

Paolo Gattavari

**Lucian in the Renaissance: the Latin and Vernacular
Traditions in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Italy and their
Interactions with Desiderius Erasmus and Thomas More**

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Department of Italian
School of European Languages, Culture and Society
University College London

I, Paolo Gattavari, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

My thesis explores the influence of Lucian of Samosata, a satirist and rhetorician of Syrian origin who lived in the second century A.D., on fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italian authors and on Northern authors who contributed to Lucian's revival during the sixteenth century. Lucian's corpus consists of about eighty texts, mostly dialogues, all composed in Greek. Though they were read widely in Byzantium, they remained unknown during the Latin Middle Ages. In 1397, Manuel Chrysoloras, a distinguished Byzantine scholar and diplomat, began to teach Greek in Florence and used Lucian's writings, among other ancient works, as textbooks for this purpose. This moment represents the starting point of my thesis, which has three parts. The first, after having outlined the reception of Lucian in Quattrocento Italy, discusses the encounter between Lucian and his main fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century humanist admirers. By reviving the Lucianic dialogue, Leon Battista Alberti distanced himself from the Ciceronian model that he, like others, regarded as dominant in his age, opening thereby a new creative path in Renaissance literature. Giovanni Pontano, while taking aim at, for the most part, the same satirical targets as Alberti, sought to find a point of convergence between Lucianic and Ciceronian dialogue. By contrast, in Ferrara, humanists and authors writing mainly in the vernacular adapted Lucian's sharp irony to the sensibility of a refined Renaissance court. The second part of my thesis analyses how, at the beginning of the Cinquecento, two Northern humanists, Desiderius Erasmus and Thomas More, gave Lucianic satire a new direction, by infusing it with theological meanings. The third and final part focuses on a group of sixteenth-century Italian writers usually known as *poligrafi*, among them Niccolò Franco, Ortensio Lando and Anton Francesco Doni. The defining trait of their satirical compositions is that they filtered their understanding and reinvention of Lucian through the Lucianic works of Erasmus and More.

Impact Statement

My thesis will bring benefits both inside and outside academia. It represents the most up-to-date study of Lucian's fortunes in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italy, a topic that has acquired an important position in the field of Renaissance Studies. The novel interpretations that my dissertation offers shed a new light on the re-enactment of Lucian in the early modern period. My thesis, moreover, may be beneficial to the field of Renaissance Studies more generally. By focusing on the rediscovery of the corpus of Lucian of Samosata, it explores a wide range of issues, such as, for example, the revival of Greek language and culture in Italy at the beginning of the fifteenth century, the concept of humanism as a multifaceted tradition and the notion of Renaissance satire as a refined literary product that acted as a vehicle for social, intellectual and religious criticism. Scholars working in different areas of Renaissance Studies may further develop insights contained in my thesis.

My thesis may have an impact beyond academia. It provides ideas that can help rethink the way in which satire is conceived. The presence of satire in the media, from newspapers and magazines to television and social media, is nowadays evident. The kind of satire that my dissertation explores, I would suggest, is markedly different from most of its contemporary counterpart. Renaissance satire drew on a number of Latin and Greek authors, was replete with metaphors and allegories and discussed, in an elegant and pleasant style, crucial cultural issues of the day. In the sixteenth century, it was also used as a channel for the treatment of fundamental theological matters. In other words, Renaissance satire represented a sophisticated theoretical instrument that, by means of a vast array of literary techniques, questioned various aspects of the early modern intellectual, political and religious world, from the obsequious imitation of certain ancient writers to a critique of court life. In present times, I believe, we have lost this lofty consideration of satire, which is often reduced to attacks *ad personam* directed at politicians or other representatives of so-called establishment. Satire is still meant to question authority in its various forms, but its horizons have become narrower. A reappraisal of Renaissance satire, notably of its Lucianic strain, may lead to a reconsideration of satire as a critical analysis of ideas and cultural tendencies rather than as, exclusively, lampooning of people in power.

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Quotations

Primary sources in Italian are quoted in the original language.

Primary sources in Latin are quoted in English translation in the text and in the original language in the footnotes. I have indicated the name of the translator, except in those instances where the translation is mine.

Quotations from primary Greek sources are given only in English translation.

Introduction

The influence of Lucian of Samosata in Renaissance Europe was geographically widespread and chronologically enduring. A unifying survey, fascinating though it might be in many respects, would run the risk of lacking specificity and grounds for fruitful analysis. I hope to avoid these pitfalls by focusing on the revival of Lucian in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italy. During the course of my research, however, I have come to realise that, in order to carry out this task, it was necessary to go beyond the Italian borders. It would be impossible to grasp the meaning of the re-enactment of Lucian in Cinquecento Italy without discussing not only his fortunes in the Quattrocento, but also the interest in Lucian on the part of two Northern humanists, Desiderius Erasmus and Thomas More, who, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, relied on Lucian's corpus as a primary model to write original and highly influential compositions. The 'Lucianic journey' that my thesis presents got underway in Italy, where the Renaissance revival of Lucian began, made an excursion into Northern Europe and then returned to where it had started, in Italy. As for the chronological boundaries, this journey is circumscribed between 1397, the year in which the Byzantine scholar Manuel Chrysoloras reintroduced Lucian's corpus in Italy, and 1552-1553, when Anton Francesco Doni's *I mondi e gli inferni* were published.

The study of Lucian's influence in Renaissance Italy, and Northern Europe, has a long scholarly history. Here I offer a review of the main contributions to the field, one that leads into my subsequent comments on the structure and aims of my thesis.

Published in 1907, Natale Caccia's *Luciano nel Quattrocento in Italia* was the first attempt to provide a survey on the role played by Lucian in Renaissance Italy.¹ It deals with two themes, the theatrical representations based on translations of Lucian's works and the influence of Lucian on the arts, especially painting. Caccia's original plan was more ambitious. In the introduction to his essay, he explained that his published research was no more than the final section of a project aiming at exploring the reception of Lucian in Quattrocento Italy in its entirety. He even provided a table of contents revealing the structure of his intended study. Among the topics that he wanted to deal with were: Byzantine imitations of Lucian's texts; the humanist translations from his corpus; the reasons for his popularity; analyses of the Lucianic writings of Leon Battista Alberti, Giovanni Pontano, Maffeo Vegio and Pandolfo Collenuccio. Caccia's research never

¹ Natale Caccia, *Luciano nel Quattrocento in Italia. Le rappresentazioni e le figurazioni*, Florence, 1907.

came to fruition. In 1914, however, Caccia published a book on the relationship between Lucian, Erasmus and the German humanist Ulrich von Hutten, opening another intellectual path destined to become highly productive.²

Although it focuses on details of a much larger picture, Caccia's *Luciano nel Quattrocento in Italia* has many merits. He pointed out some significant elements related to both Lucian and his Renaissance reception, such as, for example, the intrinsic theatricality of numerous Lucianic dialogues and how humanists rediscovered Lucian's corpus through the lens of their own interests, notably ancient history and rhetoric. In the pages on Matteo Maria Boiardo's *Timone*, Caccia highlighted the moral significance central to Boiardo's play, a trait further emphasised in later scholarship. With respect to Lucian's influence on the arts, he deemed the allegorical dimension peculiar to Lucianic ekphrases as the major feature attracting the attention of artists, Sandro Botticelli above all. These considerations show that, although limited in scope, Caccia's essay provided several ideas that later scholars elaborated systematically.

Scholarly works on the fortunes of Lucian in the Renaissance began to flourish from the 1970s onwards. In 1974, Keith Sidwell completed a PhD at the University of Cambridge with a dissertation, one that has remained unpublished, entitled *Lucian of Samosata in the Italian Quattrocento*.³ Sidwell traced a more complete account of Lucian's influence in Quattrocento Italy than Caccia succeeded in doing, drawing on a great number of manuscripts and early printed books. His main concern was to give his study a solid foundation by examining, in the first place, the availability of Lucian's texts in the period under scrutiny and the humanist translations, both in Latin and in the vernacular, that facilitated the circulation of Lucianic motifs and literary techniques.⁴

Sidwell's thorough enquiry remains a milestone in the studies on Lucian. He discussed the reputation of Lucian in the fifteenth century, taking into consideration humanists' letters and their prefaces to their translations and basing his analysis on five categories: style, knowledge, morality, philosophy and humour. His findings point to how Lucian became widely admired for his eloquence and erudition and valued as a privileged conduit for information about many matters related to antiquity. Although regarded as a sage and even a philosopher, Lucian was deemed by humanists as an author capable of

² Natale Caccia, *Note su la fortuna di Luciano nel Rinascimento. Le versioni e i dialoghi satirici di Erasmo da Rotterdam e di Ulrico Hutten*, Milan, 1914.

³ Keith Sidwell, *Lucian of Samosata in the Italian Quattrocento*, unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1974.

⁴ Sidwell broached this subject also in a later article: 'Manoscritti umanistici di Luciano, in Italia, nel Quattrocento', *Res publica litterarum*, vol. 9, 1986, pp. 241-253.

conveying serious messages in a humorous tone. The main consequence of his revival was a greater appreciation of humour in itself, in the sense that writing in jest became a more common practice in Renaissance literature. Sidwell also underlined how some humanists made translations from Lucian's corpus for practical reasons. In 'an era of patronage and ideological strife', learning represented for humanists not only a way to satisfy intellectual curiosity, but also a means for advancing in their career.⁵ Their translations could serve as pieces of masterful scholarship to impress potential patrons and show them that they, the translators, did not lack the qualities to fulfil this or that position. Humanists thus employed Lucian's writings for personal purposes, selecting those texts that suited their needs and that served their immediate ends. The pure enjoyment of Lucianic humour and irony was not ignored, but it was subsidiary to the principle of utility guiding humanist ideals of conduct.

In the last section of his dissertation, Sidwell outlined the influence of Lucian on a number of fifteenth-century authors, including Alberti, to whom he devoted an entire chapter, Vegio, Pontano, Collenuccio and Boiardo. Sidwell concluded that, underlying the popularity of Lucian in Quattrocento Italy, there was the shared understanding of him as a sophisticated orator and moral philosopher rather than as a blasphemous atheist, an interpretation that would prevail in Europe during the Reformation. By rediscovering Lucian's corpus, humanists introduced into modern literature the fantastic and a prominent use of irony.

Published in 1979, Christopher Robinson's *Lucian and His Influence in Europe* differs from the Caccia's and Sidwell's works because of its wider geographical scope.⁶ Robinson touched upon a wide range of authors from numerous countries, treating in particular the reception of Lucian in Northern Europe. As explained in his preface, he looked at the rediscovery of Lucian through a literary lens, without being overly concerned with the linguistic issues that his topic raises. Robinson's study is divided into three sections. In the first, an analysis of the major features of Lucian's corpus, Robinson explicitly acknowledged his indebtedness to Jacques Bompaigne's *Lucien écrivain*, a monumental work that presented Lucian as a stylist who relentlessly drew on and reshaped Greek literary tradition, without mirroring the world around him.⁷ In the second,

⁵ Sidwell, *Lucian in the Italian Quattrocento*, p. 96.

⁶ Christopher Robinson, *Lucian and His Influence in Europe*, London, 1979.

⁷ Jacques Bompaigne, *Lucien écrivain. Imitation et création*, Paris, 1958. For a critique of Bompaigne's position, see Christopher P. Jones, *Culture and Society in Lucian*, Cambridge, MA, 1986. Contrary to Bompaigne, Jones argued that Lucian was deeply immersed in his social and cultural environment, which he reflected in many of his works.

he traced the influence of Lucian in Byzantium, Italy and Northern Europe. As far as Italy was concerned, he briefly discussed the Lucianic pieces of Vegio and Alberti, omitting other relevant authors. Although Robinson deliberately privileged a different geographical area, a more complete account of the rediscovery of Lucian in Quattrocento Italy, I think it is fair to say, would have benefited the rest of his study, since Italian humanists anticipated numerous themes present in the writings of later European humanists. In the section on Northern Europe, Robinson distinguished four strains of Lucianic literature, that is, theatre, satirical dialogue, imaginary voyage and dialogues of the dead, providing many literary examples for each. His final section deals with Erasmus and Henry Fielding, a popular eighteenth-century English playwright, novelist and journalist. Robinson's conclusion was that, throughout the long history of the reception of Lucian, his admirers were interested in his themes and literary structures, but they did not inherit his way of seeing the world.

Douglas Duncan's *Ben Jonson and the Lucianic Tradition* dates to the same year as Robinson's *Lucian and His Influence in Europe*.⁸ To shed light on what he called 'Jonson's art of teasing', the main concern of his volume, Duncan dedicated the first section of his book to Lucian, Erasmus and More, all three of whom, Duncan sustained, were Jonson's principal sources of inspiration. Jonson's comedies were conspicuous theatrical adaptations of satirical techniques employed by Erasmus and More, who, in turn, were indebted to Lucian. Duncan emphasised that Renaissance scholars struggled to provide a clear interpretation of Lucian. The chief reasons for this were the remarkable diversity of his pieces and the evasiveness of his personality, that is to say, his use of numerous masks for conveying his varying standpoint. In this respect Lucian differed from Roman satirists such as Horace and Juvenal, in the works of whom the presence of a persona as a character distinct from the authors themselves was well-established and readily recognisable. In accordance with the Cynic tradition, the pivotal figure of Lucian's dialogues was the 'detached observer', epitomising, even more markedly than for the Cynics, the quest for a new vantage point from which to view life. According to Duncan, Lucian's detached observer merely pointed out the absurdity of human existence, without offering any constructive suggestions. Lucian was, essentially, a sceptic, who filled his writings with witty and stylistically pleasant remarks.

⁸ Douglas Duncan, *Ben Jonson and the Lucianic Tradition*, Cambridge, 1979.

Emilio Mattioli's *Luciano e l'umanesimo*, published in 1980, focuses on Lucian's influence in Quattrocento Italy.⁹ Compared with Sidwell, Mattioli was less concerned with manuscript sources and largely built his analyses on existing scholarly literature, notably the studies of Remigio Sabbadini and Eugenio Garin. Far from derivative, however, Mattioli's volume traces an original intellectual itinerary that, although questionable in some respects, has enriched the study of Lucian in the Renaissance with new ideas and interpretations. Mattioli's *Luciano e l'umanesimo* has a tripartite structure. The first, and shortest, section examines the reception of Lucian in Byzantium, from the ninth to the beginning of the fifteenth century. The second concentrates on humanist translations from Lucian's corpus in Quattrocento Italy. As Mattioli stated, his research, rather than aspiring to be definitive, was meant to be a starting point for a more detailed enquiry. Even so, his survey neglected some significant items, such as Poggio Bracciolini's rendering of *Zeus Catechized*, that one might have expected in a preliminary study.¹⁰ After having outlined the philological encounter between Lucian and Quattrocento humanists, Mattioli discussed what he called 'Lucianesimo', a term defining neither a mere literary trend nor a generic admiration for Lucian, but a complex cultural phenomenon that exerted a profound impact on humanist literature. Within a tradition as broad and variegated as Lucianism, Mattioli continued, it was necessary to make distinctions in terms of value and significance. Alberti, Pontano and Collenuccio were regarded as the main representatives of Lucianism and, therefore, deemed particularly worthy of his attention. Other authors were grouped according to the way in which they reinterpreted Lucian's works. Poggio and Enea Silvio Piccolomini, for instance, were labelled with the phrase 'Lucianesimo libellistico', that is, a form of Lucianism expressing itself through pamphlets concerned with contemporary events. Again, Galateo's *Eremita* was seen as an exemplar of 'Lucianesimo preriformista', whereas Lauro Qurini and Vegio were part of 'Lucianesimo accademico', denoting an elegant but conceptually less significant strand of Lucianism.

⁹ Emilio Mattioli, *Luciano e l'umanesimo*, Naples, 1980. For an analysis of Mattioli's *Luciano e l'umanesimo* and Robinson's *Lucian and His Influence in Europe*, see Lucia Gualdo Rosa, 'A proposito di due libri recenti sul *Fortleben* di Luciano', *Humanistica Lovaniensia*, vol. 32, 1983, pp. 347-357. Mattioli dedicated other, shorter, studies to Lucian: 'Luciano tra Pico e Poliziano', in *L'opera e il pensiero di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola nella storia dell'umanesimo*, 2 vols, Florence, 1965, vol. 2, pp. 189-195; 'La poetica di Luciano', *Studi di estetica*, vol. 1, 1973, pp. 53-112; 'I traduttori umanistici di Luciano', in Sandra Saccone, Tommasa La Spada and Renzo Rabboni (eds), *Studi in onore di Raffaele Spongano*, Bologna, 1980, pp. 205-214.

¹⁰ As noted by Keith Sidwell in his review of *Luciano e l'umanesimo*, published in *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, vol. 104, 1984, pp. 274-275.

Mattioli's conclusion raised some important issues. He argued that in the sixteenth century Lucianism was in decline in Italy. Although some authors, including Anton Francesco Doni, Teofilo Folengo and Niccolò Franco, were still indebted to Lucian to some extent, their works, he contended, were merely rehashes of, by then, hackneyed motifs. The authentic heirs of fifteenth-century Lucianism had to be found outside Italy, in Erasmus and in other European intellectuals who became familiar with Lucian's corpus largely through the mediation of Quattrocento humanists. Mattioli's interpretation is debatable. The influence of Lucian on sixteenth-century Italian writers, which he only briefly touched upon, deserves deeper analysis, as does his claim that European authors, such as Erasmus, von Hutten and François Rabelais, relied almost exclusively on Italian humanists to rediscover Lucian's merits as a satirist. It is true that Italian humanists anticipated numerous themes characterising later Lucianic literature but, in many cases, Northern European authors had a direct and vital relationship with Lucian's corpus, as Erasmus' and More's Latin translations from it demonstrate.

A decade after Mattioli's study, in 1990, Michael O. Zappala brought out *Lucian of Samosata in the Two Hesperias*.¹¹ His contribution takes into account the Renaissance reception of Lucian in Italy, especially in the fifteenth century, and in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Spain. Methodologically, Zappala adopted George Steiner's concept of 'hermeneutical motion', which stresses the importance of considering fully the wide range of questions, problems and reactions that translation involves. The revival of Lucian was contingent on a considerable output of Latin and vernacular translations, the variety and multiplicity of which projected a fragmented image of him, spread between the two poles of a moral satirist and an atheist mocker. In Zappala's view, this multiplicity of interpretations characterised the entire reception of Lucian in Europe, in Quattrocento Italy no less than elsewhere. At the outset of his study, Zappala examined the reception of Lucian among the Church Fathers and in Byzantium. The conflicting interpretations of Lucian took root in this early moment of his rediscovery. In the following section, the one on Lucian's influence in Quattrocento Italy, he underlined the anti-ecclesiastical traits typical of fifteenth-century Lucianic literature. The rest of his book is chiefly dedicated to the fortunes of Lucian in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Spain. Just as in Italy, Lucian's image was variegated and the satire inspired by his corpus was directed against the foibles of contemporary society.

¹¹ Michael O. Zappala, *Lucian of Samosata in the Two Hesperias. An Essay in Literary and Cultural Translation*, Potomac, MD, 1990.

David Marsh's *Lucian and the Latins*, published in 1998, focuses on the rediscovery of Lucian in Quattrocento Italy, although it also encompasses a study of the Lucianic writings of Erasmus, More and Rabelais.¹² In the epilogue to his volume Marsh also provided a survey on the later influence of Lucian on European literature, making reference to Cyrano de Bergerac, a precursor of modern science fiction, Jonathan Swift, Voltaire, Edgar Allan Poe and Thomas Mann. His stance privileged a literary approach, in that he explored the various genres that humanists developed using Lucian's corpus as their foremost source. By comparison with previous scholars, Marsh gave greater emphasis to how, in most cases, humanists blended Lucianic motifs and stylistic techniques with those borrowed from other ancient authors, both Greek and Latin. In the first chapter of his work, Marsh traced the reception and the reputation of Lucian in fifteenth-century Italy. He pointed out that Lucian was mainly regarded as both a master of literary elegance and a moral philosopher, and that his writings were particularly appealing to humanists on account of their humorous and witty tone. Humanists, however, did not neglect the subversive traits of Lucian, turning to him also for his 'iconoclastic side'.¹³ In the following sections, Marsh explored the encounter between Lucian and humanists in relation to four key Lucianic genres: the dialogue of the dead, the dialogue of the gods, presenting a subdivision between the scenes in heaven and those on earth, the paradoxical encomium and the fantastic voyage. In each section, he compared one or two texts of Lucian with humanist counterparts, showing how the reinterpretation of Lucian's oeuvre played an essential role for the development of Renaissance satire, in terms of both content and form.

Alberti is the central figure of Marsh's intellectual enquiry, for three reasons. First, Marsh examined Alberti's Lucianic writings in each of the sections mentioned above, apart from that dedicated to the fantastic voyage. Second, he made evident the importance of the connection between the Lucianic works of Alberti and those of Vegio, Collenuccio and Ludovico Ariosto. Third, he argued that Renaissance authors converted the Lucianic dialogue of the gods into a political novel, with Alberti's *Momus*, upon which he placed particular emphasis, as its starting point and Erasmus' *Charon* its most striking example.

Letizia Panizza's article 'Vernacular Lucian in Renaissance Italy: Translations and Transformations', contained in the volume *Lucian of Samosata Vivus et Redivivus* published in 2007, represented a new departure in the studies on Lucian's influence in

¹² David Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins. Humor and Humanism in the Early Renaissance*, Ann Arbor, MI, 1998.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

Renaissance and early modern Italy.¹⁴ Since previous scholars had concentrated chiefly on the revival of Lucian in Latin rather than in the vernacular, Panizza intended to fill this gap by tracing an itinerary of the vernacular adaptations of Lucian, delineating three different, although partially overlapping, stages. In the first stage, the period between Niccolò Leonicensi's vernacular translations of Lucian in the 1470s and the 1525 *editio princeps* based on Leonicensi's renderings, Lucian was regarded as a master of ethical teachings. In the second stage, approximately from the 1530s to the 1570s, the figures of Lucian and Erasmus were almost blended, in a process that led to the prevailing interpretation of Lucian as an anti-ecclesiastical reformer. In the third and final stage, between the end of the Cinquecento and the beginning of the Seicento, the 'vernacular Lucian' became a symbol of freedom of speech in a time characterised by political and religious repression.

Panizza observed that the Latin and vernacular traditions of Lucian converged markedly. The early vernacular reception of Lucian proceeded in the same direction of the Latin, which depicted him as a wise and witty satirist. Following Erasmus' translations, the situation rapidly changed and Lucian, closely associated to Erasmus, became a major target of Latin works concerned with theological issues, as in the case of Luther's *De servo arbitrio*. As Panizza remarked, 'by the end of the sixteenth century, Lucian is a condemned author, whether in Latin or vernacular'.¹⁵ In examining the second stage of Lucian in the vernacular, Panizza pointed out the centrality of the *poligrafì*. Contrary to Mattioli, she viewed the *poligrafì* not as the sunset of Lucianic literature in Italy, but as a novel chapter in its fortunes, one endowed with its own distinctive features. Of these two conflicting positions, I believe that Panizza's is the most convincing, as I shall explain later.

The humanist rediscovery of Lucian exerted a conspicuous influence on the development of Renaissance dialogue. It therefore may be helpful to provide also a brief

¹⁴ Letizia Panizza, 'Vernacular Lucian in Renaissance Italy: Translations and Transformations', in Christopher Ligota and Letizia Panizza (eds), *Lucian of Samosata Vivus et Redivivus*, London, 2007, pp. 71-114. I mention here another publication, following Panizza's article, not included in my literature review in that it is a detailed analysis of the Lucianic compositions of three authors, Alberti, Pontano and Erasmus, rather than a study of the overall influence of Lucian in the Renaissance: Lorenzo Geri, *A colloquio con Luciano di Samosata. Leon Battista Alberti, Giovanni Pontano ed Erasmo da Rotterdam*, Rome, 2011. Also, in 2017, a conference on the fortunes of Lucian in fifteenth- and -sixteenth-century Europe, titled *Luciano di Samosata nell'Europa del Quattro e del Cinquecento*, was held in Pisa. The proceedings, edited by Irene Fantappiè and Marina Ricucci, have been published in *Italianistica*, vol. 47/2, 2018, pp. 9-179 and vol. 47/3, 2018, pp. 11-143.

¹⁵ Panizza, 'Vernacular Lucian', p. 78.

review of the main studies on this topic, highlighting the role that scholars have attributed to the Lucianic strand in relation to the other traditions of dialogue.

In his *Tradizione e realtà dell'Umanesimo italiano*, dating back to 1967, Francesco Tateo dedicated a chapter to the dialogue in fifteenth-century Italy.¹⁶ His main argument was that humanist debate, conceived in opposition to closed and rigid systems of thought, was indicative of a new attention to the concreteness of reality and a firm belief in the persuasive power of language. Rather than theorising about the dialogue as a literary genre, Quattrocento humanists experimented with it, availing themselves of diverse classical models. Many dialogues had a markedly polemical vein, which, in Tateo's view, revealed how humanism pointed to a crisis characterising Italian culture and society in the fifteenth century. Humanists regarded Cicero's and Plato's works as the principal models for their dialogues. Cicero was considered the undisputed master of the 'narrative dialogue', a kind of dialogue in which the author himself introduced its interlocutors, whereas Plato stood for the most eminent representative of the 'dramatic dialogue', in which characters entered in succession, almost as if they were on stage. Leonardo Bruni, with his *Dialogi ad Petrum Paulum Histrum*, and Francesco Filelfo, who composed the *Convivia mediolanensia*, initiated the revival of, respectively, the Ciceronian and Platonic traditions. As for Lucian's corpus, humanists drew on it to equip their dialogues with a more dynamic structure. Among the authors indebted to Lucian, Tateo recalled Alberti, Pontano, Collenuccio and Galateo.

In 1980 Marsh published *The Quattrocento Dialogue*, a comprehensive account of the development of humanist debate in fifteenth-century Italy.¹⁷ His study explores the writings of five leading humanists, Bruni, Poggio, Lorenzo Valla, Alberti and Pontano, taking into consideration a dialogue for each author and underscoring its relationship with previous works. In the first chapter, Marsh set out the thesis of his study. The most important source for Renaissance dialogue was Cicero, to whom humanists turned above all because he tended to investigate philosophical questions by placing them in a contemporary setting and for his rhetorical technique of discussing issues *in utramque partem*, that is, by examining discordant, and even conflicting, arguments about a given issue. The Ciceronian dialogue, in which rhetoric represents the intellectual tool for seeking the truth, had been dominant in Latin literature and philosophy until Augustine of

¹⁶ Francesco Tateo, 'La tradizione classica e le forme del dialogo umanistico', in id., *Tradizione e realtà dell'Umanesimo italiano*, Bari, 1967, pp. 223-249.

¹⁷ David Marsh, *The Quattrocento Dialogue. Classical Tradition and Humanist Innovation*, Cambridge, MA, 1980.

Hippo, who replaced it with an introspective quest for God in the form of a soliloquy. Scholasticism, in Marsh's interpretation, inherited Augustine's soliloquy and transformed it into an instrument at the service of theological dialectic. The crucial figure in the resurgence of the classical dialogue was Petrarch. His *Secretum*, which portrays a discussion between Petrarch himself and Augustine, albeit still imbued with a vein of medieval symbolism, revived the Ciceronian tradition by reintroducing many elements that later humanists were to develop further. Of particular relevance were the role attributed to experience, conceived as a means to overcome the medieval polarity between authority and reason, the attacks on the abstractness and verbosity of scholasticism and the centrality of freedom of speech. In the wake of Petrarch's *Secretum*, humanists re-established Cicero's concept of dialogue as a discussion *in utramque partem*, accentuating the relativity characteristic of Cicero's works. The Ciceronian strand was complemented by three other traditions: Platonic, which was marked by a dramatic tone; symposiac, modelled mainly on Xenophon's *Symposium*; and Lucianic, characterised by the use of allegories to convey moral indignation. As representatives of the Lucianic dialogue, Marsh mentioned Alberti, Vegio, Collenuccio, Galateo and Pontano. In the following chapters, he focused on the flourishing of dialogue in Quattrocento Italy by discussing specific texts, namely, Bruni's *Dialogi ad Petrum Paulum Histrum*, Poggio's *De avaritia*, Valla's *De vero falsoque bono*, Alberti's *Libri della famiglia* and Pontano's *Aegidius*.

Published in 1992, Virginia Cox's *The Renaissance Dialogue* can almost be read as a sequel to Marsh's *The Quattrocento Dialogue*.¹⁸ Cox concentrated on vernacular examples of dialogue in sixteenth-century Italy, stressing their relationship with the social and cultural environment in which they originated. Her overarching argument was that, in the first half of the sixteenth century, in keeping with the tradition established in the Quattrocento, the dialogue was deemed a literary genre that facilitated a dynamic exchange of ideas, whereas, in the second half of the century, it lost this ideal of openness, resembling increasingly the monologue. The principal causes of this process were the new intellectual atmosphere of the Catholic Reformation, a more structured hierarchy of disciplines, which promoted explanation instead of debate as the fundamental paradigm of teaching, a growing interest in the notions of system and method, which anticipated René Descartes' philosophy, and, not least, the diffusion of the

¹⁸ Virginia Cox, *The Renaissance Dialogue. Literary Dialogue in Its Social and Political Contexts. Castiglione to Galileo*, Cambridge, 1992.

printing press, which, according to Cox, met the needs of an audience keen on the rapid acquisition of information by promoting primarily the circulation of textbooks and compendia. As a consequence of all these factors, towards the end of the Cinquecento the sole function of the dialogue ‘was to convey the truths elaborated in the silent reaches of the mind’.¹⁹ Within this overall interpretation, Cox introduced her analyses of the classical sources for sixteenth-century dialogue. She noted a discrepancy between Italy, where, with the exception of the *poligrafi*, Cicero represented the main point of reference, and other European countries, notably France and England, in which authors proved to be more inclined to the Lucianic model. Underlying this phenomenon lay social rather than literary reasons. Cicero’s dialogues, which presented refined discussions employing historical figures as interlocutors, enjoyed great popularity in the Italian courts in that they were seen as advantageous to the attempts by ruling classes to forge an image of themselves shaped around the ideals of grace, decorum and civility. In other words, the Italian elite dealt with the lack of political unity by projecting an aesthetic identity. In England, by contrast, the more stable structure of power made an artificial construction of identity unnecessary. This accounted for the success of the Lucianic dialogue, which, with its imaginative elements and fictitious characters, stimulated the fantasy of numerous writers.

A decade or so after Cox’s study, in 2001, Anne Godard brought out *Le Dialogue à la Renaissance*.²⁰ Godard argued that the popularity of dialogue in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Europe mirrored a defining feature of humanism itself, that is, what she defined ‘cultural dialogism’. By this expression, she pointed to the numerous, and partially overlapping, kinds of intellectual relationships moulding humanism, such as those between Christian and pagan traditions, Latin and vernacular languages, antiquity and the present. Like the majority of scholars, Godard regarded Plato, Cicero and Lucian as the most influential authors for the Renaissance dialogue. Her specific stance was her contention that Renaissance reinterpretations of Cicero’s and Lucian’s dialogues constituted two opposite, if not explicitly conflicting, models. Whereas the Ciceronian dialogue was suitable for presenting different philosophical systems without, however, a polemical vein, its Lucianic counterpart consisted in a sharp, albeit ironic, debate that challenged readers to take a point of view. From Cicero stemmed the literary production on the figure of the courtier, reaching its peak in Baldassare Castiglione’s *Il libro del*

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 113.

²⁰ Anne Godard, *Le Dialogue à la Renaissance*, Paris, 2001.

Cortegiano. Lucian's writings, by contrast, fuelled literature that voiced criticism of political and religious authorities, as exemplified by Alberti, Valla, Erasmus and More. The Lucianic strand continued up to Giordano Bruno and Galileo Galilei. In the conclusion of her work, Godard identified in the use of dialogue a crucial element permitting to define humanism as a 'third Sophistic'. Humanists, she suggested, believed that experience was linguistically structured, hence their emphasis upon the dialogic form.

The above review of the scholarly literature reveals a conspicuous lacuna, Lucian among the *poligrafi*. Whereas the studies on Lucian's influence in Quattrocento Italy are numerous, the Cinquecento has been overlooked, with the exception of Panizza's article cited above. A possible reason for this might be Mattioli's conclusion in his seminal work that Lucianism flourished in sixteenth-century Europe thanks, above all, to Erasmus but declined in Italy, with Franco and Doni representing the twilight of Lucianism. Another reason might be that, since the rediscovery of Lucian, at its early stage, was closely associated with the upsurge of interest in Greek language and culture in Italy at the beginning of the fifteenth century, scholars have privileged that age over later periods. Yet another reason might lie in the intellectual allure that some Quattrocento humanist admirers of Lucian enjoy, Alberti being a notable example, at the expense of Cinquecento authors.

These various studies have contributed greatly to my research. My thesis, nevertheless, makes what I believe is an original contribution. The first part, which develops ideas deriving especially from the scholarship on the Renaissance dialogue, aims at reconfiguring the picture of Lucian and Italian humanists. The chapter on Alberti explains that one of the chief reasons underlying his revival of the Lucianic dialogue was his intention to distance himself from the Ciceronian model, which he viewed as dominant among his fellow humanists, and to open thereby a new creative path in neo-Latin literature. The chapter on Pontano argues that, while aiming, for the most part, at the same targets as Alberti's satirical compositions, Pontano managed in his *Charon* to blend elements typical of both Lucianic and Ciceronian dialogue. The last chapter of the first part makes the case that the reinvention of Lucian at the court of Ferrara was markedly different from both Alberti's and Pontano's. Ferrarese authors sought to adapt Lucian's irony and mordant satirical verve to the sensibility of a refined Renaissance court.

The second part of my dissertation, the one dedicated to Lucian, Erasmus and More, acts as a bridge between the first and the third section. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the heirs of fifteenth-century Lucianic literature were Northern humanists, namely, Erasmus and More. Their Lucianic satire took on the task of criticising contemporary society at multiple levels (intellectual, political, religious) in a manner reminiscent of Alberti and Pontano. As for religion, they availed themselves of satire not just to find fault with the vices of clergymen or Christian rituals, but also to discuss theological ideas, Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium* being an obvious example. This is, arguably, the principal novelty that they introduced into Lucianic literature.

The last part of my thesis concentrates on Lucian and the *poligrafi*, in particular Niccolò Franco, Ortensio Lando and Anton Francesco Doni, and so aspires to remedy the lacuna in the scholarly studies of Lucian's fortunes in the Renaissance. Panizza's article 'Vernacular Lucian' has been my point of departure. Panizza, unlike Mattioli, noted that the Italian *poligrafi* understood the considerable change that Lucianic satire underwent in Erasmus' and More's reworking of it. The reinterpretation of Lucian's corpus by the *poligrafi*, therefore, was not a minor episode in the history of Lucian's revival in the Italian Renaissance, as Mattioli argued, but, on the contrary, a new and decisive moment.

In tracing the three stages of Lucian's journey, namely, Italy, Northern Europe and then Italy again, my thesis seeks to give a more complete appraisal than hitherto of Lucian's influence in Renaissance Italy, from the reintroduction of his corpus in the West in 1397 to the mid-Cinquecento. This is not to say that I shall treat the works of every Italian author in which the presence of Lucian is perceptible, an impossible task. I shall have achieved my objective if I convey how Lucian's trajectory in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italy can only be understood as a whole if we take into account Northern European authors' appropriation of him.

Part I: Lucian and Italian Humanists

Chapter 1. The Reception of Lucian in Quattrocento Italy

Lucian was born around 120 A.D. in Samosata, the capital of the Roman province of Commagene, in eastern Syria.¹ Very little is known about his life. We may deduce a few elements from allusions in his works, although, as some scholars have warned, the persona Lucian does not necessarily coincide with Lucian as an historical character.² It is safe to say that he travelled around the Roman empire pursuing a career as an itinerant lecturer, rhetorician and, likely, teacher of rhetoric. At a certain point of his life, he associated himself with the rhetorical movement of the Second Sophistic.³ He sojourned in Athens, Gaul and Egypt, where he held an administrative position, under the Roman empire, in Alexandria. He died between 180 and 192. Though his mother tongue was a Semitic language, perhaps Aramaic, all of his corpus, consisting of some eighty essays, is in Greek, for the most part the polished Attic Greek typical of the classical period, which he deliberately imitated.⁴ His compositions include satirical dialogues, the majority of the total, two, relatively short, fictional narratives, *A True Story* and *Lucius or the Ass*, some rhetorical pieces and a few essays on cultural issues, the most important of which is *How to Write History*.

One of the last mentions of Lucian in antiquity is in the corpus of Lactantius, a rhetorician and Christian apologist who lived between the third and the fourth century

¹ Scholarly literature on Lucian is boundless. I shall list some of the main works: Rudolf Helm, *Lucian und Menipp*, Leipzig, 1906; Francis G. Allinson, *Lucian. Satirist and Artist*, Norwood, MA, 1926; Marcel Caster, *Lucien et la pensée religieuse de son temps*, Paris, 1937; Aurelio Peretti, *Luciano. Un intellettuale greco contro Roma*, Florence, 1946; Jacques Bompaire, *Lucien écrivain. Imitation et création*, Paris, 1958; Jacques Schwartz, *Biographie de Lucien de Samosate*, Brussels, 1965; Barry Baldwin, *Studies in Lucian*, Toronto, 1973; Graham Anderson, *Lucian. Theme and Variation in the Second Sophistic*, Leiden, 1976; Christopher P. Jones, *Culture and Society in Lucian*, Cambridge, MA, 1986; Robert Bracht Branham, *Unruly Eloquence. Lucian and the Comedy of Traditions*, Cambridge, MA, 1989; Alberto Camerotto, *Le metamorfosi della parola. Studi sulla parodia in Luciano di Samosata*, Pisa, 1998; id., *Gli occhi e la lingua della satira. Studi sull'eroe satirico in Luciano di Samosata*, Milan, 2014; Karen Ni Mheallaigh, *Reading Fiction with Lucian. Fakes, Freaks and Hyperreality*, Cambridge, 2014; Eleni Bozia, *Lucian and His Roman Voices. Cultural Exchanges and Conflicts in the Late Roman Empire*, New York, 2015.

