he learnt Greek and translated several Greek texts into Latin, among which (ps.-)Isocrates’ *Paraenesis ad Demonicum* (1478), about which more below. In Ferrara he also started working on *De inventione dialectica*, which he finished shortly after he left Italy in the early months of 1479. In this treatise Agricola blends dialectic with rhetoric, which had previously been separate disciplines. Not long before his untimely death in 1485, he wrote a brief pedagogical treatise in the form of a letter, that was often printed in the sixteenth century with the title *De formando studio*. None of Agricola’s writings were published during his lifetime, but several of them, in particular *De formando studio* and *De inventione dialectica*, went through numerous printings during the sixteenth century.

Agricola's writings contain two explicit references to the ancient sophists, one in the letter in which he dedicates his translation of the Isocratean *Πρὸς Δημόνικον* (*Paraenesis ad Demonicum*) to his elder (half-)brother Johannes, the other in *De formando studio*. First, the letter dedicating his translation of *Πρὸς Δημόνικον* to his brother. This text, erroneously attributed to Isocrates in Agricola's time, is a brief pedagogical treatise, which was very well received among Italian humanist pedagogues. Agricola recommends it with great enthusiasm to Johannes:

(4) Quum sint autem permulta, que ad uite pertineant institutionem Grecis Latinisque litteris conscripta, egregia inprimis et admirabilis Isocratis ad Demonicum paraenesis mihi uidetur. (5) Ea enim suauitas est dicendi, is ornatus et (ut ita dicam) sculptura orationis, tanta preterea maiestas utilitas decor preceptorum, ut, si, quemadmodum pugiles meditados quosdam nodos nexusque habent, quibus inter certamina subito et uel non cogitantes etiam utantur, ita nos quoque oporteat certa quedam et ad manum posita uitae habere precepta, que omnes nostras uelut ad filum dirigant acciones, quorumque tenax infixata mentibus nostris memoria recti nos limitem egredi unice uetet, hic libellus aptus uel maxime ad hanc rem atque accomodatus mihi uideatur. (6) Eum itaque tibi in Latinum sermonem e Greco conuertit, me rem scrupulosam conatus, ut numeros quoque, quorum ille fuit obseruantissimus, et scemata uel (ut nos dicimus) exornationes orationis, quoad possem, imitaret. Per similiter enim cadencia et desinentia et equata et contrapposita et reliquos id genus ornatus uoluit oratio. Quorum ut studiosus precipue Gorgias Leontinus preceptor eius alique etatis illius sophiste fuerunt, ita diligencior iste, ut secuta eum, non affectata uiderentur. Hunc ego legendum tibi etiam atque etiam, sed ad uerbum quoque ediscendum censeo semperque uelut ante oculos tamquam regulam quandam uitę prescriptum habendum. (Letter 15, ed. Van der Laan and Akkerman, 102-104)

A great many things dealing with how to arrange one's life have been written in Greek and Latin literature. It seems to me, however, that Isocrates' *Exhortation to Demonicus* is particularly outstanding and commendable. Its wording is sweet, its style beautifully carved, as it were; moreover, its teachings are particularly impressive, useful and appropriate. So if we are to learn certain things that come in handy at all times, that guide and direct all our actions, and that we firmly implant in our minds so as to remind us of the path of righteousness that we ought never to stray from (just as boxers have certain holds and grips that they practice and then automatically use during a match), then this booklet seems to me to be perhaps the most comprehensive and appropriate for the job. I have therefore translated it from Greek into Latin. I have even tried to do something which requires particular skill, that is, to also include Isocrates' rhythms (to which he paid great attention) as far as I could, and also his figures of speech or (as we call them) stylistic embellishments. For his text picks up words in like cases, words with like endings, parallel clauses, opposite clauses, all that kind of embellishment. Gorgias of Leontini, his [i.e. Isocrates'] teacher, and other Sophists of the time eagerly used these stylistic figures, and Isocrates made particular use of them himself, making sure that they were naturally incorporated into his text instead of forced upon it. I think that you should read this booklet over and over again, but also learn it by heart, word for word, holding it in front of you as though it were a rule and guideline for life. (Van der Laan and Akkerman, 103-105)

Agricola's remarks on the style of Isocrates and the sophists reflect his reading of several ancient testimonies. The *suauitas* of Isocrates' style comes from Cicero, *De ora-*

tore 3.28 ("Suauitatem Isocrates [...] habuit"). Isocrates' use of rhythm ('numerus') is attested in *De oratore* 3.173 and *Brutus* 32-33, and one of these passages, or both, is probably Agricola's source.⁶ Agricola does not follow Cicero's observation in these two passages that Isocrates was the first to apply rhythm. This may be due to the fact that Agricola was aware that Cicero had corrected himself in *Orator* 174-175, where he says that it was claimed by Isocrates' admirers that he was the first to introduce rhythm into prose, but that Thrasymachus was the inventor of it.⁷ Agricola may also have in mind *Orator* 165, where Cicero mentions that Gorgias was the first to apply the skilful connection of words and clauses by means of symmetry and antithesis, though he does not use the technical term *concinntitas* that Cicero uses in this passage ("It is said that Gorgias was the first to strive for this sort of symmetry"; "In huius concinnitatis consecratione Gorgiam fuisse principem accepimus"; Trans. Hubbell 1939, 443-445). Agricola's observation that Isocrates' use of the Gorgianic figures of style was moderate, reflects the general praise for Isocrates' style in the classical testimonies, and perhaps in particular Cicero's observation in *Orator* 176 that Gorgias made excessive use of rhythm ("But Gorgias is too fond of this style, and uses these "embroideries" (his own word for it) too boldly"; "Gorgias autem auidior est generis eius et his festiuitatibus – sic enim ipse censet – insolentius abutitur"; Trans. Hubbell 1939, 455).

The second text in which Agricola mentions the ancient sophists is his letter to Jacob Barbireau, written in Heidelberg on June 7, 1484. The letter is a response to Barbireau's request for advice about the approach he should take to his studies. Agricola begins by discussing the different subjects one will choose depending on one's talent and financial means. If one has both, and if one aspires to follow a study which is honorable in its own right, then one must choose to study philosophy, which Agricola divides into ethics, including the study of the bible, and natural sciences. He then discusses the methods one needs to follow in order to achieve good results. This includes recording and memorizing systematically everything one has read in order to acquire knowledge and have it ready at hand, so to speak. This skill is acquired by using a mnemonic system of juxtaposed headings such as virtue/vice, life/death, learning/ignorance, friendliness/hatred. Second, one must acquire the ability to make the knowledge one has acquired productive, by expertly composing new, original texts. This, Agricola says, can be achieved by means of the topics of invention, for which he refers Barbireau to *De inventione dialectica*. The essence of the method of learning Agricola mentions here is discussed in book 2, chapters 28 and 29 of *De inventione dialectica* and consists of two steps. First, the topics are used to collect data (facts, sayings, anything one knows or has found in one's readings) about individual things (Agricola uses the Latin word 'res', which includes both abstract concepts and concrete things situated in place and time); these data subsequently form the material for arguments both for and against any proposition in which the 'res' in question is taken up, either in a philosophical debate or in an oratorical discourse intended to instruct or persuade an audience.

In the course of the passage describing the method of study to be followed, Agricola mentions the early Greek sophists:

(54) Quisquis ergo prius id recte et cum cura tractauerit, presertim si rationem dialectice inuentionis illi adiunxerit, ingens illi paratissimaque de omni fere proposita re disserendi facultas continget, modo ea ulla ex parte as eas pertineat, quas didicit, artes. Hoc quoque pacto veteres illos professores artium, quos Greci sophistas, id est doctores, uocabant, exercuisse se deprehendo, quantum ex Aristotele et Platone coniciere licet, atque ad eam eruditionem promittuntinque dicendi peruenerunt, ut, de qua re audire quis uellet, proponi iuberent dicerentque, quamdiu quantumque uideretur de eo, quod esset propositum. Sic Gorgias Leontinus, primus tam audacis cepti auctor, sic Prodicus Chius, sic Protagoras Abderites atque Hippias Eleus et instituti sunt et alios docuere. (Letter 15, ed. Van der Laan and Akkerman, 216)

So whoever has practised that first point of mine [i.e. the mnemonic system of headings; the second being the analysis of texts in order to range the material they contain under the appropriate headings] correctly and with care, especially if he has combined it with the dialectical invention method, that person will attain an enormous and most readily available capacity to treat almost any matter that is suggested, provided it is related in some respect to the arts he has learned. I have found that this is also the way in which those ancient teachers of the arts whom the Greeks called sophists, which means instructors, practiced their skills, as far as I can figure out from Aristotle and Plato. And they reached such a degree of learning and such ease in speaking that they would ask anyone to suggest any matter they wanted to know something about, then would speak on what had been suggested as long and as much as they saw fit. In this way Gorgias of Leontini (he was the first to engage in such a bold practice) and Prodicus of Cos, Protagoras of Abdera and Hippias of Elis were trained and taught others. (Van der Laan and Akkerman, 217)

In this passage, Agricola states that his method of study, the art of memory combined with topical invention, was also applied by the early Greek sophists. He only gives a vague reference to Plato and Aristotle to support this claim, but he does mention the feat of speaking extemporaneously for which Gorgias was famous in antiquity. Agricola probably has in mind here Cicero, *De finibus* 2.1, where Cicero labels Gorgias' habit of speaking extemporaneously as an *audax negotium*.⁸ In addition, Agricola's observations probably reflect Cicero, *De oratore* 3.126-129, a passage about the rhetoric of the sophists and especially their skill in speaking about any subject, where not only Gorgias, but also Hippias of Elis, Prodicus of Cos, Thrasymachus of Chalcedon and Protagoras of Abdera are mentioned. Agricola's reference to Plato and Aristotle may suggest that he systematically collected information about the sophists and their work, but in fact he only mentions a well-known practice of the sophists about which many ancient testimonies exist.⁹

Peter Mack has mentioned that Juan Luis Vives, in *De instrumento probabilitatis* (1531), cites Agricola's belief that the ancient sophists had drawn their *copia* and facility from the topics.¹⁰ Vives says this in a passage in which he discusses the description of 'man' by means of various topics, such as substance, conjugates, actions, causes, things that relate to man, such as God, parents, teachers, and so forth. Vives continues by listing things which may be adduced as arguments:

pro argumentis adducantur maiores, exempla priorum, historiae, fabulae, proverbia, si quid praedictum de illo, aut praemonstratum, quid dixit, aut significavit quis, nomen, cognomen, appellatio: ex his apparet non solum ad arguendum valere hanc copiam, sed ad dicendum de quacunque re uelis, ut non absurde videatur Agricola Rodolphus existimare Gorgiam, Hippiam, Prodicum, et alios Graecos sophistas, qui in conuentu hominum paratos se esse profitebantur ad dicendum de quacunque re quis uellet audire, ex his fontibus ubertatem illam et redundantiam eorum, quae dicturi essent, haurire, ut nunquam dicendi materia deficerentur (*Opera omnia*, vol. 3, 116-117).

As arguments one may use ancestors, examples of previous generations, historical narratives, fictional stories, proverbs, anything said or predicted about the individual who is subject of the discourse, what someone has said or indicated, name, surname, title. From these things it is clear that this supply not only serves towards arguing but also towards speaking about any subject you might wish. Hence it does not seem contrary to reason that Rudolph Agricola thinks that Gorgias, Hippias, Prodicus and the other Greek sophists, who claimed that they were skilled at speaking in an assembly about any subject anyone might ask for, derived their famous abundance, and even excess, of things to say from these sources, so that they would never be short of material to speak about. (my trans.)

Because Vives makes a clear distinction between arguing and speaking about any subject, it is possible that he thinks that Agricola had in mind particularly discussions of illustrious subjects¹¹ or commonplaces, which Protagoras and Gorgias were the first to treat, according to Quintilian (*Inst.* 3.1.12) and Cicero (*Brut.* 46). Agricola, however, does not cite or refer to these testimonies. And even if Agricola believed more generally that the sophists used topics as their sources, it is unclear from this passage on the basis of which texts or testimonies he had concluded this. In fact, it seems rather unlikely that Agricola supposed that the ancient sophists already had a fully developed system of topics such we know it from later handbooks of rhetoric. This may be inferred from *De inuentione dialectica* 2.25, an important chapter in which Agricola argues that the method of topical invention, which is common to all arts and sciences, belongs to dialectic, and that there are no topics of invention proper to rhetoric. This raises the question why so many teachers of eloquence wrote about *inuentio*. Here is Agricola's answer to this question:

Cum veniant autem tales plerunque quaestiones in forum, de quibus nihil perpetuum praecipere possit, sed contentione dicendique vi trahantur in quamvis partem, fuit idcirco tradenda communis quaedam inueniendi ratio, conueniens omnibus quaestionibus. Quae quidem rectissime peteretur a dialectico, si tradita iam tum fuisset. Sed multo post secutus est Aristoteles, qui primus eam in artis formam cogere adorsus est. (*De inuentione dialectica* 2.25, ed. Mundt, 382)

However, since usually questions come up on the forum about which one cannot give any general precepts, but which are twisted and turned in any direction in the course of the dispute and by the force of speaking, it was necessary for that reason to formulate some general method of invention, suitable for all questions. If this method had been formulated already at that time, it would have been demanded most properly from the dialectician. But Aristotle, who was the first to have undertaken to compress it [i.e. a method of invention] into the form of an art, came much later. (my trans.)

Agricola says here that in the time before Aristotle, rhetoricians developed a method of invention suitable for all questions that were disputed for and against on the forum. It seems likely that, if Agricola believed that this method was based on the topics, and if he thought that this method had been developed by the sophists, he would have said so explicitly in this passage. He highlights the practice of reasoning for and against on the forum because this is the essence of dialectical reasoning, of which he maintains that it is applied not only in philosophy, but in oratory and in all branches of knowledge. However, there is no indication, here or elsewhere, that Agricola thought reasoning for and against had been invented by the sophists, for instance on the basis of the testimonies that Protagoras was the first to maintain that there are two sides to any issue (Diogenes Laertius IX, 50; cf. Seneca *Ep.* 88, 43). Vives' remark in *De instrumento probabilitatis* thus seems to be an overstatement.

The passages discussed above offer no evidence to conclude that Agricola has made a thorough study of the contribution of the sophists to the early Greek art of reasoning. What he says about the early sophists amounts to not more than traditional knowledge handed down in antiquity from generation to generation and recorded in a handful of testimonies, several of which are cited by Agricola.

4. 'Sophista' in the Renaissance, the humanist-scholastic debate of the early sixteenth century and Cressolles' *Theatrum veterum rhetorum, oratorum, declamatorum, quos in Graecia nominabant σοφιστάς* (1620)

It is noteworthy, however, that Agricola's judgement about the sophists is entirely positive. He highlights that they were teachers and good writers, makes no mention of Cicero's remark that Gorgias was excessive in his use of rhythm (*Or.* 175-176), and, although he says that he read about the sophists in Plato and Aristotle, he never raises their critical stance on the sophists, for instance Aristotle's criticism that the sophist is one who makes money from apparent and not real wisdom, and therefore aims at apparent, not real proof (*SE* 165 a 22), Plato's critical discussion of Protagoras' homo-mensura thesis in *Theaetetus* (151 e – 171 a 4), or of the sophists' logical fallacies in *Euthydemus*. This is remarkable, because contemporary readers of Plato, for instance Marsilio Ficino, did bring up explicitly Plato's negative attitude towards the sophists.¹² Likewise notable is the fact that Agricola never uses the word sophist ('sophista'), commonly used in his time to denote a student in the Faculty of Arts,¹³ as a nickname for scholastic dialecticians. This practice seems to have been common among humanist critics of scholastic dialectic, both before and after Agricola. For instance, Lorenzo Valla, referring to the use of unclassical words in contemporary dialectic, speaks of the traps and tricks of the sophists ("laquei et captiones sophistarum"),¹⁴ and in the early days of the Reformation, 'sophista' was frequently used by humanists to discredit scholastic dialecticians and theologians, and by university theologians to discredit humanists as loquacious orators who wrongly

connect rhetoric with theology,¹⁵ or worse, as dishonest or even heretical theologians. Erasmus was a famous victim of this practice of framing in his polemic with university theologians about his *Declamation on the praise of marriage*.¹⁶ A similar fate struck Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim, when theologians from the universities of Paris and Louvain condemned his *Declamation De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum et artium* as heretical, and expurgated certain passages from it.¹⁷ The condemnation did not put Agrippa's work out of circulation, but from the middle of the sixteenth century onward his work was systematically presented as a literary paradox written without serious purpose, and Agrippa was stigmatized as a deceitful and insincere scholar.¹⁸

The clash between humanist and scholastic theologians in the early days of the Reformation and the stigma that was subsequently fixed on humanist theologians such as Erasmus and Agrippa suggests that the notions of sophistry and sophist were applied specifically to scholars and theologians who were critical of the Roman Church. The first comprehensive history of Greek sophistic, the *Theatrum veterum rhetorum, oratorum, declamatorum, quos in Graecia nominabant σοφιστάς* (Paris, 1620) by the French Jesuit Louis de Cressolles, published some fifty years after the Council of Trent had reinforced the established doctrine of the Roman Church, confirms that even the art of the early Greek sophists was seen entirely from this contemporary perspective.

Most Renaissance scholars will know Cressolles' work from Marc Fumaroli's *L'âge de l'éloquence* from 1980, in which Fumaroli studies the rhetoric and the culture of eloquence in France from the second half of the sixteenth century (beginning after the Council of Trent) until the beginning of the period of classicism, which started around the middle of the seventeenth century. In this period of the late Renaissance, epideictic rhetoric flourished intensely. During the first decades of the seventeenth century, the Jesuits in particular played a key role in what Fumaroli has called 'the sacred sophistic' ("la sophistique sacrée"). Cressolles wrote two important works, the *Theatrum*, and the *Vacationes autumnales*, a work in which he discusses *actio*, the fifth task of the orator, and how courtesy is a reflection of a good character. In his examination of the *Theatrum*, Fumaroli focuses on Cressolles' discussion of the so-called second sophistic in books 3 and 4,¹⁹ and especially on what he sees as Cressolles' fascination with – I quote literally – 'these heathens whom he wants to naturalize as christians' ("ces païens qu'il veut naturaliser chrétiens").²⁰ The focus on this aspect of Cressolles' work is entirely appropriate in the context of Fumaroli's book, but it is equally illuminating to see what Cressolles has to say about the early Greek sophistic. Cressolles offers the first ever systematic and critical discussion and interpretation of all the surviving sources about the notion 'σοφιστής' and its uses in pre-classical Greece, and of the ancient and the second sophistic following Philostratus' conception of the terms (*Vitae sophistarum*, Book 1, p. 480-481 Olearius), starting from the note in the pseudo-Platonic dialogue *Minos* (319 c 3-7) on verses 178-179 in book 19 of the *Odyssey*, where Zeus is called a sophist, and ending with the era of the sophists after the reign of Constantine the Great, whose biographies were written by Eunapius. This im-

pressive work of Jesuit scholarship offers a huge collection of testimonies that is still useful for modern students to consult.²¹

In book 1, Cressolles discusses the notion σοφιστής in ancient Greece and Rome and presents a brief history of the first and second sophistic following Philostratus' division at the beginning of his work. In book 2 he focuses on what Philostratus had called ancient sophistic, i.e. the sophists of the sixth and fifth century BCE. Cressolles begins with the division of the ancient sophists proposed by Adrien Tournebus (or Turnèbe, after the Latinized form Turnebus, 1512-1565) in his *Adversaria*. It consists of two groups, the sophists who are like orators, for example Gorgias, and those who are like the dialecticians who were called 'Eristici' because they used the contentious arguments (ἐριστικοί λόγοι) discussed by Aristotle in his *Sophistical Refutations*.²² It is the activity of this latter group which, according to Tournebus, seems to have produced the art of dialectic (Cressolles, book 2, chap. 1, pp. 104-110).²³ Cressolles continues by explaining that the vast majority of the ancient sophists, beginning with Gorgias, professed to be not only orators but also philosophers, and were experts in what Cressolles calls the great arts, the *magnae artes*, including civil science (Book 2, chap. 1, p. 105). In chapter 2 (pp. 111-115), Cressolles uses Gellius' portrayal of Protagoras as an untruthful philosopher (*Noctes Atticae* 5.3.7 'Protagoras insincerus philosophus') as the start of a thirty-six pages long diatribe against the early sophists and their relativism and fallacies.²⁴ According to Cressolles, these sophists were corrupted philosophers, for two reasons. First, they used their knowledge to satisfy their greed and other shameful desires,²⁵ and second, they aimed at probability instead of truth. Cressolles develops this second point in great detail, starting as follows:

Altera causa fuit, quod in scholis explicandis, & disputationibus eruditus, probabilitatem sequerentur, atque omnia sic oratione colorarent, ut quae falsa essent, illa homines non nimis docti nec arguti, & credibilia, & verissima putarent: ex quo necesse fuit prauitatem opinionum, & foedos errores turbulentosque generari. Hinc δοξόσοφοι olim nominati, de quibus Clemens Alexandrinus ita scribit: οἱ μὲν οὖν, δοξόσοφοι καλούμενοι, οἱ τὴν ἀλήθειαν εὐρηκέναι νομίζοντες, &c. (Book 2, chapter 2, p. 112)

The other reason was that in their courses and disputations, they sought to attain probability, and in their speech they presented everything with a bias, so that not so very learned and clever people saw as credible and even as simply true what in fact was wrong; from this arose necessarily misguided opinions and abominable errors; for this reason these sophists were called in antiquity 'δοξόσοφοι' ('wise in their own conceit'), about whom Clement of Alexandria wrote: "Those, then, who are called wise in their own opinions, who think that they have found the truth, etc." (my trans.)

This passage reflects Plato's and Aristotle's defamation of the sophists as men who have only apparent knowledge,²⁶ but Cressolles' immediate point of reference are the Church Fathers who used similar language in their disputes with dissenters. Cressolles' use of the notion δοξόσοφοι ('pretenders to wisdom') is particularly revealing in this respect. Both Plato and Aristotle use it referring to sophists,²⁷ but Cressolles quotes it from a passage

in the seventh book of Clement of Alexandria's *Stromata*, in which Clement replies to the objections asserted against the Christians by Greeks and Jews. He argues that many sects have emerged among Jews and Greek philosophers, which hold views that are opposed to the Christian truth. Among the people who hold such views, many deceive themselves in thinking that they have found the truth, and are therefore called δοξόσοφοι ('wise in their own opinions').²⁸ Clement continues by making the point that, while those who are δοξόσοφοι only deceive themselves because they avoid testing their views for fear of rebuttal and refuse instruction for fear of censure, others malevolently deceive those who come to them and willingly darken the truth with arguments calculated to persuade.²⁹ Cressolles elaborates this point by means of a set of testimonies from pagan authors and church fathers, and concludes that the philosophy of the early Greek sophists was impure and phoney.³⁰ Cressolles clearly misrepresents the historical facts because he randomly combines negative judgements of the early Greek sophists by philosophers and rhetoricians with criticisms directed against non-Christians by church fathers, and pretends that the early Greek sophists were accused of preferring their own opinions above the established truth.

This distortion of historical facts is brought home in chapter 3 on the ancient sophists' method of philosophizing ('sophistarum propria philosophandi ratio', p. 116). In this chapter, Cressolles again presents a combined list of testimonies of pagan authors and church fathers that stigmatize sophists and dialecticians as debaters who wanted to show off their brilliance rather than search for the truth. He then says in the same breath that this attitude is typical of all heretics:

Hoc proprium est haeticorum ingenium, haec ingenita malitia, in impiis opinionibus tuendis hoc ἐριστικῶν genere impotenti animi impetu gloriari, & omisso rationis lumine, apud indoctam multitudinem inutili σκιαμαχίᾳ dicta impia ventilare; hinc fraus et pertinacia, et in susceptis erroribus animi elati et superbi obstinatio. (Book 2, chapter 3, p. 120)

This is typically the mindset of heretics, this is their inborn malice, to pride themselves with uncontrollable desire on this kind of contentious debate when they defend their impious opinions, and, having renounced the light of reason, to bring up for discussion among the unlearned public impious views in a useless fight against a shadow. This is the source of error and stubbornness, and the obstinacy of a haughty mind that has accepted false doctrines. (my trans.)

Cressolles concludes this chapter with the observation that it was the sophists' unscrupulous practise of reasoning which caused their ill repute throughout antiquity.³¹

Cressolles' discussion of early Greek sophistic in chapters 2 and 3 of book 2 clearly stands in the tradition of the Platonic debate and is therefore quite negative. However, his survey also highlights that the Platonic tradition was very strong among early Christian intellectuals. His testimonies illustrate that church fathers commonly used the term sophist to stigmatize their non-Christian opponents as dishonest intellectuals who opposed the Christian doctrine and deliberately preferred probability above the truth.³² In fact, one might say that Cressolles uses the ancient testimonies to almost redefine

the notion ‘sophist’ as a term to stigmatize people considered to be opponents of the Roman Church.

In the course of chapters 2 and 3 Cressolles occasionally also refers to authors from the medieval period, when the possible conflict between faith (*fides*) and reason (*ratio*) as sources of justification of belief was a much debated issue. Thus, he quotes in chapter 2 a sentence from a tenth-century commentary on the *Acts of the Apostles*, attributed to Oecumenius, in which it is said that sophists are called impostors because they obscure the truth with deceit and fallacies (p.114), and in chapter 3 he cites Peter Damian who categorically rejects rhetoricians with their stylistic embellishments and enthymemes, and dialecticians with their syllogisms and sophistries (p.117).³³ Cressolles does not specifically mention any later testimonies that stem from the debate of faith versus reason nor does he refer to the early sixteenth-century university theologians who condemned humanist theologians. However, his framing of intellectuals judged rightly or wrongly to be opponents of the official church doctrine appears to be similar to the way early Christian, Medieval and Renaissance champions of Church orthodoxy approached their opponents. In each case, an opponent is denied the right to debate by claiming that the subject presented for discussion cannot be discussed by means of dialectical reasoning, because it represents a truth which may not be called into question. The sole motive for such an attack on dialectical reasoning was to prevent discussions that were judged by conservative theologians to be detrimental to the Church.

For Agricola, however, dialectic is not questionable because he assumes that its users properly apply it to subjects about which arguments for and against can legitimately be defended, even if they concern subject matter pertaining to the Christian faith. As a typical humanist, Agricola accepts that belief in God and religious truth, as revealed in the Bible or established by either church dogma or binding council pronouncements, were the cornerstone of human existence.³⁴ This fundament of human existence cannot be a subject for debate, while everything else belongs to the realm of uncertainty and is therefore by definition disputable. Hence, assuming that a debater has good faith, reasoning for and against cannot by itself imply a fundamental denial of the Christian truth, and dialectic cannot be discredited categorically as a source of corruption. Accordingly, when Agricola explains that dialectic is an *ars*, he is remarkably mild about sophistical reasoning and he does not emphatically impute it to dishonesty of its users:

Fallit tamen nonnunquam dialecticus, et pro veris falsa tradit. Evenit id quidem, sed et navem gubernator evertit, et medicus aliquando perimit. Hominum sunt ista, non artium. Atque vel eo magis fatendum erit, utilem esse dialecticem, cum et qui oratione seducunt, astu id persaepe, nulla etiam instructi arte faciunt, et qui fallitur, si artem calleret, vel nequaquam id vel minus utique pateretur. Sane sicut reliquae artes, quae remedio sunt inventae humanis necessitatibus, non potuerunt succurrere incommodis, nisi prius ea detegerent, sic dialectice, cum magna ex parte in eo sit posita, quo pacto laqueos captionum fraudumque in dicendo vitemus, necesse habuit aperire insidias et ostendere quam varie quis capi posset. Quae si quis inde deprompta utenda sibi putavit, non artis haec est culpa, vitare fugienda monstrantis, sed improbitatis, sectari vitanda cupientis. Aperienda enim sunt, ut

caveantur, mala et nemo artifex tantum remedia novit. Relictum ergo nobis sit, artem esse dialecticem. (*De inventione dialectica* 2.2, ed. Mundt, 208)

But the dialectician sometimes misguides and teaches false things instead of true ones. This happens indeed, but sometimes a steersman sinks a ship and a doctor causes a patient to die; that is the fault of human beings, not of their arts. Besides, one must admit all the more that dialectic is useful, since those who mislead by means of speech very often do so without any instruction, and the person who is being misled would either not at all or at least less likely allow this to happen, if he were to know the art. Indeed, as the other arts that are invented to a remedy against the needs of mankind cannot relieve misfortunes if they do not first uncover these, so dialectic, which is for the most part concerned with means to avoid the traps of sophisms and deceit in reasoning, must necessarily explain first the treacheries and show in how many different ways one can be deceived. If someone thinks he has to use the insights gained from these rules, this is not the fault of the art that shows to avoid things that must be shun from, but the responsibility of the wicked person who wishes to chase what he must avoid. For bad things must be disclosed so that one may guard against them, and no craftsman knows only the remedies. Our conclusion therefore is that dialectic is an art. (my trans.)

Agricola presents his theory of the topics as a reform of its medieval counterpart and his discussion of it is embedded in the medieval tradition of philosophical debate in the universities. But, similarly to the ancient Greek sophists, he is not only a dialectician who focuses on philosophical debate, but also a rhetorician who teaches how to use the art of reasoning in the public sphere. He knows the power of language,³⁵ and explains that, in order to convince an audience, it is not enough to instruct (*docere*), but also to inspire (*movere*). Thus, when he introduces topical invention and its uses, he explicitly mentions deliberative oratory and the art of preaching, and in his discussion of the shortcomings of medieval dialectic, he points out that university theologians study physics, metaphysics and dialectic, but prove inadequate in teaching common people and stimulating them to the observance of the Christian virtues.³⁶ Early sixteenth-century humanists, such as Cornelius Agrippa and Erasmus in their declamations, adopted a similar view and promoted the use of rational argumentation and emotional persuasion to stimulate Christians to live in accordance with the moral standards of the Gospel. In the circumstances of their time, however, such liberty could not exist, and their opponents silenced them using the same technique of framing which had been used to discredit the ancient Greek sophists and the early Christian dissenters.

5. Conclusion

In summary, the texts and testimonies discussed in this essay have shown that the fifteenth-century humanist Rudolph Agricola appears to have had a more positive view of the early Greek sophists and their art of dialectic and oratory than the Jesuit Louis de Cressolles, who was a champion of post-Tridentine Catholic orthodoxy. Furthermore, the texts reviewed suggest that there was a strong tradition, going back to the times of the Church Fathers, of using the term ‘sophista’ in debates between

theologians as a nickname to frame opponents of official church doctrine as dishonest and misguided intellectuals. In the Renaissance, this practice was continued by a typically conservative theologian of the Roman church such as the Jesuit Cressolles in his history of the ancient sophists. In his discussion of the early Greek sophists, Cressolles followed Turnebus' division of the sophists in those who practised oratory on the one hand and those who practised eristic and invented dialectic on the other. This division implies a negative judgement about the early Greek sophists and dialectic in general, which stands in stark contrast with Agricola's positive view of both dialectic and the early Greek sophists.