² Simon Goldhill, *Who Needs Greek? Contests in the Cultural History of Hellenism*, Cambridge, 2002, pp. 60-107; Daniel S. Richter, 'Lucian of Samosata', in Daniel S. Richter and William A. Johnson (eds), *The Oxford Handbook to the Second Sophistic*, New York, NY, 2017, pp. 327-344.

³ On the Second Sophistic, besides the aforementioned volume *The Oxford Handbook to the Second Sophistic*, see Graham Anderson, *The Second Sophistic. A Cultural Phenomenon in the Roman Empire*, London, 1993; Tim Whitmarsh, *The Second Sophistic*, Oxford, 2005.

⁴ I have used the Loeb Classical Library's edition of Lucian's works: [Lucian], eds and trs A. M. Harmon, K. Kilburn and M. D. Macleod, 8 vols, Cambridge, MA, 1913-1967.

A.D.⁵ In the first book of his *De divinis institutionibus*, he referred to him as one who spared neither gods nor men. Sharing the same fate as many other Greek authors, Lucian then disappeared from the cultural horizon of the Latin Middle Ages. By contrast, from at least the ninth century onwards, he was a lively presence in Byzantium, where his reputation significantly varied depending on the reader.⁶ In his *Bibliotheca*, the patriarch of Constantinople Photius presented him as a mocker of Greek religion, mythology and philosophy, who took nothing seriously and, ultimately, did not hold any belief. In essence, he was a sceptic. On the literary side, Photius praised Lucian's prose style, which he deemed as harmonious as a sweet melody. Much harsher was the judgement on Lucian expressed in the *Suda*, the Byzantine encyclopaedia of the ancient Mediterranean world composed in the tenth century. Here he was described as a blasphemous enemy of religion, including Christianity. The *Suda* also spread a false story about his death, according to which he was torn to pieces by a pack of dogs. Not too different was the position of Arethas, the archbishop of Caesarea, who, as we know from some scholia, regarded Lucian as, substantially, a denier of Christian providence. Lucian's popularity in Byzantium is attested also by the use of his writings for teaching purposes as well as by a few imitations of his works. Some of them present the motif of the underworld setting, a conspicuous feature in his texts.

The rediscovery of Lucian in Western Europe is inextricably linked to the Byzantine scholar and diplomat Manuel Chrysoloras.⁷ As part of his aim of reviving Greek studies in Italy, Coluccio Salutati, the chancellor of Florence, in March 1396 sent a letter to Chrysoloras, who had previously sojourned in Italy for short periods, inviting him to teach Greek in Florence. No doubt the prestige of the role and the lucrative salary played a part in his decision to take up the offer. Besides this, he probably saw an opportunity for pleading the cause of the Byzantine Empire, which was facing the threat

⁵ A few other references to Lucian are attested in late antique authors. See Christiane Lauvergnat-Gagnière, *Lucien de Samosate et le lucianisme en France au XVIe siècle. Athéisme et polémique*, Geneva, 1988, p. 12.

⁶ On the reception of Lucian in Byzantium, see Robinson, *Lucian*, pp. 68-81; Mattioli, *Luciano e l'umanesimo*, pp. 10-38; Lauvergnat-Gagnière, *Lucien de Samosate*, pp. 12-17; Zappala, *Lucian in the Two Hesperias*, pp. 20-31; Mark J. Edwards, 'Lucian of Samosata in the Christian Memory', *Byzantion*, vol. 80, 2010, pp. 142-156.

⁷ For a survey on the rebirth of Greek studies in Renaissance Italy, see Jill Kraye, 'The Revival of Greek Studies in the West', in *The New Cambridge History of the Bible*, 4 vols, Cambridge, 2012-2016, vol. 3, ed. Euan Cameron, *From 1450 to 1750*, pp. 37-60. On Chrysoloras and Greek studies in Italy, see Giuseppe Cammelli, *I dotti bizantini e le origini dell'umanesimo*, 3 vols, Florence, 1941-1954, vol. 1, *Manuele Crisolora*; N. G. Wilson, *From Byzantium to Italy. Greek Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, London, 1992, pp. 8-12; Riccardo Maisano and Antonio Rollo (eds), *Manuele Crisolora e il ritorno del greco in Occidente*, Naples, 2002; Paul Botley, *Learning Greek in Western Europe, 1396-1529. Grammars, Lexica, and Classroom Texts*, Philadelphia, PA, 2010, pp. 7-12.

of the Ottoman Turks.⁸ Chrysoloras arrived in Florence on 2 February 1397 and remained three years, leaving on 10 March 1400. In this relatively brief period, he gave great impetus to the revival of Greek language and culture in Italy. Among his pupils were some of the major figures of the next generation of humanists, such as Leonardo Bruni and Pier Paolo Vergerio.

Scholarly literature agrees that one of the chief reasons for Chrysoloras' success in teaching Greek was that he simplified the canonical grammar books used in Byzantine schools. His textbook, the date of composition of which is uncertain, was called *Erotemata*, a word translatable in English as 'questions', since it was structured as a series of questions that the master asked his students. This was probably why Chrysoloras chose to introduce his circle of learners to, by and large, easy Greek prose works suitable for beginners. He focused mostly on authors such as Xenophon, Plutarch and Lucian, training his pupils to read their writings. Brief, amusing and composed in a clear Attic style, Lucian's texts represented an appropriate starting point for those who were grappling with the rudiments of Greek. In fine, the resurgence of Lucian in the West, which proved to be such a pivotal moment in the history of early modern literature and culture, began for pedagogical reasons.

When Chrysoloras moved to Florence, he brought with him a codex, which Ernesto Berti has identified with the present-day Vaticanus graecus 87, containing almost the entire corpus of Lucian.⁹ This was the material element triggering the rediscovery of the Greek satirist. The manuscript begins with *Charon*, followed by other dialogues set in the underworld, namely, *The Downward Journey*, *Menippus* and the *Dialogues of the Dead*.¹⁰ This arrangement, uncommon in the Lucianic manuscripts, reflects the interest in the 'infernal dialogues' of Lucian, which, as mentioned above, was characteristic of his Byzantine imitators. This was also a factor that, to some extent at least, accounted for the wide popularity that the underworld setting enjoyed among the early admirers of Lucian in fifteenth-century Italy. It is likely that Chrysoloras owned another codex containing a selection of Lucian's essays, in a less bulky format, that he used in his seminars.¹¹ From

⁸ Ian Thomson, 'Manuel Chrysoloras and the Early Italian Renaissance', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*, vol. 7, 1966, pp. 63-82 (at pp. 76-82).

⁹ Ernesto Berti, 'Uno scriba greco-latino: il Codice Vaticano Urbinate Gr. 121 e la prima versione del *Caronte* di Luciano', *Rivista di filologia e di istruzione classica*, vol. 13, 1985, pp. 416-443 (at pp. 423-424). Berti has dedicated other two seminal articles to Chrysoloras and the reintroduction of Lucian in the West: 'Alla scuola di Manuele Crisolora. Lettura e commento di Luciano', *Rinascimento*, vol. 27, 1987, pp. 3-73; 'Alle origini della fortuna di Luciano nell'Europa occidentale', *Studi classici e orientali*, vol. 37, 1988, pp. 303-351.

¹⁰ Berti, 'Alla scuola di Manuele Crisolora', p. 5.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

the Vaticanus graecus 87, a pupil of Chrysoloras, the identity of whom is unknown, transcribed six works, forming the present-day Urbinas graecus 121. The six works are: *Charon*, *Slander*, *The Fisher*, *Icaromenippus*, *Timon* and *Zeus Rants*. With the exception of the last mentioned, these essays were supplied with Latin interlinear and marginal glosses. The glosses shed light on Chrysoloras' teaching practices as well as on the anonymous student's modest expertise in Greek.¹²

The first dialogues of Lucian turned into Latin were *Charon* and *Timon*.¹³ The former survives in at least six manuscripts but was never printed, the latter in one manuscript, containing also *Charon*, and a few incunabula. The codex comprising both dialogues, Laurenziano 25.9, was transcribed by Tedaldo della Casa and is dated by him as 26 May 1403. The first translations of Lucian thus took place in the period between 2 February 1397, Chrysoloras' arrival in Florence, and 26 May 1403. As the seminal researches of Berti have demonstrated, these translations, made by two different scholars belonging to Chrysoloras' circle, were both based on the Urbinas graecus 121 and its apparatus of glosses. The two translators were far from flawless in their mastery of Greek. The rendering of *Charon* was, overall, more loyal to the original Greek text than the version of *Timon*. To quote Berti, 'la libertà del traduttore del Caronte non è della stessa qualità di quella che si è attribuita al traduttore del Timone, non travalica il testo [...], non lo sconvolge o stravolge, si propone di interpretare e non si permette di inventare'.¹⁴ As for the identity of the translators, it is possible, but not certain, that whoever transcribed Urbinas graecus 121 was the same student who turned *Charon* into Latin.¹⁵ Many scholars, from Remigio Sabbadini to Emilio Mattioli, identified the translator of *Timon* with a certain Bertholdus (about whom we do not have any information), since a few manuscripts and incunabula point to this name as the translator. Berti, however, has cogently explained that such identification is problematic.¹⁶ Ultimately, the identity of the first translator of *Timon* remains uncertain.

Following the first attempts, at the school of Chrysoloras, to render Lucian into Latin, translations of his works proliferated in the fifteenth century. For various reasons, which will become apparent later, Lucian's corpus attracted the attention of numerous

¹² Ibid., pp. 6-13.

¹³ Ernesto Berti has prepared a modern edition of these translations: Lucian of Samosata, *Caronte-Timone. Le prime traduzioni*, Florence, 2006.

¹⁴ Berti, 'Alle origini della fortuna di Luciano', p. 342.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 344.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 344-351.

admirers and translators.¹⁷ A prominent name in this respect is that of Guarino Veronese, who lived in Byzantium, where Chrysoloras had returned after his stay in Italy, from 1403 to 1408, and learned Greek under his guidance.¹⁸ In Byzantium, Guarino translated two pieces of Lucian, that is, *Slander* and *The Fly*.¹⁹ He translated another Lucian's work, *The Parasite*, during his sojourn in Venice between 1414 and 1419. *Slander* was dedicated, in 1405 or 1406, to the Venetian patrician Giovanni Quirini, probably a collector of Greek manuscripts, who, as we know from Guarino's prefatory letter, had experienced vicissitudes similar to those happened to the painter Apelles in Lucian's composition. In *Slander*, a painter named Antiphilus, jealous of Apelles, maligns his rival by telling the king Ptolemy I that he, Apelles, has taken part in a conspiracy against him. Apelles is eventually saved thanks to the intervention of one of the actual conspirators, who testifies to his innocence. In the second section of the piece, Lucian describes the allegorical painting that Apelles, mindful of the risk that he has run, devotes to the theme of slander. Guarino's translation, which survives in about fifteen manuscripts, enjoyed a wide circulation, notably in Northern Italy.²⁰ Following Guarino's lead, other translators, including Lapo da Castiglionchio the Younger and Francesco Griffolini, turned *Slander* into Latin. Probably relying on Guarino's text, in the second half of the century Bartolomeo della Fonte translated it into the vernacular.

Besides being translated several times, Lucian's *Slander* exerted influence on distinguished fifteenth-century humanists and artists, such as Leon Battista Alberti and Sandro Botticelli.²¹ The former, in his treatise *Della pittura*, paraphrases Lucian's ekphrasis in a section in which he argues that painters should take inspiration from the works of poets and rhetoricians. He introduces his description of Apelles' painting as follows:

¹⁷ For a catalogue of translations from Lucian's corpus, in both Latin and the vernacular, in the period 1400-1600, see Lorena De Faveri, *Le traduzioni di Luciano in Italia nel XV e XVI secolo*, Amsterdam, 2002.

¹⁸ On Guarino's translations of Lucian, see Sidwell, *Lucian in the Italian Quattrocento*, pp. 16-19; Mattioli, *Luciano e l'umanesimo*, pp. 44-53; Lauvergnat-Gagnière, *Lucien de Samosate*, pp. 26-28; Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, pp. 21-30.

¹⁹ On Guarino's and other translations of Lucian's *Slander*, see Rudolph Altrocchi, 'The Calumny of Apelles in the Literature of the Quattrocento', *PMLA*, vol. 36, 1921, pp. 454-491; Mattioli, *Luciano e l'umanesimo*, pp. 66-68; Ioannis Deligiannis, *Fifteenth-Century Latin Translations of Lucian's Essay on Slander*, Pisa, 2006.

²⁰ Deligiannis, *Latin Translations of Lucian's Slander*, pp. 81-110.

²¹ On the influence of Lucian's *Slander* on both humanist literature and the visual arts, see James A. W. Heffernan, 'Alberti on Apelles: Word and Image in *De pictura*', *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, vol. 2, 1996, pp. 345-359; Bernhard Huss, 'Luciano, Alberti e... Petrarca: ekphrasis e personificazione nella tradizione testuale e nelle arti figurative', *Italianistica*, vol. 47/2, 2018, pp. 67-86.

Lodasi, leggendo, quella descrizione della Calunnia, quale Luciano racconta dipinta da Appelle: parmi cosa non aliena dal nostro proposito qui narrarla, per ammonire i pittori in che cose, circa alla invenzione, loro convenga essere vigilanti.²²

The influence of *Slander* on Alberti is not limited to his *Della pittura*. It is also perceptible in one of the *Intercenales, Picture*, in which Alberti describes two sets of frescos, portraying the personification of ten vices and ten virtues, painted on the opposite walls of an imaginary temple of the gymnosophists. One of the vices is, indeed, *calumnia*, slander, which Alberti depicts in a manner reminiscent of Lucian. Botticelli, as is well-known, was fascinated by Lucian's *Slander*, which inspired his famous painting *The Calumny of Apelles*, dating to the early 1490s.²³ The majority of scholars hold that Botticelli drew on Alberti's description in *Della pittura*. However, as Angela Dressen has recently suggested, it seems more likely that he used as a literary source the version of the story that Cristoforo Landino included in his commentary on Dante's *Commedia*, first published in 1481.²⁴

Guarino's translations of Lucian's *The Fly* and *The Parasite*, works both ascribable to the genre of the mock encomium, also left a mark on Quattrocento culture. Around 1440, he dedicated the former to the bishop of Modena, Scipione Manenti, with the title of *Muscae collaudatio*. After having received a copy of Guarino's translation, Alberti penned a mock encomium of the same creature, which he named simply *Musca*. Guarino's version of *The Parasite* inspired both Alberti's mock encomium of the vagabond in his *Momus* and the *Catinia*, a satire written by the Paduan humanist Sicco Polenton, dated 1419. Mattioli aptly defined the *Catinia* as an example of 'lucianesimo inconsapevole', in that Sicco mistook Guarino's translation for an original composition, as we know from an epistle that he sent to Fantino Dandolo, the podestà of Padua.²⁵

There is another important link between Lucian and Guarino. In a letter, dated 1 June 1446, to his former student Tobia del Borgo, who had been appointed court historian to the lord of Rimini, Sigismondo Malatesta, Guarino paraphrased, albeit without

²² Leon Battista Alberti, *De pictura. Redazione volgare*, Florence, 2011, p. 302.

²³ For a survey on the influence of Lucian on the visual arts in early modern Europe, see Jean Michel Massing, 'A Few More Calumnies: Lucian and the Visual Arts', in *Lucian Vivus et Redivivus*, pp. 129-144. On Lucian and Botticelli, see also Jacques Bompaigne, 'De Lucien à Botticelli', in Marie Thérèse Jones-Davies (ed.), *La Satire au temps de la Renaissance*, Paris, 1986, pp. 97-107.

²⁴ Angela Dressen, 'From Dante to Landino: Botticelli's *Calumny of Apelles* and Its Sources', *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, vol. 59, 2017, pp. 324-339.

²⁵ Mattioli, *Luciano e l'umanesimo*, pp. 160-162. On the *Catinia*, see also Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, pp. 26-28.

explicitly mentioning it, part of Lucian's *How to Write History*.²⁶ This is the only treatise entirely dedicated to the writing of history that has survived from antiquity. In the manner of Thucydides, Lucian illustrates the difference between history, poetry and rhetoric, underlining that the former should be alien to any encomiastic aim and wholly concerned with the exposition of factual truth. As Mariangela Regoliosi has pointed out, in his epistle Guarino blended three main models, that is, Lucian's *How to Write History*, Cicero's *Pro Archia* and the latter's *De oratore*.²⁷ Cicero's works, departing from the line of thought connecting Thucydides to Lucian, invested history with a moral and pedagogical function. By combining these different sources, Guarino dimed Lucian's emphasis on history as an unbiased quest for truth, placing his letter on the border between two distinct historiographical traditions. The first proper Latin translation of Lucian's treatise was that made by Giovanni Maria Cattaneo at the beginning of the Cinquecento. It was published, first, in Bologna in 1507 and, subsequently, in Venice in 1522 and 1546.²⁸

Impetus to the knowledge and circulation of Lucian's works was given also by the Sicilian humanist Giovanni Aurispa. During his stay in Byzantium from 1421 to 1423, he collected 238 Greek manuscripts, which he brought to Italy on his return. Among them were codices that, together, contained most of Lucian's corpus, from which he turned into Latin the *Dialogue of the Dead 25* and *Toxaris*.²⁹ He completed the translation of the former by 1425, while he was teaching Greek in Bologna. One of his students was Alberti. Aurispa's rendering is remarkable in that he altered the ending of Lucian's piece. Lucian's original *Dialogue of the Dead 25* features three renowned generals of antiquity, Alexander the Great, Hannibal and Scipio Africanus Major. Before the infernal judge Minos, they dispute over who of them had been the best. Both Hannibal and Alexander deliver a lengthy speech, flaunting their merits and discrediting their rival. Scipio, on the contrary, is relegated to a marginal position. He enters the scene at the end of the

²⁶ Guarino's letter is discussed in Ian Thomson, 'Guarino's Views on History and Historiography', *Explorations in Renaissance Culture*, vol. 3, 1976, pp. 49-69 (see pp. 58-63 for an English translation of the letter); Sidwell, *Lucian in the Italian Quattrocento*, pp. 98-106; Mattioli, *Luciano e l'umanesimo*, pp. 50-53; Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, pp. 29-30. On the influence of Lucian's *How to Write History* on humanist historiography, see Gabriella Albanese, 'Luciano e la storiografia umanistica', *Italianistica*, vol. 47/2, 2018, pp. 17-40. For an interpretation of Lucian's essay as a counterpart of *A True Story*, see Christopher Ligota, 'Lucian on the Writing of History. Obsolescence Survived', in *Lucian Vivus et Redivivus*, pp. 45-70.

²⁷ Mariangela Regoliosi, 'Riflessioni umanistiche sullo scrivere storia', *Rinascimento*, vol. 31, 1991, pp. 3-37 (see pp. 28-37 for Guarino's letter in Latin).

²⁸ Ligota, 'Lucian on the Writing of History', p. 59.

²⁹ On Aurispa's translations of Lucian, see Sidwell, *Lucian in the Italian Quattrocento*, pp. 19-21 and 106-109; Mattioli, *Luciano e l'umanesimo*, pp. 53-59; Lauvergnat-Gagnière, *Lucien de Samosate*, pp. 28-30; Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, pp. 30-33. I have followed the numeration of Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead* provided by Macleod in his edition of Lucian's works.

dialogue, maintaining that he was inferior to the latter but superior to the former, whom he defeated in battle. Convinced by what he says, Minos awards first place to Alexander, followed by Scipio and Hannibal. By contrast, Aurispa accorded greater importance to Scipio, presenting him not only as a valorous general, but also, and more significantly, as a model of moral and civic virtues, notably his love for his homeland. Aurispa's Minos reverses the judgement that we find in Lucian, making Scipio the winner of the contest. In the preface to his translation, dedicated to Giovanni Battista Capodiferro, the podestà of Bologna, Aurispa explained that he had changed the conclusion of Lucian's dialogue in keeping with an emendation proposed by Libanius, a rhetorician of the fourth century A.D., who was little known in Quattrocento Italy. Scholarly literature unanimously agrees that this emendation never existed. Aurispa took it upon himself to tamper with Lucian's piece, probably under the influence of Petrarch.³⁰ In several works, for instance the epic poem *Africa* and the *Trionfo della Fama*, Petrarch extols Scipio for his moral qualities, while, in his *De viris illustribus*, he portrays Alexander as a receptacle of vices, in striking contrast with the virtues of the Romans. It is likely that, by declaring the supremacy of Scipio, Aurispa hoped to ingratiate himself with Capodiferro, who was of Roman origins.

Contained in many manuscripts and printed texts, the first of which dates to 1470, Aurispa's translation circulated widely in Renaissance Italy and in other areas of Europe.³¹ Three Italian versions derived from it. The first is anonymous, the second is by Niccolò Leonicensi and the third is a verse composition in *terza rima* made by the Florentine Filippo Lapaccini.³² It is likely, although there is no irrefutable proof, that Lapaccini's version was staged at the court of Mantua in 1492. Aurispa's translation had already inspired a theatrical representation, one that took place in Naples in 1441, at the time of René d'Anjou.³³

Aurispa's rendering of *Toxaris*, dedicated to Leonello d'Este and Ludovico Gonzaga, dates to 1429 or 1430. Although it was not as influential as his previous Lucianic translation, it broached a subject, friendship, central to the humanist debate. In 1441, for example, Alberti organised in Florence the *Certame Coronario*, a contest of

³⁰ David Cast, 'Aurispa, Petrarch, and Lucian: An Aspect of Renaissance Translation', *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. 27, 1974, pp. 157-173; Giuliana Crevatin, 'Scipione e la fortuna di Petrarca nell'umanesimo (un nuovo manoscritto della *Collatio Scipionem Alexandrum Hanibalem et Pyrrum*)', *Rinascimento*, vol. 17, 1977, pp. 3-30. On the humanist view of Scipio, see Davide Canfora, *La controversia di Poggio Bracciolini e Guarino Veronese su Cesare e Scipione*, Florence, 2001.

³¹ On the fortunes of Aurispa's translation in Europe, see Cast, 'Aurispa, Petrarch and Lucian', pp. 165-170.

³² On Lapaccini's verse translation, see Caccia, *Luciano nel Quattrocento*, pp. 21-26; Sidwell, *Lucian in the Italian Quattrocento*, pp. 112-117; Matteo Bosisio, 'Scipione a corte: il *Certamen inter Hannibalem et Alexandrum ac Scipionem Africorum* di Filippo Lapaccini', *Carte Romanze*, vol. 2, 2014, pp. 125-165.

³³ Caccia, *Luciano nel Quattrocento*, pp. 11-21.

vernacular poetry on the theme of friendship. Francesco d'Altobianco Alberti, a relative of Leon Battista who participated in the competition, drew on Aurispa's version of *Toxaris* to compose the poem that he recited.³⁴

In the 1430s, the most prolific translator of Lucian was Lapo da Castiglione the Younger.³⁵ Lapo, who translated also works of other Greek authors such as Xenophon, Isocrates and Plutarch, translated eight pieces of Lucian into Latin: *On Funerals*, *The Dream*, *Octogenarians*, *My Native Land*, *Demonax*, *On Sacrifices*, *The Tyrannicide* and *Slander*. He undertook all these translations in the period between 1434, while he was in Florence with the papal Curia, and 1438, the year of his death. From Lapo's choice to focus on these texts, we can infer that he was chiefly interested in the rhetorical aspects of Lucian rather than in his satirical traits.³⁶ He conceived his translations chiefly as a means to advance his career in the Curia, as the dedicatees and the prefaces make clear. He dedicated *On Funerals* and *The Dream* to Pope Eugenius IV, *Octogenarians* and *My Native Land* to the papal secretary Gregorio Correr, *On Sacrifices* and *The Tyrannicide* to Alberti, who at the time was his colleague in the Curia, *Demonax* to the cardinal Ludovico Trevisan Scarampo and *Slander* to Giovanni Morroni da Rieti, a cleric of the papal chamber.

Two colleagues of Lapo in the Curia, Rinuccio da Castiglione and Poggio Bracciolini, were also translators of Lucian. The former turned into Latin the *Dialogue of the Dead* 20, *Charon* and *Philosophies for Sale*.³⁷ The translation of the first work is ascribable to the period of Rinuccio's stay in Greece, between 1415 and 1423. In the preface, he expresses his gratitude to his teacher of Greek, the Cretan Iohannes Simeonachis. The other two translations date to the early 1440s. Rinuccio's version of *Charon*, dedicated to the cardinal Jean Le Jeune, became more widely known than the earlier translation of it made by the anonymous student of Chrysoloras.

³⁴ Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, p. 31. Marsh has also noted some affinities between Aurispa's translation of *Toxaris* and *Amores*, one of Alberti's *Intercenales*. See *Lucian and the Latins*, pp. 31-33.

³⁵ On Lapo's translations of Lucian, see Sidwell, *Lucian in the Italian Quattrocento*, pp. 22-25; Mattioli, *Luciano e l'umanesimo*, pp. 61-63; Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, pp. 35-36. For a study on Lapo's life and work, accompanied by his dialogue *De curiae commodis* in both Latin and English translation, see Christopher S. Celenza, *Renaissance Humanism and the Papal Curia. Lapo da Castiglione the Younger's De curiae commodis*, Ann Arbor, MI, 1999.

³⁶ As highlighted in both Mattioli, *Luciano e l'umanesimo*, pp. 61-62 and Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, p. 36.

³⁷ On Rinuccio's translations of Lucian, see Sidwell, *Lucian in the Italian Quattrocento*, pp. 25-29; Mattioli, *Luciano e l'umanesimo*, pp. 59-61; Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, p. 37.

Poggio turned into Latin two works of Lucian, the dialogue *Zeus Catechized* and the narrative piece *Lucius or the Ass*.³⁸ The translation of the former, dedicated to Tommaso Parentucelli, the future Pope Niccolò V, was probably completed before 1444, the year in which Parentucelli became bishop of Bologna, but there is no consensus among scholars on the exact date. Poggio called his version *Cinicus sive de fato*, a title recalling Alberti's *Cynicus*, a piece contained in the fourth book of the *Intercentales*, which Alberti dedicated to Poggio himself.³⁹ Tellingly, some of the themes discussed in *Zeus Catechized*, notably the power of fate in the world, are integral to Poggio's dialogue *De varietate fortunae*. Poggio dedicated his rendering of *Lucius or the Ass* to Cosimo de' Medici around 1450. In the 1538 Basel edition of his, Poggio's, writings, this work is attributed to a certain Syrian philosopher called 'Lucius', the same name as the protagonist of the story. This misunderstanding was quite common in the Quattrocento and beyond. The manuscript Riccardiana 137, however, does not record this error and presents the correct name 'Lucianus'.⁴⁰ Poggio's translations were not particularly accurate renderings of the original Greek.⁴¹

Besides translating two of his works, Poggio referred to Lucian in many of his compositions.⁴² He relied on him mainly as an authority to confer more prestige on his ideas. In his *Oratio ad patres*, which he delivered at the Council of Constance probably in 1417, he adopted the metaphor of the world as a stage, borrowed from Lucian's *Menippus*. He alluded to this piece also in a passage of his *De avaritia* in which Bartolomeo da Montepulciano proposes that the greedy should be banned from any city. This echoes the infernal decree against the rich who have oppressed the poor in *Menippus*. In another of his dialogues, *De infelicitate principum*, Poggio mentioned Lucian multiple times, paraphrasing passages from *The Dream*, *Slander*, *Hermitimus* and *Menippus*.⁴³ Finally, in his *Contra hypocritas*, he polemicised with the mendicant friars,

³⁸ On Poggio's translations of Lucian, see Sidwell, *Lucian in the Italian Quattrocento*, pp. 29-30; Mattioli, *Luciano e l'umanesimo*, pp. 128-130; Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, pp. 37-38.

³⁹ Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, p. 38. For a detailed study of Poggio's *Cinicus*, including a transcription of it, see David Marsh, 'Poggio and Alberti. Three notes', *Rinascimento*, vol. 23, 1983, pp. 189-215 (at pp. 189-197).

⁴⁰ As noted by Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, p. 37.

⁴¹ On the quality of Poggio's rendering of *Zeus Catechized* and *Lucius or the Ass*, see, respectively, Marsh, 'Poggio and Alberti', pp. 190-191 and Mattioli, *Luciano e l'umanesimo*, pp. 129-130.

⁴² On Poggio's references to Lucian, see Riccardo Fubini, 'Il teatro del mondo nelle prospettive morali e storico-politiche di Poggio Bracciolini', in id., *Umanesimo e secolarizzazione. Da Petrarca a Valla*, Rome, 1990, pp. 221-302 (at pp. 238-241 and 269); Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, pp. 38-40.

⁴³ On the presence of Lucian in Poggio's *De infelicitate principum*, see Iiro Kayanto, 'Poggio Bracciolini's *De Infelicitate Principum* and its Classical Sources', *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, vol. 1, 1994, pp. 23-35 (at pp. 31-33).

observing that, if Lucian were alive, he would include them in the crowd of the charlatan philosophers whom he used to mock.⁴⁴

The humanists mentioned so far were the most important translators of Lucian into Latin in the Quattrocento. They were, however, by no means the only ones.⁴⁵ Between 1441 and 1443, for example, the Umbrian humanist Lilius Tifernas translated *A True Story* into Latin.⁴⁶ His rendering enjoyed notable popularity in the revised version of Benedetto Bordone, who included it in his collection of Lucian's works published in 1494. Cristoforo Persona turned into Latin *The Downward Journey* and *Philosophies for Sale*. Besides *Slander*, Francesco Griffolini, whom we have already met, translated several other pieces of Lucian, including *On Sacrifices* and the *Saturnalia*. Other Latin translators could be added to the list. The Quattrocento fascination with Lucian was indeed a conspicuous literary phenomenon.

Among Lucian's vernacular translators, Niccolò da Lonigo, usually known as Niccolò Leonicensino, has a special place.⁴⁷ An erudite Greek scholar and a distinguished professor of medicine and moral philosophy at the university of Ferrara, Leonicensino supposedly prepared in the 1470s a manuscript, the present-day Vaticanus Chigi L. VI. 215, containing the vernacular version of thirty-five works of Lucian plus two pieces mistakenly ascribed to him, that is, Alberti's *Virtus* and Maffeo Vegio's *Philalethes*.⁴⁸ Leonicensino's paternity of this manuscript, which does not bear his name, is proved by the testimony of the churchman and historian Paolo Giovio.⁴⁹ In his *Elogia virorum bellica virtute illustrium*, first published in 1546, he attributed vernacular translations of Dio Cassius and Lucian to Leonicensino. These *volgarizzamenti*, he remarks, had been undertaken for the duke of Ferrara, Ercole d'Este, who was not versed in Latin and Greek. The name of Leonicensino as translator of Lucian is also attested in some of the printed texts

⁴⁴ On Poggio's *Contra hypocritas*, see Mattioli, *Luciano e l'umanesimo*, pp. 131-135.

⁴⁵ For other translators of Lucian into Latin in Quattrocento Italy, see Sidwell, *Lucian in the Italian Quattrocento*, pp. 31-45; Mattioli, *Luciano e l'umanesimo*, pp. 68-70; Mariantonietta Acocella, *La fortuna di Luciano nel Rinascimento. Il volgarizzamento del manoscritto Vaticano Chigiano L.VI.215. Edizione critica dei volgarizzamenti delle Storie vere*, Milan, 2016, pp. 28-29.

⁴⁶ On Lilius Tifernas' translation of *A True Story*, see Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, pp. 40-41; Ursula Jaitner-Hahner, 'La traduzione latina delle *Storie vere* di Luciano e le sue vicende attraverso i secoli', in *Crisolora e il ritorno del greco*, pp. 283-312; Giovanna Dapelo, 'Egressus olim ab herculeis columnis: la traduzione umanistica della *Storia vera* di Luciano. Storia di un testo pluriredazionale', *Italianistica*, vol. 47/3, 2018, pp. 73-83.

⁴⁷ For an intellectual profile of Leonicensino, see Acocella, *La fortuna di Luciano*, pp. 348-353.

⁴⁸ On Leonicensino's translations of Lucian, see Mattioli, *Luciano e l'umanesimo*, pp. 63-65; Panizza, 'Vernacular Lucian', pp. 78-81.

⁴⁹ On Leonicensino and Giovio, see Acocella, *La fortuna di Luciano*, pp. 391-394.

that stemmed from the codex. The thesis that he was the actual author of the Chigi manuscript, followed here, enjoys a broad, although not unanimous, consensus.⁵⁰

The content of the Chigi manuscript merits special consideration. It includes both works that had already been translated into Latin, such as, for example, *Timon*, *Slander*, *The Parasite*, *Charon*, *Zeus Catechized*, *A True Story*, and also compositions never translated before. This is the case of the *Dialogues of the Courtesans*, of which Leonicensino translated nine pieces, and of the *Amores*, a dialogue transmitted as part of Lucian's corpus but considered spurious by some scholars. Earlier humanists had ignored these works, presumably because they deemed their topic lascivious. The *Dialogues of the Courtesans*, as the title suggests, deal with the affairs of the courtesans, featuring, at times, also their clients. The *Amores* present a debate about heterosexual and homosexual love, resolving that the latter is best. The humanists inhabiting the Curia at the time, it seems, had no interest in translating such texts. Nor were they an important part of the Byzantine Lucianic tradition, of which Chrysoloras was the herald in Florence. At the lively court of Ferrara, where in the following decades Matteo Maria Boiardo and Ludovico Ariosto would put love at the centre of their poems, compositions of that kind proved more alluring.

The introduction of the printing press promoted the circulation of Lucian in the last three decades of the fifteenth century. In 1470 the German publisher Georg Lauer brought out in Rome the first printed volume dedicated to Lucian, comprising Cristoforo Persona's Latin translations of *The Downward Journey* and *Philosophies for Sale*. Probably in the same year, Lauer printed in Rome another incunabulum including, in addition to the two pieces already published, Latin renderings of three more of Lucian's dialogues, *Charon*, *Timon* and the *Dialogue of the Dead 25* (in Aurispa's Latin version), together with Vegio's *Palinurus*, mistakenly attributed to Lucian.⁵¹ In 1494 Benedetto Bordon edited a volume, printed in Venice by Simone Bevilacqua, containing the Latin translations of thirteen pieces of Lucian, among them *A True Story*, *Lucius or the Ass*, *Charon* and *Timon*, plus three spurious works, namely, Alberti's *Virtus*, Vegio's *Palinurus* and Battista Guarini's rendering of an idyll composed by the ancient Greek

⁵⁰ Leonicensino's authorship of the translations contained in the Chigi manuscript has been called into question by, for example, Edoardo Fumagalli, 'Da Nicolò Leonicensino a Matteo Maria Boiardo: proposta per l'attribuzione del volgarizzamento in prosa del *Timone*', *Aevum*, vol. 59, 1985, pp. 163-177 (at pp. 163-165).

⁵¹ On this edition, see E. P. Goldschmidt, 'The First Edition of Lucian of Samosata', *Journal of the Warburg and the Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 14, 1951, pp. 7-20. Goldschmidt was not aware of Lauer's edition containing only Cristoforo Persona's Latin translations of *The Downward Journey* and *Philosophies for Sale*.

poet Moschus.⁵² Bordon's edition greatly contributed to the diffusion of Lucian. Another important year for Lucian was 1496, when Lorenzo di Alopa published in Florence the first edition of the Lucianic corpus in the original Greek, probably edited by the Byzantine scholar Janus Lascaris. A few years later, in 1503, Aldus Manutius prepared another edition of Lucian's works in Greek, which circulated more widely.⁵³

The keen interest in Lucian in the Quattrocento went hand in hand with the positive reputation that he enjoyed throughout the century. As Keith Sidwell's detailed study has shown, Quattrocento humanists held Lucian in high esteem for several reasons.⁵⁴ First of all, they praised the eloquence, elegance and, at times, conciseness of his style. They also deemed him an erudite writer. Indeed, his works, replete with allusions to Greek mythology, religion and philosophy, offered new insights into the world of ancient Greece, the rediscovery of which had just started when Lucian's corpus re-entered the West. Nor was Lucian just a mine of historical knowledge. With pieces such as *Charon* and *Menippus* in mind above all, humanists looked upon him as a source of ethical teaching. In short, he became a moral philosopher. His distinctive trait was his ability to transmit wisdom and to deal with grave matters in a singularly elegant and humorous style. For Quattrocento humanists he was a master of *serio ludere*, of humour that, far from being merely comic, facilitated discussion of delicate issues in a pleasant way. The reputation of Lucian as a witty moral philosopher did not deter some of his admirers from turning to his satirical and irreverent side, so as to establish a vivid cultural dialogue with their own time. Although, contrary to what had happened in Byzantium, Lucian in Quattrocento Italy passed as an innocuous writer, some of the major fifteenth-century Lucianic authors, notably Alberti and Giovanni Pontano, made abundant use of his writings to fuel their criticism of, to cite just the main targets, scholasticism, various foibles of the humanist tradition and the corruption of the Church, as we shall see in the following chapters.