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Notes

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² Gray, 497-514; Kristeller, 242-259.

³ This interest was initiated by the international conference on Agricola organized by Fokke Akkerman and Arjo Vanderjagt in Groningen, 1985. The proceedings of the conference were published in 1988.

⁴ Philostr., *VS*, Book 1, p 480-481 Olearius. Loeb edition, 4-6.

⁵ Herodotus uses the word for the followers of Solon (1.29), Melampus (2.49), Pythagoras (4.95).

⁶ *de Orat.* 3.173: "Idque princeps Isocrates instituisse fertur ut inconditam antiquorum dicendi consuetudinem [...] numeris astringeret" ("And it is said that Isocrates first introduced the practice of tightening up the irregular style of oratory which belonged to the early days" Trans. Rackham 1942, 139); *Brut.* 32: et cum cetera melius quam superiores tum primus intellexit etiam in soluta oratione, dum versus effugeret, modum tamen et numerum quendam oportere servari" ("He was in other respects superior to his predecessors, and particularly he was the first to recognize that even in prose, while strict verse should be avoided, a certain rhythm and measure should be observed" Trans. Hendrickson 1939, 41).

⁷ *Orat.* 174-175: "Nam qui Isocratem maxime mirantur hoc in eius summis laudibus ferunt, quod verbis solutis numeros primus adiunxerit. [...] Quod ab his vere quadam ex parte, non totum dicitur. Nam neminem in eo genere scientium versatum Isocrate confitendum est, sed princeps inveniendi fuit Thrasymachus, cuius omnia nimis etiam exstant scripta numerose" ("The enthusiastic admirers of Isocrates extol as the greatest of his accomplishments that he was the first to introduce rhythm into prose. [...] Their claim is only partly true. We must grant that nobody showed greater skill in this style than Isocrates, but the inventor was Thrasymachus. All his work shows even an excess of rhythm" Trans. Hubbell 1939, 453-455).

⁸ Cf. Van der Laan and Akkerman's note ad loc.: "Agricola's wording is remarkably similar to Cicero's" (p.362).

⁹ Van der Laan and Akkerman's list various other testimonies in their notes to letter 38, p. 362.

¹⁰ Mack, 316; see also Van der Laan and Akkerman, 362.

See Mack 1993, 316, and Van der Laan and Akkerman, note ad loc., 362.

¹¹ *rerum illustrium disputationes* are the terms used by Cicero to denote the commonplaces of Protagoras (*Brut.* 46).

¹² Marsilio Ficino, 'In divinum Platonem Epitomae, seu Argumenta, Commentaria, Collectanea et Annotationes', in *Opera omnia*, vol. 2, fol. 1129 ff. Translation in Farnell, see for relevant passages the Index, s.v.: Sophists.

¹³ See, e.g., Clasen, 263, quoted from the 1457 statutes of the Cologne Faculty of Arts.

¹⁴ Valla 1982, vol. 1, 277; Trans. Valla 2012, 208-209.

¹⁵ Rummel, 21-24.

¹⁶ Van der Poel 2005.

¹⁷ Van der Poel, *Cornelius Agrippa*, 116-152.

¹⁸ Van der Poel, *Cornelius Agrippa*, 160-166.

¹⁹ In Book 5, pp. 437-528, Cressolles discusses the *vitia* for which the sophists were criticized in antiquity, such as their self-exaltation (*tumidi animi elatio*), their greed displayed in their tuition fees (*avaritia in docendo*), their lust ('impura libido'), and other bad character traits.

²⁰ Fumaroli, 302.

²¹ C.J. Classen lists Cressolles' work in his Bibliography included in the volume 'Sophistik', published in the 'Wege der Forschung'-series published by the Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft (vol. 187, 1976).

²² Cressolles, book 2, chapter 1, p.104. "Duo enim genera Sophistarum fuerunt olim, unum simile oratoribus, qualis Gorgias Leontinus fuit, alterum simile dialecticorum, eorum qui Eristici vocabantur, unde ἐριστικοὶ λόγοι apud Aristotelem in Topicis et in Elenchis, a quibus Eristicis dialectica profecta videtur" (Turnebus, *Advaersaria*, Book 4, chapter 2, ed. 1604, col. 100. "For there were in times past two kinds of sophists, one similar to orators, such as Gorgias of Leontini was, the other similar to those dialecticians who were called eristics, whence ἐριστικοὶ λόγοι in Aristotle's Topics and Sophistical Refutations; it seems that dialectic originated from these eristics" my trans.).

²³ Turnebus quotes Diogenes Laertius 2.106 as the authoritative testimony on this matter: "καὶ οἱ ἅπ' αὐτοῦ Μεγαρικοὶ προσηγορεύοντο, εἴτ' ἐριστικοί, ὕστερον δὲ διαλεκτικοί" ("And his [i.e. Euclides'] followers were called Megarians after him, then Eristics, and at a later date Dialecticians" Trans. Hicks).

²⁴ Gellius calls Protagoras an insincere philosopher because he affirmed that he could teach how the weaker cause could be made the stronger; cf. Aristotle, *Rh.* 2.24, 1402 a 23-5. Cressolles' discussion of the ancient sophists covers book 2, chapters 2 to 7, 111-147. In Books 3 and 4, 148-436, Cressolles discusses the Second Sophistic or, in Cressolles' words, the sophists of the second kind.

²⁵ "Nam ad sordes inanis avaritiae, aliaque flagitia, cognitione abutebantur" (Cressolles, book 2, chapter 2, p.111).

²⁶ For instance Plato, *Sph.* 233 c sqq., Aristotle, *SE* 165 a 20ff.

²⁷ Plato, *Phdr.* 275 B; Aristotle, *Rh.* 2.10, 87 b 32, and see the commentary by Cope ad loc., vol. 2, 125, and the commentary by Grimaldi ad loc., p.167.

²⁸ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 7.15, 92.5: "οἱ μὲν οὖν, δοξόσοφοι καλούμενοι, [οἱ] τὴν ἀλήθειαν εὐρηκέναι νομίζοντες, οὐκ ἔχοντες ἀπόδειξιν οὐδεμίαν ἀληθῆ, ἑαυτοὺς οὕτοι ἀπατῶσιν ἀναπαύσθαι νομίζοντες" (ed. Stählin, 65, lines 23-24: "Those, then, who are called wise in their own opinions, who think that they have found the truth, but have no true demonstration, deceive themselves in thinking that they have reached a resting peace" Trans. Wilson, 550).

²⁹ Clement, *ibid.* 92.5-6 (ed. Stählin, 65, lines 25-30).

³⁰ "Atque ex his clarissimorum hominum testimonijs constat Sophistarum philosophiam, insinceram, quod initio dicebamus, & inanem fuisse, vmbra tantum, larvam & effigiem, non veram germanamque philosophiam" (Cressolles, Book 1, chapter 2, p.113-114). "And it is certain on the basis of the testimonies of these most famous men that the philosophy of the sophists was not genuine and, as we said at the beginning, empty, merely a shadow, a specter, an image, not true and real philosophy." (my trans.)

³¹ In chapters 4-5 Cressolles discusses a number of classical testimonies about the fallacies of the sophists, in chapter 5 he presents a number of these, and in chapter 7, the final chapter of book 2, he discusses the question who was the inventor of eristic.

³² In the course of chapters 2 and 3 Cressolles quotes or mentions John Chrysostomus, Clement of Alexandria Origenes, Jerome, Augustine, Lactantius, Tertullian, Basil.

³³ The text quoted by Cressolles is slightly different from the text found in the modern edition of Peter Damian, edited by K. Reindel, letter 28, p. 251, line 14.

³⁴ In *De formando studio*, for instance, Agricola states that education in the humanities should lead to the study of the Bible, because it contains the precepts to arrange our lives and leads to salvation (ed. Van der Laan-Akkerman, 204-206. See also Van der Poel, *Rodolphe Agricola. Écrits sur la dialectique et l'humanisme*).

³⁵ Agricola may have known the famous passage on the power of words in Gorgias' *Praise of Helen*, of which several manuscripts existed in fifteenth-century Italy; see the history of the manuscript tradition in Donadi's recent Teubner-edition.

³⁶ *De inventione dialectica*, Prologus (ed. Mundt, 10) and book 2, chapter 1 (ed. Mundt, 198).

Atticism and Antagonism: How Remarkable Was It to Study the Sophists in Renaissance Venice?

Stefano Gulizia

Abstract: This article briefly investigates the reasons for Aldus Manutius' inclusion of Alcidas in his printed edition of Isocratean orations in 1513. These reasons have not been properly studied by historiography, even though the importance of the collection has previously been described. By systematically exploring three different levels of book production — the epistemic, material, and social ones — it seeks to understand how the career of the sophist Alcidas in Renaissance Venice can be used as a useful case-study to represent Greek information management and printing in terms of network analysis.

Keywords: Aldus Manutius, antiquarianism, network theory, Alcidas, Sophists.

Introduction

The early decades of the Venetian book industry, it turns out, were more dangerous for historians than, say, the later Inquisition or Interdict periods, when many authors were forced to silence or clandestine dissemination and a storm of trials reflected the insecurity of a newly formed class of professionals that did not yet know where it stood in relation to the rest of elite society. One of my main goals here is to turn the tables on our rosy and inspiring view of Aldus Manutius' firm as a springboard of humanist critique, suggesting instead to navigate its output of Greek learning at once with greater flexibility and more discriminating ambiguity. Given his social prominence, Aldus Manutius did not need to shield himself through protective self-censorship. In some of his titles he was prepared to go further than others. There is little, however, in our evidence that sustains the idea that either he or his firm associates were interested in the 'situational' ethics of the Sophists. The argument for relativism therefore rebounds onto us, the readers of these beautifully printed books, since we must be more sensitive to how we attribute 'innovation' within a system of knowledge and to what printers chose *not* to say and *how* they said it. As I argue two sections below, the peril of attending to the dialogic imagination via the Sophists creates wider interpretive pitfalls with regards to the vernacular strategies of the book market. In essence, the Manutian engagement with the Sophists reveals a Janus-like figure—belated and pioneering, a fit in the local trade yet totally eccentric. The best way to describe this intellectual experience is to see the Aldine imprints as a vast cultural delta which,

largely by accretion,¹ collects the results of Greek networks of scribes or scholars located in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The present study is the last part of a triptych, whose other leaves present separately the impact of sophistic techniques on humanist thought from the vantage point of early modern drama,² and, finally, the Erasmian ethics of timing.³ Here we look at printers, and specifically prestigious Venetian printers. The first part lays out the basic mechanisms of the externalization of knowledge in its paratextual and sociopolitical context, and outlines the circumstances that made the work of the Sophists a profitable read for the patricians Manutius was addressing. The second part takes a step back from the printed material and discusses the historiographical conventions that have been applied to this field. I focus on prominent classical scholars because the study of *logos*, and the sophistic rubrics of *kairos* and timeliness, are not without broader significance to the way Italian philology has evaluated the impact of printing technology. The last two sections — which are related and respectively speak to the social and epistemic layers of the printing network, as it has been called⁴ — rehearse in detail how well the sophistic awareness of language and style translated into humanist practice, and examine why Attic and agonistic fabrications were attached to the figure of Alcidas. The history of the Aldine academy of Greek studies is still frequently figured in terms of an emerging, republican *libertas* that emancipates itself from the oppression of medieval bureaucracy (and theocracy), though this alleged freedom and vindication of liberal studies have never been investigated systematically in relation to the Greek diaspora of the late fifteenth century. How original were Aldus' interests against the background of the Byzantine transmission of knowledge? How remarkable and lasting his editorial solutions?

1. The paratextual framework: advertising the sophists

It is generally assumed, however incorrectly, that the primary interest of all Sophists—Plato's most formidable enemy in his struggle to control the content of the emerging discipline of 'philosophy'—was rhetoric.⁵ As a rule, it is further speculated that an unsafe political environment, while hindering the prospects of peace and stability, also works as a nurturing backdrop for the devel-

opment of eloquence and learning. It was not without suffering severe repercussions that the Venetians adopted the second of these axioms, or at least a blend of the two. Aldus Manutius' preface to Volume I of the *Greek Orators* (1513) is the poster-child for this impression.

Wars and hostilities (*bella et arma*), dear Egnazio [the dedicatee would become the chair of Latin after 1520], have always brought disaster and destruction to much else but especially to education and literature—that is so well established as not to need demonstration. But in our own time [. . .] the study of literature is so vigorous (*sic vigent studia*) during the wars that it is even flourishing (*ut etiam floreat*)—and more surprisingly in Venice in particular, although the city has been troubled by continuous warfare these many years.⁶

In terms of publicity, the existence of these geopolitical dangers led other city printers to stall or interrupt their business activity; the less timid ones might have investigated both personal circumstances and commercial reasons for the inherent shifts of a profession that appeared alternatively profitable or risky.⁷ But only few, among the colleagues of Aldus, would have mastered his exceptional defense of thematic coverage, which stands out for two reasons.

The first is not about their good state of conservation or the diligence of the editorial work, which, however, following the firm's standards, is explicitly remarked upon,⁸ but rather about the fact that the richness and quality of the Greek orations are mirrored by their official dedicatees as nodes in a network forwarding political debates and elocution across the spectrum of Venice's state diplomacy. Earlier in 1513, Manutius recommends his edition of Pindar (augmented by Callimachus, Dionysius Periegetes and Lycophron) to Andrea Navagero, whom he addresses less as a patrician and scholar than as a civic leader needing to familiarize himself with the great speeches of antiquity, and possibly to commit them to memory, as Demosthenes did. After the dedicatory epistle to Giovanni Battista Egnazio, Manutius offers Volume II of the *Greek Orators* to Francesco Fasolo, another prominent lawyer and chancellor of the Venetian senate: the letter in this case is unusually long and historically slippery, but insists vehemently on how a canon of Greek orators could benefit the Council of Ten. In short, the Aldine resurrection of Greek-speaking orators in 1513 would have been eagerly received in Venice as an emblematic collection to benefit the heart of the state, and should not be treated as an academic engagement with specifically philosophical themes. Likewise, it plausibly appears that the Sophists who ended up integrated within the printed anthology (I discuss the case of Alcidas below) had a very limited role to play: give advice to contemporary Venetian diplomats who were involved in legal or political disputes. In this, Manutius was simply following a Quattrocento search for the *orator perfectus*, and it is interesting to reflect on how adamant Aldus Manutius was about insisting on the talent of ancient Greek speakers to improve oral and vernacular performances within the closed walls of the city's Senate.⁹

The second, less frequently mentioned, reason has to do with the ideal 'bilingualism' and corresponding *divided* geography of the printed speeches themselves.¹⁰

The Aldine volumes of 1513, in the entire holding, cover a wide range of constitutional debates, from Alexandrian Greeks to Ottoman Turks, as Manutius is quick to point out in his letter to Fasolo. At least in their projected reception, the *Greek Orators* are divided in two parts: one in Greek, one in Italian—one written, one oral. Presumably, the Greek text appeals as an object of protracted study, intended to fortify and charm (as a powerful and weighty delivery did to the Athenians of the day). The Venetian reenactment, on the other hand, is predicated on the ability to move and rouse on the political battleground. In his expansive letter to Fasolo, Aldus Manutius convincingly postulates that the reciprocal integration of these practices would result into a process of transferring Greek distinction into Venetian public life, and that this transfer, in turn, would increase the awareness in worthy scholars and patricians of living in a two-sided timeframe where the glory of the present ("sunt et nostro tempore qui magni cognomento appellantur") feeds directly on the glory of the past ("apud veteres").¹¹ In other words, by printing the Sophists, Manutius understood himself primarily as someone filling a constitutional gap and better outsourcing an arena of vernacular diplomatic dispatches considered crucial for the life of his city. Already as of 1532, this situation changed. In the *Antisophista*, written by a former pupil of Niccolò Leonicensi and included as the last of the medical *opuscula* prepared by the master for the press (Basel, 1532), the discourse moves away from state assemblies, their transcripts, and the transformation of archival protocols for storing and retrieval, and is back to the method of humanists like Ermolao Barbaro and Pico della Mirandola. The anti-sophistic polemic then aims to confute erroneous practices of teaching and research by making full use of Greek commentaries to Aristotle, and, as in a striking passage of the *Antisophista*, by recasting Athenaeus' judgement on Galen.¹²

If, returning to Manutius, we accept the notion that the 1513 edition of the *Greek Orators* was an instance of record-keeping of dozens of classical speeches intended to inform future ambassadorial negotiations, the promotion of Alcidas as a participant in the collection emerges as an excellent choice. In the cluster of testimonies attributed to him, Alcidas is credited with a protracted reflection on the comparative advantages of oral and written style. In his treatise *On Those Who Write Written Speeches, or On the Sophists*, he suggests that if the goal is *ex tempore* delivery, one should avoid precision (*akribeia*).¹³ Precision was an important attribute of *logos* for the Sophists: it is promoted in Antiphon's *Tetralogies* (an author repeatedly sampled by Manutius in his prefaces)¹⁴ and in Thucydides, who writes of it as a historiographical ideal, while a more hairsplitting pursuit of *akribeia* is also parodied by Aristophanes (*Clouds* 740-42).¹⁵ Like Alcidas, Aldus, too, takes for granted the greater affinity to detail of written compositions, though his preferences and the reasons he gives for printing the Greek corpus as it is are different and quite original (here I am citing, again, from the preface to Volume I of the *Greek Orators*):

To these orations of Isocrates we have added, on the suggestion of our friend Marcus Musurus, Alcidas' speech against the teachers of rhetoric, Gorgias in praise of Helen, and Aristides in praise of Athens. This has been done since Isocrates also had

written on the same themes and it seemed worthwhile to give students the chance to read different but very expert authors on the same subject. We have appended in addition Aristides' oration in praise of Rome because of our affection for that city, so that where Athens is praised, Rome may be too, since the same author wrote with learning and accuracy about the merits of both cities (*de utriusque urbis laudibus*).¹⁶

Manutius' supplemental logic is firmly inscribed within the tenets of the Greek Sophists. Alcidas' *Odysseus*, a speech which presents the prosecution's case, is a later response to Gorgias' work in defense of Palamedes.¹⁷ What if a printer sets up pairs of *logoi*, on a design inspired by one of his trusted collaborators (Musurus): the plan does increase the collection's potential for reading and studying, but it does not translate, as desired, into public performance, apart from enlarging a basis for intellectual communication. In sum, Alcidas' own ambivalence for self-presentation in writing and alternative blueprint for debates and contests affects the printed edition of 1513 in surprising ways. This reduction of sophistic techniques as editorial aids for the printing atelier is impressive. In classical antiquity, many speeches were directly or indirectly paired to respond to one another (the characterization of Athens by the Corinthians in Thucydides 1.71, e.g., and by Pericles in 2.36-46, or the debate between Mardonius and Aristobanus in Herodotus 7.9-10). But the unquestionable influence of the larger Protagorean theory of opposed *logoi* to be used as an intellectual tool of information management is a significant innovation.¹⁸

Still, nothing in Manutius' phrasing suggests that he considered a weaker argument like something that could emerge as the just one, but only that thoughtful, if subjective, *pairing* has the constructive result of deepening the reader's understanding of important affairs of causation or responsibility. We might try to bring out details to support specific conclusions, but the details themselves would remain fuzzy. It is unclear, for example, if it was sufficient for the aspiring sophist working in contemporary Venice—a writer-for-money, say, or even higher profiles such as Bembo and Aretino—to follow the footsteps and rhetorical templates of their Hellenic predecessors or if one was explicitly required to write panegyrics;¹⁹ whether members of the "Second Sophistic" movement were ever seen as off-limits, mere successors, or, by contrast, as pivotal;²⁰ and if such rules were absolute or subject to exceptions. On the one hand, the Aldine preface to Egnazio of 1513 appears to be consistent with both the semantics and epistemology of sophistic ideas on the best reasoning: knowing how to construct arguments teaches how to plan and bind books. Yet, the underlying attention to Isocrates, on the other, flattens the Sophists as historical actors on their own right onto the profession of 'logographer', or speech-writer, confining them to the forensic business. In fact, we are meant to understand that the 1513 anthology in its entirety ultimately appealed to readers of the time as an Isocrates plus appendices and, by analogy, to perceive that adjacent printing projects worked as a Pindar with appendices or a Demosthenes' "best ten" as well.

Some among the earliest 'surviving fragments' of the Sophists in Greek to reappear in sixteenth-century Venice were associated with the—mainly commercial—activity

of the Aldine family. Anybody familiar with the transmission of a corpus in the early modern period knows that when talking about *canonization* we refer to the periodical assembling of handwritten manuscripts that circulated in several different versions across the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as across the Most Serene Republic's political boundaries, and that were gathered in the city's various *mouseia* for the benefit of state patrons or private collectors.²¹

In a relatively short time span several decisions were taken concerning the selection, preservation, and binding together of these fragments. The difficulty of teasing out all the implications of this process in the case of Aldus Manutius comes from our historiography which amounts to an almost full-scale narrative of celebration,²² and which is daring-to-heroic when it comes to assessing the printer's output in Greek. The present study argues that these (implicit) tones of admiration are not always reliable. Testing them against the extant sophistic evidence, we find that they need to be moderated. *Prima facie* evidence for caution is provided by none other than Manutius: he assembled the *Greek Orators* as archives of speech for the Venetian statesman, and his vivid description of the dangers facing the polity in his prefatory letters further testifies that his main preoccupation was republican management, not humanist revival. Navagero and Fasolo too might have done exactly what is alleged by the printer to have been their first civic duty. We should soften our rules: what printers felt that they could publish safely varied by circumstance, and often those who were willing to take greater risks were not them, but their staff, be them the Paduan professors who collaborated with the press, the agents who hunted for lesser-known manuscripts, or the copyists who transcribed them. We do not possess evidence that Manutius or members of his staff reacted one way or another to Plato's malevolent campaign against the Sophists; they saw no lack of continuity between Plato, Isocrates, and the promise to fulfill a competent edition of these works within a reasonable amount of time. As far as the rediscovery of a lost canon is concerned, the brave in this tale were dislocated brokers and translators fleeing from the collapse of their empire, old Byzantine scribes who turned to the West for help and employment—by sixteenth-century, Venetian standards, the *really* old.

2. The methodological framework: antiquarian studies, Italian philology, vernacular strategies

If we apply a "bottom up" approach to the elusive question of agency within the printing house, then the conception of the 1513 volume of *Greek Orators* is first and foremost the fruit of professor Musurus, although he did not necessarily serve as a traditional curator or editor of the final text. What gave him a special role was rather a sense of allegiance or familiarity with the antiquarians and collectors of his day. Musurus was a historical figure that could easily be constructed as the intellectual counterpart of those who assembled a great library of Greek texts—namely, Cardinal Bessarion, Domenico Grimani, and the aforementioned Niccolò Leonicensi.²³ How vast was the shadow of the Paduan, when he was

credited by Manutius for his editorial invention in 1513? And did Manutius intend to summarily evoke a whole underground of erudite commentary and antiquarian pursuits spreading alongside his printed editions? Beyond Momigliano's seminal research on the figure of the antiquarian,²⁴ the answer to these questions takes us a great deal deeper into the philological resources and strategies used in this field of studies.

In his 1976 study on early modern astrology, entitled *The Zodiac of Life*, Eugenio Garin recycled a famous dictum by Aby Warburg, whose passion for witty, aphoristic expressions was well-known in turn-of-the-century Hamburg. The saying states that it is not always easy to see where Athens ends and where Alexandria begins. Warburg's chiasmic, miniaturized tale of two cities was at once a symbol of his personal struggle with nervous exhaustion and a symptom of the perils of adapting ethnography, which he helped escorting to life, to the equally perilous standards of Weimar Germany.²⁵ In Garin's hands, all this turned into a commentary on the academic classification of knowledge in late fifteenth-century Italy. Warburg's Athens, in Garin's retelling, refers to *astrologia quadrivialis*, or the mathematical side of the astronomical lore, whereas the idea of Alexandria is stretched to subsume with the so-called *astrologia iudiciaria*, which has to do with divination.²⁶ What remains persistent in this transformation is the tone of elegiac farewell to a now-submerged, yet once-prominent world of antiquarian erudition that, in Warburg's case, can be profitably identified with the last generation of art dealers and connoisseurs from imperial Germany—a world of learned Jewish bankers that succumbs to a prophetic frenzy. For Garin, though, Alexandrian antiquarianism is simply embodied by Bessarion's collection. Is it right to say, then, that for Garin it was the *homo divinans* who would have been interested in the Sophists? Or that renewed consideration for their corpus was, in all effects, an Alexandrian tale—a story of antiquarians?

In sixteenth century Venice, Warburghian omen-mindedness happens to be one factor in a larger mobility of labor. The printer, “divining” as Aldus Manutius did in his double duty as artisan and philological *castigator*, is sharing his social space (and timeliness) with the oarsmen who shuttled across the eastern Mediterranean. This carries enormous consequences for everyone who should try to reconstruct the Aldine enterprise not as a wonder-making template of heroic scholarship, but instead to place it squarely within the Venetian culture of expertise. If, to paraphrase a receptive reader of Renaissance paradox, sophistic *doxa* is a powerful adversary, yielding only to an accomplished scholar,²⁷ the privileged position that the Italian school of history of philosophy achieved in exposing the timely and untimely nature of sophistic rhetoric should give us pause. Garin himself was one of the first to observe how a powerful vein of Quattrocento dialogues reshaped simple exercises in antithesis to a more comprehensive discourse in which the respective strength and weakness of one's argument are weighed against themselves. And while Garin's insights have been recently qualified,²⁸ the characterization of a central segment of dialogic theory in Renaissance Italy from the vantage point of sophistic antagonism still awaits a sustained treatment. Such treatment, I submit, should embrace the

timeliness of its own topic, maintaining that humanist interests in antilogic were influenced by the brokering function of Byzantine intellectuals who forcibly relocated in Venetian Crete or other locals within the Aegean system after the fall of Constantinople, and, more in general, by the Hellenism cultivated at Byzantium.²⁹ In the end, all these oppositions run in parallel: atticism and antagonism, Byzantium and Venice, Athens and Alexandria, or, to come back to Garin, *techne* and *taxis*. Such indistinction marks a profound, Braudelian *longue durée* in the reception of the Greek sophists in the Venetian republic.

A rivalry between Athenian vs. Alexandrian cultural spaces as a signpost for a ‘purist’ philology of the sophists was cultivated by two other Italian scholars: Augusto Rostagni and Mario Untersteiner. Rostagni made of *kairos* a big business,³⁰ and handed to scholars of the Renaissance his consideration of Gorgianic *apateia* from both a magic and medical point of view. Rostagni's interest is so striking that we may as well ask why later critics neglected to pay attention to the Aristotelian distinctions he applied to the sophists. In Aristotle's rhetoric Rostagni discovered a difference between speaking *πρὸς τὰ πράγματα* and *πρὸς τοὺς ἀκροάτας*, which is to say, that a *logos* may be considered in two ways—in relation to the audience, and in relation to its subject matter. Theophrastus was the first to articulate this distinction, but Aristotle himself had this in mind in passages such as *Rhetoric* III:1 (1404a11). Attending to Rostagni's strategy is important. He was reacting to the Hegelian tendencies of German historians of philosophy, which had already strengthened their hold on the pre-Socratics; within this tradition, the death of Socrates, quite arbitrarily, had been used as a convenient cut-off point in the case of the Sophists, which is detrimental to our understanding of the whole intellectual context of the movement. Rostagni instead looked at Aristotle to offer comments on the written/spoken tension, which has become the basis for a stylistic analysis of prose in both Gorgias and Alcidas—the two authors appended to the *Greek Orators* by Manutius in 1513.

It is important to recognize at least two points that benefited from Rostagni's analysis. First, the contribution of sources about the Sophists should be carried through—and beyond—Aristotle, and not treated as an exclusively fifth-century phenomenon; second, this extended framework can function as a neat counterpoint to an increasingly bookish view of the Hellenistic age. One of the advantages of bringing Peripatetic philosophy into our account of the First Sophistic is that it illustrates more clearly elements that in our scant evidence we are allowed to see through a murky glass in fifth-century controversies. Moreover, it is clear from the editorial plans and the prefatory materials surrounding it that Aldus Manutius organized his edition of the Aristotelian corpus with a keen eye not only to the scholia and lexicographical aids that came from Byzantium, but also to Greek commentaries; for example, he promoted Alexander of Aphrodisias' work (presumably on another suggestion made by Musurus) right besides what Aristotle himself had said on meteorology.³¹

As for Untersteiner, his novelty lies in the methodological approach to philosophical genre, rather than in the edition of sophistic fragments, appeared in Florence

throughout the 1960s.³² Untersteiner's selection respects more or less the inclusion criteria already defended by Diels and Kranz. Since the Diels-Kranz collection treats the Sophists essentially as a sort of prelude to Plato, this picture of intellectual life remains highly misleading.³³ Neither Untersteiner nor Rostagni, however, had an impact on studies of Aldus Manutius comparable to Carlo Dionisotti, whose account is nearly ubiquitous.³⁴ What deserves emphasis is how, in Dionisotti's treatment, the developments of literary trends or fashions are locked in conspicuously national variants, allegedly originating from the Venetian advocacy, through print, of the vernacular against Latin. To put it briefly, what we see here is the recasting of an older polemic in Norden's *Antike Kunstprosa*, which put the origins of Atticism ca. 200 BC in a wish to avoid crediting the Romans with the movement, and which exhibits a tendency to interpret the whole history of style as a righteous battle against bombastic Asianism. If Atticism had been originated only by Greeks, it is hard to imagine that Cicero would have missed an opportunity to ridicule it in *Brutus* or *Orator* as one of those fanciful and impractical Greek notions—just as fanciful and impractical, in fact, as our current devaluation of the term Byzantine as a short-hand for dull bureaucracy that ignores the creative role of fifteenth-century Greek intellectuals in the formation of a sophistic canon.

It remains to be seen how useful it really is to illustrate the Aldine academy in Venice through Dionisotti, since his almost exclusive interest in the propulsive role played by vernacular letters. In his 1513 letter to Fasolo, Manutius invokes the exemplum of Janus Lascaris, who was sent by Lorenzo de' Medici to the Peloponnesian archives with a list of rare *desiderata*.³⁵ This choice, it seems to me, illuminates two aspects of his approach. First, it points to a larger assimilation of Greek rhetoric and methodology (to which I return at the end of the next section). Second, it expresses the view that entrepreneurial agency within a printing network must be brought back to the 'minor' historical actors who worked before an *editio princeps* was assembled and not necessarily with printing in mind. It is to this level of concerns that I now turn.