On occasion, however, humanists deviated from this benign portrait of Lucian. In a letter of January 1444 to the cardinal Gerardo Landriani, Lorenzo Valla defined himself as Lactantius had described Lucian, that is, as someone who spared neither gods nor men. Later, both Poggio and Antonio De Ferrariis, better known as Galateo, used this expression in their polemic against Valla himself.⁵⁵ If Valla, Poggio and Galateo

⁵² On Bordon's edition, see Acocella, *La fortuna di Luciano*, pp. 89-105.

⁵³ On Lorenzo di Alopa's and Manutius' editions, see Lauvergnat-Gagnière, *Lucien de Samosate*, pp. 37-39; Zappala, *Lucian in the Two Hesperias*, p. 119.

⁵⁴ Sidwell, *Lucian in the Italian Quattrocento*, pp. 75-84.

⁵⁵ On Lucian and Valla, see Zappala, *Lucian in the Two Hesperias*, pp. 43-44.

emphasised this aspect of Lucian, without implying any criticism of him, Marsilio Ficino was not so well-disposed. In an epistle, dating to the mid 1480s, to the theologian Paolo Ferobanti, Ficino denigrated Lucian, charging him with mocking Socrates in some of his works, such as, for example, *The Parasite* and a couple of the *Dialogues of the Dead*.⁵⁶ Such remarks, however, did not affect significantly the fame of Lucian as a master of eloquence, ethics and humour, which remained dominant in the fifteenth century.

Why did Lucian enjoy such popularity in the Quattrocento? Several points made above suggest the answer. The rediscovery of Lucian began for pedagogical reasons at the school of Chrysoloras. The first translations of his works, as we have seen, were no more than exercises that Chrysoloras' pupils undertook to become acquainted with Greek. After this initial stage, humanists started to value Lucian for the qualities, discussed above, that characterise his corpus. It represented a window into Greek culture, a paradigm of prose style, a propagator of moral knowledge. These merits on their own would explain why Lucian's fame rose in fifteenth-century Italy. There are, however, additional reasons. Many scholars have stressed the novelty of Lucian's corpus in the context of the early Renaissance. It furnished humanists with a new model of dialogue, of markedly Menippean inspiration, endowed with a set of defining features differentiating it from Ciceronian and Platonic dialogues.⁵⁷ A few characteristics of Lucianic dialogues are the frequent presence of mythological characters, their accentuated dramatic structure, their unrestrained inventiveness and the use of hyperbolic images, irony and parody as their chief stylistic traits.⁵⁸

A further consideration is the upsurge of interest among Renaissance scholars in the philosophies of the Hellenistic period, of which Lucian's dialogues constituted, in a manner of speaking, a compendium.⁵⁹ One might go as far as to claim that the revival of Lucian was itself a factor sparking this renewed interest. His writings, albeit in a fictional and, at times, simplified way, divulged the tenets of Cynicism, Epicureanism, Stoicism,

⁵⁶ On Lucian and Ficino, see Michael J. B. Allen, *Synoptic Art. Marsilio Ficino on the History of Platonic Interpretation*, Florence, 1998, pp. 125-128; Panizza, 'Vernacular Lucian', p. 73.

⁵⁷ On Menippean satire in antiquity, see Joel C. Relihan, *Ancient Menippean Satire*, Baltimore, MD, 1993. On the revival of Menippean satire during the Renaissance and the modern age, see W. Scott Blanchard, *Scholars' Bedlam. Menippean Satire in the Renaissance*, Lewisburg, PA, 1995; Ingrid De Smet, *Menippean Satire and the Republic of Letters. 1581-1655*, Geneva, 1996; Howard D. Weinbrot, *Menippean Satire Reconsidered. From Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century*, Baltimore, MD, 2005.

⁵⁸ Irony, whether Lucianic or Socratic/Platonic, played an important role in Renaissance literature. For a study of this concept, see Dilwyn Knox, *Ironia. Medieval and Renaissance Ideas on Irony*, Leiden, 1989.

⁵⁹ For a survey on the reception of Hellenistic philosophies during the Renaissance, see Jill Kraye, 'The Revival of Hellenistic Philosophies', in James Hankins (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Philosophy*, Cambridge, 2007, pp. 97-112.

one of his favourite satirical butts, and Scepticism, of which, according to numerous scholars, he was an exponent.

Another notable reason accounting for Lucian's fortunes is that his satire could be adapted, with relative ease, to the social and cultural environment of the Renaissance.⁶⁰ Lucian's lampooning of philosophers for their verbosity and excessive abstractness, for instance, represented a model for the mockery of scholastic reasoning, a widespread theme in Renaissance satire. Along these lines, Lucian's attacks on irrational beliefs, gullibility and the dissemination of pseudo-religious cults in his time were transmuted into criticism of superstitious practices associated with Christianity.

Last but not least, there were some structural analogies between Italian humanists and Lucian. This point has been underscored especially by David Marsh, who has noted two interesting parallels.⁶¹ The former is what he has defined as a 'professional affinity'. Like Lucian and other rhetoricians of his day, many fifteenth-century humanists made the most of their literary education by embarking on an itinerant career as diplomats and orators. Moreover, Lucian, a Roman citizen of Syrian origins, composed all of his works in Greek, a language that, although it was not his mother tongue, he came to master flawlessly. Italian humanists, for their part, penned most of their compositions in an acquired language, Latin. Lucian had revived at an apposite moment.

⁶⁰ This point has been stressed by Claude Albert Mayer in 'Lucien et la Renaissance', *Revue de littérature comparée*, vol. 47, 1973, pp. 5-22 and *Lucien de Samosate et la Renaissance française*, Geneva, 1984, pp. 15-30.

⁶¹ Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, pp. 3 and 7.

Chapter 2. Leon Battista Alberti: Lucian's Revival and the Quest for a New Form of Expression in Neo-Latin Literature

Leon Battista Alberti (1404–1472) was a humanist of great learning and multiple interests.¹ Born in Genoa as the illegitimate son of a Florentine banker, he led an itinerant life that brought him to the main cultural and political centres of fifteenth-century Italy, from Padua, Bologna and Rome to Florence, Ferrara and Mantua. His literary career began when he was in his twenties with the Latin comedy *Philodoxeos fabula*, which circulated under the pseudonym 'Lepidus' and passed for an authentic classical text until the mid-1430s, when, in the second version of his comedy, Alberti declared his identity.² He then penned a number of compositions in both Latin and the vernacular. An important section of his multifaceted corpus is dedicated to his theoretical treatises on the arts, namely, the triptych *De pictura*, *De statua* and *De architectura*.

Alberti's re-enactment of Lucian represented the most fertile intellectual encounter between a humanist and the ancient satirist in Quattrocento Italy. Alberti's Lucianic oeuvre, all in Latin, comprises the *Intercenales*, a collection of dialogues and short narrative pieces, two mock encomia (*Canis* and *Musca*) and the novel *Momus*.³ These writings constitute a decisive moment in the history of Renaissance satire and, more broadly, of neo-Latin literature. A preliminary question concerns how they fit into

¹ Among the numerous monographies on Alberti, the following studies stand out: Paul-Henri Michel, *Un Idéal humain au XVe siècle. La pensée de L. B. Alberti (1404-1472)*, Paris, 1930; Joan Gadol, *Leon Battista Alberti. Universal Man of the Early Renaissance*, Chicago, IL, 1969; Cesare Cancro, *Filosofia ed architettura in Leon Battista Alberti*, Naples, 1978; Giovanni Ponte, *Leon Battista Alberti. Umanista e scrittore*, Genoa, 1981; Paolo Marolda, *Crisi e conflitto in Leon Battista Alberti*, Rome, 1988; Anthony Grafton, *Leon Battista Alberti. Master Builder of the Italian Renaissance*, New York, NY, 2000; David Marsh, *Studies on Alberti and Petrarch*, Farnham, 2012; Timothy Kircher, *Living Well in Renaissance Italy. The Virtues of Humanism and the Irony of Leon Battista Alberti*, Tempe, AZ, 2012; Martin McLaughlin, *Leon Battista Alberti. La vita, l'umanesimo, le opere letterarie*, Florence, 2016.

² On Alberti's *Philodoxeos fabula*, see Martin McLaughlin, 'From Lepidus to Leon Battista Alberti: Naming, Renaming, and Anonymizing the Self in Quattrocento Italy', *Romance Studies*, vol. 31, 2013, pp. 152-166.

³ My chapter focuses on the *Intercenales* and *Momus*, the most substantial Lucianic works of Alberti. On *Canis*, see Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, pp. 156-159; Mariangela Regoliosi, 'Linee di filologia albertiana: il *De commodis litterarum atque incommodis* e il *Canis*', in Roberto Cardini and Mariangela Regoliosi (eds), *Leon Battista Alberti umanista e scrittore. Filologia, esegesi, tradizione*, 2 vols, Florence, 2007, vol. 1, pp. 221-244; Martin McLaughlin, 'Alberti's *Canis*: Structure and Sources in the Portrait of the Artist as a Renaissance Dog', *Albertiana*, vol. 14, 2011, pp. 55-83; Maria Letizia Magnini Bracciali, 'L. B. Alberti, *Canis* 10-27. Fonti e problemi', in Lucia Bertolini, Donatella Coppini and Clementina Marsico (eds), *Nel cantiere degli umanisti. Per Mariangela Regoliosi*, 3 vols, Florence, 2014, vol. 2, pp. 777-826. On *Musca*, see Mario Bonaria, 'La *Musca* di L. B. Alberti: osservazioni e traduzione', in *Miscellanea di studi albertiani. A cura del Comitato genovese per le onoranze a Leon Battista Alberti nel quinto centenario della morte*, Genoa, 1975, pp. 47-69; Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, pp. 159-161; Martin McLaughlin, 'Alberti's *Musca*: Humour, Ethics and the Challenge to Classical Models', in Martin McLaughlin, Ingrid D. Rowland and Elisabetta Tarantino (eds), *Authority, Innovation and Early Modern Epistemology. Essays in Honour of Hilary Gatti*, Oxford, 2015, pp. 8-24.

Alberti's vast literary production. At first, it should be remarked that his Lucianic compositions were held in scant regard until recently, when they began to attract the attention of scholars. This was mainly due to the influential, and idealised, portrayal of Alberti provided by the Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt in his seminal work *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien*, published in 1860. Burckhardt presented Alberti as the prototype of the Renaissance or universal man, well-versed in all the arts, keen on physical exercises, including horse riding, endowed with a sunny personality and unlimited vigour. Burckhardt based his description on Alberti's autobiography, which was in turn a refined literary construction written in third person, but he carefully neglected the passages in which Alberti depicted himself as continuously oscillating between ire and melancholy, depression and cheerfulness.⁴ Burckhardt's image of Alberti established itself among scholars, guiding their research. Alberti's Lucianic writings, which, at least at first glance, convey a dark vision of the world at odds with Burckhardt's portrayal, were therefore dismissed or, at most, deemed as bizarre literary indulgences.

Burckhardt's picture of Alberti underwent a transformation in the second half of the twentieth century, thanks to Cecil Grayson and Eugenio Garin. The former noted that a vein of cynicism ran from the *Intercenales* to *Momus*, which he considered as 'a mordant satire on princes and courtiers, women and philosophers, in which no human values and ideals are spared'.⁵ Garin, who in the early 1960s rediscovered in Pistoia a manuscript containing twenty-five *Intercenales*, went beyond Grayson in his reconsideration of Alberti.⁶ An accentuated pessimism, in his view, characterised Alberti's stance, especially, but not only, in the *Intercenales* and *Momus*.⁷ He regarded the latter as a gloomy counterpart of *De re aedificatoria*, defining it as a work in which 'si constata che ragione e virtù non hanno spazio, né in cielo né in terra; [...] che dovunque imperversano follia e malvagità; che l'unica evasione è nella fantasia e nella sfuggente libertà dei morti'.⁸ Garin's reappraisal of Alberti proved to be influential, but provoked criticism, too. J. H. Whitfield, for instance, argued that Garin had not grasped the irony integral to

⁴ On Burckhardt and Alberti's autobiography, see Grafton, *Leon Battista Alberti*, pp. 14-27; McLaughlin, *Leon Battista Alberti*, pp. 3-18.

⁵ Cecil Grayson, 'The Humanism of Alberti', *Italian Studies*, vol. 12, 1957, pp. 37-56 (at p. 52).

⁶ Garin announced his discovery in 'Venticinque Intercenali inedite e sconosciute di Leon Battista Alberti', *Belfagor*, vol. 19, 1964, pp. 377-396.

⁷ Eugenio Garin, 'Studi su Leon Battista Alberti', in id., *Rinascite e rivoluzioni. Movimenti culturali dal XIV al XVII secolo*, Bari, 1975, pp. 131-196.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

Alberti's satirical compositions.⁹ 'The doctrine of Alberti is written everywhere, and it is positive', he claimed.¹⁰ An important result of this debate, still ongoing, is that Alberti's Lucianic strand came to be seen as an intrinsic, rather than marginal, part of his literary corpus.

Studies on Alberti as a Lucianic or humorous writer have since then proliferated. Among the cornucopia of interpretations, it is worth recalling that of Roberto Cardini.¹¹ He has regarded Alberti's Lucianic pieces as a *controcanto* of the civic ideals, such as the public engagement of intellectuals, that infused the works of other humanists of his time, Leonardo Bruni being just the most obvious example. Moreover, in his satirical works Alberti was the initiator of the aesthetics of humour, understood conceptually as radically different from the comic, that pervaded Italian literature, from Ludovico Ariosto to Giacomo Leopardi, anticipating the theories elaborated by Luigi Pirandello at the beginning of the twentieth century. Central to Alberti's humour is the idea of human existence as intrinsically marked by irreconcilable conflicts.

This brief survey, by no means comprehensive, highlights that the significance of Alberti's Lucianic writings, once neglected, is now indisputable. It also makes clear how problematic is to determine their role in relation to his overall oeuvre. Indeed, it is hard to ascertain whether the ideological views that he expressed in, for instance, the *Libri della famiglia* on the one hand and the *Intercenales* and *Momus* on the other may be harmonised or not. Nevertheless, it seems possible to identify an element that accounts for the complexity and heterogeneity of Alberti's corpus. This element, as Martin McLaughlin has particularly stressed, is the pursuit of originality.¹² Alberti markedly distanced himself from both the humanists of the previous generation and those of his own. Unlike Petrarch or Poggio Bracciolini, he was not a hunter of manuscripts nor was he concerned with the philological restoration of ancient texts. All the same, he was certainly attentive to the most recent rediscoveries of classical works, borrowing from them ideas and meanings that he transposed, in reshaped form, into his writings.¹³ Unlike,

⁹ J. H. Whitfield, 'Momus and the Language of Irony', in Peter Hainsworth, Valerio Lucchesi, Christina Roaf, David Robey and J.R. Woodhouse (eds), *The Languages of Literature in Renaissance Italy*, Oxford, 1988, pp. 31-44; id., 'Alberti in the *Intercenali* I: *Defunctus*', *Italian Studies*, vol. 46, 1991, pp. 58-68.

¹⁰ Whitfield, 'Momus and the Language of Irony', p. 43.

¹¹ Cardini has devoted numerous studies to Alberti. His arguments about Alberti's humour are developed especially in 'Alberti o della nascita dell'umorismo moderno. I', *Schede umanistiche*, vol. 1, 1993, pp. 31-85. He has also edited a volume containing the majority of Alberti's Latin works (in Latin and Italian translation): Leon Battista Alberti, *Opere latine*, Rome, 2010.

¹² Martin McLaughlin, 'Leon Battista Alberti and the Redirection of Renaissance Humanism', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, vol. 167, 2010, pp. 25-59.

¹³ On Alberti's knowledge and use of classical works, see Anthony Grafton, 'Leon Battista Alberti: The Writer as Reader', in id., *Commerce with the Classics. Ancient Books and Renaissance Readers*, Ann

again, the majority of his fellow humanists, he was interested in the technical treatises of the classical world, which inspired the composition of his own. The distinctive characteristic of his humanist approach was his Latin-vernacular bilingualism. In an age that, overall, maintained the supremacy of Latin as a literary language, he strived to restore the dignity of the vernacular.¹⁴ In 1441, in Florence, he organised the *Certame coronario*, a contest of vernacular poetry on the theme of true friendship.¹⁵ This attempt, however, proved a failure. The jury deemed the poems that had been submitted of little value and so decided not to award any prize. Around the same period in which he organised the *Certame coronario*, he completed the *Grammaticetta*, the first grammar book of the Florentine vernacular. A few years earlier, he had penned the vernacular dialogue *Libri della famiglia*, using Cicero as his principal model. The creation of a Ciceronian dialogue in the vernacular was, as far as we know, unprecedented.¹⁶ The same desire to experiment led him to revive the Lucianic dialogue with the *Intercenales* and *Momus*. In other words, works as different as the *Libri della famiglia*, the *Intercenales* and *Momus* have as a common denominator Alberti's endeavour to open new paths within Quattrocento humanism.

Alberti's *Intercenales*

Alberti began to compose the Latin pieces constituting the *Intercenales*, which are mainly in the form of dialogue, but also include fables and *novelle*, about 1430 and continued until the early 1440s, when, during one of his stays in Florence, he started to organise his writings, dividing them into eleven books.¹⁷ Probably he never prepared a definitive

Arbor, MI, 1997, pp. 53-92; Roberto Cardini (ed.), *Leon Battista Alberti. La biblioteca di un umanista*, Florence, 2005; Martin McLaughlin, 'Alberti and the Classical Canon', in Carlo Caruso and Andrew Laird (eds), *Italy and the Classical Tradition. Language, Thought and Poetry 1300-1600*, London, 2009, pp. 73-100.

¹⁴ Scholarly literature has increasingly stressed that Quattrocento humanists were not openly hostile to the vernacular. See, for example, Simon A. Gilson, *Dante and Renaissance Florence*, Cambridge, 2005; James Hankins, 'Humanism in the Vernacular: The Case of Leonardo Bruni', in Christopher S. Celenza and Kenneth Gouwens (eds), *Humanism and Creativity in the Renaissance. Essays in Honor of Ronald G. Witt*, Leiden, 2006, pp. 11-29. In the light of these and other studies it would be a simplification to posit a dichotomy between humanists and the vernacular. Nevertheless, it should be remarked that most of the fifteenth-century literary production was in Latin and that Alberti's effort to elevate the vernacular to the status of a literary language was unique in his time.

¹⁵ On the *Certame coronario*, see Guglielmo Gorni, 'Storia del Certame coronario', *Rinascimento*, vol. 12, 1972, pp. 135-181; Lucia Bertolini (ed.), *De vera amicitia. I testi del primo Certame coronario*, Modena, 1993.

¹⁶ In the early 1430s, the years in which Alberti composed the first three books of his dialogue, the Florentine humanist Matteo Palmieri penned his vernacular work *Della vita civile* that was partly inspired by Cicero and Quintilian.

¹⁷ On the manuscript history of the *Intercenales*, see David Marsh, 'Textual Problems in the *Intercenales*', *Albertiana*, vol. 2, 1999, pp. 125-135.

version of the collection. Some of the *Intercenales* circulated in separate manuscripts during Alberti's lifetime and after. At the end of the fifteenth century, Girolamo Massaini, the first editor of part of Alberti's Latin compositions (his collection of Alberti's works was published in 1499), sought to collect all the pieces in order to reconstruct them in their entirety, but his attempt proved to be unsuccessful.¹⁸ In 1890, Girolamo Mancini, who was also the biographer of Alberti, published an incomplete edition of the *Intercenales*, using as a chief source the manuscript Canonicianus miscellaneous 172, held at the Bodleian Library. Garin's rediscovery of the Pistoiese codex, mentioned above, made available twenty-five previously unknown pieces, thus advancing our understanding of the *Intercenales*.

The *Intercenales* are a highly original literary work, for which it is difficult to find comparable antecedents in European culture. A reason for this is the broad range of sources on which Alberti drew. Lucian's influence, though prominent, was not the only one.¹⁹ Alberti reshaped motifs and ideas originating both in classical and medieval literature. His liking for Aesop, for instance, is apparent in the pieces dealing with political themes, the majority of which belong to the tenth book.²⁰ Alberti was also indebted to the Latin traditions of comedy and satire and to Apuleius.²¹ As for medieval literature, he took inspiration from Giovanni Boccaccio's *novelle*, notably in the pieces in which he explored the theme of love.²² In short, a conspicuous trait of the *Intercenales* is their variety of references and allusions, some more evident than others. As Cardini has suggested, Alberti's *Intercenales* can be regarded as a mosaic combining, in disguised form, numerous disparate sources.²³

¹⁸ On Girolamo Massaini, see David Marsh and Paolo D'Alessandro, 'Girolamo Massaini trascrittore dell'Alberti', *Albertiana*, vol. 11-12, 2008-2009, pp. 260-266.

¹⁹ For a survey on the influence of Lucian on the *Intercenales*, see Mariantonietta Acocella, 'Appunti sulla presenza di Luciano nelle *Intercenales*', in Roberto Cardini and Mariangela Regoliosi (eds), *Alberti e la tradizione. Per lo 'smontaggio' dei 'mosaici' albertiani*, 2 vols, Florence, 2007, vol. 1, pp. 81-139.

²⁰ These pieces bear a resemblance with the *Apologi centum*, a collection of fables after the manner of Aesop that Alberti composed in Bologna in 1437. On Alberti's *Apologi*, see Paola Testi Massetani, 'Ricerche sugli *Apologi* di Leon Battista Alberti', *Rinascimento*, vol. 12, 1972, pp. 79-133. On political themes in the *Intercenales*, see Mario Martelli, 'Motivi politici nelle *Intercenales* di Leon Battista Alberti', in Francesco Furlan (ed.), *Leon Battista Alberti: Actes du congrès international de Paris*, 2 vols, Paris, 2000, vol.1, pp. 477-491.

²¹ On Plautus' and Terence's influence on the *Intercenales*, see Alberto Martelli, *Appresso i comici poeti. Spigolature plautine e terenziane in Leon Battista Alberti*, Florence, 2011, pp. 39-80. On Alberti and Latin satire, see Marsh, 'Poggio and Alberti', pp. 198-201. On the relationship between Alberti and Apuleius, see David Marsh, 'Alberti and Apuleius. Comic Violence and Vehemence in the *Intercenales* and *Momus*', in *Alberti: Actes du congrès international de Paris*, vol. 1, pp. 405-426.

²² Lucia Battaglia Ricci, 'In ozio e in ombra. Alberti, Boccaccio e la novellistica antica', in Roberto Cardini and Mariangela Regoliosi (eds), *Alberti e la cultura del Quattrocento*, 2 vols, Florence, 2007, vol. 1, pp. 173-199; Kircher, *Living Well in Renaissance Italy*, pp. 89-109.

²³ Roberto Cardini, *Mosaici. Il 'nemico' dell'Alberti*, Rome, 1990, pp. 1-50.

Some of the books of the *Intercenales*, namely, the first, the second, the fourth, the seventh, the eighth and the tenth, are introduced by a preface. A reading of these prefaces, probably composed in Florence when Alberti organised his writings in the early 1440s, may represent a suitable starting point, since they disclose crucial features of the collection. The preface to the first book is dedicated to Alberti's friend Paolo dal Pozzo Toscanelli, a renowned Florentine doctor, mathematician and astronomer. Alberti claims that he had divided his *Intercenales* into short books so that they could be read in a leisurely manner and in a convivial atmosphere. In the following lines he draws a parallel between Toscanelli's medicines and his compositions, endowing them with a serious purpose. Just as medicines, albeit bitter and unpleasant, treat sick bodies, so his writings, through laughter and hilarity, restore ailing minds.²⁴ Lastly, he introduces the core topic of the first book, the relationship between fortune and virtue.

Bruni is the dedicatee of the preface to the second book. It opens with a fable of Aesopian inspiration by which Alberti expresses his preference for a humble literary style over a magniloquent one. 'Not all of us resemble you, whose wealth of talent and learning is enhanced by the great power and abundance of your eloquence', he then writes, not without a certain irony, addressing Bruni.²⁵ Alberti's polemical intent becomes manifest when he states that his *Intercenales* will disturb the ears of the crowd, a metaphor presumably referring to the prevailing literary trend of his age, that is, the imitation of Cicero's eloquence.²⁶

Alberti's criticism of the servile imitation of Cicero among his contemporaries is central also to the preface to the fourth book, dedicated to Poggio. Alberti compares his detractors, who privilege classical Latin rhetoric over his more variegated style, to a

²⁴ On the therapeutic power of laughter in the *Intercenales*, see Maria Luisa Cannarsa, 'Le *Intercenales* albertiane: una cura di verità', in *Alberti: Actes du congrès international de Paris*, vol. 1, pp. 511-525.

²⁵ Leon Battista Alberti, *Dinner Pieces*, tr. D. Marsh, Binghamton, NY, 1987, p. 34. Latin text: Leon Battista Alberti, *Intercenales*, trs F. Bacchelli and L. D'Ascia, Bologna, 2003, p. 84: 'neque enim omnes tibi sumus similes, qui ad ingenii doctrine divitias summam quoque vim et copiam eloquentie adcumularas.'

²⁶ On the history of Ciceronianism and anti-Ciceronianism in Renaissance Italy, see Remigio Sabbadini, *Storia del ciceronianismo e di altre questioni letterarie nell'età della Rinascenza*, Turin, 1885; Izora Scott, *Controversies over the Imitation of Cicero as a Model for Style and Some Phases of Their Influence on the Schools of the Renaissance*, New York, NY, 1910; John D'Amico, 'The Progress of Renaissance Latin Prose: The Case of Apuleianism', *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. 37, 1984, pp. 351-392; Martin McLaughlin, *Literary Imitation in the Italian Renaissance. The Theory and Practice of Literary Imitation in Italy from Dante to Bembo*, Oxford, 1995 (in particular pp. 185-274; see also pp. 152-153 for an analysis of Alberti's criticism of Ciceronianism in the *Intercenales*); Vincenzo Fera, 'Dionisotti e il ciceronianesimo', preface to Carlo Dionisotti, *Gli umanisti e il volgare fra Quattro e Cinquecento*, Milan, 2003, pp. vii-xxxv; JoAnn DellaNeva (ed.), *Ciceronian Controversies*, Cambridge, MA, 2007; id., 'Following Their Own *Genius*. Debates on Ciceronianism in 16th-Century Italy', in William H. F. Altman (ed.), *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Cicero*, Leiden, 2015, pp. 357-376; Martin McLaughlin, 'Renascens ad superos Cicero: Ciceronian and anti-Ciceronian Styles in the Italian Renaissance', in Gesine Manuwald (ed.), *The Afterlife of Cicero*, London, 2016, pp. 67-81.

buffalo criticising a goat on account of her decision to graze in barely accessible pastures, thereby revealing his resentment. Alberti maintains that, contrary to conventional eloquence, his literary quest resembles the intellectual effort of those who try to comprehend the mysteries of nature.

The preface to the seventh book lacks the name of the dedicatee, but Alberti's definition of him as the most eminent man of letters of the time suggests that the addressee is Bruni.²⁷ Alberti's criticism of Ciceronianism reaches its peak. Relying again on metaphorical images, he likens humanists to ingenuous fauns and satyrs who, having fallen in love with the moon, attempt in vain to capture it. The moon stands for the unreachable Ciceronian model that scholars would like to master perfectly by accumulating and reading books. These pedants, whom Alberti depicts as the antithesis of what humanists should be, are totally unaware of how eloquence, far from being crystallised into a unique and immutable paradigm, is a flexible instrument. 'Eloquence is so varied that even Cicero is sometimes very un-Ciceronian', Alberti remarks.²⁸ As McLaughlin has pointed out, Alberti's stance stems from Cicero himself, notably from his *De oratore*, *Orator* and *Brutus*, three texts rediscovered in Lodi in 1421 that Gasparino Barzizza, Alberti's teacher in Padua, contributed to disseminating.²⁹ In these compositions Cicero expounds the idea that it is appropriate for an orator to evolve in the course of time, moving from one style to another. He also underlines the importance of humour and wit in the repertoire of a rhetorician, an element that surely did not pass unnoticed to Alberti.³⁰ It is therefore worth highlighting that Alberti's criticism of the fashionable emulation of Cicero originated to a significant extent from Cicero himself, an author whom he greatly admired.³¹

The last two prefaces, to the eight and tenth books, do not have a dedicatee. The former, akin to an Aesopian tale, portrays a musical competition between a frog and a cicada, with a crow as a judge. The cicada symbolises a distinct, although monotonous, style, whereas the frog embodies the mixture, inventive yet inharmonious, of different genres. Disappointed with the prolonged quarrel between the two rivals, the crow leaves without rendering a verdict. Contrary to what happens in the other prefaces, Alberti does

²⁷ As argued, for example, by Cecil Grayson, 'Il prosatore latino e volgare', in id., *Studi su Leon Battista Alberti*, Florence, 1998, pp. 325-341 (at p. 329).

²⁸ Alberti, *Dinner Pieces*, tr. D. Marsh, p. 127. Latin text: Alberti, *Intercenales*, p. 450: 'at enim varia res est eloquentia, ut ipse interdum sibi Cicero perdissemilis sit.'

²⁹ McLaughlin, 'Alberti and the Classical Canon', pp. 90-92.

³⁰ Id., 'Alberti and the Redirection of Renaissance Humanism', p. 40.

³¹ On the importance of Cicero for Alberti, see Martin McLaughlin, 'Alberti e le opere retoriche di Cicerone', in *Alberti e la tradizione*, vol. 1, pp. 181-210.

not comment on his fable, apart from claiming that ‘posterity will freely judge my work’.³² Alberti’s short story seems to be an allegory by which he reiterates his polemic with the Florentine cultural environment, charging his fellow humanists with privileging stylistic elegance before invention. His reference to posterity might reveal his trust in a more benevolent appraisal of his work after a shift in the dominant literary taste.

The last preface, which includes another tale, treats a matter already touched upon by Alberti, that is, the dearth of authentic friendship among men of letters. In Alberti’s view, humanists, despite a supposed common passion for knowledge and virtue, are only concerned about their personal interests. He concludes his piece by exhorting intellectuals to join him ‘in showing posterity that our age is neither lacking in humorous writers nor completely filled with envy’.³³ Evidently, besides the desire for a loyal community of scholars, Alberti sets great store on humour.

We may recapitulate the main themes and ideas that Alberti discusses in his prefaces as follows. First, Alberti presents his writings as humorous compositions. The humour of the *Intercenales*, rather than aiming at simple entertainment, is endowed with a therapeutic power. Second, he repeatedly marks the difference between the originality and eclecticism of his pieces on the one hand and the slavish imitation of Cicero, which he regards as a widespread literary practice, on the other. Far from representing an attack on Cicero himself, Alberti’s criticism is grounded on the rhetorical theories advanced by the Roman orator. Lucian’s corpus, as we shall see shortly, furnished Alberti with an inspiring model to devise an alternative to the Ciceronian dialogue. Third, it seems clear that Alberti is finding fault with the Florentine cultural establishment, Brunni in particular.³⁴ Alberti’s description of him in the second preface is so grandiloquent that it resembles a caricature. Moreover, he probably dedicated to him also the seventh preface, the one in which his lampooning of Ciceronianism is more noticeable.

Alberti’s decision to title his collection *Intercenales*, a Latin neologism evoking a convivial atmosphere, rendered into English by David Marsh as *Dinner Pieces*, may be interpreted as another sign of his polemic against early Florentine humanism. Brunni, its most distinguished representative, sought to re-establish the public value of oratory, as

³² Alberti, *Dinner Pieces*, tr. D. Marsh, p. 149. Latin text: Alberti, *Intercenales*, p. 532: ‘posteritas de nobis quid sentiat, libere iudicabit.’

³³ Alberti, *Dinner Pieces*, tr. D. Marsh, p. 167. Latin text: Alberti, *Intercenales*, p. 606: ‘ut nostra hec tempora, cum iocosis scriptoribus non vacua, tum eadem posterit non invidie fuisse plena sentiant.’

³⁴ On Alberti and Florentine humanism, see Roberto Cardini, ‘Alberti e Firenze’, in *Alberti e la cultura del Quattrocento*, vol. 1, pp. 223-266. For a detailed historical account of the relationship between Alberti and Florence, see Luca Boschetto, *Leon Battista Alberti e Firenze. Biografia, storia, letteratura*, Florence, 2000.

apparent in his *Laudatio florentinae urbis*, a panegyric to the city of Florence. By contrast, Alberti's dismissal of a grandiose style, along with his interest in mythological motifs and allegories, mainly mediated by Lucian's dialogues and Aesop's tales, points to a more restricted public as well as to different aims, the pursuit of originality being one of the most important.

Many scholars have noted that some aspects of Alberti's biography fuelled his critical outlook on Florentine humanism. Born in Genoa in exile, Alberti never fully reconciled himself with Florence, the city from which his family had been banned at the end of the fourteenth century, not even after 1428, the year in which the ban was revoked. In Cardini's words, Alberti's relationship with Florence was 'una relazione di amore-odio gremita di crisi e di ripensamenti, e per lo più conflittuale'.³⁵ Alberti's disillusionment with Florence surfaces several times in the *Intercenales*, as, for example, in *Scriptor*, placed at the very beginning of the collection.³⁶ In this short dialogue, Lepidus and Libripeta, two recurring characters in the *Intercenales*, converse about what being a writer involves. Libripeta discourages his interlocutor from pursuing a career as a man of letters in Tuscany, a region 'which lies entirely under the cloud of ignorance, and where all moisture is utterly consumed by the heat of ambitions and desires'.³⁷ Likewise, in *Discordia*, a Lucianic dialogue between Argos and Mercury, Florence is presented as a city that, although once illustrious, decayed and went to rack and ruin.

Alberti's reinvention of the Lucianic dialogue, as indicated above, constituted a major way by which he distanced himself from the hackneyed Ciceronian model and gave concrete shape to his quest for a novel form of expression in Latin prose. Before analysing the pieces displaying the most evident Lucianic influence, it may be helpful to examine Alberti's approach to his reading and interpretation of Lucian. His focus was on the most satirical and provocative traits characterising Lucian's corpus. In his *Intercenales*, he remoulded a vast array of Lucianic motifs so as to scrutinise critically the world in which he found himself and problematise significant intellectual matters of his day, such as, for example, the value of the *studia humanitatis*. In many of his Lucianic pieces, his narrative gives the impression of a gloomy vision of society and human existence. This is not to say that Garin's picture of Alberti should be restored wholesale.

³⁵ Cardini, 'Alberti e Firenze', p. 229.

³⁶ Cardini has suggested to regard *Scriptor* as a 'paratext' rather than as a piece of the collection. See 'Alberti e Firenze', pp. 234-235.

³⁷ Alberti, *Dinner Pieces*, tr. D. Marsh, p. 16. Latin text: Alberti, *Intercenales*, p. 8: 'qui quidem tam undique opertus est caligine omnis ignorantie, cuius et hominis humor est penitus absumptus estu ambitionum et cupiditatum.'

One should not forget that irony is at work and that Alberti, in the preface to the first book of his collection, programmatically stated that the humour of his compositions functions as a medicine for the soul. The pessimism emerging from various passages of the *Intercenales* should not be taken literally nor wholly downplayed. Indeed, peculiar to Alberti is a reflection, never trivial, on the complexity of life. It is almost superfluous to remark that the level of theoretical sophistication is higher in Alberti than in his Lucianic model.

Defunctus

Defunctus, the longest piece of the collection, encapsulates most of the themes typical of Alberti's Lucianic *Intercenales*, and can be read, as it were, as a manifesto of his Lucianism. Neophronus and Polytropus, the two characters conducting the dialogue, meet at the threshold of the underworld shortly after the death of the former. Neophronus' account of what he saw on earth after having left his mortal body triggers a meditation on the countless contradictions and ambiguities marking human existence.

The piece is Lucianic from the very beginning. The way in which Neophronus and Polytropus greet each other is evocative of the opening of *Menippus*, when Menippus, on returning from his journey to Hades, meets a friend who is eager to find out why he has been absent from the city for such a long time.³⁸ Before satisfying his curiosity, Menippus asks in turn what is happening among mortals. His friend replies that men, as usual, are busy 'stealing, lying under oath, extorting usury, and weighing pennies'.³⁹ *Defunctus* presents a similar pattern. After Neophronus and Polytropus, two old friends, have recognised each other, Polytropus wants to know about life on earth after his decease. Neophronus does not hesitate to assert that everyone is mad and that all human deeds, if considered from a lofty vantage point, turn out to be vain and foolish.

The folly of life represents the main thread conferring unity on the dialogue. By observing how maliciously his wife, son, servants and kinsmen behave after his passing, Neophronus realises that he has been deceived throughout his entire existence. The betrayal of his wife is the first piece of evidence to make him aware of his foolishness during his mortal existence. At his funeral, she left the crowd of mourners and, together with the steward Melibeus, she moved to another chamber, where they indulged in the joys of love. This episode is based on Lucian's *The Downward Journey*.⁴⁰ After his

³⁸ Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, p. 57.

³⁹ Lucian, 'Menippus', 2, in [Lucian], vol. 4, p. 77.