3. The social framework: versions of Greek *paideia*

Two brief examples of scholarly engagement with the Sophists might help identifying the social response to them within the politics of knowledge of sixteenth-century Venice, and the chronology of such response. The first has to do with the short-lived experience of the so-called Venetian Academy, between 1557 and 1561. This academy was founded by the young patrician Federico Badoer in February 1557, after a three-year mission as ambassador at the imperial court of Spain and Germany. Primarily, it was a publishing venture that turned out to be unsuccessful. Its goal was to enhance the prestige of the Republic of Venice, following the blueprint of the Florentine Academy, which to some extent functioned as a cultural ministry for duke Cosimo I. Its fate became interwoven with that of the prestigious Aldine press, at the time run by Paolo Manuzio, the third son of Aldus's mar-

riage with Maria Torresano. Rather mysteriously, by 1559 Manuzio stopped printing for Badoer, and the idea of opening their own bookstore did not help either. The publishing program of the Academy, however, was presented to the public—namely, the international public of the great German book fairs of Leipzig and Frankfurt—through the *Somma delle opere*, a 32-leaved folio listing 631 works divided in their respective categories. It is impossible to tell to what extent the academy would have stuck to this program: there are only two octavos, 67% of the total are quartos, the rest are folios. The combination of book size and the beauty of the Aldine fonts suggest that, in Badoer's intentions, these were books meant to be noticed.

In terms of intellectual history, while canon and civil law alone represent almost half of the total, one finds a suggestive reference to the Sophists in no. 203 of the list, which planned a monograph on those authors condemned by Aristotle, which, as the academy felt, needed a comprehensive rehabilitation. It might seem surprising to find a dissertation on the pre-Socratics in the section on Physics. But precisely in that sector, Aristotelianism was at its most malleable.³⁶ In short, although the academy's projected commentary on the pre-Socratics was isolated, it puts pressure on Badoer's opinions, expressed in a letter to Andrea Lippomano, that Greek learning was not at all necessary to a statesman. And more pressure comes from the lending registers at San Marco, where Badoer is cited, in January 1545, for the borrowing of the *Aethiopica* of Heliodorus, a Greek manuscript bequeathed by cardinal Bessarion to the Marciana. The Venetian Academy has been characterized by Lina Bolzoni as an institution that simply failed to conform to the ideal promotion of Italian carried out by the lines of Bembo and Speroni, but it has also been described by Shanti Graheli as strongly aligned to Latin as the universal language.³⁷ The Sophists might indicate that, contrary to expectations, Aldus' overall attitude on Greek culture, as exemplified by the *Greek Orators* of 1513, had not faded entirely.

Admittedly, my first example presented here is only a late and tantalizing instance of Venetian attention to the Greek Sophists, but it is useful as part of a general argument concerning the hegemony of philosophical languages. With my second, much earlier and more documented example, I intend to pave the way for a discussion of how the renewed prestige of the Sophists is virtually indistinguishable from a celebratory argument about the ancestral primacy of Athens, and therefore from the prestige of Attic itself.

The circumstances of such unique lawsuit are offered by a passage of the treatise *Misopogon* by the emperor Julian. Writing in Antioch in 363 AD, before he engaged in the war with the Parthians in which he would be mortally wounded, Julian gives a long survey of the training which he received from his teacher, the eunuch Mardonius and highly praises the man's pedagogical method, seemingly enjoying the contrast between his maxims and the supercultivated *paideia* of Antioch, which inspired Peter Brown his nexus of power and persuasion.³⁸ One of the city residents wonders if it might be possible for the emperor to leave off his bad habits and learn better ways (μεταμαθεῖν). To this fictitious question Julian replies: No, that is impossible for Ἔθος, φασί, δευτέρη φύσις

("habit, they say, is second nature"). What interests me in this response is, in part, its paremiographical success,³⁹ but especially the fact that, while Julian quotes the sentence in the Ionic dialect, the *Marcianus Graecus* 251—which belongs to the fifteenth century and was probably produced in the orbit of Bessarion—replaces the Ionic form of δευτέρη by the Attic one.

As we know, when working with Greek fragments, dialects give valuable hints to a possible source and often narrow the circle of its potential authors. Of the Greek philosophers, Democritus is most credible in mixing Julian's ethical terms of discussions: his Fragment 33 (in the Diels-Kranz collection) comes very close in juxtaposing habit and training. Indeed, when Diels published the third edition of the fragments in 1912 he translated the last part of it in a very significant manner; the idea of changing one's nature becomes "eine zweite Natur," by which Diels introduced—quite involuntarily, perhaps—just what we read in Julian's treatise. In conclusion, the attribute "zweite," or "second" has no equivalent in Democritus' Greek text, but it is a conjecture that gives ammunition to the cause of Attic purism.⁴⁰ If in the world of the Sophists awareness of language closely related to awareness of style itself, then a scholar might succeed in one historical reconstruction in the same way a speaker captured his audience, simply by sprinkling a few Attic *flosculi* in an otherwise indifferent literary texture.⁴¹

When Norden collected quotations of Sophists in Philostratus, his goal was to show that the florid euphuism cultivated by Gorgias and his followers could be simultaneously flaunted or concealed. It should be emphasized that Manutius' own position as the editor of the *Greek Orators* is not very different: at one extreme, every sophistic revival is an induction to sheer fabrication. For instance, the fortunes of the flamboyant panegyrist (but hypochondriac intellectual) Aelius Aristides are better understood if we evaluate the task of writing the language he was so keen to praise; even in this most conspicuously purist writer—whom Philostratus hails as τεχνιζώτατος ('most skillful')—*koine* forms creep in syntax, affectation, and lexical preferences. Readers of the Manutian appendices might not have been easily swayed by the alleged fondness for Rome as a justification for Aristides' praise. But they would have followed with interest an argument based on the prestige of a linguistically homogeneous region as a cultural tradition.⁴² For this, as Aldus maintains, is what the Venetian man of state should have been attuned to: discover by comparison, among the printed objects offered by the printers, what could improve the elegance and trustworthiness of a new generation of orators and public speakers.

Two consequences might be drawn here. First, the appreciation for the sophists went hand in hand with an industry for grammarians and lexicographers, and this explains why the Aldine press decided to tackle Gorgias and Alcidas in concurrence with a series of key instruments such as, in ascending order of strictness, the Byzantine *Souda*, Pollux's *Onomasticon*, and Harpocration's commentary to the Attic orators (which was already hunted for by Lascaris as a particularly prized possession in the 1490s). Second, not only did linguistic ability set the sophists above the throng of their admirers: the ability to think in language intelligible to Pericles, as Graham

Anderson has written, gave them a lifeline to their own past, as well.⁴³ The extent to which Renaissance humanists were able to see through this scheme could still be pressed to higher scholarly results. As a careful printer, Manutius fought against inaccuracies and errors, and alongside overwhelming pressure of business.⁴⁴ It must be taken into account that the 'Atticism' of the Sophists reassembled in 1513 was not coincidental, and that it provided an important approximation of what a school of thought and its linguistic conventions looked like. In the current work of classical philologists, who must assess the morphology and genealogy of individual manuscripts, Attic language can be taken as reproducing more or less accurately the style of a lost archetype. Yet, Manutius had reasons to proceed otherwise. While his entourage ensured him about the reliability of discrete emendations, it was his decision to defend a conflation of sophists and orators as something entirely different from a mere accident of textual transmission. In a manner of speaking, the social response to the *Greek Orators* was determined by a hypercorrection on behalf of the printer himself.

4. The epistemic framework: the controversial integrity of Alcidas

Readers of the Aldine collection knew that they possessed the genuine text of 'real' Attic orators, by way of serendipitous scribal discoveries detailed in the paratextual materials; failing that, they would have been content to enjoy a piece of 'designer Attic' prose based on them, which is exactly what Manutius is encouraging the young Venetian lawyers to do. Questions of authenticity are often unspectacular and almost certainly more familiar to historians of the fifth century BC or to scholars of the Second Sophistic than to those working on sixteenth-century Venice. Only by simultaneously accounting for the 1513 Alcidas as both a virtuoso display of humanist (and editorial) integrity and a piece of ersatz Attic recreation, one could properly see why being virtually indistinguishable from the genuine article was a positive feature. Lucian described the neighboring domains of fraud and philology in a passage of his *Pseudologist* which narrates the forging of a manual by Tisias, the alleged founder of Greek rhetoric, and then the gulling of a collector who is forced into buying it at an exorbitant price. Tisias was a Syracusan. Thus imperial collectors in Byzantium sought accounts and proofs in Doric dialect. In this way, Lucian's accusation testifies to a demand for such a prized relic that would continue well into the Renaissance, and to the incentives of producing, at some juncture, a lucrative substitute for irretrievable titles. Sophistic inventiveness achieved a proverbial status, but hardly with more fitting results than in Aldus' Venice.

Naturally, speaking of integrity, a first task for students of the Sophists is to determine the relation between printed and scribal copies. The Alcidas edited by Manutius has little independent value from the manuscripts it depends on—namely, copies of two identifiably older archetypes, the MS 88 in Heidelberg and Burney 95 in the British Library. Even though scholars disagree on the stemmatic autonomy of these Venetian copies, they all bear the name of Alcidas as the author of the surviving

fragments. Among these is a short speech called *Odysseus against the Treachery of Palamedes*, which recalls a very similar speech under the name of Gorgias in defense of Palamedes, but which is perhaps more directly comparable to the speeches attributed to Antisthenes for Ajax and Odysseus when claiming the armor of Achilles. Either way, elaborating a prosecution speech against an old enemy of Odysseus based on the plotting of Greek myth fits neatly with the cultural context of Alcidas' generation and the generation of his teachers. Incidentally, this chronological dimension is lost on the Aldine imprint, which banks on sophistic rhetoric as much as on mythological importance. There are no ancient allusions to the work, except Plato's reference, in *Phaedrus* 261, to an "Eleatic Palamedes," identified by Quintilian (or by an exegetical tradition reaching the Spaniard) with Alcidas.

Quintilian might have been right about the identification and wrong about the speech being a forgery; as for Plato, it is suggestive to think that by inventing a nickname for the sophist, he was also forced to imagine the speech that Alcidas could have written on Palamedes. In fact, paragraph 22 of Alcidas's *Odysseus* concerns the deceiving of the youth and institutes a clear parallel between Socrates before his death and Palamedes—a suggestion briefly reprised by Diogenes Laertius. In 2008, Neil O'Sullivan, the world's leading scholar on Alcidas, asked himself if the anonymous speech could have been attached at a later time to Gorgias's pupil, and moved his examination from historic to linguistic background. Basing his conclusions on the presence of post-classical clauses that have no business at all in a text of the classical era introduced by the particles ἵνα or ὅπως, but that are otherwise documented in papyri of the Ptolemaic era, O'Sullivan persuasively demonstrated that the speech could not have been written by Alcidas and cannot be earlier than the first century BC.⁴⁵

O'Sullivan's demonstration of forgery is important in itself, for the light it sheds on Manutius' intentions, and for displaying the overwhelming preference for prose by which the sophists were commonly understood. Before Aldus, the promotion of the book as the necessary medium for the permanent recording of their thought was crucial. On the one hand, at the heart of the First Sophistic lies a controversy between written and spoken performance, or, as Aristotle is prepared to acknowledge in the third book of his *Rhetoric*, between written and 'competitive' style—and Aristotle's case is remarkable, as I have mentioned earlier, because the sophists, having been rejected, now provide the cornerstone of the philosopher's analysis of rhetorical prose. In that way, along with Gorgias, Alcidas is dismissed in the early chapters of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, only to be reintroduced as an arbiter of Hellenistic fondness for books—against his better will as a great champion of extemporaneous speech, more concerned with emotional impact than with conveying the truth. On the other hand, the unambiguous self-presentation of writers in the larger sophistic orbit like Euripides as intensely bookish is contradicted by the criticism heaped upon him by Aristophanes: not only one of the very few certain sources for the critical language of Aristophanes' *Frogs* is Gorgias himself, but in the *Knights* (347-50) the grandiloquent Cleon abuses a rival

for having to stay up at night, drinking water and preparing his speech. Furthermore, Aristophanes' preoccupations resonate with a fragment of another discourse by Alcidas, *On the Sophists*, which was included in the Manutian volumes and in which Alcidas rejects Prodicus' reliance on the skills of the written word.

The Sophists flourished in cities littered with booksellers and stalls, while Alcidas remains a paradoxical witness of that larger trend. In the fragments attributed to him Alcidas defends the spoken word and insists that he was unhappy with ineffective or harmful persuasion (showing in this a strong affinity with Antisthenes), but every time he was anthologized, either in manuscript or in print, a decision was made to emphasize within the collection the forensic background of his work. Manutius is no exception: no matter how Alcidas wanted his *logoi* to be understood as tools for thinking, they were brought back to the courthouse to provide a feasible intellectual counterpart to Gorgias and increase the firm's tally of available Attic orators.

The talent of Marcus Musurus aside, by the 1510s the best traces of Alcidas' career in fifteenth-century manuscripts had already migrated from the Medicean court in the 1490s to the orbit of Venetian bibliophiles such as Grimani and Bessarion.⁴⁶ Still, the Manutian construction of the *Greek Orators* was not without frustration. The primary witness of Alcidas is the Marcianus gr. VIII.1, which also has a central role in the transmission of Lysias⁴⁷ and can be traced to the scriptorium of Cardinal Bessarion. Bessarion's copy put together Lysias, Gorgias in praise of Helen, the two speeches of Alcidas—that is, *Odysseus* and *On the Sophists*—followed by two orations of Antisthenes and a small anthology of Pythagorean writings. According to Lotte Labowsky, who worked on the inventories of Bessarion's library, the Cardinal considered this copy as part of his collection of history and rhetoric, and stored it between Libanius and Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistae*.⁴⁸ There would be many considerations to offer at this juncture, ranging from the importance of genre to Bessarion's information management, but the following statements are a feasible, conclusive assessment of how the epistemic production of the *Greek Orators* differs from the scribal models it depends on.

Once again, the Medicean "Attic" tradition—to which the work of the sophists Alcidas and Antisthenes was appended—was no longer in Florence but in the Venetian bibliophile market (with or without the intervention of personnel with open Strozzi sympathies). If one compares these manuscript testimonies in their entirety—meaning, form and construction, but also the highly complementary nature of their content—with the 1513 edition of Manutius, the result is that only the Quattrocento set is unified, whereas the Aldine *Orators* are fractured in two volumes, first omitting Gorgias' *Helen* and Alcidas' *Odysseus*, despite their established scribal warranty, and then reinserting them in Volume II, forcibly laboring to justify this belated intervention in order to restore their original, parallel position besides the Palamedes. One might speculate that Musurus had some part in rectifying Alcidas' omission, but in any event details are inconclusive. By including *Odysseus* Manutius might have admitted an interloper (more or less like Diels with Critias),

although, to his credit, no evidence of its non-Sophistic status was available at the time. By the same token, his decision to treat the sophists as orators rather than philosophers was not only intensely practical but also sanctioned by the manuscript tradition of these works.

In fact, by trying to set up Gorgias and Alcidas as the two sides of an identical demonstration, Aldus Manutius was only responding—with some perplexing delay and anxiety on his part—to the advances of the Cretan copyists and the way they organized the topic. It was from Crete, then, that sophistic antagonism brought a “supplementary” logic to printing or library pursuits, effectively functioning as a meta-rhetorical tradition. If we see the concomitant revitalization of display oratory — instigated in equal measure by the First and the Second Sophistic — as a discipline of knowledge, rather than a recasting of the classical dichotomy between performative and text-centered practices, the rewards are both epistemological and spatial. Epistemological — because a significant portion of the intellectual persona is now taken by a public performance of its work. And spatial — because the cultural *backdrop* of the Eastern Mediterranean is now *forefronted* and demonstrated to be a crucial factor in the Venetian book trade. To the extent that commercial characters were more stable than the fickle political allegiances of the city, this segment of sophistic rediscovery (to say nothing of the Aldine academy as a whole) could be re-written as a sea-to-inland narrative. After all, if ships change the shore, to borrow a formulation from social network analysis, why not Greek books?

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Notes

¹ This approach takes the environmentalist view that for Venetian entrepreneurs the sea is normal and the land is the fringe. The ‘return’ of the Sophists was endemic to the books and ideas exchanged through coastal seafaring and the role of funnel played by locales such as Crete or Cyprus. In this way, my suggestion of grounding the study of Venetian book trading on a new ‘archaeology of the sea’ (see Malkin) responds to Politian’s desire for the humanist to ‘swim without support’ (Moss, 79).

² Gulizia 2015.

³ Gulizia 2017.

- ⁴ See Renn *et al.*
- ⁵ For the sophist as a teacher of rhetoric, see Ostwald and Lynch.
- ⁶ I cite from the recent translation of Wilson, 223.
- ⁷ Cf. Baten and van Zanden, and Buringh and van Zanden.
- ⁸ “[O]rationes diligentius recognitas” (Wilson, 222).
- ⁹ On the tradition of republican deliberative debates see Cox.
- ¹⁰ Here and in what immediately follows I profited from Moli-
no’s discussion of a separation of two media across a linguistic
divide—*avviso* and *Zeitung*.
- ¹¹ Wilson, 224.
- ¹² “Aut saltem scirent, quale sit de hoc medico Athenaei iudi-
cium, qui in quodam convivio ad quod multi viri docti convene-
rant, ait inter caeteros adfuisse Galenum Pergamenum medicum,
qui neminem habuerat usque ad suae aetatis tempora philoso-
phandi scientia, vel dicendi facultate superiorem” (Nicolai Leon-
niceni *Opuscula*, Basel 1532, c. 147r).
- ¹³ Gagarin, 19-21.
- ¹⁴ Cf., e.g., Manutius’ preface to the *Greek Rhetoricians* in 1508
(Wilson, 195-197).
- ¹⁵ *Lexicon Historiographicum*, vol. I, pp. 36-66.
- ¹⁶ Wilson, 225.
- ¹⁷ Incidentally, nothing in Gorgias’ exercise—which is based on
repeated *eikos* arguments—sustains Plato’s assertion that the
Sophists saw that “probabilities should be more honored than
truths” (*Phaedrus* 267a).
- ¹⁸ On Manutius’ promise of indexing (“Quibus est animus facere
indicem eorum omnium, quae scitu digna in iis ispsis habentur
commentariis,” Wilson, 220), see Cevolini.
- ¹⁹ As Cicero reports (*Brutus* 12.47), Gorgias thought an orator
should “amplify a subject with praise.”
- ²⁰ It is one thing to see the Second Sophistic as an intellectual
aftermath, quite another to construct a taste based on figures
such as Philostratus and Galen, and their propensity to adversar-
ial disputation; see Mattern.
- ²¹ Cf. the classic study of Irigoin.
- ²² It does not help that most volumes have been commissioned
for anniversary or with the purpose of working out catalogues of
printed titles; see, most recently, Plebani.
- ²³ See at least Mugnai Carrara and Jackson.
- ²⁴ Miller.
- ²⁵ Levine.
- ²⁶ Lehoux, 21-46.
- ²⁷ MacPhail.
- ²⁸ Bausi.
- ²⁹ Cf. Naser Eslami, Gaul, and Kaldellis.
- ³⁰ Rostagni.
- ³¹ Cf. Kotwick.
- ³² Untersteiner.
- ³³ Many scholars who followed Untersteiner’s legacy, however,
including Fernanda Decleva Caizzi, Andrea Capra, and Anna De
Pace, have embraced Renaissance humanists as the heirs and
successors of the sophists; see for all De Pace.
- ³⁴ See Dionisotti and Cambiano.
- ³⁵ Speake.
- ³⁶ Cf. Martin.
- ³⁷ See Bolzoni and Graheli.
- ³⁸ Brown.
- ³⁹ The editors of the 1964 Liddell-Scott-Jones lexicon, induced
by the parenthetical $\phi\alpha\sigma\acute{\iota}$, called it a proverb.
- ⁴⁰ Lenz.
- ⁴¹ In “A Professor of Public Speaking,” Lucian described this
situation, observing a sophist attaining great success by calling
sunbathing ‘insolation’, dawn ‘crepuscule’, and scraping down
‘destrigillation’.
- ⁴² Judging from the ‘best and purest’ (“candidissimum”) in Wil-
son, 220.
- ⁴³ Anderson, 100.
- ⁴⁴ Cf. Wilson, 161.
- ⁴⁵ O’Sullivan.
- ⁴⁶ In this respect, Aldus’ strategy is similar to the one he used
for Galen with regards to the private collection of the humanist-
doctor Leonicensio, with the difference that Leonicensio was per-
sonally much more reluctant than Musurus to lend his services
and only marginally associated with the press; see Perilli.
- ⁴⁷ The MS is constructed in parchment, in regular quinions, and
its scribe has been identified with the Cretan copyist Aristobulus
Apostolius. Several apographs have been taken from this Cretan
antigraph, all containing an anthology of Lysias’ orations along
with Gorgias, Alcidas, and various other epistles.
- ⁴⁸ The exact same content has been described in Vat. lat. 3960, a
sixteenth-century inventory of Domenico Grimani’s library at
the time in which it was transferred, by deed, to the convent of
S. Anthony in Venice.

From Wit to Shit: Notes for an “Emotional” Lexicon of Sophistry during the Renaissance

Jorge Ledo

Abstract: From the late fourteenth century to the early sixteenth century, authors of neo-Latin literature developed an ever-increasing catalogue of disparaging terms aimed at their perceived rivals, the ancient and contemporary sophists. This extensive vocabulary was deployed against the sophists’ perceived attempts to confuse their listeners, misguide their interlocutors, and corrupt classical learning. This vocabulary ranged from philosophical jargon, to straightforward critiques, to directly derogatory sobriquets. In these pages, I seek to tease out the origin, evolution, and adscription of these terms. In addition, I argue that the study of this lexicon can shed light on the role played by sophistries in the culture of disputation, conversation, and intellectual exchange during the Renaissance. Finally, I will clarify some issues related to the evolution of Latin during the sixteenth century.

Keywords: history of communication, history of education, history of derogatory language, humanist latin, humanist-scholastic debate, abusive remarks.

To Roland Béhar

Introduction¹

After the first confrontations of classicists with scholastic philosophers and theologians² at the end of the fourteenth century, humanists never stopped collecting labels from classical and Christian tradition, or coining new ones, to caricaturize scholasticism. Far too frequently, this vocabulary has been read as a manifestation of the humanists’ interest in stressing the gap between themselves and the predominant culture in cathedral schools and universities through the display of their command of Latin and their wit. This view, based upon the fact that such terms were basically abusive remarks, has left aside questions such as how a humanist selected and disseminated certain phrases, labels, and epithets, how they were approved and used by his peers, and under what circumstances they endured. Furthermore, once one of these labels was incorporated into their vocabulary, humanists took it for granted that their fellows could grasp its nuances without further clarification. Because of this, Renaissance scholars, as well as editors and translators of early modern texts, have been commonly misled by such terms; and, contrary to the general understanding, they should be considered more than a mere cabinet of lexical curiosities and their study far from trivial.

Before outlining the history and evolution of some of these words, I need to give one definition and explain two

limitations with regard to my approach. As for the definition, the “emotional” in the title stresses that I do not intend to explore how Renaissance humanists dealt with classical and medieval *insolubilia* and obligations, late-medieval speculative grammar, classifications of arguments, issues of scholastic logic, theology, and so on; but rather, that I aim to appraise how these authors created and developed an ever-increasing lexicon of derogatory labels to refer to scholasticism as a form of sophistry, and how these terms acquired new overtones through their relationship to each other and their signifieds. “Emotional” also alludes to a particular quality of this vocabulary: namely, that it was shaped with the intention of being precise with regard to which aspects of scholasticism it wanted to deride, but, at the same time, was never intended to provide a philosophical criticism of scholasticism as such. Finally, “emotional” denotes the historical evolution of this vocabulary, as anger, verbal violence, and coarseness eventually replaced both elegance and wit.

In line with the general topic of this issue of *Philosophical Readings*, I have limited my exploration of these terms to those which exploited the identification between scholasticism and sophistry. As a second limitation, imposed by the amount of material that must be considered for such a task, and by the fact that the following pages represent a research in progress, I have provided a cursory set of problems which correspond to the main sections below: “What is a sophist?”, “How to fight and defeat a hydra”, “Scholastic disputation *redux*: The *logotheca* of verbal duels”, “The *logothecae* of *minutiae scholasticae*”, and “Sophistry as shit”.

1. What is a sophist?

As researchers on late-medieval education have explained,³ around the middle of the thirteenth century two new concepts, *quaestionista* and *sophista*, started to be used at the University of Oxford with a very precise meaning that went far beyond the traditional attribution of the terms. They were rooted in *quaestio* and *sophisma*, two common terms in cathedral schools and universities across Europe, where they referred to the stages in students’ education and masters’ careers and to the specific roles students and masters were expected to perform within the university.

The Latin origin and evolution of each term is nonetheless quite different. *Quaestio*, on the one hand, already referred to instruction in classical antiquity, and it kept

this meaning during the middle ages until around the twelfth century. At that point, it started to acquire a more refined connotation that included, in the first place, the *lectio*—that is, a master reading and commenting on a text—and, secondly, a direct inquiry addressed to the student concerning exacting passages. This inquiry could only be answered positively and negatively, through the proposition (*propositio*) of arguments *pro et contra*, to find a solution (*determinatio*) to the problems (*dubia*) posed by the master. As this procedure became common in schools and universities, these conundrums, which had their origin in the reading and exposition of particular authoritative texts, were soon gathered into collections of *quaestiones*. As the popularity of such collections increased, the discussion of these puzzling questions increasingly came to replace the *lectio* in classes for advanced students. The collections evolved into several subgenres, among them the *quaestio disputata*—a record of a given disputation or a treatise written following the mode of the *quaestio* itself—widely used in faculties of arts, law, medicine and theology, and the *quodlibeta* (Hamesse 17–48).

Sophisma, on the other hand, did not enjoy such a long tradition as a Latin educational term. Only after its inclusion in medieval instruction did it partially shake off the negative connotations it had carried from classical antiquity onwards.⁴ In medieval universities, *sophismata* referred to statements with twofold implications found in readings of the curriculum. These statements led to discussions on general or abstract issues of grammar, logic, natural philosophy, law, and eventually theology, based on other readings also included in the curriculum. The student was not only expected to have a good knowledge of assigned readings, but also to demonstrate his command of logical reasoning and debate. Like *quaestio*, once transformed into a technical concept *sophisma* evolved to refer either to the statement itself or to the conjunction of the statement and its subsequent discussion. Soon, *sophismata* were gathered into collections and, like *quaestiones*, came to constitute a literary genre (Spade).

By the late thirteenth century, *sophismata* had become one of the premises of the medieval curriculum, from its first steps to the baccalaureate. From the fourteenth century onwards, *sophismata* also became public disputations in which different schools competed: bachelors played the roles of respondents and opponents, and the masters were present as a jury. But the role of *quaestiones* and *sophismata* did not end there. To become *baccalaureus* and then *doctoratus* required proof of the mastery of both techniques. At the University of Paris, this assessment was composed of three long, exacting, and complex exams called *vesperiae*, *aula*, and *resumpta* or *resumptiva*, to which *tentativa* and *magisterium* were eventually added.⁵ These exams were part of the curriculum until certain reforms were made to the course of studies from the sixteenth century onwards. This system was adopted, although with differences, in late-medieval universities all across Europe and lived on during the Renaissance.⁶

Given the complex and excursive nature of these curricula, it is not difficult for a scholar of the Renaissance to find attacks made by humanists against this highly technical approach to disputation, with its exceedingly strict norms and the disregard for the elegance of Latin by mas-

ters and students alike.⁷ However, not all humanists shared a negative opinion of these practices. For instance, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, who had the chance to attend the *vesperie* of Johannes Laillier, celebrated at the Sorbonne between July 1485 and March 1486, extolled them as follows in his so-called *Oratio de hominis dignitate* [1486]:⁸

Primum quidem ad eos, qui hunc publice disputandi morem calumniantur, multa non sum dicturus, quando haec culpa, si culpa censetur, non solum vobis omnibus, doctores excellentissimi, qui sepius hoc munere non sine summa et laude et gloria functi estis, sed Platonis, sed Aristoteli, sed probatissimis omnium etatum philosophis mecum est communis. Quibus erat certissimum nihil ad consequendam quam querebant veritatis cognitionem sibi esse potius, quam ut essent in disputandi exercitatione frequentissimi. *Sicut enim per gymnasticam corporis vires firmiores fiunt, ita dubio procul in hac quasi litteraria palestra animi vires et fortiores longe et vegetiores evadunt.*

First, to those who slander this practice of disputing publicly, I am not going to say much, except that this crime, if they judge it a crime, is the joint work not only of all you very excellent doctors—who have often discharged this office not without very great praise and glory—but also of Plato and Aristotle and the most upright philosophers of every age, together with me. To them it was most certain that they had nothing better for reaching the knowledge of the truth which they sought than that they be very often in the exercise of disputing. *As through gymnastics the forces of the body are strengthened, so doubtless in this, as it were, literary gymnasium, the forces of the soul become much stronger and more vigorous.*

Over against Pico's intellectual *vigorexia*; we find the derogatory position, predominant among Renaissance humanists. In 1506, twenty years after the *Oratio*, Erasmus himself fled from Paris partly to avoid taking these exams; and yet twenty years later he remembered the practice very well, as is clear from the following statement taken from his *De utilitate colloquiorum* (1526):⁹

Huiusmodi permulta grammaticuli discutunt ex meis colloquiis, quibus sic obmurmurant isti. Sed indecorum est theologum iocari. Saltem hoc mihi concedant apud pueros, quod ipsi permittunt sibi viri apud viros in *vesperiis*, vt vocant rem insulsam insulso vocabulo.

Beginners learn many things of this sort from my *Colloquies*, about which these fellows mutter so. "But for a theologian to crack jokes is unseemly". At least they should grant me the right to do with boys what they, grown men, permit themselves publicly during "*Vespers*"—insipid name for an insipid thing.

It is in fact not far from reality to view Erasmus's defense of the *Colloquia* against their banning by the Faculty of Theology of the Sorbonne as a confrontation between two different ways of understanding education, conversation, dialogue, and dialectics.

2. How to fight and defeat a hydra

As I have already mentioned, however, Erasmus was not, by any means, the first to oppose the medieval academic curriculum and the practice of disputation that it propagated. In *The Sophistic Renaissance*, Eric MacPhail col-

lected a number of passages from the works of Petrarch that are quite illustrative for understanding one of the first opinions on “modern sophistry” made by a fourteenth-century classicist. However, I shall follow a different path here and call attention to this well-known excerpt from Plato’s *Euthydemus* (297c–d):¹⁰

You are running away, Socrates, said Dionysodorus; you refuse to answer./ Yes, and with good reason, I said: for I am weaker than either one of you, so I have no scruple about running away from the two together. You see, I am sadly inferior to Hercules, who was no match for the hydra—that she-professor who was so clever that she sent forth many leads of debate in place of each one that was cut off; nor for another sort of crab-professor from the sea—freshly, I fancy, arrived on shore: and, when the hero was so bothered with its leftward barks and bites, he summoned his nephew Iolaus to the rescue, and he brought him effective relief.