⁴⁰ Mattioli, *Luciano e l'umanesimo*, p. 83. On this point, see also Geri, *A colloquio con Luciano*, pp. 51-53.

descent to the underworld, the tyrant Megapenthes begs Clotho, one of the Three Fates, to let him return to the upper world to take revenge on his treacherous servant Cario. Immediately after his demise, Cario and Glycerium, Megapenthes' mistress, went to the room where his corpse lay and enjoyed the pleasures of love. Cario then shouted insults at Megapenthes' cadaver and even committed acts of violence against it.⁴¹ Contrary to Lucian's story, Alberti's does not hint at rage or revenge. Neophronus reacts by laughing at his wife's betrayal and blames himself for his spiritual blindness, which, he observes, is found in all men. By transposing Neophronus' personal experience into a universal level, Alberti rewrote Lucian's scene and bestowed a more profound existential meaning on it.

A Lucianic vein also shines through the following passage of *Defunctus*. Gazing upon his own funeral, Neophronus notes the grotesque behaviour of the mourners. It turns out that an old man, seemingly very afflicted, did not even know Neophronus, but he was simply conforming to the general atmosphere. Lucian ridiculed burial practices in *On Funerals*, a text in which he pointed out how mourners, under the influence of poetical tales, slavishly followed superstitious customs. Besides the critique of mourning traditions, *On Funerals* and *Defunctus* share the idea that death is not inferior to life in any way. 'What advantage do you think there is in life that we shall never again partake of?' is the ironic question that, in Lucian's view, the dead would like to ask those of their relatives that were still alive.⁴² In *Defunctus*, worldly existence appears as a series of deceits, which can be partly unmasked only after death.⁴³

Defunctus proceeds to the end by juxtaposing scenes in which Neophronus becomes increasingly conscious of how his life was illusory. Relatives and servants alike are disloyal to him after his demise. His son, supposedly a model of virtue, rejoiced at his death, revealing thereby his true, malicious, nature.⁴⁴ By the same token, his dishonest wine steward decided to waste the precious wine that he should have guarded by offering it to all the servants. In this episode Alberti inserted a digression on the use of money reminiscent of Lucian's *Timon*.⁴⁵ Discussing with the god Riches, Zeus recalls how he used to scorn people who were unduly parsimonious, since they were unaware 'that a cursed valet or a shackle-burnishing steward would slip in by stealth and play havoc'.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Lucian, 'The Downward Journey', 12, in [Lucian], vol. 2, pp. 24-27.

⁴² Lucian, 'On Funerals', 16, in [Lucian], vol. 4, p. 123.

⁴³ On the comparison between *Defunctus* and *On Funerals*, see Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, p. 58; Geri, *A colloquio con Luciano*, pp. 49-50.

⁴⁴ In shaping the character of the son, Alberti recovered the *topos* of the *senex puer*, a widespread motif in late antique literature, as expressed by Apuleius in his *Apologia*. See Marsh, 'Alberti and Apuleius', p. 411.

⁴⁵ As noted by Acocella, 'Appunti sulla presenza di Luciano nelle *Intercenales*', pp. 131-133.

⁴⁶ Lucian, 'Timon', 14, in [Lucian], vol. 2, p. 343.

Riches maintains that he considers foolish those who keep hidden treasure but he equally decries those who are excessively prodigal. What is worthy of praise, he continues, is moderation. In *Defunctus*, Polytropus reaches a similar conclusion and observes that frugality may be more harmful than prodigality.

The passage concerning Neophronus' library, as explained later, is one of the most significant in *Defunctus*. Neophronus recounts that his kinsmen, after having discovered that there was nothing for them in his will, burst into his library and ruined it irremediably, stealing the valuable volumes and scattering all the other books. Furthermore, having found a precious ointment, they took Neophronus' manuscripts, containing the historical writings on which he had worked unstintingly for many years, and used them to wrap up the unguent. 'Thus I laboured all my life to produce erudite cones of wrapping paper' is the sorrowful remark by which Neophronus comments on this distressing spectacle.⁴⁷

At the end of *Defunctus*, Neophronus recalls other sad events that he beheld after his death. On the occasion of his funeral, the bishop Hermio delivered a sermon in his honour without, however, mentioning his moral integrity and dignity. Moreover, the wicked Tirsius accidentally found the gold that Neophronus, for the sake of his sons, had hidden near an aqueduct before dying. After having discussed these unfortunate circumstances, Polytropus is eager to know how rulers act on earth, as if he wanted to pose the question of whether politics can oppose the injustices of life. Neophronus' reply leaves no room for doubt: rulers are as foolish as other men, but far more cruel. Their longing for absolute power and money leads them to oppress ruthlessly their citizens. This passage echoes Cyniscus' invective against the tyrant Megapenthes in *The Downward Journey*.⁴⁸ In front of the infernal judge Rhadamanthus, Cyniscus gives a speech stressing the countless nefarious deeds that Megapenthes committed in his lifetime. No malfeasance was omitted, since the tyrant 'practised every sort of savagery and high-handedness upon his miserable fellow-citizens, ravishing maids, corrupting boys, and running amuck in every way among his subjects'.⁴⁹

Three principal conceptual layers, partly overlapping, may be identified in *Defunctus*. The first is social criticism, which manifests itself in, for example, Alberti's description of the superstitious practices taking place at Neophronus' funeral or the

⁴⁷ Alberti, *Dinner Pieces*, tr. D. Marsh, p. 114. Latin text: Alberti, *Intercenales*, p. 404: 'ergo per omnem etatem elaboravi, ut eruditissimos cucullos ederem.'

⁴⁸ Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, p. 58.

⁴⁹ Lucian, 'The Downward Journey', 26, p. 51.

disparaging characterisation of people in power that brings the piece to a conclusion. The second is the conception of life as a theatrical performance. Death has granted a novel vantage point to Neophronus, who, looking at what happens on earth as if he were the spectator of a play, realises that his worldly existence has been fully deceptive. It is likely that Alberti borrowed the metaphor of life as a stage from Lucian, who employed this image in *Menippus*, *Icaromenippus* and *Nigrinus*.⁵⁰ Also Filippo Brunelleschi's studies on perspective, intimating that reality and truth are mutable, might have contributed to shaping Alberti's stance.⁵¹ The pessimistic outlook of Neophronus, who, as a consequence of his new, 'theatrical', viewpoint, came to regard folly as the distinctive trait of human existence, is tempered by the comments of his interlocutor, Polytropus. The latter holds that prudence and virtue represent a bulwark against the power of irrationality. The discord between them emerges sharply towards the end of the dialogue, when Polytropus declares that he would like to re-enter his body and come back to life, raising the stark opposition of Neophronus, who, on the contrary, intends to stay clear of mundane troubles. The two characters do not find a resolution to this matter, which remains unresolved.

Neophronus and Polytropus disagree also on the value of the *studia humanitatis*, the third conceptual layer in *Defunctus*, as apparent in the episode revolving around Neophronus' library. This section discloses that Neophronus was in mortal life an erudite humanist, who spent innumerable nights penning his historical commentaries. After the destruction of his, so to speak, 'sudate carte', he bemoans the time wasted on his scholarly endeavour. It has been argued that this scene points to Alberti's criticism of literary studies, which, instead of increasing Neophronus' understanding of contemporary issues, have alienated him from his relatives, friends, society in general as well as from himself, in that his knowledge did not help him unmask the numerous deceits and hypocrisies marking his life.⁵² It should be added that Polytropus acts, once again, as a counterpart of his interlocutor, singing the praises of the *studia humanitatis*. No more than for sentiments concerning the folly of life, the dialogue does not seem to suggest a

⁵⁰ Lucian, 'Menippus', 16, pp. 98-101; id., 'Icaromenippus', 17, in [Lucian], vol. 2, pp. 296-299; id., 'Nigrinus', 18-20, in [Lucian], vol. 1, pp. 118-121. On the importance of theatrical images and metaphors in Alberti's writings, see Lucia Cesarini Martinelli, 'Metafore teatrali in Leon Battista Alberti', *Rinascimento*, vol. 29, 1989, pp. 3-51.

⁵¹ Roberto Cardini, 'Paralipomeni all'Alberti umorista', *Les Cahiers de l'Humanisme*, vol. 2, 2001, pp. 177-188 (at pp. 182-183).

⁵² From different perspectives, this argument has been made by Mark Jarzombek, 'The *enigma* of Alberti's *dissimulatio*', in *Alberti: Actes du congrès international de Paris*, vol. 2, pp. 741-748 (at pp. 742-743) and Timothy Kircher, 'Dead Souls: Leon Battista Alberti's Anatomy of Humanism', *MLN*, vol. 127, 2012, pp. 108-123.

simple answer. A similar ambiguity imbues Alberti's *De commodis litterarum atque incommodis*, a treatise, probably composed in the early 1430s (the period in which *Defunctus* was also composed), on the advantages and disadvantages of a career as a man of letters.⁵³ Alberti dedicated most of the text to the latter. Ascetic preoccupation with a specific subject, perpetual dissatisfaction with their oeuvre, estrangement from worldly pleasures, lack of monetary reward and complicated relationships with their peers constitute the dark side of scholars' lives. And yet, not too differently from *Defunctus*, Alberti ended his piece with a heartfelt apology for the *studia humanitatis*. With particular reference to *Defunctus*, it may be argued that Alberti's criticism, rather than targeting the *studia humanitatis tout court*, is directed at the pedantic way of conceiving them characteristic of some of his contemporaries. As discussed above, Alberti championed a new type of humanism. His *Intercenales* evince a polemical outlook on the more conventional one, especially of Florentine tendency, as the prefaces dedicated to Bruni and Poggio suggest. Indeed, the depiction of Neophronus recalls the figure of a stereotypical humanist, immersed in historical researches in his library, instead of embodying the characteristics peculiar to Alberti's humanism, the interest in technical treatises and a penchant for humorous literature being two notable elements.

Somnium, Virtus, Cynicus, Corolle, Religio and Nummus

In the other Lucianic *Intercenales* Alberti developed in different forms the main themes present in *Defunctus*. *Somnium*, included in the same book as *Defunctus*, the fourth, portrays folly as the sole everlasting possession of human beings. Its opening, as that of *Defunctus*, echoes the beginning of Lucian's *Menippus*, but, unlike what happens in those pieces, Libripeta, before meeting his friend Lepidus, emerges from a sewer. Lepidus mocks his interlocutor, famous for being an avid book collector, insinuating that he went to that filthy place in the hope of finding ancient volumes.⁵⁴ Libripeta dismisses Lepidus' quip and tells him his unusual story. Astonished at the number of fools surrounding him, he thought that the land of dreams, a motif probably borrowed from Lucian's *A True*

⁵³ On Alberti's *De commodis*, see Mariangela Regoliosi, 'Gerarchie culturali e sociali nel *De commodis litterarum atque incommodis* di Leon Battista Alberti', in Luisa Avellini, Andrea Cristiani and Angela De Benedictis (eds), *Sapere e/è potere. Discipline, dispute e professioni nell'università medievale e moderna*, 3 vols, Bologna, 1990, vol. 1, pp. 151-170.

⁵⁴ Many scholars have identified Libripeta with the humanist and bibliophile Niccolò Niccoli. See, for example, Garin, 'Venticinque Intercenali inedite', p. 387; Giovanni Ponte, 'Lepidus e Libripeta', *Rinascimento*, vol. 12, 1972, pp. 237-265. More convincing, in my view, is Cardini's interpretation, according to which Libripeta is a symbolic character rather than a historical figure. See Roberto Cardini, 'Onomastica albertiana', *Moderni e Antichi*, vol.1, 2003, pp. 143-175 (at pp. 167-168); id., 'Alberti e Firenze', pp. 237-246.

Story, would be more suitable for his character. With the help of a priest well-versed in magical arts, he learnt the shortest way to get there while being awake. This passage is evocative of the episode in *Menippus* in which, in order to prepare himself for his descent to the underworld, Menippus goes to Babylon and meets the magician Mithrobarzanes.⁵⁵ Libripeta then narrates his outlandish experiences in the realm of dreams. Beyond a river, the waters of which carried human heads of every shape and appearance, there were mountains and valleys filled with all those things, both material and spiritual, that men had misplaced. ‘In the middle of those fields,’ Libripeta relates, ‘there are the ancient empires of nations we read about, as well as reputations, favours, loves, riches, and all such things that never return, once they are lost’.⁵⁶ The land of dreams contains everything but folly, he continues, thus revealing that folly is an inseparable companion of human beings.

Somnium ends with imaginative descriptions inspired by Lucian. Libripeta recounts that he looked at a high mountain in which all the objects of human desire were mixed together and, as if in a cauldron, boiled. Around this mountain lay the prayers that mankind had addressed to the gods. These images are reminiscent of *Icaromenippus*, where Lucian writes that, on Olympus, ‘there was a row of openings like mouths of wells, with covers on them’ and that Zeus, in order to deal with the requests of men, had to take off those covers.⁵⁷ After that, Libripeta reached a river and saw, close to its bank, some naked old women who, once proud in their youth, had the duty of ferrying people to the other bank, in a sort of Dantesque contrapasso. In depicting these figures Alberti reshaped a Lucianic invention. In *A True Story*, the protagonist and his friends encounter ‘men who were following a novel mode of sailing, being at once sailors and ships’.⁵⁸ On the other side of the river, Libripeta beheld bizarre meadows in which, instead of grass and flowers, human and animal hair grew. Finally, when attacked by a myriad of lice, he escaped and came back to the world through a stinking sewer, to be greeted by Lepidus.

If *Somnium*, through the fantastic journey of Libripeta, associates folly with human existence, *Virtus*, placed in the first book of the collection, deals with the lack of justice in the world. Contemporaries mistakenly took it to be a translation of an original dialogue of

⁵⁵ As noted by Mattioli, *Luciano e l’umanesimo*, p. 86.

⁵⁶ Alberti, *Dinner Pieces*, tr. D. Marsh, p. 67. Latin text: Alberti, *Intercenales*, p. 234: ‘adsunt quidem in mediis campis antiqua illa, que leguntur, imperia gentium, auctoritates, beneficia, amores, divitie et eiusmodi omnia, que posteaquam amissa sunt, nunquam in hanc lucem redeunt.’

⁵⁷ Lucian, ‘Icaromenippus’, 25, p. 311. Alberti’s borrowing from Lucian’s *Icaromenippus* has been noted by Mattioli, *Luciano e l’umanesimo*, p. 87.

⁵⁸ Lucian, ‘A True Story’, Book 2, 45, in [Lucian], vol. 1, pp. 351-353. Bacchelli and D’Ascia have pointed out this parallel in their edition of the *Intercenales*, p. 237.

Lucian and, under the name of *Virtus dea*, ascribed it to either Giovanni Aurispa or Carlo Marsuppini. Outside Olympus, the goddess Virtue has been waiting for a month to meet Jupiter. Since the latter does not welcome her, she addresses Mercury, telling him how badly she has been offended. While in the Elysian Fields together with her disciples, including Socrates, Plato, Cicero and other sages of antiquity, the goddess Fortune, surrounded by men in arms, suddenly came and started to shout insults at her.⁵⁹ A fight soon broke out, with Fortune's devotees easily prevailing. Although Virtue was cruelly beaten, it is unreasonable that Fortune should be punished, since, as Mercury remarks, Jupiter himself depends on her. 'Then I must hide eternally' is the bitter conclusion drawn by Virtue.⁶⁰

The principal sources for Alberti's *Virtus* were probably late antique allegorical works, such as *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* of Martianus Capella, and Lucian's corpus. The figure of a weak Jupiter at the mercy of Fortune, for instance, is central to *Zeus Catechized*. Overall, the dialogue of Lucian sharing the most affinities with *Virtus* is *The Runaways*, a pointed attack on sham philosophers.⁶¹ Instead of Virtue, its protagonist is the personification of Philosophy, who leaves the world and, before Zeus, complains that she has been insulted. She blames neither the masses nor authentic philosophers, but all those who imitate the latter in appearance and dress, without, however, dedicating their lives to real philosophical enquiry. Differently from what happens in *Virtus*, Zeus takes the side of Philosophy and sends to earth Hermes and Heracles to punish sham philosophers. Alberti's piece, in which Fortune goes unpunished, seems to be more cynical than Lucian's.⁶²

Alberti's *Virtus* inspired Maffeo Vegio's *Philalethes* (a text, composed in Florence in 1444, also known as *Dialogus Veritatis et Philalethis*), an allegorical dialogue between Philalethes, name translatable as 'lover of truth', and Truth itself.⁶³ In all likelihood, Vegio deemed *Virtus* to have been a translation of an authentic piece of Lucian.⁶⁴ After

⁵⁹ The presence of Roman historical figures, unusual in Lucian's dialogues, represents a clue about the inauthenticity of the text, which, however, readers in Quattrocento Italy overlooked. See Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, p. 35.

⁶⁰ Alberti, *Dinner Pieces*, tr. D. Marsh, p. 22. Latin text: Alberti, *Intercenales*, p. 38: 'eternum latitandum est.'

⁶¹ Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, p. 83.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 83.

⁶³ Besides *Philalethes*, Vegio wrote other two Lucianic pieces, *Palinurus* and the *Disputatio inter solem, terram et aurum*. Scholarly literature agrees that these works constitute an example of derivative Lucianism, in the sense that Vegio simply imitated some outwards elements typical of Lucian's dialogues, notably setting and characters, without bringing any substantial innovation. See, for example, Mattioli, *Luciano e l'umanesimo*, p. 148; Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, p. 67.

⁶⁴ Sidwell, *Lucian in the Italian Quattrocento*, pp. 220-221.

having met in an isolated and mountainous place, Truth, who appears to be beaten, tells her sorrowful story to Philaethes. At first, Jupiter decided to send to earth the goddesses Concordia, Peace, Justice and Pudicitia. Since they were unsuccessful in establishing order and harmony among men, he turned to Truth, vainly hoping for a better result. On earth, Truth experienced every kind of abuse. She was astonished at the violence of soldiers and sailors, who injured her, using nautical instruments as weapons. Truth then recounts how farmers, priests, merchants, women, children, artisans, painters and lawyers equally mistreated her. Seeking assistance, she went to the palaces of rulers, who, instead of being compassionate, exiled her from their city. Paradoxically, only outside it did she find relief, when wild beasts took care of her. After Truth's account, Philaethes begs her to spend some time with him in his frugal dwelling, a request to which Truth accedes.

Cynicus and *Corolle*, both included in the fourth book, expound Alberti's criticism of society and his satire of a certain manner of conceiving the *studia humanitatis*. Set in a Lucianic underworld, *Cynicus* presents different groups of dead waiting for Phoebus' judgment on their worldly existence. Together with Mercury, the witty and impudent Cynicus acts as his assistant, unmasking the hypocrisy characteristic of reputable people on earth. The first group of dead is composed of priests, making their case by claiming that they were deservedly considered holy prelates. What permitted them to obtain praise and glory, Cynicus rebuts, was nothing but sophisticated simulation. He also condemns them for being the cause of wars and carnages.⁶⁵ Phoebus would like to punish the priests by turning them into harpies, but Cynicus, noting how harmful they might be if transformed into such terrible monsters, suggests that an asinine shape would be more appropriate, arousing Phoebus' approval. The metamorphosis of culprits into asses is a Lucianic motif present in *Menippus*.⁶⁶ During his stay in the underworld, Menippus witnesses an assembly summoned to discuss various matters, including how to deal best with the wicked deeds that the rich customarily commit. A demagogue reads a motion, eventually ratified, proposing that, after death, their souls should enter into donkey bodies 'until they shall have passed two hundred and fifty thousand years in the said condition, transmigrating from donkey to donkey'.⁶⁷

After priests, it is the turn of magistrates. Cynicus' invective against them is modelled on Cyniscus' attack on the tyrant Megapenthes in *The Downward Journey*, the

⁶⁵ In this respect Alberti's position is similar to that expressed by Lorenzo Valla in his *De falso credita et ementita Constantini donatione*.

⁶⁶ Mattioli, *Luciano e l'umanesimo*, p. 87.

⁶⁷ Lucian, 'Menippus', 20, p. 107.

same passage that inspired also the close of *Defunctus*.⁶⁸ The central section of *Cynicus* is dedicated to Alberti's mockery of natural philosophers, historians, poets and rhetoricians. As far as the first two categories are concerned, he drew heavily on Lucian's oeuvre. Cynicus charges philosophers with imposing their precepts not only on citizens and kings, but even on the stars and other natural entities. They proudly considered themselves capable of measuring everything, foretelling the future and comprehending any celestial law. In reality, Cynicus ironically observes, they are so dull-witted that they could almost cut themselves by handling their sharp triangles. His words are redolent of Menippus' parodic portrayal of natural philosophers in *Icaromenippus*.⁶⁹ Cynicus then blames historians for inventing magnificent stories, epic battles and pompous speeches while being locked up in their libraries. Lucian broached the same subject in *How to Write History*, an essay in which he warned against the unjustified mixing of history with poetry and rhetoric.⁷⁰ The last group of dead is composed of merchants, who are condemned for their gratuitous ostentation of wealth and turned into cockroaches. *Cynicus* ends with yet another metamorphosis. Before leaving, Phoebus transforms Cynicus himself into a golden fly, probably an allusion to Lucian's mock encomium *The Fly*, a text that drew Alberti's interest to the point that he decided to compose a Latin mock encomium of the same creature, *Musca*.⁷¹

In *Corolle* Alberti pokes fun at pedantic approaches to the *studia humanitatis*.⁷² A poet and a rhetorician aspire to earn the garlands that Praise, who can count on the advice of Envy, has received from her mother, Virtue. None of them proves to be deserving of such an outstanding award. The poet tries to persuade Praise by declaiming a Virgilian verse. Asked to add another verse, he replies: 'I'm off to the library, where in a night's study I shall produce more than a hundred verses'.⁷³ In order to ingratiate himself with Praise, the rhetorician delivers a talk so artificially elaborate that it becomes ridiculous. In depicting this figure, Alberti possibly availed himself of *A Professor of Public Speaking*, a piece in which Lucian portrayed an experienced and shrewd rhetorician suggesting his

⁶⁸ Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, pp. 63-64.

⁶⁹ Lucian, 'Icaromenippus', 6, pp. 276-279.

⁷⁰ The connection between Lucian's *How to Write History* and Alberti's *Cynicus* has been noted by Cardini, *Mosaici*, p. 54.

⁷¹ Cynicus' metamorphosis might also allude to Burchiello's sonnet *Se tu volessi fare un buon minuto*, as suggested by Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, pp. 65-66. Burchiello's sonnet is contained in Antonio Lanza, *Polemiche e berte letterarie nella Firenze del primo Quattrocento*, Rome, 1971, p. 370.

⁷² As underlined by Cardini, *Mosaici*, pp. 54-56.

⁷³ Alberti, *Dinner Pieces*, tr. D. Marsh, p. 70. Latin text: Alberti, *Intercenales*, p. 248: 'ergo abeo hinc ad bibliothecam, ex qua versiculos plus centum una lucubratione depromam.'

young pupil to astonish his audience by using uncommon, if not obscure, expressions.⁷⁴ Evidently, by mocking the uninspired poet and the grandiloquent rhetorician, Alberti, in keeping with the ideology of the *Intercenales*, indirectly proposed an opposite cultural model, restating the importance of originality and creativity.

The character who succeeds in obtaining Praise's garlands is Lepidus. His self-description as a lover of literature not hostile to laughter points to the concept of humour integral to the *Intercenales*. Lepidus' moment of glory, however, is fleeting, in that Envy, disliking one of his quips, takes back the garlands and destroys them. A cynical vein infuses the composition.

The *Intercenales* examined above have as their primary themes the folly of life, Alberti's critique of society and his problematisation of the *studia humanitatis*. In some passages, touched upon in my analysis, he appears to be concerned also with the satire of clergymen, a trait that he developed in two pieces, *Religio*, which encompasses a broader reflection on the relationship between human beings and the gods, and *Nummus*. *Religio* portrays a dialogue between Lepidus and Libripeta. The former plays the role of the pious character, devoted to the gods and confident that they unconditionally help humankind. Prayers are vital, to the point that everything, even minutiae, can be demanded. 'I asked them to see that golden cabbages grow in my garden' is an example of Lepidus' outrageous requests, recalling one of the prayers that men address to Zeus in Lucian's *Icaromenippus*: 'O Zeus, make my onions and my garlic grow!'⁷⁵ By contrast, Libripeta is sceptical of the supposed providential plans of the gods for humankind. Given that men are the cause of their own problems, prayers are unnecessary, if not foolish. Moreover, if there were some form of providence, men's requests would certainly not exert any influence on it. Only the wicked, Libripeta concludes, bother the gods with their prayers.

The perspective expressed in *Religio* possibly implies a strong dose of anti-clericalism. Since Libripeta, the character who dominates the discussion, deems any kind of communication between human beings and the gods as pointless, one may infer that priests do not fulfil a function justifying their presence.⁷⁶ Whether this reasoning faithfully mirrors Alberti's standpoint or not, we can surmise that he intended to

⁷⁴ As suggested by Cardini, *Mosaici*, p. 54. Since the mockery of rhetoricians is a standard motif in Lucian's corpus, Alberti might have relied also on other works of his.

⁷⁵ Alberti, *Dinner Pieces*, tr. D. Marsh, p. 19. Latin text: Alberti, *Intercenales*, p. 26: 'nam petii darent operam ut mihi in hortulo caules excrescerent aurei.' Lucian, 'Icaromenippus', 25, p. 311. This similarity has been noted by Bacchelli and D'Ascia in their edition of the *Intercenales*, p. 27.

⁷⁶ On this point, see Michel Paoli, *L'Idée de nature chez Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472)*, Paris, 1999, p. 96.

undermine a notion of religion as mere exterior worship, anticipating the positions of later humanists, Desiderius Erasmus above all.

Nummus concentrates on a specific motif, widespread during the Renaissance, of anti-ecclesiastical satire, the greed of clergymen. Set in an almost mythological past, it opens by describing a gathering of wise men and priests held in Delphi. Among the numerous theological debates taking place among them, one issue stood out, namely, which deity deserved veneration more than the others. Alberti's irony is particularly biting, as evident when he recounts that Venus, Hypocrisy and Bacchus were the most appreciated gods. To put an end to the question, some priests decided to interrogate Apollo and to adhere to his response. The oracle asserted that, the following day, sunlight would show on the altar a sign alluding to the deity that they were looking for. All the priests found was a coin. Since then, Alberti caustically remarks, they have been thoroughly faithful to their supreme god and none of them has ever been charged with perjury.

Alberti's *Momus*

Alberti began to compose his later Lucianic satire, *Momus*, in 1443, when he moved from Florence to Rome along with Pope Eugenius IV and the Curia. He probably never made his work public during his lifetime. It is therefore hard to determine when he terminated his composition. The manuscript circulation of *Momus*, which started after the death of Alberti, was limited and, as far as we know, restricted to a handful of copies. The work was first printed in Rome in 1520. It appeared in two editions based on different sources, one prepared by Stefano Guillery and the other by Giacomo Mazzocchi.⁷⁷ Guillery relied mainly on the codex Parisinus Lat. 6702, held at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris, whereas Mazzocchi drew on disparate manuscript sources. Although there is no decisive evidence, Massaini, whom we have met above (p. 40), might have been involved in the publication of *Momus*.⁷⁸ The subtitle *De principe*, 'On the Prince', which in most

⁷⁷ The most recent and up-to-date account of the composition of *Momus* as well as of its circulation, both manuscript and in printed editions, is provided by Francesco Furlan in the introduction to the edition of *Momus* that he edited together with Paolo d'Alessandro. See Francesco Furlan, 'Introduction: Momus seu de homine', in Leon Battista Alberti, *Momus*, Paris, 2019, pp. xiii-xxxvi. On this theme, see also Alessandro Perosa, 'Considerazioni su testo e lingua del *Momus* dell'Alberti', in *The Languages of Literature*, pp. 45-62.

⁷⁸ Luca D'Ascia and Stefano Simoncini, 'Momo a Roma: Girolamo Massaini fra l'Alberti ed Erasmo', *Albertiana*, vol. 3, 2000, pp. 83-103; Francesco Furlan, 'Abrasaes nates: autour des *Intercenales* inconnues (Baptistae Alberti *Simiae* et de nonnullis eiusdem apologis)', in id., *Studia albertiana. Lectures et lecteurs de L. B. Alberti*, Paris, 2003, pp. 195-206 (at pp. 203-205).

editions accompanies the title, is an addition by Guillery.⁷⁹ The first translation of *Momus* into a vernacular language, Spanish, was that undertaken by Agustín de Almazán in 1553 (the title of this rendering is simply *Momus*). This translation, which came out in Alcalá de Henares and was reprinted in Madrid in 1598, was divided into short chapters preceded by didactic glosses. There is consensus that the diffusion of *Momus* in Spain contributed to the rise of the picaresque novel.⁸⁰ The Florentine scholar and diplomat Cosimo Bartoli was the first to turn *Momus* into Italian. His rendering, titled *Momo, overo del Principe*, was included in his collection of translations of numerous Alberti's works, the *Opuscoli morali di Leon Battista Alberti gentil'huomo firentino*, printed in Venice in 1568.⁸¹

An analysis of *Momus* can conveniently begin with a reading of its preface. As in the case of the prefaces of the *Intercenales*, it reveals key ideas underlying the entire work. In the preface to *Momus*, which lacks a dedicatee, Alberti restates, with even greater emphasis than in the *Intercenales*, that the fashioning of an original literary piece constitutes his main objective. He places his aesthetic ideal into a mythical, perhaps theological, framework. In the process of creating the universe, God gave all entities a portion of his majesty, keeping, however, only for himself the full abundance of divinity, which is what makes him exceptional and separate from the rest of beings. Hence people regard with admiration and astonishment the rare and unique things that they find in nature. Analogously, whoever stands out by virtue of their particular talents and abilities is judged almost divine. Writers should therefore aspire to engender innovative and surprising compositions, not an easy aim to achieve.

So I would lay it down that, if we shall ever be granted someone who equips his readers to enjoy a better life, instructing them with weighty sayings and varied and choice material, while at the same time charming them with laughter, pleasing them

⁷⁹ As noted by Sarah Knight in the introduction to her edition of *Momus* (the edition cited hereafter): Leon Battista Alberti, *Momus*, tr. S. Knight, Cambridge, MA, 2003, pp. vii-xxv (at p. vii); and by Francesco Furlan, 'Momus seu de homine. Ruses et troubles de l'exégèse, ou des errances de l'histoire', *Albertiana*, vol. 16, 2013, pp. 75-90 (at pp. 77-80).

⁸⁰ On the fortunes of Alberti's *Momus* in early modern Spain, see Mario Damonte, 'Attualità del *Momus* nella Spagna del pieno Cinquecento. La traduzione di Agustín de Almazán', in *Alberti: Actes du congrès international de Paris*, vol. 2, pp. 975-992; Alejandro Coroleu, 'Momus moralisé: Leon Battista Alberti in seventeenth-century Spain', *ibid.*, pp. 993-1000.

⁸¹ On Cosimo Bartoli's *Opuscoli morali*, see Lucia Bertolini, 'Cosimo Bartoli e gli *Opuscoli morali* dell'Alberti', in *Nel cantiere degli umanisti*, vol. 1, pp. 113-142. On Cosimo Bartoli's life and work, see Judith Bryce, *Cosimo Bartoli (1503-1572). The Career of a Florentine Polymath*, Geneva, 1983; Francesco Paolo Fiore and Daniela Lamberini (eds), *Cosimo Bartoli (1503-1572). Atti del Convegno internazionale*, Florence, 2011.

with jokes, and diverting them with pleasure, a thing which among Latin authors has not hitherto happened often enough, then I think this author should certainly not be ranked with common, ordinary, writers.⁸²

In this programmatic passage Alberti sets forth two principal concepts. First, he intends to treat serious matters in a humorous tone, which represents the pivotal principle of *serio ludere*. Second, he intimates that the seriocomic genre is almost untried in Latin literature, thus portraying himself as an innovator. At the end of his preface, Alberti also underscores the centrality of laughter. ‘I hope too that you will admire the wit and arrangement of my fictions whenever you laugh, not infrequently I trust, at the jokes and elegance that fill this whole story’, he comments.⁸³ The quest for originality, the blending of seriousness and humour and the important role of laughter are the hallmarks of Alberti’s work.

The plot of *Momus*, intricate and outlandish, may be summarised as follows. The first book opens by narrating that, when Jupiter originated the world, all the gods offered beautiful gifts, apart from Momus, the god of mockery, who crammed nasty creatures, such as wasps, hornets and cockroaches, into it. Shortly afterwards, Momus is banished from Olympus, trapped by goddess Mischief’s trick, which exposes his disloyalty to Jupiter. Fallen down to earth, he takes revenge by instigating men not to worship the gods, who, worried about these events, send to earth the goddess Virtue, accompanied by her sons and daughters. Momus talks with her and, dissimulating his thoughts, obtains her promise of helping him recover his place into the divine hierarchy. His following actions, however, show his falsehood. First, disguised as Thersites’ sister, he persuades human beings to overwhelm the gods with unbearable demands. Then he rapes Praise, Virtue’s daughter, who gives birth to Rumour, a flying and gossipy monster that takes Hercules up to Olympus.

In the second book Momus is recalled to Olympus. The gods initially appreciate the novel veneration of mankind of which he has been the chief cause. Hoping to obtain Jupiter’s favour, Momus humorously recounts his mishaps in the world below. At a dinner with the gods, he describes the human lifestyles that he experienced, praising only

⁸² Alberti, *Momus*, tr. S. Knight, p. 5: ‘itaque sic deputo, nam si dabitur quispiam olim qui cum legentes ad frugem vitae melioris instruat atque instituat dictorum gravitate rerumque dignitate varia et eleganti, idemque una risu illectet, iocis delectet, voluptate detineat, quod apud Latinos qui adhuc fecerint nondum satis exstiterit, hunc profecto inter plebeios minime censendum esse.’

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 11: ‘et utinam tam saepe eveniat ut sales et inventorum formas admireris, quam non interraro dabitur ut rideas iocos et comitatem quibus tota haec historia refertissima est.’

that of the vagabond. At the subsequent banquet, at Hercules' dwelling, he considers some impious arguments that he supposedly heard on earth, concealing his intention to provoke the wrath of the gods against men. Hercules takes the side of mankind, notably of philosophers, the primary butt of Momus' speech. When the two interlocutors are about to fight, a sudden noise interrupts the feast. Juno's triumphal arch has collapsed on account of the huge amount of golden votive objects placed on it. Sick of men's endless requests, Jupiter decides to reconstruct the world.

At the outset of the third book the gods divide in different factions, depending on whether they approve Jupiter's project or not. Serving as a counsellor, Momus gives Jupiter some notebooks containing his political teachings, the result of his earthly exile, but does not succeed in arousing his interest. Jupiter is keen on seeking advice from philosophers on how to rebuild the world, but his journey to earth is unsuccessful, like those of Mercury and Apollo. Meanwhile, he summons an assembly and, being unprepared to face his 'subjects', appoints Momus as his representative. Provoked by Juno, Momus rages against the whole gathering, which, in response, severely punishes him with castration. Heat, Hunger and Fever, having learnt of the renewal of the world, start to kill the human race, which reacts by organising spectacles in honour of the gods. Jupiter revokes his previous plan and chains Momus to a rock in the middle of the ocean.

The fourth book is the most fragmented section of *Momus*. The gods descend to earth and enter the theatre where spectacles are due to take place the next day. The god Stupor persuades his companions to hide by turning into statues that represent them, replacing thereby the actual statues that embellish the theatre. Stupor brings his effigy to a wood nearby, followed by the other gods. In the meantime, some bandits kidnap Oenops, an atheist actor and philosopher, and take him to the wood to torture him. In this moment of extreme danger, Oenops starts to pray to the gods and, as if his prayers were answered, the bandits see the statue depicting Stupor. Mistaking it for the real god, they run away terrified. Oenops reaches the theatre, where he praises the gods in the presence of his fellow actors, who scoff at his religiosity. Meanwhile, Charon, ferryman of the dead, having heard about Jupiter's projects, resolves to take a trip to earth before its, supposed, destruction and appoints Gelastus, a dead philosopher unable to pay the fare to the underworld, as his guide. Upon their arrival at the theatre, the actors shout insults from a hidden position and one of them throws a heavy stone, hitting Charon's boat. The gods start laughing, and Gelastus and Charon, frightened, flee. On the way back, they encounter, first, some pirates organising a mutiny and later, when a storm blows up,

Momus, chained to his rock. Momus and Gelastus, who met each other during Momus' exile on earth, sorrowfully recount their respective misfortunes. Eventually, Gelastus and Charon return to the underworld, whereas Jupiter, who has come back to Olympus, finds and peruses Momus' notebooks, realising that he should have read them much earlier.

In light of the knotty and eccentric character of this story, it should not come as a surprise that *Momus* has raised numerous, often sharply contrasting, interpretations. What appears to be clear is that no rigid definition can do justice to Alberti's satire. Different, albeit overlapping, conceptual layers may be distinguished in *Momus*. In particular, Alberti seems to be concerned with three main matters, namely, the unmasking of the mechanisms of power operating in the political arena, especially the court, a critique of a certain form of religion and a reflection on human existence, notably its frailty and transience. A Lucianic subtext, as we shall see, is present in all the three layers. It is worth stressing that these layers largely overlap, in the sense that the same passage may point to one or more of them simultaneously. This is mainly due to Alberti's use of allegories, a defining trait of his text.⁸⁴ A prime example of this literary technique is contained in the last book of *Momus*. During their journey to the upper world, Gelastus and Charon discuss many topics, including the origin of universe and mankind. Whereas the former has a philosophical stance, the latter tells a myth. After finishing his work, the creator of men and women realised that some human beings were unsatisfied with their appearance. He therefore asserted that they were free to take on any animal shape they wished. He then encouraged them to go to his palace, situated on the top of a mountain, where they would enjoy an abundance of good things. Human beings started to climb up the mountain, but some of them soon decided to look like asses or cattle. Others left the main road and ended up in impassable valleys full of brambles, where they turned themselves into horrible monsters. Rejected by their previous companions, they put on masks so as to resemble people. This deception was so popular that it became almost impossible to distinguish real and false human faces. Masks, Charon concludes, last until human beings reach the waters of the river Acheron, that is, until death.