This passage is of interest insofar as it was unknown until the late fifteenth century. In fact, Socrates’s comparison of Euthydemus with the Hydra of Lerna survived—before Ficino recovered and translated Plato’s *Dialogues*—thanks to St. Jerome’s translation of Eusebius of Caesarea’s *Chronicon*,¹¹ where it was found in turn by Giovanni Boccaccio, who made the following comment in the *Genealogies of the Pagan Gods* [ante 1375]:¹²

Eusebius autem in libro temporum de hac Hydra aliter sentire Platonem dicit, quem ait asserere Hydras callidissimum fuisse *Sophistam*, nam *Sophistarum* mos est, nisi quis auertat, adeo *propositiones* suas tradere, ut uno *soluta dubio* multa consurgant. Sed astutus philosophus dimissis *accessoriis* ad *internitionem principalis* conatur, quo remoto, caetera remouentur.

In the *Chronicon*, Eusebius states that Plato had a different interpretation of this Hydra. Plato affirms, he says, that the Hydra is a most skillful *sophist*, as *sophists* are accustomed—unless someone brings them into light—to say their *propositions* in such a way that once a *doubt* is *solved*, many more arise. But the wary philosopher, putting aside *subsidiary* issues, seeks to destroy the *main proposition*, so once it is removed, so are the rest.

This brief second-hand mention and the elaboration made by Boccaccio are enlightening. It is evident from the words he chooses for providing a Euhemeristic interpretation of Socrates’s comparison—and it could not have been otherwise—that the *sophista* he has in mind is the one bred in the art of the *quaestiones* and *sophismata*. Both this brief mention and its contents would be enriched soon.

Only eight years after the death of Boccaccio, Coluccio Salutati had already begun one of his most ambitious works, *De laboribus Herculis* (1383–1391). In the ninth chapter of the third book, Salutati provides a much more extensive interpretation of Socrates’s Hydra, partly drawn from medieval sources,¹³ introducing three important ways of looking at the acceptance of “sophist” within a new intellectual paradigm—that of the humanists—and marking a clear difference over against the succinct treatment by Boccaccio. Salutati first approaches the fundamental opposition between the philosopher and the sophist, which, as can be inferred, has nothing to do with Plato’s *Euthydemus*, but rather with the defense of a new art of disputation that is clearly opposed to the culture of

medieval schools and universities. From this point of view, Salutati contrasts his reckoning of education as based on the recovery and study of the classics with the technical scholastic view related to the creation of experts through verbal confrontation.

The second aspect of Salutati’s approach is the distinction between logic, grounded in reasoning, and sophistry, built upon arguments that hide fallacies. The third is the establishment of an art of disputation which contrasts a technical approach to the defense and legitimization of certain ideas with an ethical inclination which includes, paradoxically, the classical definition of rhetoric on the one hand, and the definition of ethics on the other.

Because Boccaccio and Salutati lacked the sources that would have been required for a correct interpretation of what Socrates meant by “sophists”, they were able to establish a fortunate parallel with contemporary affairs and to use the authority of Plato, the master of Aristotle, to attack scholasticism. This interpretation instituted a tradition which identified scholastic sophistries and sophists with the Hydra of Lerna and which would become much richer during the fifteenth century.¹⁴ Furthermore, when Plato’s works began to be exhumed, epitomized, and translated into Latin, this association of sophist and Hydra was not simply discarded in favor of more historically accurate understandings.¹⁵ As a matter of fact, Marsilio Ficino—who knew Plato’s works and the deeds of Plato’s sophists extremely well—wrote the following passage in a letter dated 15 September 1489 and entitled *A defense treating medicine, astrology and the life of the cosmos, and also the Magi who greeted the new-born Christ*,¹⁶ calling his circle to defend the publication of his *De vita libri tres* (1480–1489):

Tu vero, Guicciardine, carissime compater, ito nunc, ito alacer, Politianum Herculem accersito. Hercules quondam ubi periculosos certandum foret, vocitabat Iolaum. Tu nunc similiter Herculem. Nosti profecto quot barbara monstra Latium iam devastantia Politianus Hercules invaserit, laceraverit, interemerit; quam acriter expugnet passim, quam tuto propugnet. Hic ergo vel centum hydrae capita nostris liberis minitania statim contundet clava, flammisque comburet.

But you, Guicciardini, dearest comrade, go now, go swiftly, fetch Poliziano, our Hercules. Long ago, when there was to be a particularly dangerous fight, Hercules used to call out for Iolaus; you must now likewise call out for Hercules. You know only too well how many barbarous monsters Poliziano, our Hercules, has attacked, battered and destroyed: monsters ravaging Latium. You know how fiercely he fights on all sides, how sure is his defense. Therefore, he will immediately pound with his club and burn up in flames even the hundred heads of the Hydra which are now threatening our children.

Here, Poliziano is represented as Hercules—a sobriquet as adored by Ficino as it was disliked by Angelo¹⁷—that is, as the champion of the *politiores sive humaniores litterae* against an ever-increasing number of sophists who constantly threatened to spoil the aims and destroy the fruits of the new erudition.

The influence of these allegorical and mythological interpretations of the Hydra, as the monster of mystifying sophistry who had to be defeated in order to impose a new model of learning—a model that would erase the dark

middle ages and pave the way for a new golden age—was not constrained to Italy or humanists. This powerful image spread widely, employed at the beginning of the Reformation not only by Luther himself (from 1509 onwards),¹⁸ but also in H. Eobanus Hessus's representation of Reuchlin as Hercules¹⁹ and in his attacks against Edward Lee,²⁰ and even by Reuchlin himself in his letters to Hermann von Neuenahr the elder.²¹ It appeared also in the widely popular image of Luther as the “Hercules Germanicus”, destined to slash the many-headed monster of the Catholic Hydra.²² The Hydra was deployed to such an extent that Andrea Alciato's words in his *Epistula*—a *declamatio*, in reality—*contra vitam monasticam* (c. 1517–1518),²³ addressed to Bernardus Mattius, a fellow humanist who entered the Franciscan order, seem more than fair some ten years after the comparison became widespread:

Cum enim divinus ille Plato sophisten quendam fuisse Hydram prodidit, vaticinabatur credo et unum aliquem vestrum animo volutabat, cum quo quisquam de suo dogmate disputare ausit. Quotquot argumenta referes, rursus pullulant et mille syllogismis fortiores insurgunt.

For when divine Plato declared, as someone dared to dispute with him about his doctrine, that a certain sophist was a hydra, he was prophesying, I believe, and had in mind one of your people. However many arguments you put, they multiply theirs in return and rise up stronger again with a thousand syllogisms.

3. Sophistry *redux*: the *logotheca* of verbal duels

As the hydra of “new sophistry” had many heads, the war against the “new sophists” had to be fought on several fronts and by diverse methods: the institutions of *studia humanitatis* and academies, the (literary) foundation of a new way of intellectual exchange, new models to approach texts critically, the display of formidable erudition, and the rapid and insistent deployment of this erudition to reveal the lack of accuracy in scholastic Latin or to demolish its philosophical assumptions and methods. But, instead of appraising the brawls, acrimonious confrontations, and decisive exchanges of blows in the cultural, political, and religious arenas, I will focus on the trench warfare, where humanists used *Latinitas* to build up a substantial “arsenal” against scholasticism.

Three ideas should be stressed with regards to the supplies of this arsenal. First, the incorporation of new terms was grounded on the identification of scholastic philosophy as sophistry, which allowed humanists to draw these terms from a wide variety of sources, usually written for purposes other than those of the humanists. Second, the incorporation of new terms, more than simply demonstrating erudition, provided precise concepts with which to attack every purportedly negative aspect of scholasticism. Third, these terms, besides being weapons against scholasticism, were most fundamentally tools intended for domestic consumption, so to speak; as such, they served as feedback of humanists' core ideas on communication, and reinforced their sensibility as classicists. To stress the fact that the re-collection and coinage of these terms went beyond antiquarian accumulation and

was backed up by an idea of order, I have borrowed from Guillaume Budé the term *logotheca*²⁴ to refer to them. Moreover, to introduce this extensive archive of terms succinctly, I have divided the “emotional” labelling of sophistry into three different yet complementary and permeable *logothecae*: one directed at the scholastic practice of disputation as such, another at the qualification of scholastic *sophistae*, and yet another at the labelling of scholastic arguments.

The first group is important because it paves the way for appraising the other two. With terms such as *altercationes*, *argutiae*, *austultationes* [*sic.*], *blateramenta*, *caedes*, *convicia*, *contentiones*, *dedalogiae*, *digladiationes*, *kainophontai*, *lites*, *logomachiai*, *logodaedaliae*, *mataeologiae*, *nauciae*, *nugae*, *pugnae* (*rusticanae*, *verborum*, etc.), *pugillatus*, *rationes* (*logicales*, *metaphysicales*, etc.), *rixae*, *seditiones verborum*, or *tolutiloquentiae*, among many others, humanists stressed three essential aspects of the new sophistry and the disputations held in her name: their violence, their dogmatism, and their irrelevance.²⁵ However, things are not as simple as they may seem.

As I have suggested elsewhere (Ledo), these concepts were not perfectly equivalent; rather, they presented a subtle hierarchy that had the virtue of helping an educated reader reconstruct not just their ramifications for general issues but also the relationships among them. Thus, reading *contentio*—a crucial term for the history of communication thanks to its inclusion in the medieval systems of the sins of the tongue and its leading role in late-medieval and Renaissance ethics of language—a humanist was able to reassemble a full genealogy of the values of communication defended by classical learning—*sapientia*, *sodalitas*, *pluralitas*, and *civilitas*—as opposed to medieval instruction and disquisition, characterized, from their point of view, by its *insipientia*, *superbia*, and *mendacitas*.²⁶

Logomachia, by way of example, was “recovered” by Erasmus from St. Paul's First Epistle to Timothy (1:4, 2:8, 6:4) and explained in many places, as in *De copia*,²⁷ *Explanatio symboli Apostolorum*,²⁸ and *Ciceronianus*.²⁹ But undoubtedly this Hellenism made its entry in the *logotheca* of sophistic contentiousness thanks to its debut in the following passage of the *Praise of Folly*:³⁰

Nec enim adduci possum, vt credam Paulum, e cuius vnus eruditione licet omneis aestimare, toties damnatum fuisse *quaestiones*, *disceptationes*, *genealogias*, et (vt ipse vocat) *λογομαχίας*, si eas percullisset *argutias*, praesertim cum onnes illius temporis *contentiones pugnaeque rusticanae* fuerint et crassae, si cum magistrorum nostrorum plusquam Chryssippeis *subtilitatibus* conferantur.

Nothing will make me believe that Paul, from whose learning we may judge all the other apostles, would so often have condemned *questions*, *arguments*, *genealogies*, and what he himself called “*battles of words*” if he had been well up in those *niceties*, especially when all the *controversies* and *disagreements* of that time would have been clumsy and unsophisticated affairs in comparison with the more than Chryssippean *subtleties* of the schoolmen of today.

This passage appears in Erasmus's *Folly* just after three extensive lists of sophisticated technicalities, *quaestiones*, and sects, delineating the fields of action for the detrac-

tion of sophistic scholasticism and clearly showing Erasmus’s procedure in providing a fair number of equivalent terms. But what interests us here is that, in bringing back *logomachíai*—the original Pauline term in Greek, which St. Jerome rendered as *contentiones*—Erasmus was not providing a Greek equivalent to a Latin word, but rather expressing where the battle against sophistry was about to be fought—in the study of the three sacred languages, in a new translation of the New Testament, etc.³¹—comparing the confrontation between humanism and scholasticism to the Pauline endeavor to disseminate the evangelical message in its purity against Jewish sects, pseudo-Christians, and mystifiers.

Besides its ability to produce this set of equivalences in an educated reader, the *logotheca* of verbal duels expanded in two more directions. In the first place, as I have said, it established connections with the other two *logothecae* (which insisted on the dogmatism of scholastic explorations and their irrelevance, as we will see below). These links were at times established by simple morphological variations (*nuga*, *nugator*; *logodaedalia*, *logodaedalus*; etc.), but at other times by the creation and expansion of a whole conceptual field (*nuga*: *deliramentum*, *ineptia*, *inquinamentum*, *naucus*, *latratus*, *peripsemata*, *sterquilinium*, etc.). Secondly, the speed with which new terms were able to be incorporated into these *logothecae* raises the question of how this was done; and although the inclusion of a candidate in a blockbuster such as the *Praise of Folly* would not exactly hurt, the key for the success of a new term was its ability both to add something which was lacking in the *logotheca* (as we have seen with *logomachíai*) and to relate with its peers.

This procedure can be seen over and over again. Pauline *kenophóniai* or *kainophóniai*, another concept included in this *logotheca* (although secondary and with very reduced circulation), was presented in Erasmus’s *Annotations on 1 Timothy 6–20*.³² His commentary on this passage not only provides a translation of *κενοφωνίαί* to Latin, but it does so by accompanying it with a whole set of terms which will be related to it both in the *logotheca* of verbal confrontations and in that of *minutiae scholasticae*. Examples abound. Take, for instance, this formulation from the *Colloquiorum formulae* (1518) as applied to Scotists: “All right, he shall be admitted, as long as he leaves at home his sophisticated monsters, his nonsense, sycophancies, arrogance, virulence, sardonic grin, Thrasonical boasts, and self-love”.³³ As a matter of fact, the new labels for the scholastic disputations and controversies became a genre in themselves, going well beyond Erasmus and extending to the practices of the faculties of arts, law, medicine, and theology and their respective professions. A final example can be found in connection with the study and practice of law in Cornelius Agrippa’s *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum* (1531)³⁴:

Quibus tum ad hoc ipsum adsunt procuratores et notarii, quos vocant, tabelliones, quorum injurias et damna, et nequitas et falsifica, omnes patienter ferre oportet, cum omnium fidem et licentiam, ac potestatem apostolica et imperiale autoritate se obtinuisse videntur. Atque inter hos illi sunt praecipui qui norint forum egregie perturbare, miscere lites, confundere causas, supponere testamenta, instrumenta, rescripta, diplomata, tum egregie fallere, decipere et ubi opus est pejerare et falsum

scribere. *Omnia audere*, et construendis *dolis*, *fraudibus*, *technis*, *calumniis*, *laqueis*, *captiunculis*, *insidiis*, *tricis*, *ambagibus*, *circumventionibus*, *Scyllis et Charibdis* se a nullo vinci patientur.

Among these public notaries are to be reckon’d, whose injuries, falsities, and mischiefs continually by them wrought, all are bound to endure, while they pretend to have their credit, license, and authority from the Apostolike and Imperial power. Among whom they are to be accounted the chiefest, who know best how to trouble the court, perplex causes, counterfeit wills and deeds, to abuse and deceive their clyents, and, if need be, to forswear themselves, venturing at any roguery, rather than be outdone in plotting and contriving cheats, scandals, quirks, tricks, quillets, treacheries, Scylla’s and Charybdis, by any other person whatsoever.

4. The *logothecae* of *minutiae scholasticae*

Together with the derisive terms employed to refer to the medieval and contemporary practice of disputation held in universities (and to scholastic disputation in general), humanists’ re-collection, coinage, and use of labels to express their contempt for old-fashioned grammar teachers, to scorn scholastic sophists, and to attack the arguments and the techniques employed in their disputations soon conformed to two more complementary *logothecae*.

In the attacks on scholastic teachers and philosophers, sometimes irony sufficed. The titles employed in the schools and universities of the time usually included a pinch—sometimes a handful—of scorn, following a tradition started around the middle of the twelfth century. For instance, one of the more popular titles assigned to doctors in theology, *magister noster*, was already employed with irony by Peter Abelard against his master, William of Champeaux,³⁵ and it continued to be used from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century to stress that, as a matter of fact, these *magistri nostri* did not master any discipline at all.³⁶ Other titles employed in the universities of the time, such as *baccalaureatus*, *licenciatus*, *magister*, *doctor* (used most often when accompanied by *angelicus*, *seraphicus*, etc., to refer to authorities) and common designations such as *summulista*, *logicus*, *physicus*, *intrante*,³⁷ *modista*, *logista*, *quaestionista*, *calculator*, *glossator*, *legista*, and *canonista* were used scornfully as well, not only to censure the pride behind these titles and as an attack against what they represented with regard to the institutionalization of philosophy and theology, but also because they were considered to be unclassical barbarisms, coined in a period when the European classical tradition and heritage were lost in darkness.³⁸ The same motivations lay behind the attacks *ad hominem* of the surnames of scholastic philosophers.³⁹ Even such common terms as *dialectica* and *dialecticus* could become derisive when employed by humanists such as Lorenzo Valla.⁴⁰

When irony did not suffice to stress the divide between the cultural, educational, and philosophical traditions of the new sophists and those of the humanists, there were a number of procedures that reinforced it—for instance, contrasts such as *grammatista/grammaticus*;⁴¹ *argutor*, *disputator*, *logiculus*,⁴² *logista*, *nebulus*,⁴³ *occamicus*, *occamista*, *occanista*, *φιλόνεικος*, *philoscotus*,⁴⁴ *pseudodialecticus*, *sc(h)olasticulus*, *sophicaster*, *sortista*

(or *sortistus*)⁴⁵/ *logicus* and *dialecticus*; *morologus*,⁴⁶ *mosorosophus*,⁴⁷ *philomorus*,⁴⁸ *philobarbarus*/ *philosophus*; or *aristotelicotatos*, *magisterculus*, *sententionarius*, *Sorbonicus*, *Sorbonista*, *theologaster*, *theologastrus*, *theologista* *theologus*⁴⁹—but also with characterizations of teachers of grammar, sophists, and philosophers taken from the classical tradition. In this last instance, wrath and pride, common to the first *logotheca*, were depicted and taken to the extreme. But to follow them, I am afraid, would divert us from our main topic.

For the third *logotheca*, which interests us more here, humanists collected and created from c. 1400 to c. 1530 an outstanding set of terms to refer to the arguments employed by scholastic philosophy and to their mnemonic formulas.⁵⁰ The census of the set of terms grew as a result of two main complementary procedures. On the one side, humanists gathered references to ancient dilemmas, fallacies, and paradoxes from classical sources⁵¹ with the aim of linking them to the logical arguments taught in the schools and universities of their time. For instance, in a renowned passage of the *Praise of Folly*⁵²—“and I’ll demonstrate (*docebo*) it, not by the Crocodile’s Syllogism (*crocodrilitis*), or the Heap (*soritis*), or the Horns (*ceratinis*), or any other dialectical subtlety of that kind; no, with what is called sound common sense”—Erasmus mentions terms already explained in classical authorities⁵³ and brought together in Poliziano’s *Miscellanea*.⁵⁴ However, Folly’s allusion cannot be understood as a mere erudite exhumation and repetition of classical *loci*; it needed to be connected with the instruction in logic of her own time. Therefore, there is no doubt that she is bearing in mind the tradition of *insolubilia* in the context of obligational disputations here, a connection that can be easily established once Melanchthon’s treatment of *coacervationes* in his *Compendiaria dialectices ratio* (c. 1520), or Vives’s treatment of *insolubilia*,⁵⁵ is taken into account.⁵⁶ The contrast between the somehow aseptic approach to *sorites* in Lorenzo Valla’s *Retractatio*⁵⁷ and the bitter attack against scholastic sophistries made by late fourteenth- to sixteenth-century scholars—either humanists, like Elio Antonio de Nebrija,⁵⁸ or non-humanists, like Jean Gerson⁵⁹—only makes the antithesis between the emotional or derogatory use of the term and the technical use more clear.⁶⁰ The ludic role played by these terms, most probably motivated by the educated Renaissance reader’s familiarity with them, is evident not only when we observe how humanists played with some of these concepts, but also when we move forward in time and find that Thomas Wilson offers in *The Rule of Reason* (1551) a collection of examples of *crocodilites*, *antistrephon*, *ceratinae*, *asistaton*, *cacosistaton*, *utis*, and *pseudomenos* “to delute the reader”.⁶¹

Besides commenting on classical dilemmas, and in order to provide points of comparison between themselves and scholastic logic, humanists also enlarged the *logotheca* of arguments and reasoning by adapting classical and post-classical vocabulary to add nuances to their attacks. The terms they chose sometimes amplified a traditional acceptance when this was originally very precise; or, conversely, the original terms were transformed into precise terms to attack a certain aspect of sophistry, notwithstanding their more general meaning in classical and post-classical Latin. Such a catalogue would include *ar-*

gutia, *argutiola*, *calculatio*, *captiuncula*, *cavilla*, *cavillatio*, *cautela*, *centaurus*, *chimera*, *commentitia*, *conclusiuncula*, *decipula*, *deliramentum*, *ignavia*, *importunitas*, (*sui[s]setica*) *inania*,⁶² *ineptia*, *ineptiola*, *inextricabilia*, *insania*, *inventiuncula*, *involutrum*, *labyrinthus*, *labyrinthiplexia*, *laqueus*, *latebra*, *logodaedalia*, *lucubrationuncula*, *naenia*, *pedica*, *praestigia* (or *praestygia*), *quisquilia*, *quaestiuncula*, *ratiuncula*, *retia* (us. in plural, *argumentorum*, *argutiarum*, etc.), *spina*, *sphinx*, *superstitio*, *techna*, *tela* *Vulcani*, *tendicula*, *thrasonismus*, *trica*, *trivium*, *vaframentum*, *verborum perplexitas*, and *versutiloquentia*, to mention just a few, but I will concentrate here on *captiuncula*, which will serve as an apt example of how this vocabulary acquired new acceptations.

Captiuncula, as a diminutive of *captio*, appears, as far as I know, only twice in classical Latin: once in Cicero’s *Letters to Atticus* XV. 6 to refer to the political and legal traps suffered by Servius, and again in Aulus Gellius’s *Attic Nights* XVI. II. 8: “Quid autem legis istius propugnatores in illa *captiuncula* facient, in qua haerere eos necessum est, si nihil amplius quam quod interrogati erunt responderint?” where *captiuncula* was translated by Rolfe in his edition for the Loeb Classical Library as “(false) dilemma”. This value of the diminutive, constrained to the perverse exploitation of law and legal procedures, had, as one would expect, an impact on the Latin of fifteenth-century humanists, as for instance in a passage of Cristoforo Landino’s *De vera nobilitate* ([1469–1470] c. 1487),⁶³ wherein he employs it to refer to the practice of lawyers changing a jury’s understanding of a given fact. Consequently, although the term was correctly translated as “fallacies” by Albert Rabil in the following passage, part of the meaning was inevitably lost:

Sin vero tam valida arma, tam humano generi salutaria in bonorum innocentiumque virorum pertinitem convertet, atque avaritia ductus disciplinam suam, operam ac linguam venalem habebit, si mercede victus omnia invertet, si astutia, calliditate, dolo malo, *captiunculis* malitiosisque interpretationibus nigerrima quaeque in candidiora vertere conabitur.

If, on the other hand, he changes such powerful weapons—things so advantageous to the human race—into the ruin of the good and the innocent and, led by avarice, puts up for sale his teaching, work, and language; if, overcome by desire for gain, he turns everything on his head and with adroitness, artifice, and evil deceit attempts to change the blackest things into the whitest by *fallacies* and crafty interpretations...

This was not the only acceptance of *captiuncula* for Landino, however, as he uses it in the *Disputationes Camaldulenses* (c. 1474) to refer to the uses of scholastic philosophy;⁶⁴ so it would be useful to ask ourselves when exactly it came to refer to philosophical sophistry. An answer can only be provisional: the first instances I have found in the Quattrocento with this meaning are Lorenzo Valla’s *Repastinatio* (1447–1455),⁶⁵ the *Encomium of St Thomas* (1457),⁶⁶ and Leon Battista Alberti’s *Momus* (1450).⁶⁷ So, it would be possible to affirm that around the middle of the fifteenth century *captiuncula* had been incorporated into the vocabulary of the humanists to deride “sophistic” arguments. But the process of transformation of *captiuncula* does not end there. Just a decade later, the term appears with a new acceptance which hints at

the relation of *captiuncula* with *captio*. At the same time, this new acceptionation is in line with medieval use, that is, to designate the quasi-magical power of sophistry to catch the attention and mystify the listener, as happens in Giovanni Pontano’s *Charon* (c. 1469).⁶⁸ This idea is also reflected in Marsilio Ficino’s *Commentary on Plato’s Symposium* or *De amore* (1469),⁶⁹ wherein after presenting the lemma *incantator fascinatoreque, potens, veneficus atque sophista*, he writes the following passage:

Sophistam Plato in *Sophiste* dialogo ambitiosum et subdolum definit disputatorem, qui *captiuncularum* versutiis falsum pro vero nobis ostendit cogitque eos qui secum disputant sibimet in sermonibus contradicite.

A sophist Plato defines, in the dialogue [the *Sophists*], as an ambitious and crafty debater who, by the subtleties of *sophistries*, shows us the false for the true, and forces those who dispute with him to contradict themselves in their speeches.

Interestingly enough, in later works both Pontano and Ficino abandoned this reference to magic, and used *captiuncula* according to its new acceptionation as “sophistical” tricks, or a more general “deception”.⁷⁰ Therefore, we can affirm that at the end of the fifteenth century, *captiuncula* was used as a part of the vocabulary that referred to scholastic “sophistries”.⁷¹ Antonio de Ferrariis uses the term to mark a clear distinction between two kinds of philosophy,⁷² one focused on disputation and linguistic tricks (*captiunculae*), the other on the Stoic tradition, which teaches that forgetting both material things and passions leads to a good and a happy life—the term is related therefore to the concept of philosophical *persona* which Christopher Celenza (2014, 149–150) discussed in a recent essay. Interestingly, the passage is also a reformulation of Salutati’s *De laboribus Herculis*:

Salutati	De Ferrariis
Huic igitur, sicut oportet, intentus reprehendit duos esse disputandi modos, unum veris et existentibus rationibus, alium sophisticis et apparentibus, ut, nisi discatur uterque, aut haberi philosophia nequeat aut inventa nullo modo defendi.	Pater illi optimus philosophus fuit et medicus, qui in illum simul cum anima philosophiam quoque infudit, non eam quae in <i>captiunculis</i> disputationibusque, sed quae in bene beateque vivendo versatur et in contemnendis humanis rebus, hoc est, in coercendis affectibus.
Therefore, the one who attends in a fitting way to this perceives that there are two manners of debating, one with true and manifest reasons, the other with sophistical and apparent ones, so that, unless he learns both, either he will not be able to acquire philosophy or else, having found it, there will be no way to defend it.	That one’s father was a most excellent philosopher and physician, who also infused philosophy into him together with the soul; not that philosophy which meditates on logical quirks and disputations, but that which meditates on good and fulfilled living, and on despising human matters, that is, on controlling the affections.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, most humanists would have agreed that *captiuncula* in its classical meaning had been displaced by its value as a technical term—a technical jibe, if you wish—to refer to the arguments used in scholastic disputation and, more precisely, to its practice in universities.⁷³ So extensive was this updated use that Agostino Nifo felt the need to include a new term in the *logotheca* devoted to sophists: *captiunculator*.⁷⁴

5. Scholastic sophists and sophistries as shit

To do justice to the title of this article, and to the process of degradation of scholastic sophistry in the *logothecae* of the humanists, these pages that opened upon the thirteenth century, when *quaestiones* and *sophismata* were considered wit, need now to be closed with these practices’ eventual comparison to excretion and, more particularly, to excrement, which happens to be much more frequent than expected.

Although there are comparisons of scholastic logic with dirt, rubbish, and even dunghills as early as the twelfth century,⁷⁵ it was only between the 1510s and 1530s that humanists developed freely into this commonplace. Several factors explain this. In the first place, humanism’s achievements had become widespread thanks to the popularity of some of its representatives, the role of the printing press in disseminating the materials they created, and the clear impact of classical learning in the curricula of many universities across Europe. Secondly, even though scholasticism was far from exhausted in higher education, students arrived at colleges with a body of knowledge much nearer to the *litterae humaniores* than that of previous generations, especially outside Italy; moreover, traditional bastions of scholasticism such as Oxford, Cambridge, and Paris had modified—or were close to modifying—their curricula, and humanists were appointed as teachers and tutors on a regular basis. It seems feasible that these changes led to a hastening decline in the ability to identify the nuances of the *logothecae* created and developed by scholars who were, if not dead, at least in their forties or fifties. Thirdly, when wit descends to scatology, it is probably a good sign that the possibilities of playing with and elaborating on an idea have come to an end.

From this point of view, it will not come as a surprise that Erasmus, following in the steps of Petrarch⁷⁶ and Bartholomaeus Coloniensis⁷⁷ (among many others), was one of the most active contributors to the *logothecae* of scholastic mystifications, nor that he played with comparing (sophistic) scholasticism to rot, excrement, and so forth from time to time—a game which soon attracted the attention of a considerable number of followers, imitators,⁷⁸ and “emulators”.⁷⁹ A well-known example is his use in the *Parabola* of the analogy of rotten food, sprouting from rotten brains,⁸⁰ when speaking of the literature of the Scotists⁸¹:

Vt cibi male olentes non videntur male olere his qui ederint, ita *spurcae Scotistarum* et *Sophistarum litterae* cum alios melioribus imbutos literis vehementer offendant ac nauseam moveant, eos qui *nugas* istiusmodi imbiberunt, nihil offendunt, imo bellae videntur et elegantes.

Food which smells unpleasant seems to have no smell to those who have eaten it. The *filthy literature* of *Scotists* and *sophisters* is like that: it gives great offence to others, who have had a more liberal education, and makes them feel sick, but to men soaked in that sort of *rubbish* it gives no offence and even seems to show neatness and elegance.

It was Erasmus also who provided, when vividly describing his life in the Collège de Montaigu, the link between university life and dirt. In 1532, the comparison of medieval textbooks and glosses with excrement had become widespread, as can be seen in this passage on Accursius's glosses to the *Pandectas* in Rabelais's *Pantagruel*:⁸²

Ainsi vint à Bourges où estudia bien long temps et profitta beacoup en la faculté des loix. Et disoit aulcunes fois que les livres des loix luy sembloient une belle robbe d'or, triumpante et précieuse à merveilles, qui feust brodée de merde: "Car (disoit il) au monde n'y a livres tant beaulx, tant aornés, tant élégans comme sont les textes des Pandectes: mais la broderie d'iceulx, c'est assavoir la glose de Accurse, est tant salle, tan infâme et punaise, que ce n'est que ordure et villenie".

So he came to Bourges, where he studied quite a long time, and learned a lot in the law school; and sometimes he used to say that the law books seemed to him a beautiful golden gown that was bordered with shit. "For", he said, "there are no books in the world so beautiful, so ornate, so elegant, as are the texts of the Pandects; but their border, to wit, the gloss by Accursius, is so foul, unspeakable, and smelly, that it's nothing but sewage and sludge".