Charon's tale seems to convey a twofold message. It may be interpreted as an allegory of human existence, in which deception and simulation predominate, along the lines of *Defunctus*, yet, concomitantly, as a disenchanting view on court society.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ On allegorical thinking in *Momus*, see Ernesto Grassi and Maristella Lorch, *Folly and Insanity in Renaissance Literature*, Binghamton, NY, 1986, pp. 65-85; Massimo Marassi, *Metamorfosi della storia. Momus e Alberti*, Milan, 2004.

⁸⁵ On the theme of simulation in Alberti's writings, see Olivia Catanorchi, 'Tra politica e passione. Simulazione e dissimulazione in Leon Battista Alberti', *Rinascimento*, vol. 45, 2005, pp. 137-177.

The political import of *Momus*, although not unanimously, has long been recognised, even if interpretations differ.⁸⁶ Some scholars have suggested that the vicissitudes narrated in Alberti's satire should be read in close relation with momentous political and ecclesiastical events that occurred in Quattrocento Italy, events in which Alberti, in his capacity as Latin secretary in the Curia, was involved.⁸⁷ He participated, for example, in the councils of Ferrara and Florence, devoted to the reunification, which eventually failed, of Catholic and Orthodox Churches. According to this interpretative line, Jupiter would be a parodic representation of Pope Eugenius IV or his successor, Niccolò V, or both, and the rest of the gods the members of the Curia. Other scholars have argued that *Momus* should not be taken as a satirical transposition of historical circumstances, but rather as a more general enquiry, conducted in a humorous style, about political power.⁸⁸ Although Alberti, just as any other writer, must have been inevitably influenced by the happenings of his time, the latter approach seems worth pursuing. As I have suggested above, political, religious and 'existential' meanings are often intertwined in *Momus*. It follows that too strict an association of Alberti's narrative with fifteenth-century history would, probably, be restrictive.

The multifaceted character of Momus

The character of Momus represents a suitable point of departure for disentangling the conceptual layers shaping Alberti's satire.⁸⁹ Momus, the god of mockery, is mentioned in the corpus of several ancient authors, among them Hesiod, Aesop and Plato, but acquires particular importance in Lucian's writings, notably in *Zeus Rants* and *The Parliament of the Gods*.⁹⁰ In the first dialogue, Zeus calls a meeting on Olympus to make the gods aware of a perilous situation. On earth, Damis, an Epicurean, and Timocles, a Stoic, had a dispute about providence, in which the former, who predominated, asserted that the gods

⁸⁶ For an interpretation that stresses the non-political value of *Momus*, see the above-mentioned article of Furlan, 'Momus seu de homine'.

⁸⁷ See, for example, Vittorio Frajese, 'Leon Battista Alberti e la *renovatio urbis* di Nicolò V. Congetture per l'interpretazione del *Momus*', *La Cultura*, vol. 36, 1998, pp. 241-262; Massimo Miglio, 'Nicolò V, Leon Battista Alberti, Roma', in Luca Chiavoni, Gianfranco Ferlisi and Maria Vittoria Grassi (eds), *Leon Battista Alberti e il Quattrocento*, Florence, 2001, pp. 47-64; Stefano Borsi, *Leon Battista Alberti e Roma*, Florence, 2003, pp. 9-153.

⁸⁸ Cancro, *Filosofia ed architettura in Alberti*, pp. 143-163; Cesare Vasoli, 'Potere e follia nel *Momus*', in *Alberti: Actes du congrès international de Paris*, vol. 1, pp. 443-463.

⁸⁹ On the figure of Momus and his multiple literary and artistic transformations throughout the centuries, see Stefano Simoncini, 'L'avventura di Momo nel Rinascimento. Il nume della critica tra Leon Battista Alberti e Giordano Bruno', *Rinascimento*, vol. 38, 1998, pp. 405-454; Donatella Capaldi, *Momo. Il demone cinico tra mito, filosofia e letteratura*, Naples, 2011; George McClure, *Doubting the Divine in Early Modern Europe. The Revival of Momus, the Agnostic God*, Cambridge, 2018.

⁹⁰ On Momus in antiquity, see McClure, *Doubting the Divine*, pp. 1-33.

neither oversee human life nor direct any event, whereas the latter claimed that they govern everything appropriately. During the celestial gathering Momus is the first to deliver a speech. He does not blame men for questioning the role of deities, in that human existence is filled with confusion and inequality. The gods do not deserve worship and sacrifices that human beings, surprisingly, nevertheless dedicate to them. What characterises Momus' manner of address is that it is a free exercise of *parrhesia*.⁹¹ He takes the floor by saying: 'as for me, if I were privileged to speak frankly, I would have a great deal to say'.⁹² Also at the very beginning of his speech, he points out that his words will be authentic and straightforward: 'well then, listen, gods, to what comes straight from the heart, as the saying goes'.⁹³ And again, with regard to human worship towards the gods, he introduces his thoughts as follows: 'if you would have me speak the truth, we sit here considering just one question, whether anybody is slaying victims and burning incense at our altars'.⁹⁴ Lucian thus endowed Momus with the qualities that ancient Greek tradition attributed to the *parrhesiastes*, the speaker who puts the duty of saying the truth before any personal concern.⁹⁵

Zeus, at first, dismisses Momus' remarks, defining him 'harsh and fault-finding' and asking for wiser advice.⁹⁶ After Apollo has proposed to find a more eloquent spokesman to help Timocles, it is Momus again to take the floor. He exceeds Apollo in a rhetorical battle, poking fun at the obscurity of his oracles, which stand for the antithesis of the genuine practice of *parrhesia*. At the end of the dialogue, after Damis has prevailed over Timocles in another public debate, Zeus concedes that Momus' criticism, far from being a pointless attack on his royal power, was valid and just. In *Zeus Rants* Momus is portrayed as a proud opponent of ambiguity and uncritical loyalty to authority. His polemical darts aim at unveiling the hypocrisy that the other gods not only tolerate, but also foster.

⁹¹ On the notion of *parrhesia*, see Arnaldo Momigliano, 'La libertà di parola nel mondo antico', *Rivista storica italiana*, vol. 83, 1971, pp. 499-524; Michel Foucault, *Discourse and Truth. The Problematization of Parrhesia*, Evanston, IL, 1985; Luigi Spina, *Il cittadino alla tribuna. Diritto e libertà di parola nell'Atene democratica*, Naples, 1986; Giuseppe Scarpato, *Parrhesia greca, parrhesia cristiana*, Brescia, 2001; Ineke Sluiter and Ralph M. Rosen (eds), *Free Speech in Classical Antiquity*, Leiden, 2004; Arlene W. Saxonhouse, *Free Speech and Democracy in Ancient Athens*, Cambridge, 2006. For an analysis of *parrhesia* in Lucian, see Valérie Visa-Ondarçuhu, 'La Notion de *parrhèsia* chez Lucien', *Pallas*, vol. 72, 2006, pp. 261-278.

⁹² Lucian, 'Zeus Rants', 19, in [Lucian], vol. 2, p. 119.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 19, p. 119.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 22, p. 123.

⁹⁵ Several scholars have already noted the close association between Lucian's Momus and *parrhesia*. See, for example, Simoncini, 'L'avventura di Momo nel Rinascimento', pp. 409-411; McClure, *Doubling the Divine*, pp. 10-33.

⁹⁶ Lucian, 'Zeus Rants', 23, p. 125.

In *The Parliament of the Gods*, which may be regarded as the sequel to *Zeus Rants*, Zeus summons an assembly to discuss whether many ‘foreigner gods’, that is, gods not belonging to the classical Greek pantheon, should enjoy privileges and honours equal to those of the original Olympians. Momus begins his speech with a fulsome proclamation of *parrhesia*:

And I beg you, Zeus, to let me speak frankly, for I could not do otherwise. Everybody knows how free of speech I am, and disinclined to hush up anything at all that is ill done. I criticise everybody and express my views openly, without either fearing anyone or concealing my opinion out of respect, so that most people think me vexatious and meddling by nature; they call me a regular prosecutor. However, inasmuch as it is according to law, and the proclamation has been made, and you, Zeus, allow me to speak with complete liberty, I shall do so, without any reservations.⁹⁷

Lucian depicts Momus as a *parrhesiastes* who considers freedom of speech more important than his own reputation and stresses a crucial feature characterising *parrhesia*, namely, lack of simulation. Shortly afterwards, Momus finds fault with the half-humans who, after having reached the status of deities, took their servants and lovers to Olympus, fraudulently mixing them with the heavenly inhabitants. He goes as far as to target Zeus himself, who started to corrupt the Olympian gods by cohabiting with mortal women. Evidently, Lucianic *parrhesia* disregards hierarchy and social classes. Momus reads then his proposal, which ironically asks the gods to prove their identity by showing a birth certificate. Zeus acts in the same way as he does in *Zeus Rants*, recognising that Momus’ criticism, although stinging, is well-founded.

Alberti drew, to some extent, on Lucian’s characterisation of Momus, blending it with other sources. Like his Lucianic prototype, Alberti’s Momus is an impudent and skilful orator, highly critical of the Olympian gods. Two major elements, however, distinguish Lucian’s and Alberti’s characters. The first is the theme of exile from Olympus, absent in Lucian and central to Alberti’s plot. As Alberto Borghini has shown, Alberti borrowed this motif from one of Aesop’s fables.⁹⁸ In this fable, Zeus, Prometheus and Athena decide to prove their ability by setting up a competition, of which Momus is

⁹⁷ Lucian, ‘The Parliament of the Gods’, 2, in [Lucian], vol. 5, p. 421.

⁹⁸ Alberto Borghini, ‘Un’altra probabile fonte del *Momo* di L. B. Alberti: Esopo’, *Rivista di letteratura italiana*, vol. 5, 1987, pp. 455-466.

to be the judge. Zeus models a bull, Prometheus shapes a man and Athena designs a house. Momus is sceptical of all their creations. With regard to man, he notes that Prometheus should have placed his heart outside the body, so that his wickedness could be exposed.⁹⁹ Disappointed with his malice, Zeus bans Momus from Olympus. There is no doubt that Alberti was acquainted with Aesop's fable, since he included it, in reshaped form, in the first book of *Momus*.¹⁰⁰

The second substantial difference between Lucian's and Alberti's Momus is that, whereas the former is uncompromising in his desire for openness, the latter is the champion of adaptability and pretence. Alberti's Momus resembles a chameleon and, throughout his long series of misadventures, relentlessly changes, acting, as circumstances demand, as an atheist philosopher, a demagogue, a court jester, a faithful counsellor and, eventually, an unappreciated and disgraced deity. During his first, temporary, exile from Olympus, he seeks to subvert the worship of the gods, even denying their existence. He then sees Virtue's descent to earth as an opportunity to regain his rank among the gods and so, deciding to conceal his resentment, make the most of the situation. His interior monologue, almost Hamletic, in the first book is emblematic of his art of dissimulation:

A wise man adapts to the times he is living in. If conforming and acting as a suppliant will lead to bigger and better things, then Momus is prepared to adapt. Now you will say: I cannot *not* be Momus, and I cannot *not* be who I have always been without sacrificing my freedom and my consistency. Well, let it be so: keep the real you, the man you want to be, deep inside your heart, while using your appearance, expression and words to pretend and feign that you are the person whom the occasion demands.¹⁰¹

At the outset of the second book, after he has been recalled to Olympus, Momus begins to put his ideal into practice. He admits to himself that his previous grim and

⁹⁹ For a study of the motif of the 'heart outside the body' in Western culture, see Mario Andrea Rigoni, 'Una finestra aperta sul cuore. Note sulla metaforica della *Sinceritas* nella tradizione occidentale', *Lettere italiane*, vol. 26, 1974, pp. 434-458.

¹⁰⁰ A fable similar to Aesop's, and presumably inspired by him, is present also in Lucian's *Hermotimus*. As Borghini has demonstrated, Alberti's reinterpretation of this fable is more akin to Aesop's than to Lucian's version.

¹⁰¹ Alberti, *Momus*, tr. S. Knight, p. 45: 'nam est quidem sapientis parere temporibus, quin et assentando supplicandove conferet ad res maiores capessendas aditum parasse Momo. Dices: 'Nequeo esse non Momus; nequeo non esse qui semper fuerim, liber et constans'. Esto sane: ipsum te intus in animo habeto quem voles, dum vultu, fronte verbisque eum te simules atque dissimules quem usus poscat.'

ensorious attitude did not bring him any advantage and that, in order to ingratiate himself with the other gods, notably Jupiter, he needs to change his behaviour. He ponders on this matter in another theatrical monologue:

But now I realise that I must adopt another mask, one more suitable to my circumstances. What will that mask be, Momus? I must show myself to be a friendly fellow, of course, easy-going and affable. I must learn how to be useful to everyone, how to humour people indulgently, receive them with good cheer, entertain them graciously, and send them away happy. Can you do something so completely against your own nature, Momus? Yes, I can, as long as I want to.¹⁰²

In this passage, one may argue, Alberti outlines the basic tenets typical of a conduct book for courtiers.¹⁰³ The distancing of his Momus from Lucian's portrayal is evident. Alberti's Momus might even be regarded as the ironic subversion of Lucian's. In reshaping considerably his Lucianic model, Alberti might have taken inspiration from Plutarch's *How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend*, a composition belonging to his *Moralia*. In this text, dedicated to his friend Julius Antiochus Philopappos, prince of the kingdom of Commagene, Plutarch examined in detail the characteristics peculiar to a flatterer and provided advice for distinguishing him from a real friend, the practice of *parrhesia* being one of the main criteria. Between 1437 and 1439 Guarino Veronese turned Plutarch's essay into Latin and dedicated it to Leonello d'Este.¹⁰⁴ In the following century, Erasmus also translated *How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend* into Latin and dedicated it to Henry VIII. It is very likely that Alberti was familiar with Plutarch's work, since he was

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 101: 'nunc vero aliam nostris temporibus accommodatiorem personam imbuendam sentio. Et quaenam ea erit persona, Mome? Nempe ut comem, lenem affabilemque me exhibeam. Item oportet discam praesto esse omnibus, benigne obsequi, per hilaritatem excipere, grate detinere, laetos mittere. Ne tu haec, Mome, ab tua natura penitus aliena poteris? Potero quidem, dum velim.'

¹⁰³ A connection between Alberti and Baldassarre Castiglione has been made by John Woodhouse, 'Dall'Alberti al Castiglione: ammonimenti pratici di cortesia, di comportamento e di arrivismo', in *Alberti e il Quattrocento*, pp. 193-210.

¹⁰⁴ On the reception of Plutarch, in particular of the *Moralia*, in the Renaissance, see Olivier Guerrier (ed.), *Moralia et Oeuvres morales à la Renaissance*, Paris, 2008; Paola Volpe Cacciatore (ed.), *Plutarco nelle traduzioni latine di età umanistica*, Naples, 2009; Diana De Bartolo, 'La fortuna dei *Moralia* in età moderna', *Quaderni urbinati di cultura classica*, vol. 99, 2011, pp. 281-287; Marianne Pade 'The Reception of Plutarch from Antiquity to the Italian Renaissance', in Mark Beck (ed.), *A Companion to Plutarch*, Chichester, 2014, pp. 531-543. On the influence of *How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend* on Erasmus, Thomas Elyot and Castiglione, see Annalisa Ceron, 'How to Advise the Prince: Three Renaissance Forms of Plutarchian *Parrhesia*', *History of Political Thought*, vol. 38, 2017, pp. 239-266.

sojourning in Ferrara at the time of Guarino's translation.¹⁰⁵ Alberti seems to have transposed some of the core features of Plutarch's flatterer, notably mutability, to his Momus. Plutarch describes the fickleness characterising the flatterer as follows:

But the flatterer, since he has no abiding-place of character to dwell in, and since he leads a life not of his own choosing but another's, moulding and adapting himself to suit another, is not simple, not one, but variable and many in one, and, like water that is poured into one receptacle after another, he is constantly on the move from place to place, and changes his shape to fit his receiver.¹⁰⁶

This passage shares evident affinities with Momus' monologues quoted above. As if intending to conform to Plutarch's description of the flatterer, Alberti's Momus wears the mask that best fits the occasion. He is 'variable and many in one'.

Another similarity between Plutarch's flatterer and Alberti's Momus consists in the use of humour and jest as a means to pursue their goals. In Plutarch's words, 'the whole work and final aim of the flatterer is always to be serving up some spicy and highly-seasoned jest or prank or story, incited by pleasure and to incite pleasure'.¹⁰⁷ In keeping with this ideal, when Momus is recalled to Olympus, he starts to act as a jester. 'You will laugh and wonder at both Jupiter and Momus,' Alberti comments, 'for it is not easy to describe how unexpectedly funny Momus showed himself to be at that dinner, telling many hilarious and memorable stories about his experiences during his exile'.¹⁰⁸

These parallels reveal that Alberti probably drew on Plutarch's portrayal of the flatterer with regard to his depiction of Momus. There is, nevertheless, a significant conceptual difference between these characters. The flatterer is a morally negative figure, whom Plutarch contrasts with the real friend, his positive counterpart. Alberti's Momus turns out to be a more ambiguous character. The ending to the story brings this out. At the banquet at Hercules' dwelling, in the second book, Momus' art of dissimulation reaches its peak, in that he ascribes to some philosophers the atheistic arguments that he himself

¹⁰⁵ Ullrich Langer has noted that Alberti alluded to Plutarch's text in the fourth book of his *Libri della famiglia*. See Ullrich Langer, *Perfect Friendship. Studies in Literature and Moral Philosophy from Boccaccio to Corneille*, Geneva, 1994, p. 195.

¹⁰⁶ Plutarch, 'How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend', 52, in id., *Moralia*, tr. F. C. Babbitt and others, vols 16, Cambridge, MA, 1927-2004, vol. 1, p. 281.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 55, p. 295.

¹⁰⁸ Alberti, *Momus*, tr. S. Knight, p. 125: 'ridebis atque admiraberis Iovemque Momumque, nam in cena non facile dici potest quam inter epulas praeter omnium opinionem iocosum se Momus exhibuerit, multa referens quae suum per exilium pertulerat cum ridicula, tum et digna memoratu.'

sought to disseminate on earth. In the third book his vicissitudes acquire a new complication. During the assembly of the gods, the one in which he plays the role of Jupiter's representative, he falls into the trap of Pallas and Juno, reacting to their provocations with anger. Momus proves to be unable to control his emotions and to implement any longer the principles of conduct expressed in his monologues. In the fourth book, we find him chained to a rock in the ocean, a punishment redolent of that inflicted on Aeschylus' Prometheus in *Prometheus Bound*.¹⁰⁹ In his dialogue with Gelastus, he points out that, as long as he behaved as a flatterer, he was dear to everyone, but, when he rejected his servile attitude, he incurred the wrath of the other gods. Finally, at the very end of Alberti's work, Jupiter reads Momus' notebooks, which reveal that his political stance is essentially marked by caution and moderation, as apparent, for example, when he states that the prince should abstain from undertaking major changes to the status quo, unless such changes are vital to maintain his power.

From this analysis we can draw two conclusions. First, Alberti's Momus is a complex and multifaceted figure, modelled on a number of literary sources, who, ultimately, represents neither a model of behaviour nor an anti-model. Rather, Alberti availed himself of this character to unmask the hidden mechanisms of politics, in particular of the court, presenting adaptability and pretence as the most convenient modes of conduct. In this respect Alberti's *Momus* anticipates the notion of political realism that, at the beginning of the Cinquecento, Niccolò Machiavelli systematically elaborated.¹¹⁰ Second, the character of Momus brings together the different meanings of Alberti's satire. Besides his political dimension, one should not forget that Momus is a propagator of religious disbelief and, from yet another angle, a symbol of the human desire of self-affirmation. In Cesare Vasoli's words, Alberti's Momus embodies 'la volontà irrefrenabile di autoaffermazione, alla quale si accompagna la memoria di un'offesa atroce e di disavventure crudeli che solo la massima fortuna potrebbe risarcire'.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ On Alberti's acquaintance with Aeschylus, see Luca Boschetto, 'Ricerche sul *Theogenius* e sul *Momus* di Leon Battista Alberti', *Rinascimento*, vol. 33, 1993, pp. 3-52 (at pp. 34-52).

¹¹⁰ On Alberti and Machiavelli, see Grassi and Lorch, *Folly and Insanity*, pp. 75-79; Martin McLaughlin, 'Literature and Science in Leon Battista Alberti's *De re aedificatoria*', in Pierpaolo Antonello and Simon A. Gilson (eds), *Science and Literature in Italian Culture. From Dante to Calvino*, Oxford, 2004, pp. 94-114 (at pp. 106-108); Gian Mario Anselmi, 'Impeto della fortuna e virtù degli uomini tra Alberti e Machiavelli', in *Alberti e la cultura del Quattrocento*, vol. 2, pp. 827-842; Nicola Bonazzi, 'Animale irrequieto e impazientissimo: naturalismo e moralità in Alberti, Machiavelli e Bruno', *Annali d'italianistica*, vol. 26, 2008, pp. 155-170; Francesca Fedi, 'Machiavelli e la maschera di Momo', *Italianistica*, vol. 47/3, 2018, pp. 137-143.

¹¹¹ Vasoli, 'Potere e follia nel *Momus*', p. 446.

Alberti's religious stance in *Momus*

The religious aspect of *Momus* is worthy of further consideration. Similarly to what we have seen in relation to the *Intercenales*, Alberti's criticism is structured on two levels, one focusing on the concept of Christian providence and the other dealing with superstitious practices associated with religion. As for the first level, from Alberti's satire it emerges the idea that the world is a flux of singular happenings, escaping the reassuring power of divine providence. The distinctive trait of the universe depicted in *Momus* is metamorphosis, defined as ceaseless and non-teleological change. Alberti devised a vivid allegorical representation of metamorphosis in the first book. In order to relieve himself of cares, Jupiter invested the god Fate with full authority over the heavenly spheres and the stars. As a consequence, Fate is in charge of supervising the sacred altar that, from all eternity, has been hosting the perpetual flame, a divine marvel equipped with extraordinary properties. All the gods have on their forehead a little portion of it, permitting them to take on any shape they wish. The perpetual flame plays an important role in the plot. After Jupiter has banished him from Olympus for the first time, Momus loses the ability to alter his appearance, an ability that is then restored by Virtue, who, while speaking to him on earth, winds around his head her veil provided with the flame. Thanks to his renewed capability, Momus, who has in the meantime fallen in love with Praise, Virtue's daughter, turns himself into ivy and rapes her, setting in train a long sequence of events. The perpetual flame, it is worth highlighting, is dependent on Fate, described as a powerful entity. Alberti's disbelief at providence allegorically recurs many times, for example, in another passage of the first book, when Rumour shouts that 'Triumph and Trophy were not the sons of Virtue, but of Chance and Fortune, and that one of them was stupid, the other mad'.¹¹²

Alberti probably drew on *Zeus Catechized*, a text translated into Latin by Poggio, in relation to the figure of Fate. In this dialogue, Lucian presents a debate between Zeus and Cyniscus, a provocative philosopher whose name clearly alludes to the Cynics. Zeus agrees with his shrewd interlocutor on the crucial importance of Fate in the universe and yet he turns out to be totally unaware of what this means with regard to the authority of the gods and their relationship with mankind. If Fate rules everything, Cyniscus observes, there is no reason why men ought to sacrifice to the gods and it is senseless to punish or

¹¹² Alberti, *Momus*, tr. S. Knight, p. 73: 'Trophaeum enim Triumphumque non Virtute natos, sed Casus Fortunaque filios, et eorum alterum esse stolidum, alterum dementem adiurabat.'

reward people after death. Zeus is unprepared to address these issues, limiting himself to blame Cyniscus for being a ‘cursed sophist’, intent on diffusing impiety on earth.

Alberti’s anti-providential stance, as found in *Momus*, is also imbued with an Epicurean vein. Alberti was familiar with Epicurus’ doctrine through the mediation of multiple sources, namely, some of Cicero’s dialogues, notably *De natura deorum*, Diogenes Laertius’ *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, turned into Latin by Ambrogio Traversari in the early 1430s, and Lucretius’ *De rerum natura*, the revival of which, after centuries of almost complete oblivion, had begun in 1417, thanks to Poggio, who rediscovered a manuscript containing Lucretius’ philosophical poem.¹¹³ Among the many scenes witnessing Alberti’s acquaintance with Epicureanism might be recalled a passage in the first book, in which Momus, during his first exile on earth, maintains that it is meaningless to fear the gods, in that either they do not exist, or, if they do exist, they are blessed with a benevolent nature. Needless to say, this reasoning is a pillar of the Epicurean school of thought.

One point of my analysis so far needs clarification. Arguing that Alberti displays an anti-providential stance in his *Momus* is not equivalent to claiming that he undoubtedly denied the efficacy of Christian providence. Addressing this issue adequately would require an examination of his entire corpus, a task beyond the scope of this thesis. All that may be surmised in this respect is that Alberti, in his *Momus* at least, casts doubt on the notion of providence, using Lucian and Epicureanism as his principal sources.

The other religious component of *Momus* is, as mentioned above, Alberti’s critique of superstition, that is to say, of religion as an exterior and instrumental cult. Alberti formulates his criticism through a series of images of Lucianic inspiration, the most striking of which is probably the huge amount of golden votive offerings, a stock motif in Lucian, filling Olympus. The people described in *Momus* conceive religion exclusively as a means to an end, as a *do ut des*. This becomes apparent in the third book, when, in order to repulse Heat, Hunger and Fever, they decide to stage grandiose spectacles in honour of the gods. Perhaps, also the self-transformation of the gods into statues in the fourth book

¹¹³ On Ambrogio Traversari’s rendering of Diogenes Laertius’ *Lives*, see Marcello Gigante, ‘Ambrogio Traversari interprete di Diogene Laerzio’, in Gian Carlo Garfagnini (ed.), *Ambrogio Traversari nel VI centenario della nascita*, Florence, 1988, pp. 367-459. On the influence of Lucretius in the Renaissance and the early modern period, see Alison Brown, *The Return of Lucretius to Renaissance Florence*, Cambridge, MA, 2010; Ada Palmer, *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance*, Cambridge, MA, 2014; David Norbrook, Stephen Harrison and Philip Hardie (eds), *Lucretius and the Early Modern*, Oxford, 2016. On the relationship between Alberti and Lucretius, see Susanna Gambino, ‘Alberti lettore di Lucrezio. Motivi lucreziani nel *Theogenius*’, *Albertiana*, vol. 4, 2001, pp. 69-84; Davide Canfora, ‘Alberti e Lucrezio’, in *Alberti e la tradizione*, vol. 1, pp. 269-286.

is part of Alberti's criticism, in that it may represent an allegorical attack on the misrepresentation of religion as the worship of idols. As for the literary models for this episode, Alberti might have drawn on *Zeus Rants*.¹¹⁴ After Hermes has summoned the celestial assembly, Zeus declares that all the gods should sit according to material and workmanship characteristic of their statue on earth. The more valuable the material, the more a deity could claim to sit in the front rows.¹¹⁵ From this survey, we can infer that Alberti is advocating a more genuine form of religion, distinctly distancing himself from the materialistic connotations of religion in his day.

Alberti's lampooning of philosophers, a prominent theme in *Momus*, may be partly associated with his championing of a simpler religion. The philosophers whom he portrays, like those pilloried by Lucian, mostly appear as boastful, arrogant and engaged in pointless debates. In the third book, Jupiter, who holds them in high esteem, intends to seek their advice on how to rebuild the world, but his descent to earth, as those of Mercury and Apollo, proves to be thoroughly disappointing. Alberti probably borrowed the motif of Jupiter's journey to earth from *Zeus Rants*.¹¹⁶ Introducing the matter under discussion in the assembly of the gods, Zeus recounts that the previous day he descended to the world on account of some libations and ended up near the Painted Porch, home of the Stoics, where he found Damis and Timocles debating about providence.¹¹⁷ In Alberti's satire, the sole consequence of the journeys of the Olympian gods is that they involve themselves in a long sequence of humorous misadventures, including the encounter of Apollo with Democritus, which Alberti modelled on the pseudo-Hippocratic *Epistle to Damagetus*, reinterpreted through the lens of Lucian's irony.¹¹⁸ To draw the attention of Democritus, who is intent on dissecting a crab, Apollo picks an onion and pretends to analyse it to determine whether the gods would destroy the world or not, provoking the enthusiastic reaction of his interlocutor to this new kind of prophecy.

In Alberti's parody of philosophers one may hear the echo of the humanist critique of scholasticism as an excessively abstract and verbose form of philosophy. This is particularly evident in the fourth book, in the exchange between Gelastus and Charon that precedes the myth about the creation of men recounted by the latter. During the journey to discover the world, Gelastus, who was a philosopher while in mortal life, drones on about

¹¹⁴ As noted by Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, p. 119.

¹¹⁵ Lucian, 'Zeus Rants', 7-8, pp. 100-103.

¹¹⁶ Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, p. 118.

¹¹⁷ Lucian, 'Zeus Rants', 15-17, pp. 112-117.

¹¹⁸ Luca Boschetto, 'Democrito e la fisiologia della follia. La parodia della filosofia e della medicina nel *Momus* di Leon Battista Alberti', *Rinascimento*, vol. 35, 1995, pp. 3-29.

the universe and its origin, relying on Aristotelian metaphysics. His pompous speech, filled with standard scholastic terms such as ‘substance’, ‘accident’ and ‘motion’, greatly bewilders Charon, who retorts that, contrary to what he previously thought, philosophers know nothing except how to obscure the simplest facts with the words they use.

Moreover, Charon underscores that he heard the tale he is about to tell not from a philosopher, but from a painter, who ‘saw more while looking at lines than all you philosophers do when measuring and investigating the heavens’.¹¹⁹ Alberti’s mockery of the over-sophistication of scholasticism may be seen as complementary to his attack on a materialistic conception of religion in shaping his religious standpoint in *Momus*.

Charon’s preference for painters over philosophers might also point to a certain gnoseological stance, namely, that practiced-based knowledge is to be favoured over the purely theoretical one. Another passage in *Momus* adds weight to this interpretation. When Jupiter, in the last book, enters the theatre, he blames himself for having consulted the philosophers rather than the architects who had fashioned the marvellous marble columns embellishing it. Visual arts and architecture, Alberti seems to suggest, are immune to the abstractness characterising at times philosophy.¹²⁰

A further religious reference may be concealed in Alberti’s work, specifically in Momus’ mock encomium of the vagabond in the second book. Recalled to Olympus after his exile in the world below, Momus decides to obtain the benevolence of the gods by humorously recounting his misadventures on earth, notably how he tried out many different ways of life to judge which was the best. He began with military life and then he tried to become a king, but it took him little time to understand how these highly valued professions were not all that they seemed. The military life involves disregarding respect for piety and focusing only on utility, whereas ruling a state entails neglecting one’s own affairs, leading to an unbearable form of servitude. Paradoxically, only the life of the vagabond is worthy of praise. Whilst not requiring a teacher or tools, being a vagabond enables a person to live without fearing anything and to criticise others without being censured in turn.

In terms of literary sources, as scholars have long noted, Alberti’s passage is indebted to Lucian’s *The Parasite*, a text turned into Latin by Guarino. In this dialogue, the parasite Simon wittily explains to Tychiades, his initially distrustful interlocutor, that

¹¹⁹ Alberti, *Momus*, tr. S. Knight, p. 309: ‘is quidem lineamentis contemplandis plus vidit solus quam vos omnes philosophi caelo commensurando et disquirendo.’

¹²⁰ On the relationship between philosophy and the arts in *Momus*, see Caspar Pearson, ‘Philosophy Defeated: Truth and Vision in Leon Battista Alberti’s *Momus*’, *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 34, 2011, pp. 1-12.

the art of the parasite is the greatest of all arts, far superior to philosophy and rhetoric, since it can be learnt without hardship, money, tools and teacher and, above all, it generates profit immediately. Another advantage is that the parasite is not a slave to the passions and, contrary to the common belief, he is not subject to the rich, whereas the reverse is true, in that the rich end up being dependent on the company and security that parasites provide. By the end, Tychiades is persuaded unreservedly of the countless benefits that the art of the parasite brings to its practitioners.

Beyond its Lucianic patina, Momus' mock encomium is probably endowed with a religious meaning. As Mario Martelli has suggested, Alberti's vagabond may be identified with the figure of the friar belonging to the mendicant orders.¹²¹ The chief piece of evidence supporting his analysis is Alberti's characterisation of the vagabond as the one who is allowed to criticise with impunity. Such prerogative is certainly not peculiar to any vagabond, but it can be ascribed to the mendicant friar, the outspokenness of whom finds its justification in a society permeated with Christian values and, ultimately, in the authority of the Church. Momus' panegyric to the vagabond thus voices criticism, rather than representing an authentic praise, of the friar. It is no exaggeration to maintain that Alberti was the humanist who best exploited the ironic potential of the mock encomium before Erasmus.

¹²¹ Mario Martelli, 'Minima in *Momo* libello adnotanda', *Albertiana*, vol. 1, 1998, pp. 105-119 and vol. 2, 1999, pp. 21-36 (at pp. 22-31).

Chapter 3. Lucianic Irony and Ciceronian Decorum in Giovanni Pontano's *Charon*

Giovanni Pontano (1429–1503) was a prolific and versatile author, whom modern scholars unanimously consider as one of the Renaissance masters of the Latin language. Born in Umbria, he spent most of his life at the court of Naples, performing crucial political roles at the service of king Alfonso of Aragon and his successors.¹ Pontano's considerable literary production includes poems, treatises of moral philosophy and five dialogues: *Charon*, *Antonius*, *Asinus*, *Actius* and *Aegidius*. In his corpus there are two explicit mentions of Lucian, both in the same work, *De sermone*, a treatise on the art of conversation that he composed shortly before dying.² It is interesting to note that, on both occasions, the name of Lucian is juxtaposed to that of Giovanni Boccaccio. In the first case, Pontano observes that Boccaccio has deservedly achieved popularity in that the narration of his hundred *novelle* is remarkably amusing and amiable. In Pontano's view, Lucian pursued the same goal among the Greeks. The second mention of Lucian occurs in a section dedicated to the characteristics peculiar to the *homo facetus*. Pontano groups together Lucian, Boccaccio and Poggio Bracciolini as witty authors who, with their writings, relieve the human soul of its troubles and concerns.

From the remarks above we can infer that Pontano's understanding of Lucian was in line with the general reputation that he, Lucian, enjoyed in Quattrocento Italy. In his re-elaboration of Lucian, however, Pontano did not shrink from reviving the mordant satirical vein characterising his dialogues. This is apparent in *Charon*, the work of Pontano displaying the most evident Lucianic influences. Pontano penned his dialogue around 1470.³ It was printed for the first time together with *Antonius* in 1491 by Mattia Moravo, a publisher active in Naples. Some of the polemical targets in *Charon* are the same as those present in Leon Battista Alberti's Lucianic compositions, such as, for example, scholasticism and the widespread corruption of the Church. The main difference

¹ For a monograph on Pontano's life and literary production, see Carol Kidwell, *Pontano. Poet & Prime Minister*, London, 1991.

² For a modern edition of Pontano's *De sermone* accompanied by an Italian translation, see Giovanni Pontano, *De sermone*, tr. A. Mantovani, Rome, 2002. For a study arguing that the ideas expressed in *De sermone* represent an interpretative key to Pontano's *Charon*, see Margherita Sciancalepore, 'La realtà infernale nel *Charon* di Giovanni Pontano', in Concetta Bianca and others (eds), *Acta Conventus Neo-Latini Monasteriensis*, Leiden, 2015, pp. 496-504.

³ On the chronology of Pontano's *Charon*, see Salvatore Monti, 'Ricerche sulla cronologia dei *Dialoghi*', in Giuseppe Germano (ed.), *Studi su Giovanni Pontano*, 2 vols, Messina, 2010, vol. 2, pp. 757-834 (at pp. 765-791).

in their re-enactment of Lucian is that Pontano sought to find a point of convergence between the Lucianic model and the Ciceronian one.⁴ This represents one of the most significant features of Pontano's *Charon* as well as a fruitful approach to it. Besides blending Lucian with Cicero, Pontano made some references to Stoicism and Epicureanism, as mediating between these two different schools of thought, echoed some Dantesque motifs and encapsulated, in reshaped form, a novella of Masuccio Salernitano. Eclecticism is a distinctive trait of *Charon*.

By merging these elements, Pontano created a seriocomic dialogue of Menippean inspiration, which frequently alternates tones and atmosphere. *Charon* does not have a unified structure coherently organising its twelve episodes. Quite the opposite, it presents a series of exchanges mixing satirical passages with serious philosophical discussions, redolent of Cicero, about a wide range of topics, such as the role of chance and fate in the world, the brevity of life and the possibility of human happiness. Yet, according to some scholars, beneath this disorderly structure lie some core ideas conferring unity on the text. Francesco Tateo, for instance, has argued that, in his *Charon*, Pontano endeavours to compare the decadence of contemporary times with classical antiquity.⁵ His primary interest consists, according to Tateo's reading, in the restoration of wisdom in a period which seems determined to overlook it. That Pontano voiced some prominent humanist themes is irrefutable. From the viewpoint of fifteenth-century Lucianic literature, what is striking is how he expressed those themes. Pontano conceived a dialogue that managed to combine Lucian's liveliness and irony with Cicero's grace.