Around two decades later, in a wonderful passage from his *Hieroglyphica* (1556),⁸³ Piero Valeriano animates his explanation of *nugae* and *cavillae* with the following image of a sophist as a pig romping in its own excrement:

Et ut, quod initio dicere coeperamus, prosequamur, sacerdotes illi cum nihil aeque abhorrent quam inanes sophistarum nugae et cavillosas verborum argutias argumentorumque decipulas in naturae viribus indagandis, eiusmodi notae hominem per suis hieroglyphicum significabant. Eodem intellectu apud Hebraeos suillam abstinere praeceptum ait Philo, admonitosque nos ea divina lege ut sophistas evitarem, per evitabilem huiusmodi animalis impuritatem. Illi enim acutissimis tantum acuratissimisque rerum distinctionibus, quod per bifidam animalis unguam interpretantur, quasi luto inhaesitantes, ita illis adhaerescunt, ut inde nunquam avelli possint, sed ad extremam usque senectutem ibidem computrescunt, nam et porci nihil illustre, nihil purum, nihil limpidum amant, sed turbida tantum spissa et sordida et faeculenta sectantur, inque his praecipuam statuunt voluptatem.

And to go ahead with what we started to say at the beginning: because there was nothing more abhorrent to those priests than the empty trivialities of sophists, quibbling nimbleness of words, and logical traps when investigating the forces of nature, they indicated this type of man by means of the hieroglyphic of a pig. Philo affirms that the commandment among the Hebrews to abstain from swine-flesh was understood in the same way; and that, by this divine law, through the avoidable impurity of such an animal we are admonished to avoid sophists. For they, by their so sharply pointed and highly elaborate distinctions about things, which they explain by means of a cloven-hoofed animal, are as it were caked in mud, and they stick to those things so much that later they can never scrape it off, but stink of it all the way to extreme old age. For pigs also love nothing bright, nothing clean, nothing transparent, but run after only what is muddy,

thick, foul, and mucky, and their principal pleasure is in these things.

6. Conclusion

With some highly valuable exceptions,⁸⁴ the history of verbal violence, derision, and contempt during the Renaissance as yet lacks a study which accounts for how this vocabulary was inspired, learned, and driven. From the starting point of a simple image—the identification of sophistry with the Hydra of Lerna—and its reinterpretation in the fourteenth century, I have sought to explain schematically the dramatic multiplication of derogatory terms against scholastic sophistry during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Poetic images aside, my hypothesis can be summarized in three main points.

First, the thriving of this vocabulary cannot be explained by increasing tensions between scholasticism and humanism—a less-than-accurate historiographical commonplace—but was in line, rather, with the evolution, maturity, and partial decadence of the Latin of the humanists. With this in mind, we ought to be able to identify discrete patterns of linguistic evolution in which this word-stock was able to prosper. In pursuit of such a pattern, I have borrowed from Guillaume Budé the concept of the *logotheca*, which allowed me to explain two complementary facts. First, I showed that in the evolution of this vocabulary, the survival and eventual success of a new term depended upon its relations with its likely peers. This was most often done through the new term's inclusion in lists of correlatives and through the exemplification its unique contribution to that list.

Secondly, for clarity's sake and due to the volume of terms considered, I have approached this vocabulary by sorting it out in three separate yet permeable *logothecae*: (1) terms that highlighted the opposition between the communicative and intellectual aims of humanism and those of scholasticism, (2) terms that referred to the agents and guardians of scholastic sophistries, and (3) terms that referred contemptuously to the arguments and "tricks" employed in scholastic debate.

In addition, given the permanent need to find new and effective derogatory terms and the fact that Latin was an artificial language in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, I have outlined the predictable consequences of carrying this process to an extreme. In this spirit, I have chosen to close my exposition with two complementary expressions of contempt: humanists' attacks *ad hominem* against scholastic thinkers and the comparison of scholastic sophistry with shit. It was certainly not by chance that Europe's doctrinal schism and the shift from creative derision to an outbreak of coarseness went hand in hand. My aim in these pages has been to offer an alternative to scholarly accounts explaining the trajectories of this early modern vocabulary with recourse to political or intergroup animosities between humanists and scholastics. Instead, we ought to examine closely (and indeed at greater length) the institutional and formal characteristics that drove the evolution of these derisive repertoires "from within."

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Folly (MacPhail 2006, 73), can be traced back at least to a known expression by Coluccio Salutati: “moderni sophiste”, *Epistolario* III. 15. A Roberto Guidi conte di Battifolle (Salutati 1891, 179). On Salutati’s passage, see the comments by Ullman, 85, Lawn, 107–108, and Fubini, 18.

³ The first part of this section is a synthesis of Fletcher 1967, 417–454; Becker, 23–25; Weijers 1987, 180–182 and 1988, 44–45; Fletcher 1988, 50; Lawn, 39–65; Maierù, 100–103 and 121–141, esp. 130–134; Weijers 2002, 79–80; Teeuwen s. v., 120–121; and Périgot, 25 and 102–107.

⁴ For the attacks on *sophismata* and *sophistae* from the twelfth century onwards, see Lawn, 101–126, esp. 104–107.

⁵ Koch, 160–168; Farge, 26–28; Weijers 1987, 407–424; Teeuwen, 315–317; and Weijers 2009, 49, 87–92, 196–198, 247, 249 and 253.

⁶ Schwinges, 232–234; Müller, 343–345; Grendler, 152–157, 174–175, 175n106, 283–285, 298–299, 308, 318, 358, and 384–385; Davies, 119–128; etc.

⁷ Garin’s essay, “Per una cultura nuova: la polemica contro i ‘Barbari’” (Garin 1969, 137–177), still offers a balanced approach to the problem. See also his “I filosofi italiani del Quattrocento”, Garin 2009, 156.

⁸ Pico della Mirandola, 1965, 19 and 2014, 76. Further examples of humanists—mainly Salutati and Vergerio—praising the medieval system of disputation in Gilbert, 206–208 and 217–218.

⁹ Erasmus, ASD I. 3: 751; CWE 40: 1108.

¹⁰ Plato, 469, 471.

¹¹ Eusebius, 91: “Hercules consummat certamina, Antheum interficit, Ilium uastat. Dicitur autem Antheus terrae filius, quia solorum palaestrae artis certaminum quae in terra exercentur scientissimus erat et ob id uidebatur a terra matre adiuuari. *Hydram autem callidissimam fuisse sofistriam adserit Plato*” (“Hercules finishes his labors, slays Antaeus, devastates Ilium. Antaeus, however, is said to be the son of the earth, because he was most versed in the art of wrestling in single matches that are staged on the earth, and on that account was seen to be aided by the earth as his mother. *But Plato asserts that a Hydra was (just) a most cunning sophistry*”), my italics. It should be noted that Jerome himself identifies heresies with the Hydra several times: *Contra Vigilantium* I. 355 (Jerome of Strido 2009, 400); *In Hieremiam prophetam libri sex* III. 1. 119 (Jerome of Strido 2008, 202); *Commentariorum in Hiezechielem prophetam libri XIV*. Prologus and book VI (Jerome of Strido 2005, 4 and 374); and *Commentariorum in Michaeam prophetam* II. [Praef.] (Jerome of Strido 2000, 840). According to Isidore of Seville (246), this comparison started with Ambrose of Milan’s *De fide* I. 4. On the fortune of this comparison between the late-thirteenth and early-fourteenth centuries, see Girardi 399–400.

¹² G. Boccaccio (1532, 326 and 1951, II, 640), *Genealogiae deorum gentium libri XIII*.1.

¹³ Boethius (2005, 121), *Consolatio Philosophiae* IV. Prose 6. 3; Bernardus Silvestris VI [287–288], 69; and Wheatley IV. 10, attributed to Thomas Aquinas during the middle ages.

¹⁴ See, for instance, Cristoforo Landino, *De vera nobilitate* [1469–1470, c. 1487] 1970, 110; Rabil, 257: “[...] sed si in altum et ad divina eueletur, tunc illarum amore raptis animis nostris funditus perit omnis terrenarum rerum libido. Neque vos cancrum, qui pedem Herculis aduersus hydram validissime pugnantis mordicus apprehendit, ullo modo contemnatis. *Est enim animi torpor cancer, qui magno persaepe viros doctrinam per hydram, id enim est per dialecticas subtilissimas inquisitiones inquirientes saepe defatigat*; sed illum vir magno animo et qui nullo labore succumbat, calce terit, idest perseverantia exsuperat” (“But if our minds are lifted up on high to divine things and seized by the love of those things, all desire for earthly things completely perishes. You should not in any way scorn the crab who, with his teeth, seizes the foot of Hercules while he is fighting fiercely against the Hydra. *The crab is sluggishness of mind, which very often wearies great people seeking learning through the Hydra*, that is, *searching through the most subtle dialectics*; but one with a great mind who does not give way under any labor grinds him under his heel, that is, overcomes through perseverance”); Landino, *Disputationes Camaldulenses* [c. 1474] 1980b, 235; Bartolomeo Sacchi, *De falso et vero bono* [ante 1480] 1999, 25 and 111; Niccolò Perotti, *Cornu copia* [1478, princeps 1489] 1994, I. V. 61, 89: “Plato *Hydram acutissimam sofistriam scribit fuisse*, cuius mos erat cauillari et questiones ita proponere, ut uno soluto dubio multa renascerentur. Ego inde datum huic fabulae locum existimo, quid anguim genus, sub quo hydra continetur, omnium fertilissimum sit, et nisi incendiis semina exurerentur, non esset fecunditati eorum resistere” (“Plato writes that the Hydra was a cunning sophist whose habit was to criticize and to put questions in such a way that, when one doubt was resolved, many more would arise. I think what gave rise to this fable is that the genus of serpents to which Hydra belongs is the most fertile of all, and unless its offspring are burned out with fire, it is impossible to

Notes

¹ I would like to express my gratitude to Eric MacPhail for his commentaries on this text. All the remaining mistakes and omissions are my own.

² Whom Eric MacPhail (2011, 52) called “new sophists” in a brilliant and seminal book. The term, made famous by Erasmus in the *Praise of*

stand against their fecundity”); Lodovico Lazzarelli, *Crater Hermetis* [c. 1492–1494] 2005, 15.1, 212–213; Hernando Alonso de Herrera, *Disputatio adversus Aristoteles Aristotelicosque sequaces* [ante 1517] 2004, 252–253; etc. For the commonplace of the Hydra as multiplication of errors, see, e.g., Biondo Flavio’s *De verbis romanae locutionis Blondi ad Leonardum Aretinum* XXV. 104 (Tavoni, 214), Marcus Musurus’s introduction to Aristophanes (Manutius, 276–277), and Erasmus’s (*ASD* II. 1: 338–340; *CWE* 31: 238) *Adagia* I. III. 27. *Lerna malorum*.

¹⁵ Ficino had already translated, with a summary, *Euthydemus* in 1484 (Plut. LXXXII 6. Mbr. s. XV), soon thereafter came the renderings by Cornarius and Serranus. On the transmission of these early translations, see Hankins 1990, 331–332, 334, 340 and 1990b, 683, 726, 741, 778, 810, 813. A translation of the summary of *Euthydemus* into English can be found in Ficino 2006, 74–80. Although Erasmus (*ASD* II. 1: 516; *CWE* 31: 420) already quoted *Euthydemus* 297c–d freed from this tradition in *Adagia* I. V. 39. *Ne Hercules quidem adversus duos*, another equally influential work, Alciato’s *Emblems*, incorporated from the 1546 edition (fol. 15r) onwards the emblem ‘XII certamina Herculis,’ which gave new life to the image of the Hydra as sophistry. Compare Achille Bocchi 2015, III. XCII, 446–447, and Pierio Valeriano 1678, XVI. 36–37, 200.

¹⁶ Ficino 2009, appendix B, 41. The Latin text, with an alternative translation, in Ficino 1998, 400.

¹⁷ Poliziano 1526, fols. 103v–104r, also collected in Kristeller 1937b, 278 (LXXI.3). A translation into English can be found in Ficino 2009, appendix F, 47. Further data on Poliziano as Hercules in Batkin, 108–114.

¹⁸ *WA* 8: 48, *WA* 9: 29 (Murphy 64), etc.

¹⁹ *Eobani Hessi de Capnioni eulogium* [c. 1514]: “That subduer of monsters, Jupiter’s son, is renowned all over the world in recognition of his heroic deeds. Reuchlin’s glory is not inferior to his. He has vanquished monsters no less savage than the Hydra and the other beasts. Nobody asks what kind of monsters they are — unless you, cowl, perhaps don’t recognize yourself anymore”, Eobanus Hessus 2012, 49–51. See also Mutianus Rufus’s addition and gloss to the poem (dated November 1, 1514): “Hactenus imposituit ficta gravitate Catonis, / non poterit populo nunc dare verba Magus. / Debita Capnioni laus inviolata manebit, / sed tua quam simulas gloria, Barde, jacet. / Ceu Nemesis subito tetigisset sidere linguam, / infans perpetuo non blaterator eris. Habes igitur Hesium et Rufum. Accipe glossam. Jove natus, i. e., Hercules alexiacus, Musagetes, Melampygnus, monstrorum domitor. Subito sidere, i. e., apoplexia. Cetera sunt cognitissima” (“So far he deceived the people with the feigned seriousness of Cato, / The magician will not not be able to speak to them. / The praise owed to Capnio [i.e., Reuchlin] will remain inviolate, / but your glory that you feign, Bard, lies prostrate. / Just as if Nemesis had touched [your] tongue with sudden stars / you would not henceforth be a babbling infant. There you have Hesus and Rufus. Here is the gloss. *Jove natus*, i.e., *Hercules alexiacus*, *Musagetes*, *Melampygnus*, a tamer of monsters. *Subito sidere*, i.e., apoplexy. The rest are very well known”), Mutianus Rufus, 497–498.

²⁰ *In Eduardum Leeum Epigrammata* [1520], Eobanus Hessus 2016, 140–143, 160–161, and 164–165.

²¹ Reuchlin 2013, 51, 75, and 238. See also Reuchlin’s *De arte cabalistica* II 2010, 230, and his letters to Jakob Questenberg (Augustsburg, April 25 1514) 2007, 52, and to Girolamo Ricci (Stuttgart, August 4 1516), 2007, 298

²² Warburg, 568 and 570; Seidel Menchi, 80–86 and 94; and Whitford, 27. Still, leading anti-Lutherans, such as Eck (1979, 274, 404, and 415), Catharinus (87) and Cochlaeus (18), employed “hydra” both against Luther and contemporary heresies following Ambrose and Jerome, see above n11.

²³ Alciato 2014, 34–35.

²⁴ The word is a *rara avis* coined by Budé to describe Erasmus’s *Adagia* in a letter (Paris, 19 May 1517) to Cuthbert Tunstall: “[...] certe quum Iliadem [vt ita loquar] illam leporum Graecorum iuxta Latinorum lego, quae *Paroemiae* vocantur, nunc *logothecam Mineruae* videre mihi videor; nunc Mercurii salinum, quem Logium appellant, arte sane eximia fabrefactum, et in quo tamen ipso materia cum opificio certet, vnde sales candidissimos oratoria comicaque facundia ad vsus diceriorum sumat [...]” (“when I look at this *Iliad*, so to call it, of elegance in Greek and Latin that he [Erasmus] calls his *Proverbs [Paroemia]*, I seem to see Minerva’s own arsenal of language [*logothecam Mineruae*]. Or again, it is Mercury’s own standing salt-cellar—Mercury the god of eloquence—a masterpiece of craftsmanship in which, even so, the material vies with the making, from which those who would be eloquent or amusing can help themselves to purest Attic salt when they need to make an effect”), Allen, *Opus epistolarum* II, 566; *CWE* 4: 357–358, my italics.

²⁵ For later examples, and as a proof of the success of this identification, see Isidoro da Chiari’s *Adhortatio ad concordiam* ([1540] 2008, 44) and Annibal Caro’s ([1558] 1912, 128) *Apologia degli academici di Banchi di Roma contra messer Lodovico Castelvetro—Rimenata del Buratto*: “E come? Con chiarire il mondo che voi siete un sofistuzzo, un fantasticuzzo, uno arrabbiatello, che con tanta vanità, con tanta impertinenza e con tanta ostentazione di voi, procurate il biasimo degli altri e la vostra vergogna?” and *ibid.*—*Mattaccini*: “— Un sofista — dicono — un filosofastro, uno spiritocco, corrompitore della verità, della buona creanza e delle buone lettere; un furioso, un empio, un nimico di Dio e degli uomini, ardisce di gar queste cose? Vuol che la sua dottrina, la quale è vana e falsa e pestifera, sia di tutti tenuta per buona [...]”.

²⁶ See Petrarch 2006, I. 4. 521, 138–140: “Ex quibus omnibus, fratres, piis esse debet *has ventosas et frivolas disputationes*, quibus non Cristi veritas, sed vulgi favor queritur, atque omnem seu *vanam inquisitionem rerum imperscrutabilium*, seu maxime miraculorum concupiscentiam pervicacie et curiositatis esse, non fidei” (“From all of this, brothers, the pious ought to be convinced that these are *windy and frivolous disputations* by which, not the truth of Christ, but the favour of the crowd is sought, and all either *vain investigation of things beyond the possibility of examination*, or lust especially for miracles is the sign of obstinacy and curiosity, not of faith”), the translation into English in Trinkaus I, 39, my italics; Petrarch 2014b, XII. 2. 123–124, 390: “[Pythagoras] sapientem dicere, quo cognomine primi illi septem usi erant, erubesceret, primus omnium nominis huius inventor, philosophum se respondit, hoc est nondum sapientem, sed sapientie amatorem; quod tunc nomen humillimum, brevi postea vehementer intumuit, nunc et tumidum et inane est, his qui illud profitentur non iam sapientiam, sed *ostentationem et ventosas contentiones amantibus*” (“[Pythagoras], because he was embarrassed that they called him ‘Sage’, that is, wise man, the name used for those famous first Seven, responded that he was a ‘philosopher’—he was the first man to coin this term—, meaning not so much a wise man as a lover of wisdom. A name that was then most humble soon afterward grew extremely swollen, and is now puffed up and vain; those who profess it are now not *lovers of wisdom but of showiness and windy arguments*”); Salutati (1891, 178–179), *Epistulae* III. XV (to Roberto Guidi, 16 August 1374): “[Petrarch] in philosophiam [...], omnium scientiarum et artium imperatrix ac magistra, quantum excessit! Non dico in hac, quam *moderni sophiste ventosa iactatione inani et impudente garrulitate mirantur in scolis*; sed in ea, que animos excolit, virtutes edificat, vitorum sordes eluit, rerumque omnium, omissis *disputationum* ambagibus, veritatem elucida. Gaudeant siquidem illa priori, quos *indissolubilia*, ut aiunt, *argumenta* multo conflata labore reperire delectat, quos *scolastice palestre gloria movet* hanc autem posteriore nos merite veneremur et totis animi viribus amplectamur” (“How greatly did [Petrarch] excel in philosophy, the empress and mistress of all sciences and arts! I am not speaking of this *modern, sophisticated, windy, boastful, empty philosophy of impudent chatter that is admired in the schools*; but that which—leaving aside the evasiveness of disputations—develops minds, builds up virtues, purifies low vices, and brings to light the truth of all things. So then, let them rejoice in the first kind [of philosophy] with its so-called *indestructible arguments* brought together with much labour, and the *glory of the scholastic arena moves them*: let them rejoice in it, but we will venerate as worthy the second kind and embrace it with our whole heart”); Salutati 1985, 63 and 70; etc.

²⁷ “Porro Graeca Latinis in loco intermixta non mediocrem addunt gratiam. In loco adhibentur, vel cum Graeca vox est significantior, vt *λογωμαχία* pro ‘contentione’ siue ‘rixa’” (“Not a little charm is added by the judicious mingling of Greek forms with the Latin. This can be when the Greek word is more expressive, like *λογωμαχία* [battle of words] for ‘dispute’ or ‘quarrel’), *ASD* I. 6: I. XI, 50, ll. 460–462; *CWE* 24: 317.

²⁸ *ASD* V. 1: 290, ll. 488–490.

²⁹ *ASD* I. 2: 626, ll. 20–21.

³⁰ *ASD* IV. 3: 154; *CWE* 28: 128.

³¹ A good example of the use of the term under these premises can be found in Reuchlin’s *Defensio... contra calumniatores suos Colonienses* [1513] 1999, 241–243; see also his letter to Jakob Lemp (Stuttgart, August 1 1512; 2003, 322), where he amplifies the list of equivalents with “*λογωσομαχίας*” and “*μικρόλογον σοφίαν*”, taken from Gregory of Nazianzus, among others. Once the situation changed, the term normally lost its ability to provide the set of equivalences that motivated its inclusion in the census of derisory terms, as can be seen in Melanchthon’s *Ethicae doctrinae elementorum libri duo* [1550]: “*Quaestio* haec sit: *An virtus sit finis hominis, an vero voluptas?* Aristoteles inquit: actionem virtutis finem hominis esse. Nos cum dicimus, virtutem finem esse, non intelligamus ociosum habitum, sed Aristotelis sententiam retineamus, etiamsi brevitas causa, tantum virtutem nominamus, ut et Cicero loquitur. Removeantur ergo *λογωμαχίαι* et plane statuamus, falsam esse sen-

tentiam Epicuri, qui contendit, voluptatem finem esse. Rectius autem in Philosophia dici. Virtutum esse finem hominis, id est, recte faciendum esse, etiamsi dolores et detrimenta sequantur” (“Here is the *question*: is virtue the end of man or is it, in fact, pleasure? Aristotle says that virtuous activity is man’s end. When I say that virtue is the end, I do not mean an inactive disposition; rather, I support Aristotle’s opinion, even if, for the sake of brevity, I refer to it simply as virtue, in the manner of Cicero. Let us be done, therefore, with *logomachiai* and clearly establish that Epicurus’s opinion is false. He contends that pleasure is our end. It is stated more accurately in philosophy, however, that man’s end is virtue, that is, doing what is right even if pain and loss are the consequences”), quoted from Melanchthon 1553, 11 and Turmeda *et al.*, 112, my italics.

³² “*Vocum novitates*. *Κενοφωνίας*, id est ‘*vocum inanitates*’. Ambrosius et interpres legis videntur *καίνοφωνίας*. Quanquam Graeca scholia per ε legunt. Nec enim hic agit de novandis vocibus, sed de *disputationibus supervacaneis*. Ex interpretatione Chrysostomi non liquet quid legerit. Theophylactus legit et interpretatur *κενοφωνίας*, id est *ματαιολογίας*, non dissimulans tamen Chrysostomum videri legisse *καίνοφωνίας* per αι diphthongum. Addit ‘*videri*’ quod quemadmodum diximus, ex illius enarratione non liquet quid legerit. Falsi nominis. *Ψευδωνόμου*, quasi dicas ‘*falso nominatae scientiae*’. Nec enim est scientia vbi fides non est. Et haec omnia mire quadrant in hos quosdam *spinosos theologistas*. Non enim de omnibus loquor et fortassis nulli futuri sunt. Et apte dixit □ντιθέσεις, ‘*oppositiones*’, quod *omnibus* de rebus *inter istos* mira sit *digladiatio*” (“*Vocum novitates* [‘newness of voices’]. *Kenophonias*, that is, ‘emptiness of voices’. Ambrose and the translator appear to have read *kainophonias*, although the Greek glosses give an ‘epsilon’. For this is not dealing with new voices but with unnecessary voices. From Chrysostom’s translation it is not clear what his reading was. Theophylact reads and interprets it as *kenophonias*, that is, *mataiologias*, while not hiding the fact that Chrysostom appears to have read it as *kainophonias* with the diphthong *ai*. He adds ‘appears to’ because, as we said, it is not evident from his commentary what his reading was. *Falsi nominis* [‘of a false name’]. *Pseudonumou*, as if you were to say, ‘of falsely-named knowledge’. For there is no knowledge where there is no faith. And all these things fit amazingly well with certain of these *thorny theologists*. For I do not speak of all of them, and possibly not all will be such. And he aptly said *antitheseis*, ‘confrontations’, for among these *men every topic is a marvellously fierce combat*”), *ASD* VI. 10: 118.

³³ “Age admittetur, modo domi relinquat *gryphos sophisticos*, *mat[ae]ologias*, *sycphantias*, *supercilium*, *virulentias*, *risum Sardonium*, *glorias Thrasonicas*, *philautiam*”, *ASD* I. 3: 90n40–45. The passage was soon removed from the *Colloquia*, but Erasmus commented it again in his *Apologia qua respondet duabus invectivis Eduardi Lei*, from where the translation into English has been drawn, *ASD* IX. 4: 59; *CWE* 72: 50.

³⁴ Agrippa von Nettesheim 1531, ch. XCIV. *De arte notariatus et promptoria* and 1676, 325.

³⁵ Abaelardus 57, 59, 64, 67, 82, etc.

³⁶ Boccaccio, *Letters* XXIV [1374] 1992, 734; Salutati, *Letters* X. XV [to Pellegrino Zambecari, April 23, 1398] 1896, 290; Gerson, *Letters* 3 [to Pierre d’Ailly, April 1, 1400] 1960, 25–28; Salutati 1985, 48–49; etc.; Erasmus’s *Encomium Moriae* (*ASD* IV. 3: 158–160; *CWE* 27: 130–131), *Opus epistolarum* (Allen I. 145: 105; I. 337; II. 608, 100, II. 345–347; III. 628: 21, II. 10–19), *De recta Latini Graecique pronuntiatione* (*ASD* I. 4: 26–27), *Responsio ad annotationes Eduardi Lei* (*ASD* IX. 4: 266–269), etc. The formula “magistri nostri” is sufficiently defined in the *Epistolae obscurorum virorum* I. 1: “Et intelligit bene facta sua, et habet multos discipulos, parvos et magnos, senes cum iunioribus, et cum magna maturitate dixit, et tenuit quod dicendum est ‘*nostermagistrandus*’, quod sit una dictio, quia ‘*magistrare*’ significat ‘*magistrum facere*’, et ‘*baccalauriare*’, ‘*baccalaurium facere*’, et ‘*doctorare*’, ‘*doctorem facere*’. Et hinc veniunt isti termini ‘*magistrandus*, ‘*baccalauriandus*, et ‘*doctorandus*.’ Sed quia doctores in sacra theologia non dicuntur doctores, sed propter humilitatem et etiam sanctitatem, et propter differentiam nominantur seu appellantur *magistri nostri*, quia stant in fide catholica in loco domini nostri Iesu Christi qui est fons vitae, sed Christus fuit nostrorum omnium magister; ergo ipsi appellantur ‘*magistri nostri*’, quia habent nos instruere in via veritatis, et deus est veritas, quapropter merito vocantur ‘*magistri nostri*’, quia omnes nos scilicet Christiani debemus et tenemur audire praedicationem eorum, et nullus debet dicere contra eos, ex quo sunt omnium nostrum *magistri*” (“He [Warmsemel] knoweth his business right well, and hath many pupils, high and low, young and old; and, speaking with ripeness of knowledge, he held that we should say ‘*nostermagistrandus*’—in one word—because ‘*magistrare*’ signifies to make Master, and ‘*baccalauriare*’ to make Bachelor, and ‘*doctorare*’ to make Doctor (whence come the technical terms ‘*magistrand*’, ‘*baccalauriand*,

and ‘*doctorand*’). Now Doctors in Divinity are not styled ‘*Doctors*’, but on account of their humility and sanctity, and by way of distinction, are named and styled ‘*Magistri Nostri*’, because in the Catholic Faith they stand in the room of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the fount of life, and the ‘*Magister*’ of us all: wherefore are they styled ‘*Magistri Nostri*’ because it is for them to instruct us in the way of truth—and God is truth”), Von Hutten 2004, 131 (the translation into English has been drawn from Von Hutten 1909, 292) and *ibid.* II. 43; see also Becker, 85–89, 92, 95, 104–106, 107–117, and 135–138.

³⁷ For the derogatory use of these four terms, see Ong, 138–139 and De-faux, 39, 45n7, and 141.

³⁸ Bausi, 177–184. See also the list of terms collected by Nizolio 1956, I, 19–20: “Si prius tamen oraverimus Lectores, ut nobis ignoscant, nec vitio vertant, si quando inter refutando barbaros, barbaris aut parum latinis vocabulis utemur, qualis sunt exempli gratia, *ens*, *essentia*, *essentialis*, *entitas*, *quiditas*, *accidentalitas*, *potentialitas*, *praedicatio*, *praedicatum*, *praedicamentum*, *praedicamentalis*, *univocum*, *aequivocum*, *univocam univocans*, *univocum univocatum*, *aequivocum aequivocans*, *aequivocum aequivocatum*, *realis*, *substantialis*, *intentionalis*, *principale*, *principaliter*, *secundario*, *Metaphysica*, *metaphysicalis*, *Logica*, *logicalis*, *mentalis*, *sermocinalis*, *orationalis*, *logice*, *metaphysice*, *realiter*, *intentionaliter*, *consequenter*, *infinite*, *universalizare*, et alia quamplurima huiusmodi plusquam barbara, a *Pseudophilosophis* prorsus inaniter inventa, et temere in Philosophiam introducta” (“If we nevertheless pleaded previously with the readers to indulge us and not cast blame if we ever use, while refuting the barbarians, barbaric or hardly-Latin words, as for example: *ens*, *essentia*, *essentialis*, *entitas*, *quiditas*, *accidentalitas*, *potentialitas*, *praedicatio*, *praedicatum*, *praedicamentum*, *praedicamentalis*, *univocum*, *aequivocum*, *univocam univocans*, *univocum univocatum*, *aequivocum aequivocans*, *aequivocum aequivocatum*, *realis*, *substantialis*, *intentionalis*, *principale*, *principaliter*, *secundario*, *Metaphysica*, *metaphysicalis*, *Logica*, *logicalis*, *mentalis*, *sermocinalis*, *orationalis*, *logice*, *metaphysice*, *realiter*, *intentionaliter*, *consequenter*, *infinite*, *universalizare*, and many others of this sort that are more than barbarous, entirely and inanely invented by *pseudophilosophers* and rashly introduced into philosophy”), my italics.

³⁹ See Bruni 1994, I. 25, 247 and 1987, 69: “Quid autem de dialectica, quae una ars ad disputandum pernecessaria est? An ea florens regnum obtinet, neque hoc ignorantiae bello calamitatem ullam perpessa est? Minime vero; nam etiam illa barbaria, quae trans oceanum habitat, in illam impetum fecit. At quae gentes, dii boni! Quorum etiam nomina perhorresco: *Farabrich*, *Buser*, *Occam*, *alique eiusmodi*, *qui omnes mihi videntur a Rhadamantis cohorte traxisse cognomina*” (“What about dialectic, an art very necessary to disputation? Does it possess a flourishing realm, and has it endured no calamity in this war of ignorance? Not at all, for it has been assaulted even by that barbarism which dwells across the ocean. What peoples! I shudder even at their names: *Ferabrich*, *Buser*, *Occam*, and others of this sort, all of whom seem to have drawn their names from the throng of Rhadamanthus”), my italics.

⁴⁰ See Copenhaver’s and Nauta’s “Introduction” to Valla 2012b, xi–xii. The attacks on *dialectici/dyalecticali* appear many times in Petrarch 2016, I. 10. 2–6, 40–43; 2004, I. 7, 100–109; 2014a, III. 47, 270; 2009, V. 2. 63–66, 44–47; etc.