The book opens by presenting an unconventional scene taking place in the underworld. The two infernal judges Minos and Aeacus, who are enjoying a day off from their ordinary duties, predict that calamities and disorder will befall the earth, notably Italy. Before the souls of mortals begin their descent, they decide to sit under the shade of the cypresses near the bank of the Styx and invite Charon, who is also enjoying *otium*, to join their conversation. He is a much sought after companion, since 'his speech is well informed and thoughtful'.⁶ The ferryman starts philosophising about the human condition, which is thoroughly unhappy, given that men spend all their life relying on hope, which constantly deludes them, yet they consider it one of the goddesses. Since the infernal

⁴ The compresence of Lucianic and Ciceronian features in *Charon* has already been noted by, among others, Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, pp. 129-131; Geri, *A colloquio con Luciano*, pp. 124-128.

⁵ Francesco Tateo, *Umanesimo etico di Giovanni Pontano*, Lecce, 1972, pp. 11-39.

⁶ Giovanni Pontano, *Charon*, in id., *Dialogues*, tr. J. H. Gaisser, vol. 1, Cambridge, MA, 2012, p. 4: 'oratio eius erudita et gravis est.'

judges are astonished by his wise words, Charon explains that he has benefited from the educated souls whom he regularly ferries to the other bank of the Styx.

Mercury appears for the first time together with his assistant Pyrichalcus. They brand the dead with different marks, depending on their sins. In the group of sinners there are also two clergymen, who try in vain to conceal themselves. When Charon arrives, he invites Mercury to spend some time with Minos, Aeacus and himself. While crossing the Styx, they see Diogenes the Cynic, who decided to live in the river to catch fish and have water to drink, and Crates the Theban, looking for the gold that he once threw away. During their journey, Mercury and Charon discuss many different topics, such as the reason why the Athenian citizens did not approve Plato's laws and the obscurity in which Aristotle's thinking is enveloped.

Meanwhile, Minos and Aeacus contemplate the beauty of their surroundings, with its pleasant shade, birdsong and peacefully gliding brooks, and wait for Mercury and Charon. Once arrived, Mercury replies to the questions of the infernal judges, explaining what is happening in the upper world. Powerful earthquakes are shaking Italy, leading to the destruction of many towns. These events become the starting point for Mercury's vehement attack on superstition and human folly. Men blame Nature for causing dreadful disasters, and yet they are always busy waging war against each other. Superstition controls human minds and rules in every country, arousing a countless number of meaningless practices and rituals, including an excessive attention paid to burial places.

Charon proceeds to the very end by juxtaposing scenes in which different groups of characters converse on various themes. Pontano portrays an amusing encounter between Charon, Diogenes and Crates, describing humorously the bizarre behaviour of these philosophers. The wise Charon draws the conclusion that it is best to avoid the company of all those unhappy people who do not accept consolation for their misery. Then, Mercury, Minos and Aeacus talk about priests and their vices, especially avarice, as well as the current political situation in Italy. There follows a highly Lucianic 'grammarians' duel', in which Mercury acts as a judge in the quibbling arguments among three pedantic grammarians.

In the last scene, Charon meets a series of shades: a Cyprian harlot who had a cardinal as a favourite, a monk who frequently changed order so as to deceive ingenuous women more easily, a bishop who had been concerned only about his belly and concubines, and an unhappy girl who had been duped and raped by an old priest. Finally, Pontano introduces the shades of two enigmatic characters, an inhabitant of Etruria who

joyfully spent his existence and another from Umbria who, after the manner of the Stoics, regards virtue as the sole and indispensable condition to achieve happiness. *Charon* ends lyrically with two poems expressing the sentiments of guilty and innocent shades.

The setting in *Charon*: Lucianic underworld and humanist academy

The blending of Lucianic and Ciceronian dialogue is apparent in the setting of *Charon*. The underworld, in which all the scenes take place, clearly recalls a number of Lucian's compositions, such as *The Dialogues of the Dead*, *Menippus* and *The Downward Journey*, but, nonetheless, the Lucianic model is substantially reshaped. Whereas Lucian depicted Hades as a dark and gloomy environment, Pontano positioned his characters in a *locus amoenus*, showing the same love of nature that characterises many of his poems.⁷ Moreover, the way in which Charon, Minos, Aeacus and Mercury converse is evocative of an academic gathering of Ciceronian kind. Significantly, the opening of the work hints at Cicero. Minos maintains that people who hold office should never be idle, even in their free time. Aeacus agrees with him, adding that spare time, by unburdening mind from cares, facilitates the clearest perception of the truth. This exchange echoes a passage in Cicero's *De officiis* in which Scipio Africanus sets out similar ideas. It probably also alludes to Leonardo Bruni's *Cicero novus*, a biography lauding Cicero for harmoniously combining *otium* and *negotium*.⁸

Some scholars have argued that the academic discussions in *Charon* point to the Neapolitan Academy, of which Pontano was the chief representative.⁹ Grace, the variety of topics and the sodality among the interlocutors are the key elements suggesting this comparison. Vito Tanteri, for example, claimed that in *Charon* Pontano allegorically depicted Villa Antiniana, one of the main venues of the Neapolitan Academy.¹⁰ Although more cautious about proposing an exact identification between the gatherings portrayed by Pontano and the Neapolitan Academy, Scevola Mariotti also interpreted *Charon* as the mirror of a humanist academy.¹¹ The academic setting, he noted, is the thread linking all Pontano's dialogues, including *Charon*, which, on account of its mythological façade, would seem, at first sight, to depart from this model. However, instead of representing

⁷ On this point, see Luisa Vergani, 'Giovanni Pontano scrittore luciano', *Critica letteraria*, vol. 2, 1974, pp. 485-497 (at p. 488).

⁸ Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, p. 131.

⁹ On Pontano's academy, see Shulamit Furstenberg-Levi, *The Accademia Pontaniana. A Model of a Humanist Network*, Leiden, 2016.

¹⁰ Vito Tanteri, *Giovanni Pontano e i suoi Dialoghi*, Ferrara, 1931, p. 125.

¹¹ Scevola Mariotti, 'Per lo studio dei Dialoghi del Pontano', *Belfagor*, vol. 2, 1947, pp. 332-344 (at pp. 336-337).

Minos and Aeacus in their traditional role as judges, Pontano portrayed them discussing their personal opinions on mankind. Further, all the speakers, to different extent, articulate their viewpoints using the standard expressions of academic debates. Pontano was thus interested in evoking the humanist sodality exemplified in Cicero's dialogues.¹²

Into this academic and almost symposiastic setting Pontano inserted some characters and situations borrowed from Lucian's underworld. In the second scene, for instance, Minos describes to Charon a cruel, treacherous and greedy tyrant whom he has recently punished:

And so, day and night, all he thought about, everything he did, was aimed at sowing strife in any way he could, stirring up disorder, starting wars, or expanding those already started, a foe of peace and tranquillity.¹³

This description is reminiscent of the tyrant Megapenthes in Lucian's *The Downward Journey*, whom Cyniscus depicts as follows:

He did not leave a single form of excess untried, but practised every sort of savagery and high-handedness upon his miserable fellow-citizens, ravishing maids, corrupting boys and running amuck in every way among his subjects.¹⁴

The principal difference between the two characters pertains to their punishment. Megapenthes is condemned not to drink the water of Lethe, and he will thereby remember eternally the luxurious and contemptible life that he used to conduct on earth, whereas Pontano's tyrant is sentenced to spend his entire underworld existence in solitude, far from the other souls of those who have died. Moreover, in a sort of Dantesque contrapasso, he will be subject to a perpetual circle of transformations: every seventh day he will turn into a toad, which will be devoured by a hydra, and, the following day, he will revive as a shade.

Pontano harked back to Lucian's underworld also in the fourth scene, the one in which Mercury and his assistant Pyrichalcus brand the dead with different marks. A long pageant of sinners parades before them: usurers, pimps, pirates, gamblers and clergymen

¹² Ibid., p. 336.

¹³ Pontano, *Charon*, tr. J. H. Gaisser, p. 11: 'itaque dies noctesque nihil unquam aut cogitavit aliud aut egit quam quomodo lites serere, tumultus excitare, bella movere aut augere mota posset, pacis ac quietis inimicus.'

¹⁴ Lucian, 'The Downward Journey', 26, p. 51.

are all alike waiting for their punishment. This episode recalls both *Menippus* and *The Downward Journey*.¹⁵ In the former, the infernal judge Minos faces an assortment of rascals, not too different from that present in Pontano's *Charon*. 'They were said to be adulterers, procurers, tax-collectors, toadies, informers, and all that crowd of people who create such confusion in life', Menippus recounts.¹⁶ Pontano presumably took inspiration from *The Downward Journey* for his idea of branding the dead with different marks. In Lucian's text, the infernal judge Rhadamanthus orders the dead standing in front of him, namely, the philosopher Cyniscus, the cobbler Micyllus and the tyrant Megapenthes, to strip themselves, so that he can look at the marks that every wicked deed which they committed during their lives on earth has impressed on their souls. Cyniscus has just a few, faint, marks, Micyllus is completely unmarked, whereas Megapenthes is covered by black and blue marks.

Although he substantially based his scene on Lucian's corpus, Pontano deviated from the Lucianic prototype when he referred to contemporaries who have recently died. Among the crowd of the dead, Mercury recognises and severely punishes the Catalan Pere de Besalù, Conservator General of Alfonso the Magnanimous, whom Pontano cited also in the *Amores* and *De oboedentia*, and the cardinals Lodovico Trevisan Sacarampo and Juan de Mella. Besides Dante's *Commedia*, a source of inspiration was probably Lorenzo Valla's *De falso credita et ementita Constantini donatione*, which not only questioned the debasement of the Church, but also targeted specific clergymen.¹⁷

The figure of Charon

The presence of both Lucianic and Ciceronian features is also noticeable in the protagonist of Pontano's work, Charon. In portraying this character, Pontano departed from the most eminent predecessor, the fearsome Dantesque demon, and recovered, albeit reshaped, the Lucianic model.¹⁸ Charon appears in many dialogues of Lucian, including some of the *Dialogues of the Dead*, *The Downward Journey* and *Charon*. His distinctive traits are a pronounced practical sense and a moralistic attitude. An example of the former is displayed in the fourteenth piece of *The Dialogues of the Dead*, in which Hermes wants Charon to pay his debt. The latter is not in the position to do so but he adds that, as soon

¹⁵ As noted by Geri, *A colloquio con Luciano*, pp. 138-140.

¹⁶ Lucian, 'Menippus', 11, p. 91.

¹⁷ Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, p. 135.

¹⁸ For a detailed study of the character of Charon in ancient, medieval and early modern literature, see Ronnie H. Terpening, *Charon and the Crossing. Ancient, Medieval, and Renaissance Transformations of a Myth*, Lewisburg, PA, 1985.

as an epidemic or a war sends to the underworld a large crowd, he ‘can then make a profit, by overcharging on the fares in the rush’.¹⁹ The same keen practical sense is peculiar to Charon in the twentieth piece, too. The ferryman has to board a huge number of dead, each of them laden with luggage. Since his boat is small and leaks, he orders the dead to strip themselves before boarding and to leave their belongings on the shore. This represents the literary device permitting Hermes to point out all the vices, among them vanity, pride, luxury and hypocrisy, dominant in the life of men.

The moralistic outlook of Charon is evident in the dialogue that Lucian dedicated to him. The ferryman, this time, is eager to deepen his knowledge about the upper world and, in particular, he intends to discover what pleasures in life make the dead grieve when they descend to Hades. Thus, together with Hermes, his guide, he stands on the top of a mountain and observes the human world with all its contradictions and nonsense. The two companions comment on the foolish behaviours of human beings, such as their insane love for gold, which continuously provokes wars, the excessive attention paid to ephemeral values, the lack of balance in governing themselves in the chaos of existence and their superstitious burial practices. What characterises Charon is erudition, since he knows by heart many verses of Homer, and, above all, his moral wisdom. He is especially concerned with underlining how unstable and precarious human life is, comparing it to bubbles in water. Some of them disappear in a moment, others last longer, but, in any case, all must burst. Yet men are ambitious and chiefly interested in glory and riches, ignoring the fundamental rule according to which nothing is eternal and that it is not possible to take anything to the underworld. At the end of his mundane journey, the ferryman expresses his pity for ‘unhappy mankind, with their kings, golden ingots, funeral rites and battles, but never a thought of Charon!’²⁰

Before Pontano, Lucian’s Charon had been revived by Maffeo Vegio in his *Palinurus* or *De felicitate et miseria*, a dialogue composed in 1445.²¹ *Palinurus* circulated as a Latin rendering of an authentic text by Lucian both in Quattrocento Italy and in sixteenth-century Spain, where, around 1554, Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda undertook a vernacular translation of it entitled *Diálogo de Luçiano Ilamado Palinuro*.²² The dialogue

¹⁹ Lucian, ‘The Dialogues of the Dead’, 342, in [Lucian], vol. 7, p. 77.

²⁰ Lucian, ‘Charon’, 24, in [Lucian], vol. 2, p. 447.

²¹ On Vegio’s *Palinurus*, see Sidwell, *Lucian and the Italian Quattrocento*, pp. 222-226; Mattioli, *Luciano e l’umanesimo*, pp. 148-152; Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, pp. 67-71.

²² For a modern edition of Sepúlveda’s translation, see Julián Solana Pujalte (ed.), *Dos traducciones castellanias atribuidas a Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda*, Córdoba, 1999. For a survey on Vegio’s influence in Spain, see Julián Solana Pujalte, ‘Quelques Notes sur la présence de Maffeo Vegio en Espagne’, in Rhoda Schnur (ed.), *Acta Conventus Neo-Latini Bariensis.*, Tempe, AZ., 1998, pp. 549-556.

opens by presenting Palinurus, who in life was Aeneas' helmsman, asking Charon to ferry him beyond the Styx. The latter, glad to help a 'colleague', welcomes him aboard. Shortly after, Charon's efforts in steering his boat remind Palinurus how hard and demanding it had been to face the countless perils of seafaring. Charon dismisses Palinurus' criticism, remarking that it is typical of human beings to be dissatisfied with their own state. Still convinced that nothing is more dangerous than being a steersman, Palinurus starts to recount some of the riskiest adventures that he experienced on earth. Charon invites him to reflect more carefully on the variety of human conditions, underscoring how citizens, jurisconsults, soldiers, the rich, husbands and tyrants are, for different reasons, equally unhappy. Even gods do not live free of difficulties and annoyance. Happy people, he observes, are those who, having discarded mundane pleasures, direct themselves towards virtue. Charon's words convince Palinurus, who ends the exchange by claiming that, if he could come back on earth, he would exhort mankind to follow such a wise way of life.

There is no evidence that Pontano was acquainted with *Palinurus*. Yet it should be noted that, like Vegio before him, Pontano associated his Charon with the second quality of Lucian's Charon discussed above, that is, moral wisdom. In Pontano's *Charon* we do not find the ferryman engaged in practical issues, as he was in *The Dialogues of the Dead*, but we encounter an 'amateur philosopher', who, at times, astonishes his interlocutors in virtue of his insightful remarks. Charon is almost turned into a humanist imbued with Ciceronian ideals. In the second scene, he unreservedly praises philosophy, which he defines as 'consolation for my labours and my companion; it does not allow me to be alone, and yet also keeps me at distance from the multitude that constantly surrounds me'.²³ Tellingly, while conversing with Minos and Aeacus, he stresses that his intellectual development is due to the discussions that he had, or simply heard, with the learned men whom he ferries to the other bank of the Styx. This comment might stand for a veiled critique of scholasticism, the philosophy of the school, since it implies that philosophy should not to be restricted to a scholastic curriculum. Pontano's criticism of scholasticism, as we shall see shortly, is central to his composition.

At the outset of the third scene, Minos expresses to Aeacus his sincere amazement at Charon's 'philosophical metamorphosis':

²³ Pontano, *Charon*, tr. J. H. Gaisser, p. 18: 'ea laborum meorum solatrix est et comes, ea solum esse me non sinit, atque a multitudine, quae me assidue circumscistit, longius etiam segregat.'

There, Aeacus, do you notice how great is the power of instruction? What a philosopher we now see in the one who started out as a rower! What would he accomplish if he had the time or if he had heard philosophers from his first years?²⁴

In Pontano's work, Charon is therefore presented in the process of his transformation from an uncultured ferryman to a refined philosopher. That this process, although at an advanced stage, is not yet complete is suggested by the language that he uses, modelled on Latin comedy.²⁵

Pontano's Charon shares an affinity with Alberti's. Both of them display a gentle temperament which manifests itself especially in a love of nature.²⁶ Charon admires flowers in both Alberti and Pontano. In the fourth book of *Momus*, during their journey on earth, Charon and his companion Gelastus end up in a flowering meadow. Referring to the former, Alberti writes that 'when the fragrance of the flowers that filled the meadow reached his nostrils, he felt so much pleasure and wonder in gathering and contemplating those flowers that he could hardly be torn away from them'.²⁷ By the same token, in the sixth scene of Pontano's *Charon*, while he is strolling in a meadow with Mercury, Charon exclaims: 'how pleasing is the beauty of the flowers, and how many there are! How fragrant these dark ones are!'²⁸ Shortly afterwards, he adds: 'amidst all this variety of flowers we have not noticed the effort of the journey'.²⁹

The similarity between the passages above is apparent. Yet this does not prove that Pontano drew on *Momus*. As pointed out in the previous chapter, it is likely that Alberti's satirical masterpiece began to circulate in manuscript only after the death of its author, in 1472. If we accept the established chronology, according to which Pontano finished *Charon* at the latest by 1471, we must conclude that he was not familiar with *Momus*, at least when he composed his *Charon*. This parallel should thus be taken as a consonance rather than as evidence of Pontano's acquaintance with *Momus*.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 19: 'en, Aeace, consideras quanta sit vis institutionis? Quem nunc philosophum videmus, qui principio remex erat! Quid ociosus ageret, quid si a primis annis audisset philosophos?'

²⁵ Tateo, *Umanesimo etico*, p. 38.

²⁶ A certain affinity between Alberti's and Pontano's Charon has already been noted by Mattioli, *Luciano e l'umanesimo*, p. 103. More recently, Geri has developed this theme in *A colloquio con Luciano*, pp. 142-145.

²⁷ Alberti, *Momus*, tr. S. Knight, p. 302: 'cum igitur ad eius nares florum, qui passim in prato aderant, applicuisset odor, illico se ad flores ipsos colligendos et contemplandos dedit tanta voluptate et admiratione ut ab iis aegre ferret abstrahi.'

²⁸ Pontano, *Charon*, tr. J. H. Gaisser, p. 43: 'quam grata florum amoenitas et quanta copia! Ut halatiles hae sunt ferrugineae!'

²⁹ Ibid., p. 45: 'itineris laborem non sensimus in tanta hac florum varietate.'

Satire of philosophers and grammarians

The Lucianic vein in *Charon* shines through the numerous satirical sections inserted amidst the philosophical discussions. Pontano's satire is concerned with four main targets: certain philosophers or philosophical traditions, pedantic grammarians, corrupt clergymen and superstition. Let us analyse all of these themes in order.

The primary butt of Pontano's lampooning of philosophers is scholasticism, notably scholastic logic, deemed as deceptive and totally detached from experience. In the second scene, Charon retraces an encounter, infused with an unmistakable Lucianic flavour, that he had lately with a Parisian sophist, who, relying on a play on words, captiously tried to persuade him that he would die, although he is not mortal. It would not be reckless to suggest that this Parisian sophist represents nothing else than a caricature of a logician of scholastic orientation. The university of Paris was, indeed, one of the strongholds of medieval and Renaissance scholasticism. That Pontano's sophists stand for scholastic philosophers becomes manifest in the fifth scene. Alluding probably to the Parisian sophist, Charon tells Mercury that a sophist has recently harassed him with his fraudulent arts. Mercury speculates that he might be one of those who are called brothers, a hypothesis that Charon promptly confirms. Mercury then warns his interlocutor to be on guard when facing them:

You need to be very cautious and cunning whenever you come across one of these. There is nothing they would not pursue with argumentation, indeed, nothing they would not twist to pieces, and do you know how? So that, willy nilly, you must agree with their pronouncements, and in this way you might easily be changed from Charon into an ass.³⁰

It is noteworthy that this discussion on the sophists occurs right after another exchange between Charon and Mercury focusing on Aristotle and his modern interpreters. Charon recalls that, even after death, Aristotle was obscure and confusing, since he was still unable to provide a precise answer regarding the immortality of the soul. The ferryman is amazed and perplexed that, after such a long period, his thinking is hard to understand. Mercury carries on the dialogue, affirming that a rhetorician recently mocked

³⁰ Ibid., p. 36: 'cautissimum itaque oportet esse te ac versutissimum quotiens in eorum aliquem incideris. Nihil est enim quod argumentando non consequantur, immo quod non extorqueant, et scin quomodo? Ut velis nolis assentiendum sit eorum dictis; facileque hoc pacto efficiare e Charonte asinus.'

a ‘loquacious little philosopher’ for having misinterpreted some of Aristotle’s doctrines.³¹ When Charon adduces Aristotle’s obscurity to excuse the philosopher, Mercury rebuts that his obscurity is not the issue. The main cause, he claims, is twofold:

First, that today’s philosophers are ignorant of literature, of which Aristotle was in fact an important author; second, that dialectic has been corrupted first by Germans and Gauls, then also by our own people, and they are now making a hash of it, too.³²

It is clear that Pontano is not criticising Aristotle, but rather the scholars, especially the scholastic logicians, of his time and the recent past who distorted the meaning of ancient philosophy. In this respect Pontano’s views are akin to those of other leading Quattrocento humanists, such as Leonardo Bruni and Valla, who attributed the decline of philosophy, a Petrarchan theme widespread in humanist literature, to inaccurate and misleading interpretations of Aristotle by medieval philosophers.³³ As David Marsh has noted, this idea constitutes the link between *Charon* and *Aegidius*, respectively Pontano’s first and last dialogue.³⁴ In the latter Pontano expressed explicitly what he had only adumbrated in his *Charon*, namely, that a humanist reconfiguration of philosophy, centred on the reunification of learning and eloquence, should replace the contentious scholastic debate with a more polished form of Latin speech. Hence the definition of such philosophy as a ‘Latin philosophy’ in *Aegidius*.

Far from being hostile to him, Pontano held Aristotle, the classical philosopher who influenced his ethical and political outlook the most, in high esteem.³⁵ His admiration for him is indirectly revealed in the section of *Charon* dedicated to the polemic against Plato’s laws. In the fifth scene, doubtful about why the citizens of Athens had not approved Plato’s legislation, Charon addresses Mercury. The latter ironically replies that, since the barbarian state of the Ubii had already adopted his laws, Plato should have gone to live there. The Athenian people, on the contrary, should rule themselves with the wise

³¹ Ibid., p. 37: ‘argutululum quendam philosophum.’

³² Ibid., p. 36: ‘altera, quod qui nunc philosophantur ignorant bonas litteras, quarum Aristoteles gravis etiam auctor fuit; altera, quod dialectica corrupta fuerit a Germanis primum et Gallis, deinde et a nostris, in eaque maximam nunc quoque ruinam faciunt.’

³³ Marsh, *The Quattrocento Dialogue*, pp. 114-115; Lodi Nauta, ‘Philology as Philosophy: Giovanni Pontano on Language, Meaning, and Grammar’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 72, 2011, pp. 481-502 (at pp. 493-494).

³⁴ Marsh, *The Quattrocento Dialogue*, p. 114.

³⁵ Tateo, *Umanesimo etico*, p. 143; Matthias Roick, *Pontano’s Virtues. Aristotelian Moral and Political Thought in the Renaissance*, London, 2017.

laws promulgated by their ancestors. Furthermore, Mercury continues, Aristotle undermined Plato's authority, since 'he was a more adroit speaker than his master, and he did not depart so much from the customs of his fellow citizens'.³⁶ This exchange possibly echoes a passage of Lucian's *A True Story*. When the protagonist of the perilous journey arrives in the Elysian Fields, he is astonished at all the eminent men whom he sees there. He has the chance to meet, among others, the veterans of Troy, some famous legislators, such as Lycurgus of Sparta, and philosophers, like Socrates. Surprisingly, he was unable to find Plato: 'it was said that he was living in his imaginary city under the constitution and the laws that he himself wrote'.³⁷ Nevertheless, Pontano's criticism of Plato's laws is indebted, more than to Lucian, to the *Comparationes philosophorum Platonis et Aristotelis*, a text in which George of Trebizond found fault with Plato's legislation.³⁸ According to the Byzantine scholar, Plato's laws threatened the stability of the state and the traditional notion of family. In Eugenio Garin's words, George of Trebizond presented Platonism as 'ideologia della sovversione europea', deeming it as responsible for the moral and political corruption of society.³⁹ The wisdom of ancient legislators or Aristotle's political thinking, by contrast, represented a solid theoretical ground on which to forge long-lasting states. By hinting at George of Trebizond's essay, Pontano showed his interest in a burning cultural issue of his time, the comparison of Plato and Aristotle, revealing a predilection for the latter.

In *Charon*, Pontano also satirises two Cynic philosophers, Diogenes and his pupil Crates.⁴⁰ After death, they both chose to live in the Styx, respectively, the former to obtain food and water without difficulty, and the latter to find the gold thrown away in life, as mentioned above. Pontano's characterisation of Diogenes is influenced by both Diogenes Laertius and Lucian. Particularly consonant with Lucian's style is a dialogue between Charon and Diogenes, in which the latter ironically maintains to have bequeathed to dogs the splendid houses of the nobles, provided that they kept them busy with hunting by day and ceaselessly barked at night. As for Crates, the anecdote according to which he decided to get rid of his riches is recounted by Diogenes Laertius.

³⁶ Pontano, *Charon*, tr. J. H. Gaisser, p. 34: 'fuit enim magistro argutior, nec tam recessit a civili consuetudine.'

³⁷ Lucian, 'A True Story', Book 2, 17, p. 321.

³⁸ Giacomo Ferrà, *Pontano critico*, Messina, 1983, pp. 84-87.

³⁹ Eugenio Garin, 'Il platonismo come ideologia della sovversione europea. La polemica antiplatonica di Giorgio Trapezunzio', in Eginhard Hora and Eckhard Keßler (eds), *Studia Humanitatis. Ernesto Grassi zum 70. Geburtstag*, Munich, 1973, pp. 113-120.

⁴⁰ For a detailed analysis of Pontano's satire of Diogenes and Crates, see Geri, *A colloquio con Luciano*, pp. 154-160.

Pontano added a sequel to this story. In the fifth scene of *Charon*, Mercury recalls that, during one of his journeys to Athens, he saw some Aristotelian philosophers poking fun at Crates, who, with his hasty action, had proved to be unable to grasp that money in itself is neither good nor bad and that its value depends on its use. Hence Crates' desperation and vain search for his gold in the Styx. By this story Pontano is presumably revealing his preference for Aristotle's ethical tenets rather than those of the Cynics.⁴¹ Once again, he discloses his favourable opinion of Aristotle.

The pedantry often characterising grammarians is another conspicuous satirical target in *Charon*.⁴² Pontano broaches this subject in the eleventh scene of his work, which presents Mercury dealing with the captious arguments of three conceited grammarians, Pedanus, Theanus and Menicellus. The 'grammarians' duel' opens with Pedanus, the name of whom clearly brings to mind the idea of pedantry, asking Mercury to report some details on Vergil's writings to his pupils on earth. This is reminiscent of the first piece of Lucian's *The Dialogues of the Dead*, when Diogenes tells Pollux to deliver a message to Menippus.⁴³ In a sort of ring composition, Pontano's scene ends in a similar way as it began, with Menicellus begging Mercury to talk with Pontano and Panormita reminding them to be more careful about certain etymological issues. In the central part of the passage, Pedanus, Theanus and Menicellus quarrel with each other and reciprocally point out trivial mistakes in their sentences. Mercury, who acts as a moderator, is astonished at their pedantry, drawing the conclusion that 'nothing is more obtuse than a grammarian'⁴⁴.

This scene can be seen as conceptually akin to Pontano's criticism of the sophists, alias scholastic logicians, examined above. By means of irony and humour, Pontano engages in a polemic against the reduction of philosophy and grammar (or, more broadly, humanist culture) to, respectively, quibbling argumentation and sterile erudition. He seems to suggest, indirectly, that humanism, rather than representing an uncritical rediscovery of the past, should serve to revive the classical tradition in order to bring forth something new. His *Charon*, with its blending of Lucianic and Ciceronian features, exemplifies this ideal. It has also been remarked that the grammarians' duel might parody

⁴¹ As noted by Geri, *A colloquio con Luciano*, p. 159.

⁴² The satire of grammarians is also central to Pontano's second dialogue, *Antonius*. On this point, see David Marsh, 'Grammar, Method, and Polemic in Lorenzo Valla's *Elegantiae*', *Rinascimento*, vol. 19, 1979, pp. 91-116 (at pp. 111-113).

⁴³ Geri, *A colloquio con Luciano*, p. 151.

⁴⁴ Pontano, *Charon*, tr. J. H. Gaisser, p. 93: 'nihil est grammatico insulsius.'

one of the most famous disputes among Italian humanists, the one between Poggio and Valla.⁴⁵

As for the literary sources, we should bear in mind that the mockery of punctilious grammarians is a core motif in Lucian's corpus. Marsh has suggested that Pontano drew in particular on *The Solecist*, one of the very few pieces in which Lucian himself appears as a character.⁴⁶ Throughout the dialogue, Lucian ceaselessly ridicules his interlocutor, a novice in the elaborate art of sophistry, who, despite his initial claim, is incapable of detecting the numerous solecisms that Lucian purposely inserts in his sentences.

Anti-ecclesiastical satire and criticism of superstition

If Pontano's lampooning of philosophers and grammarians represents the intellectual side of his satire, his attacks on corrupt clergymen and superstition constitute the social component of it.

Anti-ecclesiastical satire marks *Charon* from the beginning, involving all its primary characters. In the opening scene, Aeacus recalls that Minos was pronouncing sentence against priests few days before. Shortly afterwards, Mercury and Charon start a conversation of markedly Lucianic inspiration, especially in its use of irony. Mercury informs his interlocutor that the Olympian gods promulgated a law prohibiting immortals from having carnal knowledge of women. The reason for this is that Jupiter, after having kissed a girl, contracted an infection which made him lose his teeth. The gods, albeit reluctantly, passed the aforementioned law and stopped having carnal relationships with women. Priests, as worldly representatives of divine power, were allowed to take their place. At the end of the same dialogue, in reply to Charon's answer about who on earth enjoys the most pleasant life, Mercury does not hesitate to assert that 'the priests live more happily, since you hear them singing even in funerals'.⁴⁷

The closer *Charon* approaches its conclusion, the more Pontano's attacks on clergymen become sharp and stinging. Mercury seems to be the character more engaged in the anti-ecclesiastical polemic, as the following invective against priests makes evident:

⁴⁵ Ferraù, *Pontano critico*, p. 13.

⁴⁶ Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, pp. 135-136. The presence of Lucian in the text, together with some stylistic observations, has led some scholars to consider this composition as spurious. According to another position, supported by M. D. Macleod, the presence of Lucian intimates that he wanted to reply in person to critical attacks on his use of Greek language. The second hypothesis seems more plausible, since, as Macleod has pointed out, the keen interest that the author of *The Solecist* reveals in linguistic minutiae and subtle reasoning is easily traceable in many works of Lucian.

⁴⁷ Pontano, *Charon*, tr. J. H. Gaisser, p. 38: 'sacerdotes laetiosus, quos etiam in funeribus cantantis audias.'

No men are less concerned about true religion, since their aim is to increase their property, pile up money and keep busy fattening up their bodies; and although they are all terrible misers, no one dines more sumptuously or dresses with greater elegance. Not long ago a cardinal priest attacked his caterer with every kind of verbal abuse because he had been parsimonious in buying a pike (the price was sixty gold pieces), and he almost threw him out of the house for not being attentive enough to his style of life. And make no mistake, Charon, ‘lifestyle’ is what they now call what once was termed the gullet. Another priest of the same college died and left thirty thousand gold pieces to a male prostitute.⁴⁸

This passage clarifies that the main fault that Pontano attributes to the clergy is its detachment from true religion. Far from devoted to evangelical poverty and charity, the ecclesiastics whom he portrays are concerned only with their deplorable personal interests, including love of money and splendour, gluttony and lust.

Moreover, Mercury regards priests as the cause of the wars that are afflicting the upper world, notably Italy. ‘They seek peace with their words, but war with their deeds’, he comments, adding that what instigates them to do so is their insatiable avarice.⁴⁹ In the *Intercenale Cynicus* Alberti, too, condemns clergymen for being responsible of wars, carnages and, overall, of the disorderedly political situation in Italy. Pontano and Alberti display a similar outlook on this issue.

Pontano’s anti-ecclesiastical satire reaches its peak in the last scene of *Charon*. Charon interrogates a group of shades who in life were either clergymen, one even having been a bishop, or their lovers. Once again, Pontano emphasises the lascivious behaviour of the clergymen. Charon’s encounter with the shade of an unhappy girl becomes the pretext that permits Pontano to insert a short story, which, adopting as a model a *novella* contained in Masuccio Salernitano’s *Novellino*, recounts how a priest deceived an unsophisticated young woman.⁵⁰ After having lost her virginity, the girl became pregnant

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 62: ‘nulli de vera religione sunt minus solliciti, quippe quorum studium est ampliare rem familiarem, congerere pecuniam atque in saginandis corporibus occupari; et cum nimis improbe avari sint omnes, nemo coenat lautius, nemo vestit elegantius. Dudum sacerdos cardinalis obsonatorem suum, quod in emendo lupo pisce pecuniae pepercisset (erat autem precium aurei sexaginta), quibus non maledictis est insectatus? Parumque abfuit quin illi domo interdixerit, ut vitae suae parum studioso. Ac ne erres, Charon, vitam nunc quae olim gula dicebatur vocant. Alter quoque sacerdos eiusdem collegii moriens exoleto legavit aureum triginta millia.’

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 79: ‘verbis pacem, coeterum rebus bellum petunt.’

⁵⁰ Mariotti, ‘Per lo studio dei Dialoghi’, pp. 333-334; Geri, *A colloquio con Luciano*, pp. 145-150.

and died in childbirth, her only, paradoxical, consolation being that she received absolution by the same priest who indirectly caused her death.

Partly connected to anti-ecclesiastical satire is Pontano's criticism of superstition. Again, Mercury is the protagonist. Whereas Charon symbolises the quest for wisdom, he embodies the idea of *parrhesia*. Mercury vehemently attacks superstition, defining it not only ridiculous, but also harmful. Nothing is more deplorable than a life subjected to its nefarious power. The critique of superstition leads him to blame devotion towards gods when deprived of profound values and thus observed as mere appearance. To prove that superstition is widespread, Mercury recounts the foolish practices taking place among different European peoples, including the French, the Germans and the Italians, on the occasion of some religious events, such as, for example, Saint Martin's day in Germany or the celebration dedicated to San Gennaro in Naples.

If Mercury proves to be an implacable censor of human gullibility, Minos expresses a more pragmatic and disillusioned vision. He attributes a political value to superstition, remarking that, on account of its power over human beings, it is necessary for ruling a state. This view might, to some extent, reflect Pontano's own experience as a statesman at the court of Naples.⁵¹ Mercury's observation, nevertheless, does not seem to undermine the core idea expounded in *Charon*, namely, that superstition exerts a pernicious influence on men.

Some of the motifs that Pontano uses with regard to superstition find an antecedent in Lucian's *Charon*. The first is the critique of superstition as a form of unreasonable preoccupation with external appearance. In Lucian's dialogue, Charon and Hermes listen to a conversation in which Solon points out how foolish Croesus' votive offerings of golden ingots to Apollo are.⁵² Pontano echoed this theme by describing the religious practices mentioned above, which reveal a lack of deep values. The second Lucianic motif that Pontano reshaped is the excessive attention paid to burial places. In Lucian, Charon blames people for embellishing tombs with garlands and perfumes, since this implies that 'they do not know what an impassable frontier divides the world of the dead from the world of the living'.⁵³ Similarly, in Pontano's *Charon* Mercury ironically observes that 'a Christian worries more about his tomb than his house'.⁵⁴

⁵¹ For a profile of Pontano as a statesman, see Jerry H. Bentley, *Politics and Culture in Renaissance Naples*, Princeton, NJ, 1987, pp. 182-194.

⁵² Lucian, 'Charon', 12, pp. 420-425.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 22, p. 441.

⁵⁴ Pontano, *Charon*, tr. J. H. Gaisser, p. 72: 'at Christianus de sepulcro quam de domo sollicitus magis est.'