⁴¹ *Grammaticus* referred to a deep knowledge of *Latinitas* in the first place and familiarity with classical antiquity in all its aspects. *Litteratus* and *litterator* is, in this context, nothing more than a variant of the same concept inherited from Suetonius. For the acceptations and uses of both terms, see Rico, 52–54; Poliziano 1986, 102–103 and 2010, 40–41, 92–93 and 140–141; and Cummings, 249–270. It should be stressed that, despite the success in the use of this opposition, and that Erasmus was one of his most ardent defenders—he liked to call himself a *grammaticus*—this did not mean that this use would not strike some of them back. See, for instance, Estuñiga’s attack against the humanist of Rotterdam in the handwritten version of *Erasmii Roterodami Blasphemiae ac impietates* (c. 1522): “Immo tu es complorandus, *grammatista* superbissime ac lamentis luctuosus omnino prosequendus, qui christianae modestiae prorsus immemor tanta verborum insolentia ac procacitate in omnem christianorum gradum ac ordinem aperte debaccharis” (“But you, most arrogant *grammatista*, ought to be bewailed and accompanied with sorrowful tears, who, recklessly heedless of Christian modesty, openly rave against every rank and order of Christian with such insolent speech and impudence”), *ASD* VI. 7: 307n849–858.

⁴² *Logiculus* stems from the famous textbook of Paolo Veneto, the *Parva logica*. See Pomponazzi’s *Quaestio de speciebus intelligibilibus et intellectu speculativo* [c. 1504] 1970, 207: “Et est simili illi quod dicunt *sophistae* et *logiculi* quod nomen et significat sua significata et significat

seipsum” (“And it is similar to what the *sophists* and *logicicians* say, that the name signifies its signifieds and signifies itself”), my italics.

⁴³ *Nebulus* or *nebulonicus* were much to the liking of Thomas More, see by way of example his *Responsio ad Lutherum* II. 27: “nec aliud in ore gestare, quam sentinas, cloacas, latrinas, merdas, stercora, faciant quod uolent alij, nos ex tempore capiemus consilium, uelimus ne sic bacchantem ex eius tractare uirtutibus et coloribus suis depingere: an furiosum fraterculum et *latrinarium nebulonem*, cum suis furijs et furoribus, cum suis merdis et stercoribus, cacantem cacatumque relinquere” (“and to carry nothing in his mouth but bilge-water, sewers, privies, filth and dung, then let the other do what they will; we will take timely counsel, whether we wish to deal with the fellow thus ranting according to his virtues and to paint with his colors, or to leave this mad friarlet and *privy-minded rascal* with his ragings and ravings, with his filth and dung, shitting and beshitted”), More 682–683, my italics. See also below: “Scholastic sophists and sophistries as shit”.

⁴⁴ See Mutianus Rufus’s (1885, 658, 665) letter to Erasmus (Gotha, c. March 1523): “Quorsum tendat temeritas et peruersa ostentatio non video. Non obsunt cameli et *philoscoti*...” (“...where their headstrong folly and their perverse desire to shine will end, I do not know. The Camels and the *Scotophiles* are no obstacle...”); also collected in Allen, *Opus epistolarum* V. 1425: 409; the translation is taken from *CWE* 10: 191. There is a wordplay (Duns) *Scotus/ σκότος* (‘darkness’ in Greek) here, see Erasmus 2011, 327n335.

⁴⁵ *Sortista* stems from ‘Sortes’, that is, ‘Socrates’ abbreviated in medieval syllogisms. It is a fairly uncommon term, but it can be found in Pomponazzi’s *Expositio libelli de substantia orbis* [1507] 1966, 63.

⁴⁶ On *morologus*, far less common than *morologia*, see Perotti 1995, I. X. 114, 63: “Et *morologi* dicuntur qui in sermone morosi, hoc est, molesti, sunt. Vnde et sermones huiusmodi dicuntur *morologi*. Plautus: ‘Nec molestum esse nec sermonibus morologis uti’” (“And those who are fussy, that is, affected, in their speech they call *morologi*. Thus words of this sort are also called *morologi*. Plautus: Neither be affected nor use *morologi* words”). Erasmus translates *μωρολογία* as *stultiloquium*, another term with a long tradition in the attacks against sophistry, in his translation of *Eph.* 5:4, *ASD* VI. 3: 530. See my note to Erasmus 2014, 69n7 and later examples in Ramus fol. 63r; Cardano III. XI, 177b; and Estienne I, 111.

⁴⁷ On *morosophus*—a term taken from Luc., *Alex.* 40—and, more generally, for the Greek derogatory terms employed by Erasmus, see Thompson 333–335. The term became very common after Erasmus used it in the *Praise of Folly*, either in direct imitations of the work, such as the one found in Palingenius *Stellatus* 2012, vv. 504–520, pp. 325–326, or in original pieces, such as Rabelais’s *Tiers Livre* or Gulielmus Gnapheus’s play, *Morososophus* (1531).

⁴⁸ Budé sigs. p4r, p7v, q8r, and r1v.

⁴⁹ For the term *theologaster* (or *theologastrus*), see Erasmus’s *Adagia* 870. *Elephantus non capit murem* (*ASD* II. 2: 388–390) and *Apologia contra Sanctium Carranzam* (*ASD* IX. 8: Ioannis 20. *Dominus meus et Deus meus*, 34) and Melancthon 1834, 286–326. The vocable was introduced to French very soon thanks to the anonymous *Farce des théologastres* [1523–1525], Des Périers’s *Cymbalum mundi* [1537], and Viret’s *Cosmographie infernale* [1552]. For the term *theologista*, see Reuchlin’s *Defensio contra calumniatores suos Coloniaenses* [1513]: “[...] not to mention myself being unjustly attacked by the Cologne ‘theologists’ [...]. I cannot call my Cologne slanderers theologians; they are false theologians... and I shall call them from now on by a term of reproach ‘theologists’ because I do not want to anger anyone in the saintly assembly of true theologians at other universities”, Rummel 2002, document 4, 103. See also the following words in the anonymous pamphlet entitled *Conciliabulum theologistarum* [c. 1521]: “Eck. [...] I was unsuccessful because that man [Luther] denies everything and cannot be bothered with syllogisms [*non curat syllogismos*]. As soon as I produce a neat argument and have come up with a conclusion according [*consequentiam*] to Frisesomorum or Berbelin or Braca [*mnemonic words for types of syllogisms*, see below n. 50] he throws out the conclusion and the whole argument [*negat conclusionem ad totum argumentum*] and says that these are fantasies [*fantasiae*] and snares [*tendiculae*] laid by men who have no business with theology [*in theologia non habent locum*]. And he wants us to cite the gospel or Paul or a text from Holy Writ instead of syllogisms [...] Arnold. [...] There you are wrapped up in your wonderful speculations [*in illis speculabilibus et in mirabilibus super vos*] [...]. And you know nothing of this world, except perhaps as far as avarice and envy goes, because according to the proverb ‘Every theologian is S-upercilious [*superbus*], A-varicious [*avarus*], and L-ivid [*libidus*] with envy’ (and you may add ‘with a T-aste for luxury [*luxuriosus*]’), according to the etymology of the word SALT, as is written: ‘You are the SALT of the earth’”, Rummel 1993, 59 and 61. On

the meaning of the coupling *philosophus/ philosophante* (or *philosophaster*) there is not agreement in early modern sources.

⁵⁰ Students were expected to learn by heart the valid categorical syllogisms of the three figures through the following mnemonic formulas: “Barbara, Celarent, Darii, Ferio, Baralipon./ Celantes, Dabitis, Fapesmo, Frisesomorum./ Cesare, Camestres, Festino, Baroco, Darapti./ Felapton, Disamis, Datisi, Bocardo, Ferison”, as a consequence they were collected in the main medieval manuals of logic, such as Petrus Hispanus, *Summule logicales*, Buridan’s *Summulae de dialectica*, Ockham’s *Summa logicae*, and Paolo Veneto’s *Logica parua*, among many others. As examples of their derogatory use, see Trapezuntius sig. b4v; Melancthon 1854, 738; Ramus (Ong, 45–47); etc. Therefore, J.C. Scalliger’s (374) complaint about these jokes is fairly understandable.

⁵¹ An early example of this procedure can be found already in Petrarch 2014a, II. 51. *Dyogenes cynicus*. 2, 160.

⁵² *ASD* I. 3: 92: “Docebo autem non crocodilitis aut soritis, ceratinis aut aliis id genus dialectorum argutiis sed pingui, quod aiunt, Minerua rem digito propemodum ostendam”, *CWE* 27: 96–97.

⁵³ On *crocodilites* and *ceratinis*, see Quint., *Inst.* I. X. 5 and Luc., *Vit. Auct.* 22. On *sorites*, Cic., *De div.* II. 11; *Acad.* II. 49, 92–95; *Fin.* IV. 29–31; *ND.* II. 165, III. 43; and D.L. VII. 44. 82–83.

⁵⁴ Poliziano 1489, ch. 44–45, sigs. i1v–i2v. Compare also Lefèvre d’Étaples’s preface to the *Libri logicorum* [1501/1503] (Lefèvre d’Étaples 88–89) with the prologue to his *Introductiones logicales* [1496] (*ibid.* 39), and see Renaudet 274–276.

⁵⁵ Vives 1979, 140–143.

⁵⁶ Melancthon 1854, 747–748, and see Ashworth 2008, 631–632.

⁵⁷ Jardine, 161–162 and Nauta, 252–255; cf. Ashworth 2008, 631–632.

⁵⁸ Rico, 63n77.

⁵⁹ Gerson, *Contra curiositatem studentium* 1962, 233, 239–240 and 242–244. On the influence of Gerson on the *Praise of Folly*, see De Vogel, 106; Rummel 1995, 35–39; and my notes to Erasmus 2014, 103n6–104.1, 212n6b, 215n8–216.1, 216n6, 220n3 and 235n11–236.4.

⁶⁰ See an extreme example of the former in Bèze’s *Epitaphs*. 13. In *Ceratinum, pseudomonachum*: “Flete cucullati fratres: iacet ille sepultus./ Ille cucullatae religionis honos./ Ridite, o reliqui; risu dignissima res est:/ Haec sunt perpetuis funera digna iocis./ Quippe huius quondam mendacibus omnia fucis/ *Perdere, sola diu cura laborque fuit.*/ *At dum cuncta tegit, dum fraudibus omnia velat.*/ Mors simulatorem non simulata rapit” (*Cératin, a Pseudomonk*: “Come weep, hooded brothers; the glory of your hooded religion has died and gone away. The rest of you, laugh; oh yes, it is a very laughable matter. This is a death worthy of endless jokes. *You see, once he gave all his effort and attention to wrecking everything by his crooked guile. But though he feigned everything, though he concealed everything in deception, the death that took that faker was no fake*”), De Bèze, 126–127, my italics.

⁶¹ Wilson fols. 85v–88v, and Howell, 28.

⁶² *Suisetica* stands for Richard Swineshead (†1354), also known as ‘Calculator’. For the attacks against the *calculatores* and their fortune during the *Quattrocento* and the early *Cinquecento*, see Dionisotti, 219–253; Valcke 1985, 43–56 and 1992, 275–284; and Raimondi 1995, 53–94 and 2000, 311–358.

⁶³ Landino 1970, 89; Rabil, 242.

⁶⁴ Landino 1980, 208: “Neque rursus *levium futillumque rerum* est quaerenda doctrina, veluti qui in *dialecticorum* superfluis *captiunculis* ac vanis *amphibologiis* aut *inanibus fabellis* omne paene tempus terunt” (“Again, neither should one seek for the knowledge of *light and empty matters*; meaning, he who wastes nearly all his time in the unnecessary *logical quirks of the dialecticians*, and in empty words of *double meaning or inane little fables*”), my italics.

⁶⁵ Valla 2012, II. 2. 9, 224–225: “Sed hos duos posteriores modos, ne dialecticos nimium onerare videamur, rhetoricae relinquamus. Secundum modum nisi admittant, dialectici caveant ne dicam ideo hunc eos nolle admittere quia *non ita est ad captiunculas opportunus*” (“However, lest I seem to put too great a burden on the dialecticians, let me leave the last two ways to rhetoric. If they do not allow the second way, the dialecticians should take care lest I claim that their reason for not wanting to allow it is that *it does not lend itself to sophisms*”).

⁶⁶ Valla 2014, 308–309: “Id quod etiam visum est theologis graecis, Basillio, Gregorio, Ioanni Chrysostomo ac ceteris eius aetatis, qui neque *dialecticorum captiunculas* neque metaphysicas ambages neque *modorum significandi nugas* in quaestionibus sacris admiscendas putaverunt, ac ne in philosophia quidem suarum disputationum fundamenta iecerunt” (“Such also seemed to be the case to the Greek theologians Basil, Gregory, John Chrysostom, and the others of that age. They did not think that the *sophisms of dialectics*, the obscurities of metaphysics, or the *trifles of the modes of signifying* should be mixed in with sacred

questions. Nor did they even lay the foundations of their disputations in philosophy”).

⁶⁷ Alberti 306–309: “Referam quae non a philosopho—nam vestra omnis ratio nisi in argutiis et *verborum captiunculis* versatur—sed a pictore quodam memini audivisse. Is quidem lineamentis contemplandis plus vidit solus quam vos omnes philosophi caelo commensurando et disquirendo. Adsis animo: audies rem rarissimam” (“I will tell you what I remember hearing, not from a philosopher—for all your reasoning revolves only around subtleties and *verbal quibbles*—but from a certain painter. By himself this man saw more while looking at lines, than all you philosophers do when you’re measuring and investigating heavens. Pay attention: you’ll hear something that is very rare indeed”).

⁶⁸ Pontano 2012, 36–39: “Nimis ridiculus es qui id arbitrare; in asinum mene illos *captiunculis* suis versuros quasi Apuleium amatorio poculo, que ego vix agnovi cum hac iter faceret?” (“Do you imagine that they might transform me with their *snares*, like Apuleius changed by the love potion, whom I hardly recognized when he came this way?”)

⁶⁹ I quote from Jayne’s second revised edition and translation (Ficino 1985, 6.10, 126); Allen 1989, 24–28 offers a commentary on the passage and on sophistry as incantation. The primitive version of the Epistle to Banco can be found in Kristeller 1937a, VII. a. 3, 39: “Nam profitentur quod nesciunt, et solis preterea prestigiis quibusdam sive artificiosis *captiunculis* velut *aranearum telis* confidunt, nec eorum adhuc ullus repertus est, cuius memoria ex improvviso fecunda promptaque fuerit. Itaque cave ne dum ad cacumen pervenire contendis, cum ipsis ramis quos comprehenderis decidas” (“For they profess what they are ignorant of, and only rely on certain tricks or skillful *logical quirks*, *spiders’ webs* if you will; up to now we have found not one of them who can think on his feet with a fertile and ready memory. And so be careful that, when striving to reach the summit, you do not fall down along with the very branches you take hold of”), my italics.

⁷⁰ Pontano 2002, 114: “Quod si *captationem* ipsam duplicem fecerimus, et eorum quos cupiditas habendi trahit et quos popularis auras atque ambitionis studium, ut alteri pecuniae, alteri popularis auras captatores dicantur, fortasse non male distribuisse iudicabimur, quando etiam sunt qui inter loquendum disserendumque etiam verba capent, qui quidem ipsi dicantur captiosi et fraus ipsa *captiuncula*” (“So if we should make *captatio* to consist of two kinds—of those whom acquisitive greed moves, and of those moved by popular favour and the zeal of ambition—, so that both would be called *captatores*, one moved by money, the other by popular acclaim: we will not be judged to have made a poor distinction if there are also those who, in the midst of speaking and discussing, ‘capture’ words too, who indeed would themselves be called *captiosi*, and whose fraud would be called *captiuncula*”), my italics. Ficino 2000, XXV. 16A, 234–235: “Legibus Plato conqueritur, atque infamiam adversus legitimos philosophos Socratem praesertim hinc exortam in *Apologia* testatur. Tria haec incurrit vitia adolescentibus cavillator. Qui ut primum *captiunculas* attingit admodum congratulatur, tamquam thesaurum sapientiae nactus, laetitiaque exultat ac gestit et *argumentatiunculas* omnes prompte pertentat, tum gyro multa retorquens in unum, tum unum in multitudinem explicans et evolvens, ubi superbia et procacitas statim exoritur” (“In the *Laws*, Plato complains bitterly about this impiety [deny God’s Providence] and in the *Apology* he attests to the infamy that befell legitimate philosophers, particularly Socrates, from it. The adolescent quibbler falls into three vices. As soon as he stumbles on *verbal paradox*, he congratulates himself as if he’d come upon a treasure-house of wisdom and exults and throws his arms around with delight and promptly assays every *paradoxical argument*, now twisting the many round and round into one, now unfolding and untwisting the one into the many”). See also Ficino 2005, 136–137.

⁷¹ See, for instance, Merula IV, fol. 73v: “Sed pro dolor, religiosi postea viri [...] ad civilia certamina animos applicarunt; alii ut longius a conspectu tot malorum et seditioinum procella se subducerent, in tranquillissimo portu trans Alpes *philosophantes* non tam speculationi altissimarum rerum quam *frivolis quaestionibus* et *captiunculis* quibusdam vacabant. Quanto conducibilius fuisset [...]” (“But alas, afterwards religious men [...] set their minds to civic struggles; others, in order to remove themselves further from the sight of the tempest of so many evils and seditions, idled away their time in a most quiet harbour across the Alps, *philosophisers* not so much in speculation concerning the highest matters as in *frivolous questions* and certain *logical quirks*. How much more expedient would it have been...”), my italics. In February 29th, 1520, in a letter to Pirckheimer, Reuchlin (2013, 321) uses *captiuncula*, according to its original meaning, to refer to legal sophistries.

⁷² De Ferrariis XXV, 149–150.

⁷³ See Clichtove’s *Commentary* [1502] on Lefèvre’s *Paraphrases of the Eight Books of Aristotle’s Physics* (Lefèvre d’Étaples 10); Eck, *Briefwechsel* 2 (to Matthias Ackermann, June 3, 1506); Erasmus. “Vita

Hieronymi”. *Erasmii opuscula* 178, *CWE* 61: 52; Id. *Enarration on the first Psalm. Bonus vir*, *ASD* V. 2: 54, *CWE* 63: 32; J.L. Vives. “De causis corruptorum artium” 1783b, 201–202; and Agrippa von Nettesheim 1531, ch. XCIV, quoted above.

⁷⁴ Nifo, 40–41. See Murdoch, 177.

⁷⁵ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus* VII. 12; Id. *Metalogicon* II. 6; etc.

⁷⁶ Petrarch 2003, *Contra medicum* II. 100, 79–78: “I say that your color, smell, and taste come from the stuff to which you are exposed—*shit*” (“Ab obiectis inquam *stercoribus* et colorem et odorem traxeris et saporem”); Petrarch 2003, *Contra eum qui maledixit Italiae* 99, 454–455: “But our little Gaul loves Greek titles; and although he may have no Greek or Latin learning, he thinks he is someone great when he *belches forth* the word ‘Physics’ or *spits out* ‘Metaphysics’” (“At Galliculus titulos Grecos amat, et quamvis scientiam forte nec Greecam habeat nec Latinam, magnum se aliquid credit, dum ‘Phisicam’ *ructat*, ‘Metaphisicam’ *spuit*”), my italics.

⁷⁷ Bartholomaeus Coloniensis was one of Erasmus’s teachers in Deventer and much admired by him; see his *Epigrammata* (1497), especially those against Zoilus (Coloniensis 5. 1–7, 30–35). Further examples on his influence on Erasmus in Ijsewijn 233 and 271–273.

⁷⁸ See, e.g., Van Dorp’s *Oratio in laudem omnium artium* (31); Reuchlin’s (1999, 368) wordplay *Asinus aureus/Asinus stercorarius* in his *Defensio contra calumniatores suos Colonienses*, written originally in 1513; Beatus Rhenanus’s (410) description of the new sophists as “foeda barbarie;” Von Hutten’s (1862b, 435–436) attack against Arnold Tungern in *Triumphus Doctoris Reuchlini*, written originally in 1517; Eck’s *Briefwechsel* 41 (to Joachim Vadian, March 18, 1517); Ps-Pirckheimer’s (Pirckheimer, 68–69) *Ecceus dedolatus*, written originally in 1520: “Friends. Gracious! He threw up a red beret! Surgeon. He was made doctor of canon law. You see now how violently all these things abused his stomach? Friends. We do, ad it’s no wonder he took sick. The wonder’s more how he could live! Surgeon. I arrived in the nick of the time. But now the force of the medicine is descending to the lower regions. Did you hear? He voided something. Friends. You mean he emptied his bowels! Whew! What a stench! Did he discharge bile? Surgeon. Those are the indulgences that that slanderer Hochstraten excreted in his cacology [...] And these are the sweet-smelling niceties of the *magistri nostri*! But with his chest exposed now, the skin must be removed. My word! What tetter, what psora, or rather ulceration, or, in fact, cancer itself!...” (“Amici. Pape, quin rubeum eiecit Biretum. Chirurgus. Iuris Canonici doctoratus. Videtis nunc, quam vehementer haec omnia stomachum oppresserunt? Amici. Cernimus, et haud mirum si aegrotaverit, magis mirandum quo pacto vivere poterit. Chirurgus. In tempore adveni, sed nunc medicinae vis ad inferiora descendit: audistis? Iam oletum fecit. Amici. Quin concacavit. Hui, quantus foetor! Num bilem egressit? Chirurgus. Indulgentiae sunt, quas iam pridem σοκοφάντης ille Hochstratus in cacologia sua permerdavit [...]. Et haec Magistrorum Nostrorum suave olentes sunt mundiciae. Sed iam aperto pectore pellem detrahere est necesse. Hui, quae vitiligio, quae psora, imo gangraena, seu potius cancer ipse”), Von Hutten 1860, 540; and, of course, Luther’s (1989, 727, 731, also 732 and 733) *To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany* [1523], together with his *Contra XXXII articulos Lovaniensium theologistarum* [1545] §30–31, *WA*, 54: 427, just to give two examples. Catholic humanists rapidly used these terms against early reformers; see, for instance, the following passage of More’s (1969, 60–61) *Responsio ad Lutherum*: “Illi igitur abeunt, alius alio, quo quemque tulit animus: et se pero omnia plaustra, uehricula, cymbas, thermas, ganea, tonstrinas, tabernas, lustra, pistrina, latrinas, lupanaria diffundunt: illic observant sedulo, atque in tabellas referunt, quicquid aut auriga sordide, aut seruus uerniliter, aut portior improbe, aut parasitus scurriliter, aut meretrix petulanter, aut leno turpiter, aut balneator spurce, aut cactor obsceno loquutus sit. Atque haec quum aliquot fecissent menses: tum demum quicquid undecunq̄ collegissent, conuitorum, iurgiorum, et scurrilium scommatum, petulantiae spurciciae, sordium, luti, caeni, stercorum, omnem hanc colluuiem in foedissimam cloacam Lutheri pectus infartiant. Quam ille totam, in libellum istum suum conuitorum per os illud impurum uelut comesam merdam reuomuit. Inde tibi lector aceruus ille spurcissimorum latratuum, quibus solis stultissimus libellus impletur...” (“There they diligently observe and set down in their notebooks whatever a coachman spoke ribaldly, or a servant insolently, or a porter lewdly, or a parasite jeeringly, or a whore wantonly, or a pimp indecently, or a bath-keeper filthily, or a shitter obscenely. After hunting for several months, then, finally, all that they had collected from any place whatever, railings, brawlings, scurrilous scoffs, wantonness, obscenities, dirt, filth, muck, shit, all this sewage they stuff into the most foul sewer of Luther’s breast. All this he vomited up through that foul mouth into that railers’ book of his, like de-

voured dung. From there, reader, you receive that accumulated mass of indecent brawlings, with which alone the utterly foolish book is filled”).

⁷⁹ See Erasmus’s *Spongia adversus aspergines Hutteni* [1523]: “Fortasse sic me volebat Huttenus scribere: ‘spurcissima latrina, tun’ audes viros heroas tuis merdosis libellis aspergere?’ Forsitan sic decebat scribere Huttenum, at non decebat Erasmus” (“Hutten would perhaps have wanted me to address Hoogstraten in this fashion: ‘You filthy cesspool, how dare you defile men of heroic stature with your muck-filled books?’ Such a style might be fitting for Hutten, but not for Erasmus”), *ASD* IX. 1, 136; *CWE* 78: 56. Erasmus, as it is known, could be, and actually was, equally harsh when the situation required, see by way of example (there are many more) his *Concio sive Merdardus* [1531]: “Merdardus suas merdosas purulentias effuderit”, *ASD* I. 3: 655.

⁸⁰ “Sed in nostrae tempestatis theologastros quosdam iocari libuit, *quorum cerebellis nihil putidius*, lingua nihil barbarius, ingenio nihil stupidius, doctrina nihil spinosius, moribus nihil asperius, vita nihil fuca-tius, oratione nihil virulentius, *pectore nihil nigrius*” (“I merely wished to make a joke at the expense of a few quasi-theologians of our own day, whose brains are the most addled, tongues the most uncultured, wits the dullest, teachings the thorniest, characters the least attractive, lives the most hypocritical, talk the most slanderous, and hearts the blackest on earth”) Allen, *Opus epistolarum* I. 64: 192–193; *CWE* 1: 138, my italics.

⁸¹ *ASD* I. 5: 316–318; *CWE* 23: 272–273.

⁸² Rabelais 1955, 189 and 1999, ch. IV, 149.

⁸³ Valeriano IX. 5, 100.

⁸⁴ Humanist invectives, for instance, have been thoroughly studied in the following articles and monographs: Mattioli, 127–139; Allen 1986, 417–55; Fabbri, 551–556; Godman, 26–30, 39–51, 54–56, 76–77, 82–100, 253–260, etc.; Laureys, 9–30; Rao; Helmuth, 259–293; and Rizzi, 145–158.

Hercules, Silenus and the Fly: Lucian's Rhetorical Paradoxes in Erasmus' Ethics

Elisa Bacchi

Abstract: Starting from the fierce conflict between Desiderius Erasmus and Martin Luther, my contribution aims to show the rhetorical genesis of Erasmus' reflection on ethics. Specifically, I will focus on the fact that some of the most significant and recurrent metaphors in Erasmus' moral and theological meditation (e.g. Hercules, Silenus and the fly) trace their roots back to the work of Lucian of Samosata. Against this background, it will be possible to investigate the fundamental role of the Lucianic attitude in defining some key-concepts of Erasmus' thought, such as the rhetorical concepts of *festivitas* and *persona*. Moreover, I will demonstrate how these concepts become the starting point of Erasmus' silenic moral, modelled on the sophistic ability to transform relations and proportions between things by using words.

Keywords: Desiderius Erasmus, Martin Luther, Lucian of Samosata, Rhetoric, *Festivitas*, Ethics.

1. Introduction

For a long time critics have underestimated the influence of Lucian of Samosata's work on the pedagogical, rhetorical, moral and theological thought of Desiderius Erasmus. Critical studies on Erasmus and on Lucian's Renaissance legacy often devote one or more chapters to the relationship between the humanist from Rotterdam and the rhetorician from Samosata, but, just as often, their analysis is reduced to a thematic catalogue where recurring characters and situations are listed without taking into account any deeper intellectual accord.¹

The only work by Erasmus on which there exist exhaustive scholarly accounts of the formal and substantial influence exerted by Lucian is the *Moriae Encomium*. This work, however, despite its symbolic value, is frequently considered either as merely a playful digression in Erasmus' workshop or as a serious labour, in which the Lucianic sophistic brilliance is no more than a disguise.²

Against this background, the objective of my contribution is to show how Lucian's rhetorical experimentations became the centre of Erasmus' moral and theological reflection, based on the concepts of exercise and contextual knowledge. First, I shall focus on the importance of Lucian's legacy in understanding the dispute on free will between Erasmus and Martin Luther. Secondly, I shall shed light on the fact that the whole of Erasmus' ethics,

whose figure are the *Sileni Alcibiadis*, originated in the sophistic aesthetics of the rhetorician from Samosata

To do this it will be necessary to understand the key role played by Lucian during the first years of Erasmus' rhetorical education. In this period the Latin translation of the Greek sophist became a training ground in language and life that accompanied the humanist from Rotterdam and his friend Thomas More for a decade, and laid the groundwork of Erasmus' pedagogy.

With this contribution, therefore, following the approach of Eric MacPhail (2006; 2011), I propose to outline a first stage in the history of Erasmus' reception of late ancient sophistry.

2. Hercules at the crossroads

There is an image that, more than any other, both unites and divides the work of Desiderius Erasmus and the work of Martin Luther: the image of Hercules.³

To show how the discussion about the value of rhetorical art constitutes the focus of the conflict between Luther and Erasmus, nothing is more effective than an investigation of the different ethical and gnoseological approaches that established their different characterisation of Hercules.

Ulrich Von Hutten was the first, after the Leipzig debate (1519), to connect Luther with the figure of *Hercules Germanicus*, which had become the emblem of the new German power, thanks to the authority of the emperor Maximilian I and the propaganda of the humanist Conrad Celtis⁴. This representation of Luther as a wild and warlike destroyer of the papal heresy, in the name of the new prosperity of the German nation, was the basis of an engraving by Hans Holbein the Younger (1522), in which a brawny Luther, covered with the lion skin and gripping the club of Hercules, shows his vigour by breaking up scholastic philosophers and curial enemies.⁵

One year later, Holbein painted a portrait of Erasmus (1523) in which the Dutch humanist is represented as a man quietly sitting at his desk and resting his hands on a bound volume, whose top edge exhibits the words ΗΡΑΚΛΕΙΟΙ ΠΟΝΟΙ (i.e. *Herculei labores*).⁶

The ironic counterpoint between the two images is evident: by turning the challenges of Hercules into a tireless research within the changing universe of speech, Erasmus' *corpusculum vitreum*⁷ is opposed to the violent and aggressive physicality of Luther's Herculean labours.

The *harena*, where the Herculean *gladiator* from Rotterdam fights, is, explicitly, that of the *cultum Musarum* (CWE 10, 438; Allen V, 590).