Lucianic laughter and Ciceronian decorum

My analysis has shown how Pontano's *Charon* represents a combination of Ciceronian and Lucianic elements. The opening of the dialogue, the academic setting, the philosophical discussions among its characters point to Cicero, its numerous satirical passages, on the contrary, to Lucian. Pontano conceived a form of dialogue in which prominent Lucianic traits are tempered with the ideals of grace and moderation typical of Cicero. The conclusion of *Charon* is emblematic of this approach. At first, Charon converses with an Etrurian shade, who stands out for his wit and his penchant for jest. Asked about his origins and way of life, the inhabitant of Etruria replies:

Etruria was my homeland, not Istria, and I never cared for anything except never to be sad or angry. When someone took a wife, I laughed; when someone buried a son, I laughed; when another went mad with love, I laughed. I laughed when someone dressed too finely, built too grandly, when he bought too large a property. In short, I laughed at everything. I remember weeping once in my whole life, because when my mother died I had to buy land in holy ground to bury her in; then I very bitterly bewept the condition of mankind and grumbled about religion. Nevertheless, soon afterward I stifled my grief and returned to my nature and began to laugh at myself, since I had not also laughed at this.⁵⁵

The Etrurian shade expounds the standpoint that laughter, a symbol of ironic detachment from reality, permits men to step back from the chaos of their existence so as to gain a new perspective on it. As Charon remarks, the laughter of the Etrurian shade is a sign of his wisdom. These ideas are prominent in Lucian's corpus. In *Menippus*, at the end of his journey to the underworld, which represents an intellectual quest for the meaning of life, Menippus meets Teiresias and asks him what sort of existence is the best. The latter recommends him to concentrate only on the present, 'laughing a great deal and taking nothing seriously'.⁵⁶ To provide another example, in *Charon*, while conversing with Charon on how uncertain human life is, Hermes claims that only a few men are

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 104: 'Etruria mihi patria fuit, non Istria, cui nihil aliud curae fuit unquam quam ut numquam dolerem, numquam irascerer. Ut quis uxorem ducebat, ridebam; efferabat quis filium, ridebam; insanibat amore alius, ridebam. Ridebam ubi quis nimis sumptuose vestiret, nimis magnifice aedificaret, ubi praedia nimis ampla emeret. Ridebam demum omnia. Semel autem in omni me flere vita memini, quod matre mortua, ubi illam sepellirem terra mihi emenda in sancto fuit; tum nimis graviter hominum conditionem flevi ac de religione sum questus. Sed tamen haud multo post dolorem hunc compressi atque ad naturam redii meque ipsum ridere coepi, qui non et id quoque risissem.'

⁵⁶ Lucian, 'Menippus', 21, p. 109.

devoted to truth. Recognising them is not hard, since ‘they stand aloof from the masses and laugh at what goes on’.⁵⁷ It seems likely that Pontano had in mind these, or similar, passages when conceiving his ‘philosophy of laughter’. In the continuation of the scene, Pontano associates the inhabitant of Etruria with some principles ascribable to the Epicurean doctrine. We come to know that he refrained from public incumbencies and spent most of his life in his estate, cultivating his land and giving himself rare visits to the city. Both Epicurean and Lucianic features shape the figure of the Etrurian shade.

Among the crowd of the dead standing before Charon, the inhabitant of Etruria points to an Umbrian shade as a model of true philosopher. His teachings, indeed, have always been conformed to his actions. In his conversation with Charon, the Umbrian shade sings the praises of virtue, which he describes as the link between men and the gods. Virtue, he continues, is the only long lasting good to which human beings can aspire. Evidently, this encomium of virtue, permeated with Stoic concepts, is far from the spirit of Lucian’s dialogues, whereas it might fit Cicero’s. This means that in the closing of his composition Pontano aims to re-establish equilibrium between Lucian’s irony and Cicero’s decorum. Ultimately, his *Charon* can be regarded as a refined, as well as innovative, piece of literature in which Lucianic satire, overall dominant, is harmoniously merged with a Ciceronian atmosphere.

⁵⁷ Lucian, ‘Charon’, 21, p. 439.

Chapter 4. Lucian at the Court of Ferrara: Matteo Maria Boiardo, Pandolfo Collenuccio and Ludovico Ariosto

The reception of Lucian in Renaissance Ferrara was a significant phenomenon. This chapter focuses on the three main ‘Lucianic writers’ who gravitated towards the Estense court between the end of the Quattrocento and the beginning of the Cinquecento: Matteo Maria Boiardo (1440–1494), Pandolfo Collenuccio (1444–1504) and Ludovico Ariosto (1474–1533). These authors found the Estense cultural environment a fertile soil for their Lucianic compositions. As early as the first half of the fifteenth century, interest in Lucian was sparked by Guarino Veronese. As we have seen in Chapter I.1, Guarino was one of the first and most distinguished translators of Lucian in fifteenth-century Italy. He turned *Slander*, *The Fly* and *The Parasite* into Latin and had the chance to study Greek in Byzantium with Manuel Chrysoloras, the scholar who introduced Lucian’s corpus in the West. On his return to Italy, Guarino travelled extensively, sojourning in Florence, Venice and Verona. In 1429 he settled in Ferrara, where he initiated a highly influential school based on humanist principles.¹ We can date the origin of Ferrarese acquaintance with Lucian to this period.

Some of Leon Battista Alberti’s Lucianic pieces also circulated in Ferrara.² Among them was a manuscript containing part of the *Intercenales*, which inspired, in varying extent, all three authors mentioned above. Another work of Alberti certainly known at the Estense court were the *Apologi centum*, dedicated to the Ferrarese humanist Francesco Marescalchi.³ In his apologue entitled *Specchio d’Esopo*, Collenuccio paid homage to Alberti’s collection of short stories.

Around the 1470s, Niccolò Leonicensino translated thirty-five compositions of Lucian, plus another two, Alberti’s *Virtus* and Maffeo Vegio’s *Philalathes*, both mistakenly attributed to Lucian, into the vernacular. Leonicensino left his mark also on so-called

¹ On Guarino’s life and school, see Giulio Bertoni, *Guarino da Verona. Fra letterati e cortigiani a Ferrara (1429-1460)*, Geneva, 1921; Eugenio Garin, ‘Motivi della cultura filosofica ferrarese nel Rinascimento’, *Belfagor*, vol. 11, 1956, pp. 612-634 (at pp. 615-620); Remigio Sabbadini, *Guariniana*, Turin, 1964; Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities. Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth-and Sixteenth-Century Europe*, Cambridge, MA, 1986, pp. 1-28.

² On Alberti’s influence in Ferrara, see Luca D’Ascia, ‘Humanistic Culture and Literary Invention in Ferrara at the Time of the Dossi’, in Luisa Ciammitti, Steven F. Ostrow and Salvatore Settis (eds), *Dosso’s Fate. Painting and Court Culture in Renaissance Italy*, Los Angeles, CA, 1998, pp. 309-332; Antonia Tissoni Benvenuti, ‘Alberti a Ferrara’, in *Alberti e la cultura del Quattrocento*, vol. 1, pp. 267-291.

³ On Alberti and Marescalchi, see Luciano Gargan, ‘Un possessore di opere albertiane: Francesco Marescalchi’, *Rinascimento*, vol. 42, 2002, pp. 381-397; Enrico Peverada, ‘Un corrispondente dell’Alberti in cura d’anime: il canonico Francesco Marescalchi’, in *Alberti e la cultura del Quattrocento*, vol. 1, pp. 349-374.

medical humanism, a prominent cultural feature of Renaissance Ferrara.⁴ He held that the major problems concerning the science of his day were due to inaccurate translations of Galen and other classical physicians and that it was therefore necessary to return to ancient sources.⁵ Once he had mastered Greek and had put together the largest private collection of Greek philosophical and scientific texts in Europe, Leonicensino turned Galen's corpus into Latin.⁶ This led to a process by which Galen, together with Dioscorides and Hippocrates, replaced Avicenna and Pliny as the chief authorities in medicine. Interest in contemporary science played a role in shaping the writings of some of the authors treated in this chapter, notably Collenuccio.

Guarino, Alberti and Leonicensino were the key figures paving the way for the flourishing of Lucianic literature in Ferrara. Another element important for putting such literature into context is the rise of vernacular theatre. The chief promoter was Ercole d'Este, who was not comfortable with Latin and unable to read Greek. On 25 January 1486 a vernacular adaptation of a Latin comedy, that is, Plautus' *Menaechmi* (the title was translated as *Menechini*), was performed on stage for the first time, not only in Italy but also, probably, in Europe.⁷ Before that date, Latin plays had circulated mostly in written form and had been acted in their original language either to entertain nobles or as a 'scholarly exercise' for humanists.⁸ The performance of the *Menechini*, followed by many other spectacles based on vernacular translations of Latin comedies, permitted a wider public to become acquainted with ancient theatre and enabled Ercole d'Este to propagate moral and political messages, in line with the values of the Estense court.⁹

The link between theatre and Ferrarese Lucianic literature is obvious in the case of Boiardo, in that he penned a vernacular play, *Timone*, based on Lucian's *Timon*. Broadly speaking, as Luca D'Ascia has pointed out, a theatrical dimension is peculiar to Lucian's fortunes in Ferrara generally.¹⁰ Preferring fables and plays to treatises, Ferrarese humanists found in Lucian's corpus an inspiring model for conveying an ethics centred

⁴ Vivian Nutton, 'The Rise of Medical Humanism: Ferrara, 1464-1555', *Renaissance Studies*, vol. 11, 1997, pp. 2-19.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁶ For a detailed study on Leonicensino's library, see Daniela Mugnai Carrara, *La biblioteca di Nicolò Leonicensino. Tra Aristotele e Galeno: cultura e libri di un medico umanista*, Florence, 1991.

⁷ Richard F. Hardin, 'Menaechmi and the Renaissance of Comedy', *Comparative Drama*, vol. 37, 2003, pp. 255-271; *id.*, 'Encountering Plautus in the Renaissance: A Humanist Debate on Comedy', *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. 60, 2007, pp. 789-818; Chiara Sbordoni, 'A Vernacular Renaissance of Plautus: Texts and Performances of Battista Guarino's Comedy *I Menechini*', *The Italianist*, vol. 34, 2014, pp. 379-399.

⁸ Antonio Stäubel, *La commedia umanistica del Quattrocento*, Florence, 1968, pp. 194-202.

⁹ Towards the end of the 1470s, Ercole d'Este appointed Battista Guarino, the son of Guarino Veronese, as translator of Plautus' comedies, twelve of which had been rediscovered in 1429.

¹⁰ D'Ascia, 'Humanistic Culture and Literary Invention in Ferrara', p. 310.

on examples rather than abstract notions. Instead of emphasising the most provocative traits characteristic of his dialogues, they regarded Lucian as a master of humour and moral philosophy and adapted his sharp irony and, at times, grotesque content to the sensibility of a refined Renaissance court. These observations particularly pertain to the works of Boiardo and Collenuccio, whereas Ariosto partly deviated from this paradigm, as we shall see later on.

Lastly, it should be remarked, as a background note, that Lucianic literature in Ferrara was mostly written in the vernacular. There are several reasons for this. Ercole d'Este promoted vernacular translation of classical texts, not only plays, but also works of history. Leonicensio's rendering of a substantial part of Lucian's corpus into the vernacular greatly contributed to the development of vernacular Lucianic literature. We should then bear in mind that, between the end of the Quattrocento and the beginning of the Cinquecento, vernacular literature gathered momentum in Italy also outside Ferrara.

The importance of *medietas* in Boiardo's *Timone*

Boiardo, as mentioned above, turned Lucian's *Timon* into a vernacular play, entitled *Timone*. *Timon* had already served as a model for two Latin plays composed in the 1430s, namely, Tito Livio Frulovisi's *Claudi duo* and Ziliolo Zilioli's *Michaelida*.¹¹ Both authors were born in Ferrara and had been pupils of Guarino.

Boiardo composed his *Timone* between the end of the 1480s and the beginning of the 1490s. No manuscript has survived. The *editio princeps* came out of press in 1500, six years after his death, in Scandiano, his hometown. Although *Timone* was never put on stage, the description of costumes included in the 1500 edition suggests that Boiardo considered the possibility of putting on a performance of it. Being inexpert in Greek, he availed himself of Leonicensio's vernacular rendering of *Timon* and, perhaps, of the so-called Bertholdus' Latin translation.¹²

¹¹ Luciana Marzari, 'Presenza di Luciano nel teatro umanistico: i *Claudi duo* di Tito Livio Frulovisi', *Atti dell'Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti*, vol. 135, 1977, pp. 213-230; Antonia Tissoni Benvenuti, 'La Comediola *Michaelida* di Ziliolo Zilioli e il *Lamento* di Giovanni Peregrino da Ferrara', *Romanistisches Jahrbuch*, vol. 29, 1978, pp. 58-76. Some affinities between Frulovisi's *Claudi duo* and Boiardo's *Timone* have been noted by Peter Brand, 'Boiardo's *Timone*', in Jane Everson and Diego Zancani (eds), *Italy in Crisis. 1494*, Oxford, 2000, pp. 80-91 (at pp. 83 and 88).

¹² Ermete Rossi, 'Nota bibliografica circa il Boiardo traduttore', *La Bibliofilia*, vol. 39, 1937, pp. 360-369; Marianonietta Acocella, 'Matteo Maria Boiardo, *Timone*, I, 1-11', in Carlo Caruso and William Spaggiari (eds), *Filologia e storia letteraria. Studi per Roberto Tissoni*, Rome, 2008, pp. 105-116.

Before concentrating on Boiardo's *Timone*, it will be helpful to recall the plot of Lucian's original.¹³ The protagonist, the Athenian Timon, once a wealthy man but now fallen into wretched poverty because of his excessive generosity, works as a hired labourer in a farm. At the beginning of the dialogue, he blames Zeus for not establishing justice in the world, leaving the wicked unpunished. Realising that Timon has often offered abundant sacrifices to the gods, Zeus decides to help him. He asks Hermes to find Riches and bring her to Timon. Riches, however, is not willing to visit him. Before Zeus, she claims that Timon has mistreated her, by squandering all his money on parasites and toadies. As the conversation with Zeus proceeds, Riches illustrates her position more clearly. She is friend neither of those who are too lavish nor of those who keep their wealth hidden. Balance and moderation are the only qualities that she admires. Eventually, Riches has to obey Zeus and, together with Hermes, she descends to earth to meet Timon, who is busy working surrounded by Poverty and other companions, such as Toil and Wisdom. Satisfied with his new life, at first Timon rejects Riches and, delivering what amounts almost to a mock encomium, praises Poverty. On account of Riches' and Hermes' insistence, Timon eventually complies with the divine will and finds a treasure trove, making him rich again. Mindful of his previous vicissitudes, Timon expresses his resolute intention to become a misanthrope, living by himself and deeming all human beings as enemies. In the last section, Lucian humorously describes the encounter between Timon and a number of flatterers and charlatans, intent on taking possession of his gold, but receiving from the misanthrope only blows and insults.

Boiardo's *Timone* is divided into five acts composed of *terzine*. The first four, albeit not devoid of differences, are modelled on Lucian's *Timon*, whereas in the fifth Boiardo combined and developed various motifs originating in Latin comedy. A prologue and an *argomento*, absent in Lucian's dialogue, precede the five acts. In the prologue the speaker is Lucian himself. He claims that he will display something new, 'che non vide Roma tryomphante nel tempo antiquo de li imperatori'.¹⁴ This illustrates how Boiardo deemed his play as original since, unlike most humanist comedies, it relied on Lucian, rather than Plautus or Terence, as its main model. Moreover, Lucian presents himself as a playwright who, although now critical of philosophers, had been a philosopher in the past. In this way, Boiardo makes evident how, in Renaissance Ferrara, Lucian was regarded mostly as a moral philosopher. In the *argomento*, Boiardo introduces a character not present in

¹³ For a study on the figure of Timon from antiquity to the Renaissance, see Christian Barataud, *Misanthropologie. La Figure de Timon d'Athènes à l'antiquité et à la Renaissance*, Paris, 2007.

¹⁴ Matteo Maria Boiardo, *Timone. Orphei tragoedia*, Novara, 2009, p. 87.

Lucian's *Timon*, Ecechratide, the father of Timone. Although of noble origins, he did not learn how to behave with liberality, given that he dedicated his entire existence to amassing riches by any means, including subterfuge and usury. At his death, Timone inherited his patrimony. The description of Ecechratide points to Boiardo's criticism of mercantile ethics, to which he opposes the values of courtesy and spiritual nobleness, central to his *Orlando innamorato*, too.¹⁵ In the *argomento* we also encounter the figure of Timone, who appears as slightly different from Lucian's Timon. In Lucian's dialogue, Timon loses his money by helping (false) friends, that is, on account of his generosity, whereas in Boiardo Timone is linked to the ideas of wastefulness and squandering.

The first act of *Timone* follows quite closely the text of Lucian. It opens with Timone's invective against Jupiter and retraces the original plot up to when the king of the gods asks Mercury to find Riches. The fourth and last scene is Boiardo's addition, presenting a monologue in which Timone pessimistically regards sleep as the only way to escape the hardships of life. His gloomy speech is mitigated by the depiction of his house and its surroundings, which, comprising a mountain and a spring, resemble a *locus amoenus*.

The second act, composed of exchanges between Jupiter, Riches and Mercury, is set entirely in the heavens. It differs from Lucian's *Timon* chiefly in two aspects. At the very beginning, Boiardo inserts a political motif absent in Lucian. Despite Jupiter's request, Riches is reluctant to visit Timone and highlights that a ruler should always give sensible orders if he does not want to act as a tyrant. Embodying the reason of state, Jupiter replies that a government decays if its subjects become legislators. Far from being an uncommon feature, many Quattrocento plays, such as, for example, Antonio Cammelli's *Panfila*, include discussions on statecraft.¹⁶ Indeed, Renaissance theatre did not aim exclusively to entertain, but was often imbued with a political vein, as evident also at the end of the act. Departing from Lucian's *Timon*, Boiardo introduces some elements of anti-ecclesiastical satire. While descending to earth, Riches and Mercury comment on human behaviour in regard to wealth. The latter is polemical of the unnecessary pomp characterising churches and sacred ceremonies, as his words make clear: 'li vasi nostri de oro e de argento vogliàne' templi, e le veste pompose di gemme, e rico el sacro aparamento'.¹⁷

¹⁵ Marcello Aurigemma, 'Il *Timone* di M. M. Boiardo', in Giuseppe Anceschi (ed.), *Il Boiardo e la critica contemporanea*, Florence, 1970, pp. 29-60 (at p. 38).

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 39-40. On Cammelli's *Panfila*, see Marcello Aurigemma, 'La *Panfila* di A. Cammelli e la posizione storica del teatro dell'ultimo Quattrocento', in id., *Studi sulla letteratura teatrale ed eroica del Rinascimento*, Rome, 1968, pp. 9-68 (at pp. 45-51).

¹⁷ Boiardo, *Timone*, p. 143.

Set on earth, where Timone lives, the third act is, probably, the most loyal to Lucian's composition. The main non-Lucianic trait consists in an accentuated Dantesque influence, particularly apparent in the second scene. In an exchange with Mercury, Poverty stresses her important role in helping Timone conduct his life more wisely. She continues by saying that 'dal mar de la abondanza ove periva mi venne ignuda questa anima in braccio, del suo poter e d'altro aiuto priva'.¹⁸ As Mariantonietta Acocella has noted, neither Lucian nor his translators made reference to a 'naked soul', the mention of which confers, through Dantesque images, a Christian tone on the passage.¹⁹ The motif of the soul recurs later on, when Poverty regrets that Riches, by tempting Timone, might corrupt 'una alma guadagnata', meaning a soul that has been previously rescued.²⁰

The fourth act may be divided into two parts, of which the first is an addition by Boiardo and the second is modelled on Lucian's *Timon*. The act opens with a monologue in which Fame, a gossipy and malicious being reminiscent of the Virgilian character, makes public that Timone has just discovered some treasure. This permits Boiardo to explain why the numerous toadies visiting Timone shortly afterwards are aware of his prosperity, an element left unsaid in Lucian. In the following scene, Boiardo substantially departs from Lucian. Worried about his riches, Timone hides them in Timoncràte's tomb, where, to his surprise, he finds two urns full of gold. Although he realises that Philòcoro, Timoncràte's son, should inherit that gold, nonetheless he unscrupulously decides to keep it for himself. The rediscovery of treasure was a popular motif in Latin comedy. In this respect, Boiardo probably drew on Plautus' *Aulularia* and Aelius Donatus' commentary on Terence's comedies.²¹ In the prologue of his *Eunuchus*, Terence polemicised with Luscius Lanuvinus, a contemporary playwright who wrote some comedies, all lost, based on Menander's corpus. In particular, Terence mentioned Lanuvinus' *Phasma* and *Thesaurus* as examples of low quality adaptations in Latin of Menander's works. In his commentary, Donatus summarised both *Phasma* and *Thesaurus*, the plot of which shares many similarities with the fourth and fifth acts of Boiardo's *Timone*. It is likely that Boiardo was familiar with Donatus' commentary, since the Estense library contained a copy of it.²² Boiardo might have found another, more recent, model in Alberti's

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 149.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 149.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 150.

²¹ Mariantonietta Acocella, 'Acquisizioni sul *Timone* boiardesco: *contaminatio* e nuove fonti', in Giuseppe Aneschi and William Spaggiari (eds), *Boiardo, il teatro, i cavalieri in scena*, Novara, 2010, pp. 81-99 (at pp. 90-93).

²² Marco Villoresi, *Da Guarino a Boiardo. La cultura teatrale a Ferrara nel Quattrocento*, Rome, 1994, pp. 55-57.

Defunctus, notably in the passage describing how Neophronus, after his death, sorrowfully observes the wicked Tirsius recovering the gold that he, Neophronus, hid for the sake of his sons.²³

The second part of the fourth act follows the Lucianic plot. The parasite Gnatonide, the flatterer Phlyade, the corrupt orator Demea and the false philosopher Trasicle try to convince Timone to share his riches with them, but Timon rebuffs them, giving them a good beating.

The fifth act is entirely Boiardo's invention. Whereas Lucian ends his dialogue with Timon driving his unwanted visitors away and reiterating his decision to spend the rest of his life as a misanthrope, Boiardo continues his play developing some scenes that confer a novel meaning on the story. As for the plot, he is indebted to Donatus' commentary as well as to some of Plautus' and Terence's comedies.²⁴ At the outset, the god Auxilio, a character used by Plautus in his *Cistellaria*, delivers a speech shedding light on the main event of the previous act, that is, Timone's discovery of some treasure in the tomb of Timoncràte. Before dying, the wealthy Timoncràte, conscious of how wasteful his son Philòcoro had been, buried a considerable part of his gold. He gave Philòcoro a letter revealing its exact location, on the condition that he would read it by his tomb only ten years after his death. Timoncràte's caution was well-founded, since, in fact, during the ten years after his, Timoncràte's, death, Philòcoro has squandered all his money. As a result, he is currently in prison for debt. After ten years have passed, Auxilio explains, Philòcoro consigns the letter to the freedman Parmeno, depicted as loyal and grateful to his former master, and sends him to his father's tomb. While undertaking his task, Parmeno encounters the servant Syro, who takes the letter and reads it aloud. The two companions are approaching the tomb when Timone bursts on the scene, ordering them to stop. The cunning Syro engages Timone in a conversation, persuading him that nobody is free if subject to avarice and the unstable power of Fate. Timone decides to dispense with all his riches and to live alone in the wilderness, far from any human community. In the last scene, Auxilio delivers another monologue recounting how the story terminates. Thanks to his father's gold, Philòcoro is freed from prison and becomes wiser, learning how to employ his money without being wasteful nor greedy. Parmeno and Syro share the treasure that Timone has hidden under Timoncràte's tomb and so become prosperous.

²³ Acocella, 'Acquisizioni sul *Timone*', pp. 93-94.

²⁴ For a survey on Plautus' influence on Boiardo, see Margherita Rubino, 'Echi di teatro plautino in Matteo Maria Boiardo', *Res publica litterarum*, vol. 10, 1987, pp. 297-303.

In the fifth act of *Timone* Boiardo profoundly transformed the meaning of Lucian's *Timon*. The latter pessimistically ends with its protagonist who, mindful of his previous vicissitudes, is intent on spending his existence in solitude, keeping avidly his gold without understanding how to avail himself of it within society. This conclusion shapes a dichotomy, infused with a Cynic tint, between being rich but isolated, on the one hand and enjoying the company of other people at the cost of losing personal wealth on the other. If we think of the courtly environment in which Boiardo's *Timone* originated and the social role of the theatre in Renaissance Ferrara, it is evident that Boiardo could not replicate the ending of *Timon*. His development of the original plot creates the literary premises for conveying a new message. Just like Lucian's, Boiardo's *Timone* condemns himself to a solitary life. He even renounces his treasure and his misanthropic traits are more pronounced in comparison with the Lucianic character.²⁵ In Boiardo, however, the figure of *Timone* has a positive counterpart in *Philòcoro*, a young man, who, after having passed through hard times, manages to find a balance between excessive generosity and avarice. In *Auxilio*'s words, 'el giovane fia tratto di pregione; più prodigo non fia, ma liberale, servendo e dispensando cum ragione'.²⁶ Experience, Boiardo is saying, has taught *Philòcoro* how to use reason.

The theme of experience proves to be central to the play.²⁷ In the first act, for instance, Mercury explains to Jupiter that lack of experience has been the chief cause of *Timone*'s problems: 'non havendo bona experienza del mondo falso e de li adulatori, distribuito ha el suo sancia prudenza'.²⁸ Experience and caution are elements pointing to Boiardo's moral ideal, the notion of *medietas*, conceived as a disciplined control of reason over the instability of life.²⁹ By emphasising the role of *medietas*, Boiardo distanced himself from the Lucianic model. This concept, tracing back to Aristotle's ethics, was integral, with various nuances, to numerous humanist texts, from Leonardo Bruni's *Isagogicon moralis disciplinae* to Giovanni Pontano's *De principe*.³⁰ In the case of Boiardo, it converged with the ideas of chivalry and courtesy characterising his works, especially his *Orlando innamorato*.

²⁵ Giorgio Forni, 'Rifacimenti e riscritture di Luciano nel teatro settentrionale dell'ultimo Quattrocento', in *Boiardo, il teatro*, pp. 65-80 (at pp. 75-76).

²⁶ Boiardo, *Timone*, p. 229.

²⁷ Antonio Corsaro, 'Intorno al *Timone*. Aspetti della scrittura satirica nella cultura estense', in Giuseppe Anceschi and Tina Matarrese (eds), *Il Boiardo e il mondo estense nel Quattrocento*, 2 vols, Padua, 1998, vol. 2, pp. 723-753 (at pp. 733-738).

²⁸ Boiardo, *Timone*, pp. 105-106.

²⁹ On the notion of *medietas* in Boiardo, see Aurigemma, 'Il *Timone* di Boiardo', pp. 34-37; Acocella, 'Acquisizioni sul *Timone*', pp. 89-90.

³⁰ Aurigemma, 'Il *Timone* di Boiardo', pp. 36-37.

In Boiardo's view, the practice of *medietas* leads to the achievement of spiritual freedom. This becomes apparent in the fifth act, when Syro undermines Timone's certainty about what being slave or freeman means. Drawing on the seventh satire in the second book of Horace's *Sermones*, Boiardo, through the character of Syro, sets out his notion of freedom as follows:

Liberò è quel che a sé solo obedisce,
che strengie il freno a la Cupiditate,
né la Avaritia el pongie, come io disse;
non teme el sciemo de la Povertate,
e non estima el colmo de Richecia,
né per Fortuna cangia qualitate:
non cura Infamia, e la Fama disprecia.³¹

This passage discloses that being free consists in exercising authority over oneself and, consequently, in finding a balance between the two opposite poles of avarice and wastefulness. Lucian's Timon is unsuccessful in reaching this equilibrium and so is Boiardo's. Philòcoro, by contrast, eventually comes to embody the ideals of *medietas* and self-control dear to Boiardo. In terms of literary techniques, as Acocella has pointed out, Boiardo underscored his message by portraying in the same act, the fifth, his positive model, Philòcoro, and his anti-model, Timone, and showing how the former, contrary to the latter, has been able to learn from his own mistakes.³² Boiardo presumably found an inspiring model in Terence's *Adelphoe*, a comedy comparing and contrasting two educational methods.³³

Boiardo's use of language merits attention. He combined two different linguistic registers, of which one is elegant, refined and abundant in Latinisms, whereas the other is replete with popular and realistic expressions, which confer a vivid tone on the text. This bears a resemblance to the use of language in Lucian, who, albeit inclined to reproduce the polished Greek language of the classical period, endowed his writings with a novel style by adding literary images and idioms based on ordinary situations, often humorously associated with mythological motifs.³⁴

³¹ Boiardo, *Timone*, p. 221.

³² Acocella, 'Acquisizioni sul *Timone*', pp. 98-99.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 94-95.

³⁴ Aurigemma, 'Il *Timone* di Boiardo', p. 51. On Boiardo's use of language in *Timone*, see also Corsaro, 'Intorno al *Timone*', pp. 744-753.

The originality of Boiardo's *Timone* stands out if we compare it to another rewriting of Lucian's *Timon*, namely, Galeotto Del Carretto's *Comedia de Timon Greco*, composed at the end of the fifteenth century. Poet, historian and playwright, Del Carretto, who was born around 1455 and died in 1530, spent most of his life in Milan and Casale Monferrato. He had frequent contacts with the court of Mantua, as his extensive correspondence with Francesco Gonzaga and his wife, Isabella d'Este, makes clear. His letters to Isabella d'Este permit us to date his *Comedia*, which survives in one manuscript held in the Biblioteca Estense in Modena.³⁵ On 17 August 1497, he wrote that he had penned a play, which he called *Timon* in his epistle, using Lucian as a model, but he added that he still could not send it to her since he needed more time to perfect it.³⁶ In January of the following year, he forwarded another letter to her to accompany some works, including his *Comedia*: 'mando due belzerette et uno strambotto. Gli mando etiam la *Comedia de Timon* composita per me et traducta de greco et latina in rima'.³⁷ This comment raises a question concerning the sources that Del Carretto used. By the expression 'traducta de greco et latina in rima', he claimed that he had availed himself of both the original Greek text and one of its Latin versions. However, as Antonia Tissoni Benvenuti has convincingly argued, a philological analysis of his *Comedia* suggests that Del Carretto drew exclusively on the Latin edition printed in 1494.³⁸

There is no evidence that Del Carretto was acquainted with Boiardo's *Timone*. His work faithfully follows the plot of Lucian's dialogue, without inserting any significant additions. As in Boiardo's play, the five acts composing the play are preceded by a prologue and an *argomento*, but, unlike Boiardo, Del Carretto chose as a speaker the figure of the poet himself rather than Lucian. In terms of metrics, again unlike Boiardo, Del Carretto employed mostly *ottave*, using *terzine* only to open and conclude his *Comedia*. The major difference with Boiardo pertains to the significance of his play. Whereas Boiardo, as we have seen, invested Lucian's *Timon* with a novel meaning, Del Carretto limited himself to structuring the Greek text as a drama in the vernacular, without changing the ending and its moral consequences. In the final monologue, the poet plainly observes that wealth brings numerous advantages and comforts, which

³⁵ The entire correspondence of Del Carretto with Isabella d'Este is included in Giuseppe Turba, 'Galeotto del Carretto tra Casale e Mantova', *Rinascimento*, vol. 11, 1971, pp. 95-169.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

³⁸ See Antonia Tissoni Benvenuti's introduction to Galeotto Del Carretto's *Comedia de Timon greco* and *Noze de Psiche e Cupidine*, in Antonia Tissoni Benvenuti and Maria Pia Mussini Sacchi (eds), *Teatro del Quattrocento. Le corti padane*, Turin, 1983, pp. 557-567 (at pp. 562-563).

immediately disappear when poverty replaces it. The last lines seem to convey a non-Lucianic message. The poet regards prayers to God as a way to overcome difficulties, which is at odds with Lucian's criticism of those who address the Olympian gods asking them help and favours.

Compared to Lucian's *Timon*, two distinctive elements characterise Del Carretto's *Comedia*. First, the misanthropic traits of its protagonist are less accentuated. This is particularly evident in the long monologue that Del Carretto's Timon delivers in the fourth act, after having discovered the treasure that makes him rich again. In Lucian, just as in Boiardo, this invective reaches its peak when Timon proudly declares that, from that moment onwards, he will call himself a misanthrope. Besides discarding that passage, Del Carretto added a few lines in which Timon, by remarking how nobody has helped him during his hard times, seems to justify the rude behaviour that he will adopt later on towards his unwanted guests. Second, Del Carretto reworked some details in Lucian's *Timon* in order to modernise it.³⁹ He removed any mention of Attica and replaced most of the references to Greek mythology, customs and habits with expressions related to his contemporary historical and social environment. In Lucian, for instance, Demea flatters Timon by saying that he has won competitions in the Olympics, whereas, in Del Carretto, he hints at a joust in France: 'Timon in Francia vinse già la giostra! Timon ben canta balla salta e corre et a luctar è forte come torre'.⁴⁰ Demea continues adulating Timon by inventing that he has been triumphant in fighting against the Turks and the Jews: 'si come armato contra turchi e ebrei tu combatesti cum virtù decora, e ne portasti summo onor e gloria per l'ottenuta grande tua victoria'.⁴¹ Del Carretto's modernisation of the Lucianic model might imply that he was targeting a public unfamiliar with the Greek cultural heritage. It also suggests that he thought of performing his play, but we do not have any documentation confirming this.

Collenuccio's *Apologi Quattuor*: moral allegories and active life

Shortly after Boiardo's *Timone*, Collenuccio enriched the Ferrarese Lucianic tradition with a series of fables. Born in Pesaro, Collenuccio was a humanist, jurist and diplomat, who spent many years at the Estense court.⁴² He tragically died in his native town in 1504, when Giovanni Sforza, with whom he had quarrelled, imprisoned and executed

³⁹ Ibid., p. 563.

⁴⁰ Del Carretto, *Comedia*, p. 601.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 602.

⁴² On Collenuccio's life and work, see Alfredo Saviotti, *Pandolfo Collenuccio umanista pesarese del sec. XV. Studi e ricerche*, Pisa, 1888; Claudio Varese, *Pandolfo Collenuccio umanista*, Pesaro, 1957.

him. His literary production includes compositions of various kinds, such as poems, plays and an historical work, the *Compendio de le Istorie del Regno di Napoli*.⁴³ He also turned Plautus' *Amphitruo* into the vernacular.⁴⁴ In, probably, 1497 he completed the *Apologi Quattuor*, a series of four Latin apologues, entitled *Agenoria*, *Misopenes*, *Alithia* and *Bombarda*, which he dedicated to Ercole d'Este. The first apologue to be printed was *Agenoria* (Deventer, 1497), whereas the first printed edition collecting all his Latin apologues dates back to 1511. Collenuccio also composed two apologues in the vernacular, *Filotimo*, in 1497, and *Specchio d'Esopo*, at about the same period.⁴⁵ They were printed for the first time in, respectively, Venice (1517) and Rome (1526). Both texts were reprinted several times throughout the Cinquecento. In the sixteenth century *Filotimo* enjoyed wide popularity outside Italy as well, being translated into French, German, Spanish and English.⁴⁶

Despite the variety of situations that they portray, Collenuccio's apologues present some recurring themes. We may identify four primary elements, which, read in continuity with each other, shape a substantially coherent standpoint.⁴⁷ First, Collenuccio praises the ideal of active life, of work as the bedrock of society.⁴⁸ He is then critical of certain philosophers and branches of philosophy, notably metaphysics, which he depicts as too abstract and, ultimately, as a useless form of knowledge. In Renaissance satire, the critique of metaphysics, or of logic, often points to the dissatisfaction with scholasticism widespread among humanists, as the cases of Alberti and Pontano make clear. In the Latin apologues of Collenuccio, however, we do not find the same echo of so-called humanist-scholastic debate. His criticism of metaphysics should be contextualised within his ideal of active life, in which, evidently, fanciful speculations about the essence of nature are out of place. Collenuccio, it is true, seems to refer polemically to scholasticism in one of his vernacular apologues, *Specchio d'Esopo*, when he dismisses the logic of syllogism. Nevertheless, even in this piece his criticism of scholasticism is far from scathing. The third key element characteristic of Collenuccio's stance is the crucial role

⁴³ On Collenuccio's *Compendio*, see Paolo Paolini, 'Aspetti letterari del Collenuccio storico', *Italianistica*, vol. 17, 1988, pp. 49-77.

⁴⁴ Stefano Pittaluga, 'Pandolfo Collenuccio e la sua traduzione dell'*Amphitruo* di Plauto', in id., *La scena interdotta. Teatro e letteratura fra Medioevo e Umanesimo*, Naples, 2002, pp. 155-175.

⁴⁵ All the apologues of Collenuccio, together with other compositions, have been collected by Alfredo Saviotti in *Operette morali. Poesie latine e volgari*, Bari, 1929.

⁴⁶ On the popularity of *Filotimo* outside Italy, see Saviotti's remarks in *Operette morali*, p. 354.

⁴⁷ The conceptual unity of Collenuccio's Latin apologues has been underlined by Saverio Orlando, 'L'ideologia umanistica negli *Apologi* di P. Collenuccio', in Giovannangiola Tarugi (ed.), *Civiltà dell'umanesimo*, Florence, 1972, pp. 225-240.

⁴⁸ This trait, especially in relation to *Agenoria*, has been stressed by Susanna Barella, 'Pandolfo Collenuccio and the Humanist Myth of Work: *Agenoria*', *Studi rinascimentali*, vol. 11, 2013, pp. 61-70.

with which experience is invested, whether in moral philosophy or in the investigation of nature. Finally, we should not overlook his frequent commendation of the figure of the ruler, mainly as guarantor of law and peace. Such commendation is in part plainly encomiastic, Ercole d'Este being the dedicatee of his apologues, but it might also express a genuine belief in the possibility of establishing an ordered society thanks to the intervention of a capable and righteous prince. Let us analyse now how Collenuccio developed these, and other, themes in his apologues.