This interpretation is confirmed by the fact that, in the portrait painted by Holbein, the volume Erasmus is touching is a copy of his *Adagia*, at the centre of which is the proverb *Herculei labores*. Within the texture of the *Adagia*, this maxim constitutes a real *mise en abyme* of Erasmus' method of working: it shows his effort to fight the Hydra which stands for the mobility of literary sources and to bring some partial order into the changeable field of proverbial meanings.⁸

Following Plutarch's *De genio Socratis*, Erasmus' Hercules is he who learned the alphabet under the guidance of the ever-changing Proteus and handed it down to the Greeks⁹, or rather, he is, following the description given by Lucian of Samosata, the *Hercules Gallicus* who replaced the emblems of physical strength with the emblems of protean rhetorical power. It is no coincidence that Erasmus was the first Latin translator of Lucian's *Herakles*: he created a vivid portrait of the new Hercules *senex*, which became, in turn, the protagonist of many iconographic and literary "rewrites" as the symbol of *vis eloquentiae*:¹⁰

That old Heracles of theirs drags after him a great crowd of men who are all tethered by the ears! His leashes are delicate chains fashioned of gold and amber, resembling the prettiest of necklaces. Yet, though led by bonds so weak, the men do not think of escaping, as they easily could, and they do not pull back at all or brace their feet and lean in the opposite direction to that in which he is leading them. In fact, they follow cheerfully and joyously, applauding their leader and all pressing him close and keeping the leashes slack in their desire to overtake him; apparently they would be offended if they were let loose! But let me tell you without delay what seemed to me the strangest thing of all. Since the painter had no place to which he could attach the ends of the chains, as the god's right hand already held the club and his left the bow, he pierced the tip of his tongue and represented him drawing the men by that means! Moreover, he has his face turned toward his captives, and is smiling [...]. In general, we consider that the real Heracles was a wise man who achieved everything by eloquence and applied persuasion as his principal force. His arrows represent words, I suppose, keen, sure and swift, which make their wounds in souls. (Luc. *Herc.*, tr. Harmon, I, 65-67)¹¹

In this context, starting from the adage *Herculei labores*, in which Erasmus shows himself engaged in the work of organizing and reorganizing ancient literary tradition, the Herculean labours prove to be an education in the elusive luxuriance of the persuasive speech.

The Lucianic origin of Erasmus' Hercules-orator well illustrates the mediating role that Lucian's work played in the defining process of Erasmus' idea of rhetoric as a playful and contextual cognitive instrument. In accusing Erasmus of using words like an equivocal and ambiguous mask, which imprisons the interlocutor in the meshes of paradox,¹² Luther was actually-railing against this mocking and evasive Hercules-Proteus of Lucianic ancestry.

Against this background, the *Hercules Gallicus* engraving by Albrecht Dürer (1498) would have been fully appreciated by Luther:¹³ the German painter represented the *Hercules Gallicus* as a vacillating Hercules at the crossroads, his guilty hesitancy staged by details such as

his helmet, which bears the cock of the loquacious Mercury, the proof that he is an able rhetorician – "trepidat in morem galli" (CWE 33, 88; ASD II/3, 146).

3. A Lucianic training: mask, representation, exercise

Before turning back to the conflict that, with regard to Lucian's rhetoric, set Erasmus and Luther against each other, it will be useful to consider the key role that the special sophistic aptitude of Lucian had on Erasmus' intellectual biography from its very beginning.

It seems impossible to deal with the relevance of Lucian's influence on the definition of Erasmus' rhetorical paradigm without focusing on the intellectual partnership and the sincere friendship that, thanks to the rhetorician of Samosata, bonded Erasmus and Thomas More. Between 1505 and 1506,¹⁴ Erasmus and More's translation of Lucian's works¹⁵ was not only a test of their knowledge of Greek language and literature, but also, and especially, a workshop for the construction of a joint educational project and a shared view regarding the role of rhetorical practice.

In the eyes of Erasmus and More, what made Lucian especially suitable in teaching the elements of Greek, so much so that he was regarded as an essential pedagogical tool,¹⁶ was the quality that can be defined as the *festivitas*¹⁷ of the rhetorician from Samosata. On the one hand, this concept of rhetorical origin, crucial for Erasmus' pedagogical and theological elaboration, is concerned with a sociable and cheerful, refined and graceful kind of laugh. Indeed, the pleasantness of *festivitas* results mainly from expertise in the use of language and from the skill in playing with a specific cultural tradition, by translating and betraying its *topoi*.¹⁸ On the other hand, the festive approach reveals a more comic than tragic theatrical tendency, towards changing voice and character (*persona*), according to the needs of representation¹⁹ ("And this dialogue is sure to be no less pleasant than profitable, if the reader only observe the appropriate way in which its characters are treated"; Dedication of *Toxaris, sive Amicitia*' translation to Richard Foxe, CWE 2, 103;²⁰ "This dialogue of Lucian [...] is a most skilful performance, in that the drawing of so many and such different characters is so wonderfully lifelike"; Dedication of *Convivium, sive Lapithae*'s translation to Johann Huttich, CWE 4, 282²¹). Therefore, the *festivitas* is a cultivated comicality (*festivissima doctrina* and *doctissima festivitas*) and Lucian's *nugae litteratae* are made up of allusions, in which the mask has an essential role because of its quality of indirect and oblique enunciation. The impression of lightness communicated to Erasmus and More by Lucian's *festivitas* has little to do with the idea of idle and intellectually weak literary practice.²² This agreeableness seems rather to be the result of a never-ending exploration of meanings where each mask is an *exercitium* and truth takes the form of a representation. The pedagogical importance of Lucian's work, therefore, concerns laughter not only, and not so much, as a rhetorical device to capture a child's attention. Laughter is above all the focal point of a perspective in which rhetorical fiction has the quality of an intertextual structure to be explored and changed, starting from the contexts in which it is used. It

is not by chance that Erasmus and More identify the main peculiarity of the Lucianic laugh with the multiplicity of characters and situations: their topical quality becomes the means through which the work of the rhetorician from Samosata is assembled and disassembled, and forms the perfect base to receive innumerable variations, in the form of rhetorical exercises. Thus Lucian's moral usefulness, which is repeatedly emphasized by Erasmus and More,²³ is consistent with the fact that his work seems to be a mechanism for generating text and an inexhaustible container of sources, i.e. a real *palestra ingeniorum*. According to Erasmus, Lucian's laughter is the most appropriate instrument to guide pupils towards moral seriousness because it is the denial of every peremptory and dogmatic point of view and, therefore, the image of a joyful *pietas* ("true religion ought to be the most cheerful thing in the world"; *De recta pronuntiatione*, CWE 26, 385²⁴). By teaching the relativity of communicative situations and the variability of temperaments, the laughter resulting from the art of rhetoric comes to resemble the most sincere content of Christian morality, based on tolerance and loving persuasion.

In Erasmus and More's translations, the ever-present epigraph of Lucian's work is Horace's advice to *miscere utile dulci* and to *coniungere voluptatem cum utilitate*.²⁵ In this context, it should be clarified that laughter is the medium between pleasure and usefulness because it transforms every representation into a kind of partial composition related to the concept of rhetorical *exercitium*. This means that, in Erasmus and More's pedagogical approach, the ability to produce an effect on the mind has greater weight than absolute adherence to a worthless and useless truth. In a rhetorical *exercitium* the three meanings of *ludus* (game, play and school) overlap.

However, the art of persuading that Erasmus learned from Lucian is a paradoxical tool, which needs at the same time to be heeded and unpacked: it is precisely through the *festivitas* that it reveals its nature as artifice. In this context, it will be interesting to note that the works of Lucian that Erasmus chose to translate are, for the most part, rhetorical exercises in declamation (*Abdicatus*; *Toxaris sive Amicitia*; *Tyrannicida*) or texts where Lucian ironically condemns superstition as harmful gullibility, where the level of representation blends with the level of truth (*Alexander seu Pseudomantis*; *De sacrificiis*; *De luctu*; *De astrologia*). Reading Lucian means learning to recognize the *fabula* as a space of possibilities and as a fiction that serves as an antidote to superstition. This kind of Lucianism is especially evident in the group of *Colloquia*²⁶ where Erasmus looks at trickery as a real *pharmakon*, i.e. as a *fabula* staged with wit and irony to reveal the stupid stagnation of credulity with its ineptitude in decoding representations.

If one shifts the focus specifically onto Erasmus' pedagogical thought, the preceptor-rhetorician he envisaged, through the filter of Lucian, is not only someone who teaches by *ridiculae fabulae*. He is a true comedian who chooses Lucian's rhetorical skill as a lifestyle: in this comic activity of *mimesis* he goes so far as to play the role of his pupil and to take his weaknesses and his doubt as the cornerstone of all possible knowledge:

I prefer a teacher who is of an age when his vigour is in its prime, an age which does not repel his pupils and allows him to assume any role. In guiding the intellectual development of his students, the instructor should abide by the same principles that are followed by parents and nurses in promoting physical growth. (*De pueris instituendis*, CWE 26, 334-335)²⁷

It is no coincidence if, in the dialogue *Puerpera* (CWE, 39, 590-618; ASD I/3, 453-469), the two characters bear the descriptive names of *Fabulla* and *Eutrapelo*. By conversing about the most appropriate way to take care of a child's physical and intellectual education, they mark out an educational space where *fabula* and *iocus* become the real protagonists. Indeed, the perfect pedagogue is one who has the rhetorical ability to play with representations and who is able to educate his pupil to make a constant hermeneutic effort. This training allows the pupil not only to be a passive spectator of the educational *fabula*, but also to enter into the *fabula* as a protagonist, through the mimetic game. The preceptor's rhetorical skill lies in making the speech an instrument that functions as a pathway for the imagination²⁸. This means that Erasmus' preceptor does not teach through a prescriptive moralism or an unreflective persuasion. On the contrary, he suggests an educational opportunity that the pupil may develop at his pleasure. Therefore, according to Erasmus, education is a beneficent deception: it is a playful fiction ("Moreover, I'm not sure anything is learned better than what is learned as a game. To confer a benefit through a trick is surely deception of the most innocent sort"; *De utilitate colloquiorum*, CWE 40, 1098²⁹), which suspends the categories of true and false ("Nor is truth always the opposite of falsehood" *Ecclesiastes*, CWE 68, 691³⁰).

At this point, to go back to the relationship established between Erasmus and More under the banner of Lucian, it is not surprising that in his letter to Ulrich Von Hutten of July 1519 Erasmus superimposed the image of the rhetorician from Samosata onto the lively portrait of his English friend and fellow scholar:

The affection [...] that you feel for that gifted man Thomas More, fired of course as you are by reading his books, which you rightly call as brilliant as they are scholarly – all this, believe me my dear Hutten, you share with many of us [...] His expression shows the sort of man he is, always friendly and cheerful, with something of the air of one who smiles easily, and (to speak frankly) disposed to be merry rather than serious or solemn, but without a hint of the fool or the buffoon [...]. His language is remarkably clear and precise, without a trace of hurry and hesitation. (CWE 7, 16-18)³¹

More not only displays immense culture, outstanding eloquence and a great disposition to laugh, but he is also able to change his role depending on the context without abandoning his convivial levity. This *iocunditas* makes him look like the perfect Lucianic rhetorician and preceptor:

In society he shows such rare courtesy and sweetness of disposition that there is no man so melancholy by nature that More does not enliven him, no disaster so great that he does not dissipate its unpleasantness. From boyhood he has taken such pleasure in jesting that he might seem born for it [...]. In his youth he both wrote brief comedies and acted in them. Any remark with more wit in it than ordinary always gave him pleasure, even if directed against himself; such is his delight in witty sayings that

betray a lively mind. Hence his trying his hand as a young man at epigrams, and his special devotion to Lucian; in fact it was he (yes, he can make the camel dance) who persuaded me to write my *Moriae Encomium*.

In fact there is nothing in human life to which he cannot look for entertainment, even in most serious moments. If he has to do with educated and intelligent people, he enjoys their gifts; if they are ignorant and stupid, he is amused by their absurdity. (CWE 7, 18-19)³²

Significantly, the classic comedy and the particular sophistic aptitude of Lucian seem to be the literary instruments through which More formed his own character. Thus, it is obvious that he became the promoter of Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium*.

4. *Muscarum Achilles*

After this brief survey of Erasmus' Lucianic training, we can now focus on his discussion with Luther, in which his Lucianic identity became the symbol of a fundamental gnoseological opposition.

When, in September 1524, Erasmus published his own *Diatriba de libero arbitrio*, he chose to view the entire work in the light of a disproportion: the decision to discuss with Luther one of the foundations of the theology of the German Hercules put Erasmus – *Hercules senex* and *homuncio pygmaeus* – in the position of a miserable fly faced with the majesty of the elephant of Wittenberg (“Does Erasmus dare to take on Luther as a fly might an elephant?”; CWE 76, 6³³).

The apparent inanity of this confrontation was destined, however, for a potential reversal, whose paradoxical nature originates in the rhetorical universe of Lucian. Indeed, in the immense workshop of the *Adagia* there is a brief comment on the proverbial saying *Elephantum ex musca facis*, through which Erasmus makes the comical outcome of this identity exchange explicit by referring to Lucian's *Muscae encomium*:

Ἐλέφας ἐκμύιας ποιεῖς, You make an elephant out of a fly, that is, you use big words about little things and exaggerate them. Lucian in his Panegyric on the Fly: «There is much more that I could say, but I will stop there, for fear of seeming, as the proverb has it, to make an elephant out of a fly. (CWE 32, 219)³⁴

The way in which Lucian's paradoxical encomium works is concisely rendered by Erasmus' quotation. The lack of correspondence between words and things creates a parodic effect, which changes the nature of words and things themselves through a sophistic process: the fly transmutes into an elephant by a skilful patchworking of the fragments of the elephant's epic wisdom onto the laughable little body of the annoying insect.

The ambiguity of the fly-elephant couple occurs once again, when it is observed that in Lucian's *Muscae Encomium* the fly gets the better of the elephant because of its small size: “So strong is the fly that when she bites she wounds the skin of the ox and the horse as well as that of man. She even torments the elephant by entering his wrinkles and lancing him with her proboscis as far as its length allows” (Luc. *Musc. Enc.*, tr. Harmon, I, 89). The

elephant's trunk is of no avail against the fly – this is its ironic nemesis.

To draw a genealogy *sub specie muscae* – i.e. under the sign of sophistic reversibility – of Erasmus' interest in Lucian's work, it will be useful to turn our attention to the rewriting of Lucian's encomium made by Leon Battista Alberti between 1441 and 1443, as a reply to Guarino Veronese's translation of the *Muscae Encomium*.³⁵

In the context of Alberti's rewriting, the results of the contest between fly and elephant become even clearer: “posterity handed down in literary monuments that the elephant saw himself defeated by the fly” (*Musca*, 50: “elephantum a musca prostratum se posteritas vidisse litterarum monumentis tradidit”). Furthermore, Alberti's *Musca* has a particular interest because it shows how the paradoxical praise responds to a real philosophical programme, which is able to give new value to *res domesticae et familiares*. In his *Musca*, Alberti rejects the human folly of investigating the forms of reality *a conspectus abditae et in obscuro retrusae*, thereby re-evaluating those things which are for the most part *in medium expositae et cognitu perfaciles* (45-46). Therefore, if the reading of Lucian's eulogy can cheer up Alberti and cure him of the inconvenience of fever by means of laughter (45), then this depends on the fact that the tiny praised animal is the bearer of a kind of knowledge that is able to deconstruct the seriousness of knotty philosophical speculation, through the levity of play. This playful approach questions every established value. In the first proem of the *Momus*, Alberti distinguishes those who wear the static mask of sternness (*severitatis persona*), from those who attain seriousness through the changeability of *festivitas* (6-7). As we have seen, this festive quality is connected to the ability to combine and vary different sources because “nothing is said which has not previously been said” (*Momus*, 4-5: “nihil dictum quin prius dictum”). The humble fly, *minutus animans*, hardly to be taken seriously, dresses itself up in epic words and philosophical virtues, which take the form of a parodic exercise.

Fully in keeping with this spirit, Erasmus took the identity of the buzzing insect and moved the discussion on free will from the systematic ground of the *tractatus*³⁶ to the rhetorical ground of the *diatriba*,³⁷ whose literary form deals more with the rhetorical exercise of the *disputatio in utramque partem* than with the Cynic-Stoic dialogic tradition. Erasmus' diatribe is characterized by the assumption of the concept of *decorum personae* as an expression of an unsystematic philosophy, which is structured on the basis of contextual needs. Therefore, Erasmus' decisive rejection of Luther's *pervicacia asserendi* plays a central role in the first part of *De libero arbitrio* because this rejection leads Erasmus to investigate the rhetorical field of the probable and plausible:

Now for my part I was well aware how poorly suited I was for this wrestling-match – indeed there is hardly a man less practised in the art than I, for I have always preferred sporting in the spacious plains of the Muses to engaging in swordplay at close quarters. And I take so little pleasure in assertions that I will gladly seek refuge in Scepticism [...], and so I will act as disputant, not as a judge; as inquirer, not as dogmatist; ready to learn from anyone, if any truer or more reliable arguments can be put forward. (CWE 76, 7-8)³⁸

It is clear that the most appropriate context for Erasmus' reflection is that of the *ludus*, of play, and the exercise of *fictio*: what is dubious, what is difficult to discern in the labyrinth of the Scriptures cannot take the form of peremptory assertion, but it may be explored through the practice of fiction:

What you affirm, I wish; what you say you know, I desire to learn; nor is it enough for me that you firmly assert this – I demand the certitude which you profess to have [...] For it often happens that when someone comes out of the dark, he does not see anything even in full sunlight unless he has focused his eyes for a while, and some things we do not see immediately through the darkness, but as we focus our eyes what was doubtful before gradually begins to be clear to us, and the same thing happens when things are far away from us. But out of courtesy I pretended that the interpretations on both sides were ambiguous so that on a level playing field you might show something that would incline towards your side those of us who were vacillating in the middle. (*Hyperaspites*, CWE 76, 226-227)³⁹

Against this background, the letter that Erasmus wrote to John Extin in November 1499, about twenty years before the explosion of the Lutheran issue, is very significant. By relating the degeneration of a convivial discussion into a battle *inter pocula*, i.e. a kind of Lucianic anti-symposium, Erasmus represents himself as a poet-orator in the midst of an assembly of theologians: he is able to take the banquet, which is corrupted by the harshness of controversy, back to a relaxed, cheerful and sociable mood through the narration of a *festiva fabella*:

In the end, since the discussion had gone on rather long and had become too serious and too rigorous to suit a dinner party, I decided to play my part, that is, the part of the poet, with the object of getting rid of this contentious argument and introducing some gaiety into the meal. (CWE 1, 230)⁴⁰

To return to the discussion on free will, Luther recognized and was severely critical of the sophistic and Lucianic disposition of Erasmus, who was able to transform things through words. According to Erasmus, the interchangeability of roles in the competition between fly and elephant shed a playful light on the whole *diatribe*; according to Luther, however, Erasmus' art of transmutation took the form of a diabolic rhetorical *fucus*, of Odysseus' malicious *flexiloquus* (*On the Bondage of the Will*, tr. H. Cole, 3-4; *De servo arbitrio*, WA 18, 601-602): Erasmus' *festivitas* was decisively banned (*On the Bondage of the Will*, 8; WA, 18, 603), together with Lucian's laugh:

For, by so doing, you only evince that you hug in your heart a Lucian, or some other of the swinish tribe of Epicureans; who, because he does not believe there is a God himself, secretly laughs at all those who believe and confess it. (*On the Bondage of the Will*, 12)⁴¹

What shall I say here, Erasmus? To me, you breathe out nothing but Lucian, and draw in the gorging surfeit of Epicurus. (*On the Bondage of the Will*, 17)⁴²

Furthermore, Luther did not leave any space for the possibilities of fiction, so relevant to Erasmus in the field of theological education:

And moreover [I would shew you] what is it to run against divine things and truths, when, in mere compliance with others and against our conscience, we assume a strange character and act upon a strange stage. It is neither a game nor a jest, to undertake to teach the sacred truths and godliness: for it is very easy here to meet with the fall which James speaks of, "He that offended in one point is guilty of all". For when we begin to be, in the least degree, disposed to trifle, and not to hold the sacred truths in due reverence, we are soon involved in impieties, and overwhelmed with blasphemies: as it has happened to you here, Erasmus. (*On the Bondage of the Will*, 34)⁴³

Nugae and *sacrae litterae* should on no account be mixed (*On the Bondage of the Will*, 107; WA 18, 661): the inconceivable contaminations that systematically appear in Erasmus' works seemed to Luther closer to the fictional inventions of Lucian's *Vera Historia* than to serious theological engagement ("To teach, then, a something which is neither described by one word within the scriptures, nor evidenced by one fact without the scriptures, is that, which does not belong to the doctrines of Christians, but to the very fables of Lucian"; *On the Bondage of the Will*, 107⁴⁴). Thus, in the centre of his *De servo arbitrio*, Luther redeployed the image of Erasmus as a fly and portrayed the humanist from Rotterdam as leading a ridiculous army of insects and fighting against an impressive and solemn rank of fully armed men: "it is just thus, that the human dreams of the Diatribe are drawn up in battle against the hosts of the words of God!" (*On the Bondage of the Will*, 165).⁴⁵ In this context the military virtues of the fly, ironically commended by Alberti (*Musca*, 47-49), prove to be only as a grotesque shadow and a poor substitute for the stern decorum of a warrior: according to Luther, the human comedy of the *diatribe* is clearly at variance with the tragic epic of Christianity. It was for this reason that, in a letter of 1524, Luther attempted to discourage Erasmus' stance against the Protestant reformation by referring to his own theological battle as a real *tragoedia*, whose harshness did not suit the intelligence of the *homo loquax*: Erasmus should have remained simply a spectator of the Lutheran tragic drama ("I beg you [...] to be no more than a spectator of this trouble in which we are engaged"; CWE 10, 246⁴⁶). Erasmus' reply was immediate and, by turning what Luther considers the *imbecilitas* of the man of letters into a judgment parameter, he insisted on the need to take part in the *tragoedia lutherana* in order to dissipate its tragic result ("let me not be a spectator and watch the tragedy unfold- I only hope it does not have a tragic ending!" CWE 10, 255⁴⁷).

At this point, it should be borne in mind that the *muscarum Achilles* (*On the Bondage of the Will*, 165; WA 18, 688) mask, which exploits the meaning potential of laughable realities, is not a novelty in Erasmus' repertoire. In the *Prolegomena* to the *Adagia*, the proverbial form is compared to those *minutissima animantia* which reveal the expertise of nature more than the mighty elephant because of the functionality of their anatomical structure ("And, as Pliny says, the miracle of nature is greater in the most minute creatures [...] than in the elephant, if only one looks closely; and so, in the domain of literature, it is sometimes the smallest things which have the greatest intellectual value"; CWE 31, 14⁴⁸). According to Erasmus, smallness, *nugacitas*, and a witty and lively mind are one and the same. They have an essential rela-

tionship with the universe of rhetorical exercise (*Apo-phthegmata*, CWE 37, 15-16; ASD IV/4, 45) and with the stutter of human speech (*Ratio seu methodus*, LB V, 124), whose fate it is to acquire meaning only through reformulation and shift in perspective. It is no coincidence that, in the discussion with Guillaume Budé which started in 1516, Erasmus focused on the definition of a poetics of *leptologemata*. While according to Budé, Erasmus' eloquence should find more appropriate tones and subjects to display its grandeur, the humanist from Rotterdam insisted on the nugatory nature of his light philosophy (CWE 4, 102-107; Allen II, 362-366), which could adapt itself to the world stage (CWE 4, 228-236; Allen II, 463-469).

Moriae Encomium is the best example of Erasmus' paradoxical approach.—Here, the aptitude of the *tetrica philosophia* for dealing with serious things in a light and foolish manner (i.e. in specular terms, for changing trifles into serious things) is opposed to the aptitude of the *mosophus* in dealing with trivial things as such. In short, the most pleasant and useful thing is to achieve *seria* by means of *nugae*.⁴⁹ Therefore, while the supercilious philosophers reveal their silliness behind the appearance of graveness, Folly's companions recognizes the *festiva, lepida et iucunda* surface of reality as the place for the production of meaning. Once again, the acknowledgement of the *nugacitas* of *nugae* leads to the paradoxical reversibility of the fly-elephant's rhetoric.

5. Alcibiades' Sileni

There is another image in Erasmus' work that certainly can be juxtaposed with the fly-elephant couple: the image of the scarab, which is described in the *fabula* that comments on the adage *Scarabaeus aquilam quaerit* (CWE 35, 178-214; ASD II/6, 395-424). Most of this *fabella* is taken up by the development of two epideictic compositions: the first consists of the condemnation of the eagle's ferocity and arrogance, which is compared to the rapacity of contemporary tyrants; the second consists of the paradoxical praise of the hidden qualities of the humble scarab, which turn into symbols of divinity. The condemnation of the eagle affords an opportunity to stage a satirical tirade against the violence of power and to paint the portrait of the ideal sovereign; the praise for the scarab, on the other hand, is characterized by the ironic transformation of the scarab's faults into physical, moral and intellectual qualities. In short, in Erasmus' definition, the scarab is a true Alcibiades' Silenus⁵⁰ in whom a risible surface and rich inwardness coexist.

Against this background, it will be useful to go back to the point in Erasmus' *Adagia* where the proverbial phrase *Sileni Alcibiadis* is first mentioned. This will enable us to better understand the nature of Erasmus' apologue, which shows the poor scarab defeating the eagle, and to investigate more closely the peculiar qualities of this scarab-Silenus.

The commentary of the adage *Sileni Alcibiadis* is one of the most extended in the whole *corpus* of *Chiliades Adagiorum* and develops into a sort of political-theological essay where Erasmus condemns social hypocrisies and their inauspicious consequences. However, for

my argument, the most interesting aspect of Alcibiades' Silenus is his first description, which sheds light on the paradoxical relationship between amusing surface and serious inwardness, and between the playful artifice of the outward form and the numinous essence:

The Sileni are said to have been a kind of small figure of carved wood, so made that they could be divided and opened. Thus, though when closed they looked like a caricature of a hideous flute-player, when opened they suddenly displayed a deity, so that this humorous surprise made the carver's skill all the more admirable. Furthermore, the subject of these images was drawn from the well-known comic figure of Silenus, Bacchus' tutor and the court buffoon of the gods of poetry. (CWE 34, 262)⁵¹

First of all, in following Erasmus' approach, it should not be forgotten that the metaphor of Silenus originates in Plato's *Symposium*. Here Alcibiades, who is completely drunk, paradoxically praises an *atopos* Socrates, whose real nature can be understood only through the ridiculous medium of the image (*Smp.* 215a-222b).⁵² The paradox of the discrepancy between Socrates' superficial foolery and his inner qualities is the result of the ambiguous speech of the drunk Alcibiades, whom Socrates himself describes as someone who lacks the ability to see properly (*Smp.* 219a). The portrait of Socrates that emerges from what Alcibiades says is that of a man who deceives and disguises himself while upsetting roles and identities and whose irony displays the attitude of the sophist. The contradictory identity of Socrates can be understood only through the dislocated perspective of the drunk and blind Alcibiades: by confusing Socrates with Eros-sophist (*Smp.* 203d), he is compelled to hold onto a man in whom comedy and tragedy coexist (*Smp.* 223d).

In his commentary to the adage *Sileni Alcibiadis*, Erasmus fully exploited this substantial ambivalence of the Silenus metaphor, and insisted on Socrates' ridiculous appearance, his zany behaviour, his inclination to play and trick, as well as on his open staging of a weak form of knowledge:

Anyone who had valued him skin-deep (as they say) would not have given twopence for him. With his peasant face, glaring like a bull, and his snub nose always sniffing, he might have been taken for some blockheaded country bumpkin. The care of his person was neglected, his language simple and homely and smacking of common folk; for his talk was all of carters and cobblers, of fullers and smiths [...]. Last but not least, that unbroken flow of humour gave him the air of a buffoon. While that was a period when the ambition to advertise one's own cleverness reached manic heights among the foolish [...], Socrates was alone in declaring that there was only one thing he knew, which was that he knew nothing [...]. Small wonder then, though the world of those days was full of professional wits, if this buffoon was the only man declared wise by the oracle, and he who knew nothing was judged to know more than those who boasted there was nothing they did not know – was in fact judged to know more than the rest for that very reason, that he alone of them all said he knew nothing. (CWE 34, 262-263)⁵³

Therefore, the comic mask is part of Socrates as his sublime soul or, better, the comic appearance seems to be the very foundation of his inner virtues. It is not by chance that Socrates' silenic comedy is opposed to the tragedy of *praeposteri Sileni*, who are not able to recognize the the-

atrical quality of their splendours and honours and who confuse this golden surface with their individual substance:

A goodly number of men reproduce Silenus inside-out. Anyone who looked thoroughly into the driving force of things and their true nature would find none so far removed from real wisdom as those whose honorific title, learned bonnets, resplendent belts, and jewelled rings advertise wisdom in perfection. So true is this that you may not seldom find more real and native wisdom in one single ordinary man [...], than in many of our pompous theologians. (CWE 34, 265-266)⁵⁴

At this point, according to Erasmus' reappraisal of Alcibiades' perspective, it is clear that any opportunity to grasp a truth must necessarily pass through the surface of the comic mask, which creates the condition for all investigation of truth: Erasmus' silenic approach does not consist in the mere unveiling of a more substantial reality⁵⁵, but in the acknowledgement of the theatrical nature of every *persona*. The nature of Erasmus' paradox does not lie in the overturning of appearance, but in the *aporia* of coexistence⁵⁶. Silenus' comicality is related to the ability to recognize the contextual existence of each mask (*persona*); the tragedy of the inverted Silenus consists in wearing the mask as a skin.

Once again, examining Erasmus' work in the light of Lucian's paradoxes can be profitable: through the mediation of Lucian, Erasmus seems to fully exploit the potential sophistic aptitude of Alcibiades' speech. The image of Silenus that Lucian outlined in his *Bacchus* constitutes an intermediate step between the Silenus of Alcibiades and that of Erasmus. Lucian, with Alcibiades' Socrates in mind, used the image of Silenus to justify the comic quality of his writings. He states that Bacchus' pedagogue is able to produce his best speeches, and his most ornate and wise utterances when his inebriation and drollery reach their acme. In the same way Lucian's work, which is a hybrid of philosophical dialogue and comedy, achieves its most significant results when it makes explicit use of the device of laughter (*Luc. Bacch.*, tr. Harmon, I, 56-59). In this context the laughable appearance of Lucian's work becomes the real mediator and the focal point of every hermeneutical activity.

Against this background, it is not by chance that the image of Alcibiades' Silenus became the emblem of the literary structure of Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium* and the metaphor of the exegetical process required for its interpretation (CWE 27, 102-103; ASD IV/3, 104). As a matter of fact, the Silenic approach excludes a simplified allegorical reading and exploits the playful nature of the rhetorical principles of *decorum* and *aptum*.

Now that the qualities of the figure of *Sileni Alcibiadis* have been clarified, we can return to the Silenic image of the scarab. Our first impression is that the ability of the tiny despised animal to humiliate artfully the haughty eagle makes the humble insect next of kin to the fly, whose graceful levity is set against the massive structure of the elephant. On closer examination, however, the reader is disoriented by the fact that the praise of the scarab takes on an increasingly satirical tone: through the exaltation of its skill as a warrior, Erasmus ridicules military prowess and glory⁵⁷ and, through the scarab's mys-

terious sanctification, he makes fun of superstition⁵⁸. Erasmus' portrait of the scarab shows a small animal of shabby appearance, which is full of vainglory and greedy for power:

Now the beetle was not a little pleased by the very fact that someone existed who, first, was willing to owe his life to him and believed that such a great thing was in his power; and who, second, found his hole [...] suitable as a place in which to hide for safety, like a sacred altar or the king's statue. (CWE 35, 207)⁵⁹

He was also tickled by a certain alluring hope that, if the act succeeded and the eagle were overthrown, he might himself take power. (CWE 35, 209)⁶⁰

Erasmus' scarab is sure of its honour and authority ("personal dignity is no slight matter to anyone"; CWE 35, 208⁶¹), and when this insignificant beast is offended by the eagle he begins to harbour a destructive hatred and to engage in such a cruel and malicious deception ("And so he pondered all sorts of arts and trick. It was no common punishment but extermination and "total destruction" he contemplated"; CWE 35, 208⁶²). Therefore, the smallness of the scarab is at variance with the joyful and playful aptitude of the fly. Indeed, the scarab statically takes on the identity of a revealed allegory and, by forgetting and rejecting its comic mask and its laughable appearance, it does not look much different from the eagle in terms of its rapacity and thirst for glory.⁶³ Thus, the Silenus-scarab turns into a tragic mask, into an inverted Silenus, which is unable to exploit the potential meaning of its ludic *persona* and which projects outwards its own ridiculous gravity: taking a *mysterium* too seriously and effacing the comical *ambages* of its surface means eschewing the fiction that produces truth and being content with a fictitious truth.

6. Conclusion

The materials analysed in this overview allow us to affirm that some of the best-known and recurring metaphors in Erasmus' work (Hercules, Silenus and the fly) originated in the paradoxes of Lucian.

In this article I have attempted not only to trace the genealogy of Erasmus' ethics, by emphasizing the way in which its constitutive metaphors are rooted in Lucian's work, but also to show that what is most serious and deep in Erasmus' theological perspective (i.e the tolerance of *pietas*) is founded in the sophistic aptitude of Lucian's laughter and in his ability to test and experiment with the contingencies of every context.

From this point of view, the Lucianism of Erasmus is no longer the playful dressing up of a more substantial moral commitment but becomes the rhetorical aesthetics which fostered the growth of his ethics.

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Notes

¹ See, among others, Lauvergnot-Gagnière, Marsh and Geri.

² See, for example, M. A. Screech. For my purpose, the approach to the *Moriae Encomium* of Margolin 1983 and Fumaroli is more significant because of its focus on the rhetorical and sophistic nature of the paradoxes of Folly.

³ For the plurality of values of the recurrent image of Hercules in Erasmus' work see Margolin 1996.

⁴ For *Hercules Germanicus*'s identification with Arminius, the hero of the battle of the Teutoburg forest, see McDonald and Leitch.

⁵ For the ascription of the engraving to Hans Holbein the Younger and for its anti-Lutheran interpretation see Burckhardt-Werthemann and Burckhardt-Biedermann.

⁶ On the value of Erasmus' portrait by Holbein see, in particular, among others, Heckscher.

⁷ For an exhaustive exploration of the theme of physical weakness in Erasmus' epistolary see Vanden Branden.

⁸ Cf. CWE 34, 175-176: "Some people, I perceive, are of a disposition to measure books by their size, rather than by the learning they contain, and think a thing finished only if nothing can be added to it and much is superfluous, nothing adequate that is not greatly overdone, and fullness never achieved except where everything is repeated ad nauseam. Among this gentry, someone will say that there are points to which I might have given fuller and richer treatment [...] Who, I ask you to begin with, is so arrogant that he dare maintain such a thing? So unfair as to demand that in this literary kind work no passage shall ever be passed over? Suppose you have read everything, made notes of everything, have everything ready at hand: is it all, in this vast medley of materials, instantly available, just what you needed and where you needed it? Then think what tedious pedantry it would have been to collect from every quarter all that could in any way have been adapted to enrichment of a proverb!" (ASD II/5, 33: "Nam quosdam hoc animo esse video ut libros mole, non eruditione metiantur et id demum absolutum existiment, ubi nihil adiungi possit, supersint pleraque; quibus nihil satis nisi quod impendio nimium, atque ibi denique copiam esse iudicant, cum ad satietatem ubique dicuntur omnia. Horum igitur quispiam dicit quaedam a me copiosius locupletiusque tractari potuisse [...]. Quis tam iniquus ut exigat in huiusmodi scripti genere ne quis omnino praetereatur locus? Ut nihil non legeris, nihil non annotaris, nihil non apparaveris, itane statim in tam immensa rerum turba succurrit quod oportuit quoque oportuit loco? Deinde quae tandem futura fuerat ista molesta diligentia

undecunqne conquirere quicquid quocunqne modo poterat ad proverbii locupletationem accomodari?”).

⁹ See Grassi, 150-153 about the relationship between Hercules and Proteus and, in general, about Hercules as protagonist of the humanization of the natural world through speech.

¹⁰ For the literary and iconographic fortune of the image of *Hercules Gallicus* after Erasmus' translation see Hallowell 1962, Hallowell 1966 and, more recently, Carlini.

¹¹ ASD, I/1, 591-592: “siquidem Hercules ille senex ingentem admodum hominum multitudinem trahit, omnibus ab aure revinctis, porro vincula catenulae tenues auro electrove confectae pulcherrimis istis monilibus adsimiles. Atqui quum vinculis usqueadeo fragilibus ducantur, tamen neque de fugiendo cogitant, quum alioqui commode possint, neque prorsus obnituntur, aut pedibus adversus trahentem obtundunt, sese resupinantes: verum alacres ac laeti sequuntur, ducentem admirantes, ultro festinantes omnes, et laxatis funiculis etiam antevertere studentes, perinde quasi graviter laturi, si solverentur vinculis. Ne illud quidem pigebit referre, quod mihi videbatur omnium absurdissimum: etenim quum non inveniret pictor unde catenularum summam ansas necceret, videlicet dextera iam clavam, laeva arcum tenente, summam dei linguam perterebat, atque ex hac religatis catenulis eos trahi fecit. Ipse nimirum ad eos qui ducebantur, vultum et oculos convertebat, arridens [...]. Quin de eodem hanc in summa habemus opinionem, ut quicquid egit, id oratione fecundaque confecisse putemus, utpote virum sapientem, ac persuadendo pleraque sibi subegisse. Iam tela illius nimirum rationes sunt acutae, missiles, citae atque animam sauciantes”.

¹² Cf. *The Table Talk, or Familiar Discourse of Martin Luther*, tr. Hazlitt, 283: “[Erasmus is] a mere Momus, making his mows and mocks at everything and everybody, at God and man, at papist and protestant, but all the while using such shuffling and double-meaning terms, that no one can lay hold of him to any effectual purpose” (*D. Martin Luthers Werke. Tischreden*, I, 811, 390: “Erasmus verus est Momus. Omnia ridet ac ludit, totam religionem ac Christum, atque ut hoc melius praestet, dies noctesque excogitat vocabula amphibola et ambigua [...]. Omnia eius scripta quolibet trahi possunt, itaque neque a nobis, nec a papisti deprehendi potest, nisi prius ademeris illi amphibologiam”), and cf. *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Briefwechsel*, VII, 2093, 36: “Our king of ambiguity sits upon his ambiguous throne and destroys us, stupid Christians, with a double destruction. First, it is his will, and it is a great pleasure to him, to offend us by his ambiguous words [...] And next, when he sees that we are offended, and have run against his insidious figures of speech, and begin to exclaim against him, he then begin to triumph and rejoice that the desired prey has been caught in his snares” (“At noster rex amphibolus sedet in throno amphibologiae securus, et duplici contritione conterit nos stupidos christianos. Primo vult, et magna voluptas est, ambiguis suis dictis nos offendere [...]. Deinde, ubi sensit nos offensos et impegisse in insidiosas figuras et clamare contra eum, ibi serio triumphat et gaudet incidisse in suos casses praedam petitam”).

¹³ About the mockery of the image of *Hercules Gallicus* in Dürer's engraving see Wind.

¹⁴ Erasmus carried on his translation of the works of Lucian until 1514, constantly adding new material to the subsequent editions of Lucian's translations. The ten translated texts (four by More and six by Erasmus) of the first edition of 1506 became the thirty-six translations of the 1514 edition.

¹⁵ On this see Thompson, Delcourt, Rummel, 49-70 and Geri, 166-177.

¹⁶ The role of Lucian in Erasmus' pedagogical project is clarified in *De ratione studii*, CWE 24, 669: “For a true ability to speak correctly is best fostered both by conversing and consorting with those who speak correctly and by the habitual reading of the best stylists. Among the latter the first to be imbibed should be those whose diction, apart from its refinement, will also entice learners by a certain charm of subject-matter. In this category I would assign first place to Lucian” (ASD I/2, 115: “Nam vera emendate loquendi facultas optime paratur, cum ex castigate loquentium colloquio convictaque, tum ex eloquentium auctororum assidua lectione, e quibus ii primum sunt imbibendi, quorum oratio, praeterquam quod est castigatissima, argumenti quoque illecebra aliqua discentibus blandiatur. Quo quidem in genere primas tribuerim Luciano”).

¹⁷ For a definition of the humanistic concept of *festivitas* see Dresden.

¹⁸ Cf. *De copia*, CWE 24, 634: “Stories which are invented to raise a laugh are the more entertaining the further they are from truth [...] and can also win the ears of the educated by learned allusions. To this type belong Lucian's *True History* and Apuleius' *Golden Ass* which he copied from Lucian's example, further the *Icaromenippus* and lots of other things by Lucian; also nearly all the plots of Old Comedy, which delight us not by presenting a picture of real life, but by allusion and hidden meaning” (ASD I/6, 257: “Porro, quae risus causa finguntur, quo

longius absunt a vero, hoc magis demulcent animos [...] et eruditus allusionibus doctas etiam auras capere possint. Quo de genere sunt Luciani Verae narrationes, et ad huius exemplum effectus Asinus Apulei; praeterea Icaromenippus, et reliqua Luciani pleraque. Item argumenta ferme omnia veteris comoediae, quae non imagine veri sed allusionibus et allegoriis delectant”). For the characterization of Lucian's work as an exercise of topical assemblage (cultural *mimesis*) see Bompaire.

¹⁹ Cf. the chapter *Exercitatio et imitatio* of the *De conscribendis epistolis*, CWE 25, 25 (ASD I/2, 233) in which Erasmus regards Lucian as a rhetorician especially well-versed in the genre of *declamatio* because of his ability to assume the fictitious identity of historical and mythological characters. For the relationship between the concept of *festivitas* and the mimetic ability see Lecointe, 441-445.

²⁰ ASD I/1, 423: “Neque minus tamen iucundus quam frugifer futurus est, si quis modo decorum observet, quod in personis situm est.”

²¹ *Ibid.* 603: “Luciani dialogus [...] plurimum habeat artis ob decorum mire servatum in personis tam multis tamque diversis”.

²² Too often critics have pinned these disparaging labels on the work of Lucian, by accepting as a fact the opposition between rhetorical form and philosophical content.

²³ Cf. CWE 2, 114 “It is a dialogue by Lucian; and there is hardly any of them that is more useful or pleasant to read”; 116: “it secretes a juice of sovereign potency for health; [...] whether you look for pleasure or edification there is no comedy, or satire, that challenges comparison with his dialogues”; 122: “So you will, I hope, read him with a certain amount of profit – but also with a vast degree of pleasure” (ASD I/1, 488: “Is est Luciani dialogus quo vix alius lectu vel utilior vel iucundior”; 470: “succo praesentaneo salubrem et efficacem. [...] Nulla comoedia, nulla satyra cum huius dialogis conferri debeat, seu voluptatem spectes”; 449: “Eum igitur leges (uti spero) non modo cum fructu aliquo, verum etiam summa cum voluptate”); Cf. “Translations of Lucian”. *The Complete Works of St Thomas More* III/1, 5: “Whether this dialogue is more amusing or more instructive is hard to say” (“dialogus nescio certe lepidior ne, an utilior”).

²⁴ ASD I/4, 28: “vera pietate nihil est hilarius.”

²⁵ Cf. CWE 2, 116: “as Horace has written *He who mingles use with pleasure/ Every prize doth bear away*. [...] By his mixture of fun and earnest, gaiety and accurate observation, he so effectively portrays the manners [...] of men” (ASD I/1, 470-471: “Omne tulit punctum, (ut scripsit Flaccus) qui miscuit utile dulci [...]. Sic seria nugis, nugas seriis miscet; sic ridens vera dicit, vera dicendo ridet; sic homines mores [...] depingit”); Cf. “Translations of Lucian”. *The Complete Works of St Thomas More* III/1, 3: “If, most learned Sir, there was ever anyone who fulfilled the Horatian maxim and combined delight with instruction, I think Lucian certainly ranked among the foremost in this respect” (“Si quisquam fuit unquam vir doctissime, qui Horatianum praeceptum impleverit, voluptatemque cum utilitate coniunxerit, hoc ego certe Lucianum in primis puto praestitisse”).

²⁶ Cf. CWE 39 (ASD I/3), *Exorcismus sive Spectrum*, 531-544 (417-423); *Alcumistica*, 545-556 (424-429); *Hippoplanus*, 557-561 (430-432); *ΠΤΩΟΛΟΓΙΑ*, 562-570 (433-437).

²⁷ ASD I/2, 65: “Optarim aetatem virentem, a qua non abhorreat puer, et quam non pigeat quamvis personam sumere. Hic idem aget in formando ingenio quod parentes et nutrices facere solent in fingendo corpore”.

²⁸ Cf. *De pueris instituendis*, CWE 26, 341: “Nausea, after all, often arises from pure imagination [...]. Do we not see small boys constantly on the go all day, incredibly active, yet not experiencing any weariness? The great Milo would soon tire if he attempted to keep up a similar pace. Why are children like this? The reason is that play and childhood go naturally together, and that children think of their activity as play rather than exertion. The fact is that whenever we feel dissatisfied about something it is largely due to our imagination, which is often responsible for creating such a mood even when there is nothing wrong. [...] it is then the teacher's task to prevent these feelings from taking hold and to give the course of study the appearance of a game” (ASD, I/2, p. 73: “Nonnunquam enim horrorem adfert sola imaginatio [...]. An non videmus pueros tenerellos mira agilitate totum cursitare diem, nec sentire lassitudinem? Idem si faciat Milo, fatigaretur. Quid in causa? Quia lusus aetati cognatus est, et lusus imaginantur, non laborem. Est autem in re quavis maxima molestiae pars imaginatio [...]. An non videmus pueros tenerellos mira agilitate totum cursitare diem, nec sentire lassitudinem? Idem si faciat Milo, fatigaretur. Quid in causa? Quia lusus aetati cognatus est, et lusus imaginantur, non laborem. Est autem in re quavis maxima molestiae pars imaginatio, quae mali sensum adfert interdum, etiam ubi nihil est mali. Proinde [...] praeceptoris [...] partes erunt, eandem multis rationibus excludere studioque lusus personam inducere”).

²⁹ ASD I/3, 742: “Et haud scio an quicquam discitur felicius, quam quod in ludendo discitur. Est hoc nimirum sanctissimum fallendi genus, per imposturam dare beneficium”.

³⁰ ASD V/4, 442: "nec vero semper opponitur falsum". For Erasmus' concept of truth as human research see Margolin 1969, 45-69.

³¹ Allen IV, 13-15: "Quod Tomae Mori ingenium sic deamas [...] nimirum scriptis illius inflammatus, quibus, ut vere scribis, nihil esse potest neque doctus neque festivus, istuc, crede mihi, clarissime Huttene, tibi cum multis commune est [...]. Vultus ingenio respondet, gratam et amicam festivitatem semper prae se ferens, ac nonnihil ad ridentis habitum compositus; atque, ut ingenue dicam, appositior ad iucunditatem quam ad gravitatem aut dignitatem, etiamsi longissime abest ab ineptia scurrilitateque [...]. Lingua mire explanata articulataque, nihil habens nec praecipue nec haesitans."

³² *Ibid.* 16: "In convictu tam rara comitas ac morum suavitas, ut nemo tam tristi sit ingenio quem non exhilaret, nulla res tam atrox cuius taedium non discutiatur. Iam inde a puero sic iocis est delectatus ut ad hos natus videri possit [...]. Adolescens comoediolas et scripsit et egit. Si quod dictum esset salsius, etiam in ipsum tortum, tamen amabat; usqueadeo gaudet salibus argutis et ingenium redolentibus. Unde et epigrammatis lusit iuvenis, et Luciano cum primis est delectatus; quin et mihi ut Morias Encomium scriberem, hoc est camelus saltarem, fuit auctor. Nihil autem in rebus humanis obvium est unde ille non venetur voluptatem, etiam in rebus maxime seriis: Si cum eruditus et cordatus res est, delectatur ingenio; si cum indoctis ac stultis, fruitur illorum stulticia. Nec offenditur morionibus, mira dexteritate ad omnium affectus sese accomodans."

³³ LB IX, 1215: "Erasmus audet cum Luthero congregi, hoc est, cum elephanto musca?". On the importance of this incipit of *De libero arbitrio* in the work setting see Boyle, 1-4.

³⁴ ASD II/2, 388: "Ἐλέφα ζέκ μυίας ποιεῖς, id est «Elephantum ex muscafacis», id est res exiguas verbis atollis atque amplificas. Lucianus in Muscae encomio: Πολλὰ δ' ἔτι ἔχων εἰπεῖν καταπαύσω τὸν λόγον, μὴ καὶ δόξο κατὰ τὴν παροιμίαν ἐλέφαντα ἐκ μυίας ποιεῖν, id est "Multa adhuc commemorare possem, sed finem dicendi faciam, ne videar et ipse iuxtatritumproverbium ex musca elephantum facere."

³⁵ On the translations of Lucian by Guarino and, in general, on Lucian's legacy in the Renaissance see Mattioli and Marsh.

³⁶ Luther's *Tractatus de libertate Christiana* discusses exactly of the issue of free will.

³⁷ On the formal features of the literary genre of the *diatriba* and thegnoseological consequences of Erasmus' choice see Boyle, 5-42.

³⁸ LB IX, 1215-1216: "certe vix alius quisquam minus exercitatus, ut qui semper arcano quodam natura e sensu abhorruerim a pugnis: eoque semper habui prius in liberioribus Musarum campis ludere, quam ferro comminus congregi. Et adeo non delector assertionibus, ut facile in Scepticorum sententiam pedibus discessurus sim [...], eoque disputatorem agam, non iudicem: inquisitorem, non dogmatisten, paratus a quocunque discere, si quid adferatur rectius aut compertius".

³⁹ LB X, 1304: "Quod tu affirmas, ego opto, quod tu dicis te scire, ego discere cupio, nec mihi satis est hoc asseverari abs te, certitudinem efflagito quam tu proferis [...]. Fit enim frequenter, ut qui a tenebris prodeunt, nihil videant in media luce Solis, nisi aliquandiu intenderint oculos, et per tenebras quaedam non statim videmus, sed intendentibus oculis paulatim incipient nobis esse paecipua, quae prius erant ambigua: quod idem accidit in rebus quae procul absunt a nobis. Sed ita civilitatis causa finxi, interpretationem utriusque partis esse ambiguum, ut rebus aequatis, ostenderes aliquidquod nos in medio vacillantes in tuam partem inclinaret".

⁴⁰ Allen, I, 269: "Tandem cum et longius processisset disputatio, et esset quam ut convivio conveniret gravior et severior, tum ego meis, hoc est poetae, partibus functurus, ut et eam contentionem discuterem et festiviore fabella prandium exhilararem".

⁴¹ WA 18, 605: "Nam hoc consilio aliud nihil facis, quam quod significas te in corde, Lucianum aut aliumquendam de grege Epicuri porcum alere, qui cum ipse nihil credat esse Deum, rideat occulte omnes qui credunt et confitentur".

⁴² *Ivi.* 609: "Quid hic dicam Erasme? Totus Lucianus spiras, et inhalas mihi grandem Epicuri crapulam".

⁴³ *Ibid.* 620: "Deinde [ostendo], quid sit in divinas res et literas impingere, dum aliorum obsequio, personam sumimus et invita conscientia alienae scenae servimus. Non est ludus neque iocus, sacras literas et pietatem docere, facillime enim hic contingit lapsus ille, de quo Iacobus dicit, Qui offendit in uno, fit omnium reus. Ita fit enim, ut cum modicum videamur velle nugari, nec satis reverenter sacras literas habemus, mox impietatis involvamur, blasphemiasque immergamur, sicut hic tibi contigit Erasme."

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 661: "Docere igitur aliquid, quod intra scripturas non est ullo verbo praescriptum et extra scripturas non est ullo facto monstratum, hoc non pertinet ad dogmata Christianorum, sed ad narrationes veras Luciani."

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 688: "Sic pugnan thumana Diatribes somnia adversus divinorum verborum agmina."

⁴⁶ Allen V, 447: "spectator tantum sit tragoediae nostrae."

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 452: "non licet esset spectatorem istius tragoediae, que utinam non habeat tragicum exitum!"

⁴⁸ ASD, II/1, 60: "Et ut auctore Plinio in minutissimis animantibus [...] maius est naturae miraculum quam in elephanto, siquis modo proprius contempletur, itidem in re litteraria nonnumquam plurimum habent ingenii, quae minima sunt."

⁴⁹ Cf. CWE 27, 84: "trifling may lead to something more serious" (ASD IV/3, 68: "nugae seria ducant"). It is particularly interesting to note that this statement originates in Horace's *Ars Poetica*, where it takes on a completely different meaning from that of Erasmus. "Hae nugae seria ducunt", according to Horace, means that even the smallest negligence in style can lead to a disastrous outcome in the finished work. For his part, Erasmus has fun juxtaposing *nugae* as little mistakes in the field of grammatical propriety and *nugae* as poetic games, by superimposing the seriousness of the consequences of a poorly finished literary work on the seriousness of thought content. Cf. Gordon, 54.

⁵⁰ Cf. CWE 35, 200: "But in truth, if anyone will open up this Silenus and look more closely at this despised creature, in its own setting as it were, he will see it has so many uncommon gifts that, all things well considered, he will almost prefer to be a scarab rather than an eagle" (ASD II/6, 413: "Verum si quis hunc explicit Silenum et contemptum hoc animalculum proprius ac veluti domi contempletur, tam multas in eo dotes haud vulgares animadvertet, ut omnibus diligenter pensitatis propemodum scarabeum se malit esse quam aquilam").

⁵¹ ASD, II/5, p. 160: "Aiunt enim Silenus imagnunculas quaspiam fuisse sectiles et ita factas, ut diduci et explicari possent, et quae clausae ridiculam ac monstrosam tibicinis speciem habebant, apertae subito numen ostendebant, ut artem scalptoris gratiore iococus faceret error. Porro statuarum argumentum sumptum est a ridiculo illo Sileno, Bacchi paedagogi numinumque poeticoorum morione."

⁵² About the possibility to read Plato's *Symposium* as a game with the sophistic literary genre of paradoxical praise, see Dandrey, 15-17.

⁵³ ASD II/5, 160-162: "Quem si de summa, quod dici cote, culet quis aestimasset non emisset asse. Facies erat rusticana, taurinus aspectus, nares simiae mucroque plenae. Sannionem quempiam bardum ac stupidum dixisses. Cultus neglectus, sermo simplex ac plebeius et humilis, ut qui semper aurigas, cerdones, fullones et fabros haberet in ore [...]. Denique iocus ille perpetuus nonnullam habebat morionis speciem. Cum ea tempestate ad insaniam usque ferret inter stultos profitendi sapientiam ambitio [...] solus hic hoc unum scire se dicitabat quod nihil scire [...]. Proinde non iniuria, cum id tempestatis plena sophis essent omnia, solus hic morio sapiens oraculo pronuntiatus est et plus iudicatus est scire qui nihil sciebat quam hi, qui nihil nescire se praedicabant, imo ob id ipsum iudicatus est plus caeteris scire, quod unus omnium nihil sciret."

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 166: "Bona pars hominum praeposterum Silenum exprimunt. Si quis rerum vim ac naturam penitus introspectat, reperiet nullos a vera sapientia longius abesse quam istos, qui magnificis titulis, qui sapientibus pileis, qui splendidis cingulis, qui gemmatis anuli absolutam profitentur sapientiam. Adeo ut non raro plus verae germanaeque sapientiae deprehendas in uno quopiam homuncione [...] quam in multis theologorum tragicis personis."

⁵⁵ Too often critics have insisted on the truth value of the silenic overturning and they have applied, in a short-sighted way, a dualistic conception deduced from *Enchiridion militis christiani*. They have not taken into account Erasmus' reflection on the hermeneutic value of mask (*persona*) and fiction (*fabula*). Against this background, the development of the playful aspects of Erasmus' theology in Gordon is of great interest, though Gordon's work tends to erase the rhetorical context of Erasmus' reflection on *ludus*. Indeed, he accepts the thesis of Screech, which considers Erasmus' irony in the univocal perspective of mystical ecstasy. For a critique of the reduction of the *Praise of Folly* to unidimensional mystical ecstasy see Margolin 1983, who focuses on the fact that Erasmus' *Praise of Folly* belongs to the aesthetic category of *iocoseria*.

⁵⁶ About the meaning of the Greek word *paradoxa* see *Ivi.* 27: "Mais pourquoi réduire le sens de la préposition grecque *para* a celui d'une opposition? Elle signifie tout aussi "à côté", ou "contre", mais à la condition de donner à ce mot le même sens qu'au premier". Cf. Pavloskis, 108-111, who has explicitly shed light on the paradoxical nature of Erasman *Silenus* where the opposites coexist and where everything is a mask of its contrary, so that the very concept of identity disappears: it is impossible to perceive the real nature of anything at all.

⁵⁷ Cf. CWE 35, 203-204: "In ancient times it was given first place among sacred images and in sacred rites as the most apt symbol of the

eminent warrior [...]. There too, not like “blue pimpernel among vegetables” as the proverb says, but among sacred images, was the scarab, carved on a seal [...]. This too is in Plutarch, in case anyone thinks I have made it up, as some ignorant theologians sometimes contrive allegories. But some uninformed person will ask, “What has a beetle to do with a military general?” In fact they have many points in common. In the first place you can see that the beetle is covered with gleaming armour and no part of its body is not carefully protected by scales and plates; Mars does not seem to be better armed when Homer equips him in his fullest panoply. Then there is its aggressive approach with terrifying, unnerving thrum and truly warlike voice. For what is harsher than the blare of trumpets, what is more vulgar than the roll of drums? The sound of trumpets, which delights kings so much nowadays, was intolerable to the Busiritae of old, because it seemed to them like the braying of an ass, and the ass was one of the things that nation considered detestable [...]. What, I ask, could be more apt for a strong leader? Indeed it is also fitting, as Plutarch also reports, that they use those dainty balls I have described to give birth to, nurture, feed, and bring up their offspring; their birthplace is their food. Do not think this esoteric aptness is easy for me to explain” (ASD II/6, 415-416: “antiquitus inter sacras imagines et in vatium mysteriis cum primis habitus est scarabeus, egregii bellatori saptissimum symbolum [...]. Aderat non corchorus inter olera, quod proverbio dicunt, sed inter sacras imagines scarabeus sigillo insculptus [...]. Nam hoc quoque Plutarchus indicat, ne quis sic a me confictum existimet, quemadmodum allegorias aliquoties comminisci solent in docti theologi. At dixerit imperitior aliquis: “Quid scarabeo cum duce belli?” Permulta sane congruunt. Principio vides, vt totus armis luceat scarabeus nullaque pars corporis sit non diligenter crustis ac laminis communita, vt non melius armatus videatur Mauors Homericus, cum illum maxime sua instruit panoplia. Adde nunc militarem assultum cum horrendo ac Panico bombo cantuque vere militari. Quid enim in suavius classicorum sonitu? Quid ἀμυσότερον tympanorum strepitu? Nam tubarum vocem, qua nunc reges tantopere delectantur, olim Busiritae non ferebant, quod asino rudenti videatur adsimilis. At ei genti inter abominanda habebatur asinus [...]. Quin et illud ad rem apte quadrat, vt idem indicat Plutarchus, quod in delicatis illis pilis, de quibus dictum est, foetus suos aedunt, fouent, alunt, educant, nec alius est locus nascendi quam cibi. Verum hoc mysterii mihi non facile sit interpretari”).

⁵⁸ Cf. CWE 35, 205: “I mean “that formidable type” of scarab that is carved on an emerald, for as the proverb says “you can’t carve a Mercury out of any and every wood”; the scarab does not consider every gem worthy of itself, but if carved on the emerald, the brightest of all gems, and hung from the neck as I said (but only with the hair of an ape or at least a swallow’s feathers), it affords an immediate remedy against all poisons” (ASD II/6, 417: “Siquidem ὀδαινὸς ἐκείνος scarabeus, smaragdo gemmae insculptus, nec enim e quovis lingo fingitur Mercurius iuxta proverbium, nec quamvis gemmam se dignatur scarabeus, sed smaragdo gemmarum omnium nitidissima expressus, ut dixi, si de collo suspendatur, at non nisi cynocephali capillis aut certe plumis hirundinis, adversus omnia veneficia adfert remedium”).

⁵⁹ ASD II/6, 418: “nonnihil placebat scarabeus, quod extitisset, qui ipsi suam vitam debere vellet quique rem tantam a se praestari posse crederet, denique cui suum antrum [...] idoneum videretur, ad quod salutis causa velut ad sacram aram aut principis statuam confugeret.”

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 420: “Titillabat et blanda quaedam spes, si facinus successisset, futurum ut profligata aquila ipse regno potiretur.”

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 419: “nulli sua levis est auctoritas.”

⁶² *Ibid.* 420: “Omnes igitur artes, omnes dolos in pectus advocat. Nec vulgare molitur poenam, internecionem ac plane πανολεθρίαν in animo volvit.”

⁶³ About it, see the significant conclusion of the adage (CWE 35, 214): “There are some little men, of the meanest sort but malicious nevertheless, no less black than scarab, no less evil-smelling, no less mean-spirited, but by their obstinately malicious spirit (since they can do no good to any mortals) they often make trouble for great men. Their blackness is terrifying, their noise is disturbing, their stench is an annoyance; they fly round and round, they cannot be shaken off, they wait in ambush. It is preferable by far sometimes to contend with powerful men than to provoke these beetles whom one may even be ashamed to beat. You cannot shake them off nor fight with them without coming away defiled” (ASD II/6, 424: “Sunt enim homunculi quidam, infimae quidem sortis, sed tamen malitiosi, non minus atri quam scarabei neque minus putidi neque minus abiecti, qui tamen pertinaci quadam ingenii malitia, cum nulli omnino mortalium prodesse possint, magnis etiam saepenumero viris facessant negocium. Territant nigrore, obstrepunt stridore, obturbant foetore, circumvolitant, haerent, insidiantur, ut non paulo satius sit cum magnis aliquando viris similitatem suscipere quam

hos lacessere scarabeos, quos pudeat etiam vicisse quosque nec excutere possis neque conflictari cum illis queas, nisi discedas contaminior”).