Agenoria is an allegorical tale dealing chiefly with Collenuccio's ideal of active life. At its outset, Orcus would like to wed his daughter, Inertia, to Labour, who is renowned for his beneficial power over humankind. Yet Inertia is disappointed with Labour's gifts, which she deems unpleasant and austere, and decides to flee. She starts to travel around the world, along with her friend Hypocrisy and two handmaidens, Fraud and Desidia. They persuade men to venerate Murcea, the goddess of indolence. It is likely that Collenuccio borrowed this character from the sixteenth book of *De civitate Dei*, in which Saint Augustine, making a list of pagan deities, contrasts Murcea with Agenoria, a goddess stimulating action.⁴⁹ Wherever they go, Inertia and her companions, promising an indolent and lascivious existence, incur the approval of the masses. Shortly afterwards, tumults arise, since food shortage threatens men and Hunger is about to come. In order to find a solution, the most eminent citizens gather an assembly, in which Antisthenes, Diogenes and Crates, three Cynic philosophers, take the side of Inertia. Other people suggest recalling Labour, but the multitude, terrified at this prospect, rejects their proposal. Fraud takes the floor, offering a recipe for living comfortably without working. Men should be versatile and expert in stealing, deceiving and pleasing the crowds. To speak frankly, she remarks, this is the way in which merchants, bankers, usurers, astrologers, alchemists, priests and many others already behave. Supported by renowned Greek philosophers and rhetoricians, such as Democritus, Aristotle and Demosthenes, Fraud fuels the enthusiasm of the masses. Her talk is continued by Hypocrisy, who lists the laws sacred to Murcea. Work is condemned as the worst enemy, the pursuit of pleasure, far from indiscreet eyes, is extolled and men encouraged to wear the mask that the occasion demands. Marriage, the court, navigation and agriculture need to be carefully avoided. Hypocrisy also mentions distinguished Greek rhetoricians and philosophers, from Aeschines to Plato and Speusippus, underlining how, despite their

⁴⁹ Varese, *Pandolfo Collenuccio umanista*, pp. 36-37.

supposed wisdom, they fell prey to vices such as avarice and lust. She concludes her speech by quoting the Plautine expression *homo homini lupus*.

Meanwhile, Labour marries Agenoria, a virtuous and industrious woman. A number of allegorical figures, standing for wisdom and industriousness, attend their wedding. Labour and Agenoria give birth to seven daughters, of whom the name begins with the letter 'V' (vocalic or non-vocalic): Vita, Valentia, Virtus, Victoria, Vbertas, Veritas and Voluptas. Inertia, Fraud and their devotees wreak havoc, imperilling Vbertas and Voluptas, who are defended by their parents as well as by Hercules. Virtus, too, is in danger. Labour and Agenoria, along with Politia, symbol of good governance, react by seeking justice from Jupiter, who ensures that he will support them. The apologue lyrically ends, with Calliope, the muse of epic poetry, reciting six hexameters, reminiscent of Virgil's *Georgics*, in which she warns the wicked and announces an imminent age marked by a new order.

Collenuccio's use of allegorical characters is straightforward and unambiguous.⁵⁰ His allegory portrays an opposition between the forces striving to institute a productive society and those who conspire against this model. Philosophers, a major satirical butt in both Lucian and the Renaissance Lucianic tradition, belong to the second group. Collenuccio's lampooning of Cynic philosophers is built around the supposed frugality for which they were well-known. In supporting Inertia, they advance the idea that men should feed themselves solely with roots and water. Facing famine is not despicable if it serves to repulse Labour. Democritus and Aristotle, resembling the sophists for their elegant yet captious manner of speaking, are presented as followers of Fraud. Not too differently, Plato, Speusippus and other Greek philosophers stand out, in Hypocrisy's oration, for the divergence between their reputation and their actual conduct of life.

Integral to *Agenoria* is the theme of duplicity and pretence. When Fraud addresses the assembly before her, she underscores how being shrewd and maliciously flexible is vital for men. Stealing and deceiving are the best companions of those who desire to spend their existence far from the hardships of Labour. Hypocrisy reinforces this view, stressing the importance of wearing different masks depending on the situation. Some scholars have argued that Collenuccio drew on Alberti's *Momus* in relation to these issues. Collenuccio, David Marsh has suggested, borrowed from it 'the scenario of dissimulating gods who curry favour with the mob' and modelled the character of

⁵⁰ Mattioli, *Luciano e l'umanesimo*, p. 114; Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, p. 143.

Hypocrisy after Alberti's *Momus*.⁵¹ As much as this argument is plausible, and convincing, it is hard to determine with certainty that Collenuccio was acquainted with *Momus*, given the scarcity of information on the circulation of Alberti's satire. An alternative explanation accounting, at least partially, for Collenuccio's emphasis on the theme of deception might be his own experience as a statesman in Ferrara and, for a shorter period, Florence. In this light, *Agenoria* would represent also a warning against the traps with which the political arena was rife, simulation and pretence being two striking instances.

Whether or not Collenuccio was familiar with *Momus*, his apologue diverges from it in a significant aspect. Whereas in *Momus* Jupiter is depicted as weak and perennially indecisive, in *Agenoria* he is an undisputed authority, guarantor of justice and order. In Alberti's work, Jupiter's plans to rebuild the world fail miserably, since he proves to be unable to devise a credible alternative to the status quo. The conclusion of *Agenoria*, by contrast, intimates that an improvement of the world is not only feasible, but also impending. Needless to say, the figure of Collenuccio's Jupiter recalls, to some extent, Ercole d'Este.

If *Agenoria* focuses on the opposition between active life and sloth, to which simulation is connected, *Misopenes* explores the tension between wisdom and wealth. Set in a slave auction, it presents the philosopher Misopenes conversing with two youths for sale, Chrysius, standing for gold, and Sophia, the personification of wisdom. Chrysius descends from the Earth itself and has giants as brothers, whom he exceeds in power and strength. Asked about his pale appearance, he replies that it is the result of being ceaselessly observed by an avid multitude eager to acquire him. 'Pandorus' would be another name suitable for him, in that he is the source of countless goods and pleasures. No woman can resist him and he is equally useful in war and peace, promulgating laws and appointing kings. Misopenes is puzzled, wondering how such a potent man is subjected to slave condition. Almost posing a riddle, Chrysius answers that, if properly used, he is a servant, whereas, if morbidly kept secret, he becomes the master. Chrysius then invites his interlocutor to ascend with him the pinnacle of a temple, from which it is possible to observe how people, including merchants, judges, clergymen and courtiers, act. The spectacle beneath them discloses that the life of men resembles a relentless quest for riches. In describing these characters, Collenuccio drew on Plautus' comedies,

⁵¹ Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, p. 144. On Alberti's influence on Collenuccio's apologues, see also D'Ascia, 'Humanistic Culture and Literary Invention in Ferrara', pp. 314-315.

providing a particularly broad and diverse vocabulary.⁵² The figure that attracts their attention the most is an alchemist, who, surrounded by filters and alembics, tries to comprehend how to blend his potions to create gold. Fraud, Chrysius remarks, is the most convenient way to obtain the precious metal.

The dialogue, then, changes its tone. Chrysius starts to question Misopenes about his own profession, namely, what being a philosopher entails. In this section Collenuccio emphasises how moral philosophy is by far superior to metaphysics. Instead of engaging themselves in groundless debates on the mysteries of nature, real philosophers are concerned with practical matters, such as human actions and their consequences.

Subsequently, Misopenes addresses Sophia. All what she offers, that is, honour, virtue and truth, although magnificent, is nonetheless projected into an undefined future. Chrysius, on the contrary, promises immediate benefits. Misopenes, who, throughout his existence, has experienced numerous tribulations, is inclined to choose the latter, but, all the same, he decides to rely on chance and throws a dice. There is, however, a final complication. It seems that Misopenes is not eligible to buy Chrysius, since he does not enjoy the protection of Fate. Playing the role of the *deus ex machina*, Hercules takes the side of Misopenes and makes the transaction possible.

Misopenes is arguably the Latin apologue of Collenuccio most indebted to Lucian, as evident in its setting. By framing his apologue in an auction, Collenuccio recalled Lucian's *Philosophies for Sale*, a dialogue in which representatives of ancient schools of thought are sold at the cost of little money. There is no doubt that Collenuccio was acquainted with this text, given that, in his *Specchio d'Esopo*, the character of Lucian refers to it.⁵³ Another source of inspiration for *Misopenes* was probably Lucian's *Charon*, which portrays Charon and Hermes at the top of a mountain, observing and commenting on the nonsensical behaviour of human beings. Similarly, a passage in *Misopenes* presents Chrysius and Misopenes at the very pinnacle of a temple looking down at how men spend their entire existence in quest of gold. In both *Charon* and *Misopenes*, a character, respectively Charon and Chrysius, acts as an experienced guide, helping his companion gain a new perspective on life. It is likely that Collenuccio drew also on Lucian's *Timon* for some incidental details.⁵⁴ Chrysius is reminiscent of Plutus in terms of physical appearance. Moreover, one of the false philosophers described by Chrysius

⁵² Stefano Pittaluga, 'Note sul *Misopenes* di Pandolfo Collenuccio', *Res publica litterarum*, vol. 7, 1984, pp. 171-180 (at p. 173).

⁵³ Collenuccio, *Operette morali*, p. 98.

⁵⁴ Sidwell, *Lucian in the Italian Quattrocento*, pp. 259-260.

shares some similarities with Thrasyclus, an example of hypocritical philosopher whom Lucian depicts at the end of his dialogue.⁵⁵

Misopenes sheds light on Collenuccio's conception of philosophy. Moral philosophy is declared superior to the whimsical fantasies of metaphysics. True philosophy is praxis and the harmonious combination of knowledge and existence. 'It is life, not doctrine, that makes a philosopher', Chrysius points out during his conversation with Misopenes.⁵⁶ These notions hark back mainly to the Socratic tradition, but are evocative of the Lucianic one, too. In many of his dialogues, Lucian ironically targets the discrepancy between the lofty precepts that the philosophers profess and their lives, which do not reveal any trace of such precepts. This means that also Lucian is, albeit implicitly, advocating the idea that conduct, rather than theory, is the criterion to determine who is worthy of being called a philosopher.

Collenuccio's polemic with alchemy is akin to his criticism of metaphysics. When Chrysius and Misopenes observe men from above, they pay special attention to an alchemist, who is vainly attempting to generate gold. Collenuccio's satirical description, particularly detailed and vivid, is indicative of his disbelief at these practices. Alchemy is indirectly compared to metaphysics and rejected. Lack of concrete objectives and methodological disorder are the features linking the two disciplines.

We should remember that Collenuccio was not deprived of scientific interests. Evidence of this is his polemical exchange with Leoniceno.⁵⁷ Around 1490, Leoniceno wrote a treatise, entitled *De Plinii et plurimum aliorum in medicina erroribus liber*, which blamed Avicenna, Pliny and other authorities for their numerous mistakes in medicine. Leoniceno's work provoked a reaction from various humanists, including Angelo Poliziano and Collenuccio himself, who composed in response the *Pliniana defensio*, an attempt to reinstate the figure of Pliny based on both logical and empirical arguments.

The other motif at the core of the allegory, the opposition between wisdom and wealth, may well be explained by taking into consideration Collenuccio's own life. Claudio Varese plausibly argued that *Misopenes*, Collenuccio's most dramatic apologue, is marked by an accentuated autobiographical dimension.⁵⁸ Rather than being an allegorical figure, Misopenes would stand for the author, Collenuccio. The reason behind

⁵⁵ Collenuccio, *Operette morali*, p. 24; Lucian, 'Timon', 54-57, pp. 386-393.

⁵⁶ Collenuccio, *Operette morali*, p. 36: 'vita ergo philosophum facit, non doctrina.'

⁵⁷ On the dispute between Leoniceno and Collenuccio, see Saviotti, *Pandolfo Collenuccio umanista pesarese*, pp. 62-79; Varese, *Pandolfo Collenuccio umanista*, pp. 21-27; Mugnai Carrara, *La biblioteca di Nicolò Leoniceno*, pp. 25-31.

⁵⁸ Varese, *Pandolfo Collenuccio umanista*, pp. 50-52.

his preference for Chrysius over Sophia would therefore lie in the vicissitudes that Collenuccio, who suffered chronically from financial difficulties, experienced during the course of his life. Under this perspective, *Misopenes* almost represents a prayer for a more prosperous future.⁵⁹

The third apologue of Collenuccio, *Alithia*, is an allegorical tale describing a battle between two entities of divine origin, Vanity and Alithia, the embodiment of Truth. The former seduces mortals by promising riches, honour, pleasures and kingdoms, whereas the latter offers a chest containing happiness itself, which only few people know. Detesting each other, they decide to have a fight employing all their respective devotees and appoint Hercules as a judge. Collenuccio meticulously lists the characters belonging to the two armies, which, with their liveliness and colourful decorations, resemble the Carnival parades popular during his age.⁶⁰ Vanity is supported by astrologers, alchemists, sophists, pettifogging lawyers, impostors, poets and historians writing about living kings. Superstition and phantoms complete the band. The group in favour of Alithia, by contrast, comprises legislators, scientists, authentic philosophers, jurisconsults, rulers, physicians, farmers, shepherds, architects and artisans. The Muses and Momus also take her side. As soon as the battle begins, Momus stands out on account of his courage and, eventually, he is decisive for Alithia's victory. Vanity goes on exile wandering among the multitude, which, Collenuccio observes, is not a matter of wealth or ancestry, but is an inclination of the soul. At the request of Hercules, Momus weds Alithia, to whom a temple is dedicated.

A significant antecedent of *Alithia* was Alberti's *Virtus*, one of the *Intercenales*. This piece, it is worth remembering, mistakenly passed for an original composition of Lucian and was translated into the vernacular by Leoniceno. In all likelihood Collenuccio was acquainted with it. Both texts focus on a fight between two allegorical figures, of which one embodies positive values and the other negative. A different vein, nevertheless, imbues *Virtus* and *Alithia*. Whereas in the former Virtue is not only beaten by Fortune, but also unable to obtain justice, the latter optimistically ends with the triumph of the forces of good. The chief reason accounting for this variation presumably lies in Collenuccio's political outlook. As already pointed out, he was, it seems, confident in the achievement of order, especially if enforced by a charismatic leader. The character of Hercules is, evidently, an allusion to Ercole d'Este, just as Jupiter was in *Agenoria*.

⁵⁹ Saviotti, *Pandolfo Collenuccio umanista pesarese*, p. 173.

⁶⁰ Orlando, 'L'ideologia umanistica negli *Apologi* di P. Collenuccio', p. 237.

The presence of Momus is an important element linking *Alithia* to the Lucianic tradition. Collenuccio's reinterpretation of him profoundly diverges from Alberti's and recalls Lucian's god. Far from ambiguous and malicious, in *Alithia* Momus acts as a monolithic deity. Collenuccio underlines his bravery and frankness, the essential features of Lucian's character. While strenuously fighting against his enemies, Collenuccio's Momus removes the masks covering their faces. Since wearing countless masks is, indeed, the distinctive trait of Alberti's Momus, it would be tempting to interpret these lines as an ironic reference to Alberti's satire, as if Collenuccio wanted to mark the difference between the two figures. Yet, as mentioned above, his knowledge of *Momus* is possible but not certain.

There might be a further echo of Lucian in *Alithia*, concerning Collenuccio's allusion to bad historians, namely, those historians who write about living rulers. The obvious implication is that such historians laud people in power expecting a favour in exchange for their praise, abandoning thereby any demand of objectivity. In his treatise entitled *How to Write History*, Lucian warns against this reduction of history to rhetoric. As we have seen in Chapter I.1, Guarino paraphrased part of Lucian's text in his letter to Tobia Borghi, newly appointed court historian to Sigismondo Malatesta in Rimini. It seems likely that Collenuccio, whether via the mediation of Guarino or not, came to know Lucian's work on history.

As for its message, *Alithia* is in line with the other apologues of Collenuccio. Its central theme is the opposition between false philosophy and science on the one hand and productive knowledge on the other. Among Vanity's devotees, besides bad historians and sophists, there are also astrologers and alchemists. By this image, Collenuccio continues his polemic against sham science characterising *Misopenes*. *Alithia*'s supporters, on the contrary, exemplify the model of knowledge and society that Collenuccio intended to promote. Legislators, jurisconsults and rulers point to his belief in the possibility of establishing an ordered human community. Physicians are emblematic of his interest in contemporary science. Lastly, architects, artisans and farmers embody the same ideal of active life that he expresses in *Agenoria*.

Collenuccio completed his series of Latin apologues with *Bombarda*, a brief composition employing mythology to account for the origin of firearms. Its protagonist, another allegory for Ercole d'Este, is Phronimus, who, after having built a city and having made laws for it, decides to question some philosophers about the best way to defend his

creation.⁶¹ His encounter with them turns out to be disappointing. Heraclitus tells him to observe an egg and, similarly, Diogenes shows him a chestnut. Nor is Phronimus luckier when he interrogates Minerva, who replies with an obscure oracular utterance. Shortly afterwards, he addresses Hercules, who avails himself of a myth to explain to his interlocutor the origin of the bombard, a powerful firearm, as well as the technical principles underlying its functioning. Hercules then applies his notions to the construction of three bombards, teaching Phronimus how to protect his city efficaciously.

Bombarda reveals from yet another angle Collenuccio's faith in progress. This time, he concentrates on the role of technology and on the importance of applying abstract concepts. Through his short narrative piece, he declares himself in favour of the use of bombards, a kind of firearms, invented during the late Middle Ages, on which numerous Renaissance rulers, including Ercole d'Este, relied.⁶² As Paolo Paolini has shown, in Renaissance literature there are numerous echoes of the usage of firearms, especially starting from the generation of writers following that of Collenuccio.⁶³ It might be helpful to recall a few of these echoes, along the lines of Paolini, in order to give a sense of this 'debate'. Ariosto was, at least at first glance, critical of artillery, as evident in the following invective delivered by the poet in his *Orlando furioso*:

Come trovasti, o scelerata e brutta
 invenzion, mai loco in uman core?
 Per te la militar gloria è distrutta,
 per te il mestier de l'arme è senza onore;
 per te è il valore e la virtù ridutta,
 che spesso par del buono il rio migliore:
 non più la gagliardia, non più l'ardire
 per te può in campo al paragon venire.⁶⁴

⁶¹ The construction of the city is an allusion to the *addizione erculea*, an urban extension of Ferrara planned by the architect Biagio Rossetti at the request of Ercole d'Este.

⁶² On Renaissance and early modern warfare, see Piero Pieri, *Il Rinascimento e la crisi militare italiana*, Turin, 1971; J. R. Hale, *Renaissance War Studies*, London, 1983; Bert S. Hall, *Weapons and Warfare in Renaissance Europe. Gunpowder, Technology, and Tactics*, Baltimore, MD, 1997; Stephen Turnbull, *The Art of Renaissance Warfare. From the Fall of Constantinople to the Thirty Years War*, London, 2006; Paul E. J. Hammer (ed.), *Warfare in Early Modern Europe 1450-1660*, Aldershot, 2007.

⁶³ Paolo Paolini, 'L'apologo latino *Bombarda* e altri riflessi letterari delle prime armi da fuoco', *Italianistica*, vol. 18, 1989, pp. 357-365.

⁶⁴ Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, Bologna, 1960, XI, 26, p. 302.

In Ariosto's view, firearms threatened the chivalric way of conceiving war, since they permitted cowards to prevail easily over valorous warriors.⁶⁵ Unlike Ariosto, who, albeit polemically, appreciated the power of artillery, Niccolò Machiavelli undervalued its role and relegated it to a marginal position in military strategy.⁶⁶ A reference to firearms, notably the bombard, is present also in the second book of Baldassarre Castiglione's *Il libro del Cortegiano*. Castiglione seems to be captivated by the explosion that bombard provokes. While discussing different kinds of temperaments, he compares rage with a burst of bombard, defined as 'violento e furioso'.⁶⁷ Collenuccio's apologue can be seen as a precursor of the Renaissance fascination with firearms.

Collenuccio's eulogistic vein is particularly accentuated in *Bombarda*. In a letter to his friend Cesare Nappi, a notary and humanist from Bologna, Collenuccio explains that Ercole d'Este deserves the epithet of 'Phronimus', a Greek word translatable in English as 'prudent' or 'wise', since he had the foresight to understand how important it was to provide Ferrara's fortification with bombards.⁶⁸ At the end of his letter, Collenuccio casts light on the overall meaning of his apologues, which he conceived as a form of philosophy useful and pleasant for investigating reality. This task was as necessary as it was demanding, given that 'everything is replete with mysteries'.⁶⁹ Moreover, by expressing his hope for the diffusion of his apologues at school, he reveals that his literary production had, at least in part, a pedagogical inspiration.

Lucian, Aristotle and Aesop in Collenuccio's vernacular apologues

Collenuccio's definition of his Latin apologues as a useful and pleasant kind of philosophy is equally applicable to his vernacular apologues, *Filotimo* and *Specchio d'Esopo*. *Filotimo* is a humorous dialogue between a head, *testa*, and her cap, *berretta*, conversing in a lively manner about honour and virtue. Lucianic in form and style, as for the content it shows many affinities with the debate over nobility, a genre, usually deprived of Lucianic traits, that flourished during the Renaissance. The title itself probably derives from Cristoforo Landino's *De nobilitate*, a work in which one of the

⁶⁵ Scholars hold different views on Ariosto's outlook on firearms. That Ariosto was critical of their use has been argued, for instance, by Michael Murrin, *History and Warfare in Renaissance Epic*, Chicago, 1994, pp. 123-137; Franco Cardini, *Quella antica festa crudele. Guerra e cultura della guerra dal Medioevo alla Rivoluzione francese*, Milan, 1995, pp. 108-109. Other scholars, by contrast, have argued for an ironic interpretation of Ariosto's condemnation of firearms. See, for example, Wiley Feinstein, 'The Strategic Rhetoric of Ariosto's Invective Against Firearms', *Italian Culture*, vol. 8, 1990, pp. 63-73.

⁶⁶ Paolini, 'L'apologo latino *Bombarda*', p. 359.

⁶⁷ Baldassarre Castiglione, *Il libro del Cortegiano*, Florence, 1947, p. 162.

⁶⁸ Collenuccio's letter is included in Collenuccio, *Operette morali*, pp. 346-350.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 350: 'omnia enim mysteriis plena sunt.'

characters is named, indeed, *Filotimo*.⁷⁰ Besides Lucian, Collenuccio drew on Aristotle's ethical thinking, which, albeit disguised, recurs in various passages.

At the outset of *Filotimo*, the cap complains about her fate, consisting in being improperly used by the head wearing her. The cap blames the head for raising her every time she, the head, encounters someone who seems to be worthy of honour, without discerning between those who justly deserve deference and those who take advantage of a noble appearance so as to conceal their superficiality. In introducing her critical remarks, the cap relies on the notion of *parrhesia*, as, for example, when she tells the head: 's'io ti vorrò parlar chiaro, non cesserò, misera! di dirti il vero, e tu, non usata a tal ragione, ti adirerai'.⁷¹

As the dialogue proceeds, we realise that the cap and the head disagree on many topics. The head, for instance, claims that beauty depends on outward features, notably clothes. The cap, on the other hand, regards it as harmonious proportion of the parts forming a body. The head's defence of her argument as the one supported by the majority provokes the indignation of the cap, who vehemently attacks the crowd, *vulgo*, 'il quale di ogni verità pessimo interprete fu sempre iudicato'.⁷² The polemic against the multitude, recurrent in *Filotimo*, is reminiscent of the conclusion of *Alithia*, in which the crowd is the destination of the exile of Vanity.

The main disagreement between the two interlocutors pertains to the ideas of honour and nobility. Whereas the head superficially maintains that honour is nothing but raising the cap, the cap affirms that 'onore è una esibizione di reverenza, in segno di eccellente virtù de l'onorato'.⁷³ The discussion then moves to a nearby *piazza*. The cap and the head encounter a parade of vain characters, flaunting symbols of wealth and power so as to arouse the admiration of other people. Before this lamentable spectacle, the head argues that nobility consists in listing a long series of ancestors. If this was true, the cap rebuts, everyone would be noble, since humankind in its entirety originated from Deucalion and Pyrrha. This is an allusion to the fourth book of Dante's *Convivio*, in which Dante remarks that it is meaningless to conceive nobility in terms of lineage, in that all human beings descend from Adam. Far from related to origin and provenance, the cap continues, nobility stems entirely from virtue.

⁷⁰ As noted by Francesco Tateo, 'La disputa della nobiltà', in id., *Tradizione e realtà nell'Umanesimo italiano*, pp. 355-421 (at p. 398).

⁷¹ Collenuccio, *Operette morali*, p. 56.

⁷² Ibid., p. 59.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 64.

The conclusion of *Filotimo* assumes a political twist. The head explains that, behind her habit to raise the cap in front of everyone, lies an astute quest for personal benefit, which, as the multitude claims, is the primary goal of any sensible man. Advocating the standpoint of a ruler, the cap replies that the pursuit of personal interest is disadvantageous to human communities, of which the administration requires wiser principles. To put an end to their debate, the head and the cap address Hercules, who, as in *Misopenes*, plays the role of the *deus ex machina*, leading the dialogue to its close. Hercules' arguments are akin to those set out by the cap, as evident in his concept of honour, which he defines as a sign of deference before excellent virtue. Evidence of this is that, originally, raising the cap was an act needed only in the presence of rulers and magistrates. Collenuccio's implicit praise of Ercole d'Este becomes manifest shortly afterwards, when Hercules maintains that 'veramente beata chiamare quella città, quella provincia e quella nazione si deve, che di bon principe è dotata'.⁷⁴ In his final speech, Hercules, first, argues for the incompatibility of virtue and money, since, if one increases, the other decreases. This view is in keeping with the conclusion of *Misopenes*, in which the protagonist has to choose between Chrysius, gold, and Sophia, wisdom, without having the possibility of buying both slaves. Second, Hercules makes a distinction between intellectual and moral virtues. Collenuccio's encomiastic vein reaches its peak when Hercules points out that it is rare that someone is endowed with both kinds of virtue, as in the case of 'quel Principe che 'l mio nome porta', referring to Ercole d'Este.⁷⁵

Filotimo can be placed in the Renaissance tradition of the debate over nobility.⁷⁶ It is noteworthy that Collenuccio hinted at Dante's *Convivio*, which represented an influential precursor of this tradition. The Dantesque model was revived and innovated by a number of humanists, such as, for example, Buonaccorso da Montemagno, Poggio Bracciolini, Leonardo di Chio, Bartolomeo Sacchi and Cristoforo Landino. Although not without significant differences, and sometimes even written as polemical reactions to each other, their dialogues explore the theme of nobility by discussing contrasting perspectives on it, one of which tends to emphasise the notion of nobility as a moral or

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 79-80.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 83.

⁷⁶ On this topic, see Aldo Vallone, *Cortesia e nobiltà nel Rinascimento*, Asti, 1955, pp. 31-79; Charles Trinkaus, *Adversity's Noblemen. The Italian Humanists on Happiness*, New York, NY, 1965, pp. 47-57; Francesco Tateo, 'La disputa della nobiltà', pp. 355-421; Claudio Donati, *L'idea di nobiltà in Italia. Secoli XIV-XVIII*, Rome, 1988, pp. 3-150. For a collection of English translations of numerous Renaissance dialogues on nobility, see Albert Rabil Jr. (ed. and tr.), *Knowledge, Goodness, and Power: The Debate over Nobility among Quattrocento Italian Humanists*, Binghamton, NY, 1991.

intellectual virtue, as in *Filotimo*. Unlike other dialogues on nobility, however, *Filotimo* is indebted to Lucian, mainly for its style. The liveliness and the humorous tone characterising the exchanges between the head and the cap are remarkably Lucianic. Stemming from Lucian is also Collenuccio's use of irony, largely consisting in describing ordinary situations employing grandiose examples borrowed from mythology or history. An instance of this literary technique is noticeable in the following passage, in which the cap complains about her condition:

Chiamo felice il pelo caprino che a tappeti e zelleghie deserve, e la canepa e il lino chiamo beati, che per sacchi e calzoni da naviganti si usano, piuttosto che la lana de la quale io fui composta, se ben del vello di Iasone fusse stata tosata.⁷⁷

Moreover, *Filotimo* contains an episode evocative of the series of metamorphoses to which Pythagoras had been subject in Lucian's *The Dream*.⁷⁸ When the head asks her interlocutor how she is so educated without having studied, the cap replies:

Di questo non hai da maravigliarti, perchè io son stata sopra tanti capi di industriosi, di dotti, di savi, di stolti, di ostinati, di vani e di tante sorte di omini, ch'io seria molto degna di repressione se in tanta pratica con loro qualche verità non avessi imparata.⁷⁹

In the passage above the cap highlights the pivotal role that experience plays in relation to knowledge. This motif is consonant with her idea that proverbs, which are rooted in experience, act as rules of philosophy.

Along these lines we can also interpret the numerous allusions to Aristotle's ethics, in which attention to reality is conspicuous. It is worth providing a few examples of Collenuccio's indebtedness to Aristotle, starting from the definition of honour given by the cap as 'esibizione di reverenza, in segno di eccellente virtù de l'onorato'. This definition seems to hint at the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where Aristotle declares the superiority of virtue over honour, but, nonetheless, does not condemn the latter, arguing that it constitutes a public acknowledgement of virtue.⁸⁰ Analogously, the cap regards

⁷⁷ Collenuccio, *Operette morali*, p. 56.

⁷⁸ Sidwell, *Lucian in the Italian Quattrocento*, pp. 261-262.

⁷⁹ Collenuccio, *Operette morali*, p. 72.

⁸⁰ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, tr. H. Rackham, Cambridge, MA, 1934, Book 4, III, 15, p. 217.

honour as a deserved prize, merited by virtue. No doubt Collenuccio had in mind the *Nicomachean Ethics* when, later on in *Filotimo*, the cap echoes the famous expression by which Aristotle revealed his preference for truth over friendship, by asking the head: ‘non sai tu che li amici e ogni omo in certo modo onorare si debbeno, ma che la veritá sopra tutto nonché reverita ma adorata dev’essere?’⁸¹ The final speech of Hercules includes another allusion to Aristotle. Hercules groups virtues into two categories, which he labels as intellectual and moral. The former comprises art, science, prudence, intellect and wisdom, the latter all the ethical qualities, such as being just or moderate. Hercules’ classification is arguably modelled on Aristotle’s distinction between intellectual and moral virtues, as formulated in his *Nicomachean Ethics*.⁸²

The last apologue of Collenuccio, *Specchio d’Esopo*, can be regarded as a manifesto of his poetics. By portraying Aesop, Lucian and Plautus as characters, he proposed a canon of authors who, in his interpretation, conceived literature in the same way, namely, as a means to teach moral principles while amusing. Aesop appears as the central figure, since the dialogue is replete with short narrations of his fables. Their pedagogical function was a theme already present in Italian literature before Collenuccio. In the fourteenth book of his *Genealogie deorum gentilium*, for example, Giovanni Boccaccio recounted that King Robert of Sicily, as a young learner, struggled to study literature. To tackle this problem, his master used Aesop’s writings as a textbook, arousing Robert’s keen interest in all the liberal arts.⁸³ Aesop’s fables were popular also in late medieval vernacular culture. Their practical tone conformed to the values of the growing merchant class, as made evident by the vernacular versions of Aesopian tales that circulated in different areas of Italy, notably Tuscany and Veneto.⁸⁴ In the fifteenth century, the Aesopian tradition gathered new momentum thanks to Latin translations of Aesop’s texts made by numerous humanists, from Guarino to Lorenzo Valla. Aesop’s corpus established itself as an influential model for humanist apologue. A prime example are the aforementioned Alberti’s *Apologi centum*, which in turn inspired the composition of other Aesopian apologues both in Latin, as in the case of Bartolomeo Scala, and in the

⁸¹ Collenuccio, *Operette morali*, p. 75; Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1, VI, 1, p. 17.

⁸² Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1, XIII, 20, pp. 67-69. Aristotle then elaborates on this distinction in the following books of his work.

⁸³ Giovanni Boccaccio, *Genealogie deorum gentilium libri*, 2 vols, Bari, 1951, vol. 2, pp. 708-709.

⁸⁴ Vittore Branca (ed.), *Esopo toscano. Dei frati e dei mercanti trecenteschi*, Venice, 1989; id. (ed.), *Esopo veneto*, Padua, 1992.

vernacular, suffice it to mention Leonardo da Vinci's *favole*.⁸⁵ Collenuccio inherited this tradition, combining it with the Lucianic one.

Specchio d'Esopo opens with an exchange between Hercules and Aesop. The latter, on his return from the royal court, is disappointed, in that the porters did not allow him to encounter the king, to whom he wanted to offer a basket of apologues as a present. Hercules assures him that he will facilitate the meeting. The two companions move towards the court while pleasantly conversing. Hercules reveals that he comes from a recently built city, an allusion to the *addizione erculea*, whereas Aesop, probably hinting at Alberti's *Virtus*, recounts an unfortunate event in which he has been involved. While he was in Greece, he met a group of philosophers quarrelling over the causes of some natural phenomena. To put an end to the question, he addressed Truth, whom the philosophers brutally harassed. Realising that their vain arguments could be undermined only by even greater falsehoods, Aesop told them fantastic stories. He acknowledged his debt to Lucian, presented as a Greek friend 'che disse esser già diventato asino e altre volte con le navi esser stato, e aver visso bon tempo asino quindici giorni nel corpo di un grandissimo pesce'.⁸⁶ Although inaccurate, these references point to Lucian's *Lucius or the Ass* and *A True Story*.

Once at the royal court, Hercules and Aesop encounter Blacico, one of the porters. He tells them that, in the morning, the king was busy checking his bronze war machines, presumably an allusion to the bombards depicted in *Bombarda*, whereas at the moment he is strolling with two courtiers, Plautus from Sarsina and Lucian from Patras. This is another reference to *Lucius or the Ass*, the protagonist of which hails from Patras. Aesop is delighted to hear that the king spends his time with Plautus and Lucian, whom he defines as 'omini d'ogni mano, dotti, acuti, umani, faceti, pronti, eleganti, destri et esperti'.⁸⁷ Before the king, Aesop offers his apologues, described as fruits luxuriantly growing, and, manifesting Collenuccio's homage to Alberti's *Apologi centum*, points out that he is able to give him one hundred of them.

As Hercules predicted, the king is pleased with Aesop's present and asks him how to make the best use of it. Aesop replies enigmatically. Perhaps hinting at the literary genre of the *speculum principis*, he claims that his apologues are useful to clean and burnish courtiers' mirrors, so that they can reflect the 'V V'. Plautus is unable to solve the

⁸⁵ On the Aesopian tradition in Quattrocento Italy, see David Marsh, 'Aesop and the Humanist Apologue', *Renaissance Studies*, vol. 17, 2003, pp. 9-26.

⁸⁶ Collenuccio, *Operette morali*, p. 93.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

riddle. Nor is Lucian more successful, although he has often enjoyed the company of wise men:

Io, o re, con molti savi ho praticato, in tanto che una volta io ne vendetti una mandria per pochi denari, e ho veduto assai del mondo e insino con Caronte, infernal dio, ho già avuto commercio, e s'io dicessi con Giove ancora, non mentiria; et èmmi bastato l'animo (come tu sai) fare de la mosca un elefante.⁸⁸

On the basis of this passage, we can assume that Collenuccio was acquainted with several works of Lucian, that is, *Philosophies for Sale*, *Charon*, *Zeus Catechized* and *The Fly*.

The king is the one who finds the solution for Aesop's puzzle. He explains that the human soul, composed of intellect and will, is comparable to a mirror, being endowed with the power to represent the imagines of everything. Ignorance and moral vices, however, corrupt the soul and make it lose its peculiar capability. Apologues act as medicines that heal the soul and take it back to its original condition, to the point that it can reflect *Virtù* and *Verità*, virtue and truth.⁸⁹ The dialogue ends with Aesop's praise of the king.

Specchio d'Esopo is remarkable for its combination of Lucianic and Aesopian traditions. In Collenuccio's view, their point of convergence lies in the preference of lively narrations over abstract theoretical notions. Lucian introduces Aesop to the king as a philosopher who rejected the logic of syllogism and availed himself of a different and more productive method:

Il nome di costui, o re, chiamano Esopo, nato in un casale di Frigia, che si nomina Ammonio: et è filosofo, ma non come li altri che con sillogismi e longhe narrazioni e difficili mostrano a li omini la via de la virtù, facendo oscuro quel che molto chiaro esser dovería, e non facendo però con le opere quello che con la lingua insegnano. Ma ha trovato una nova via breve et espedita, per la quale pigliando argomento di cose umili e naturali, con dolci esempi dimostra quello che a li omini

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 98.

⁸⁹ For an interpretation of the motif of 'V V' in the context of sixteenth-century art, see Giancarlo Fiorenza, 'Pandolfo Collenuccio's *Specchio d'Esopo* and the Portrait of the Courtier', *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, vol. 9, 2001, pp. 63-87.

sia utile. E Plauto e io soi amici e compagni de la medesima setta siamo, e confortiamoti accettare questi soi doni, e ne la tua famiglia accettar lui.⁹⁰

Aesop's, and Lucian's, philosophy is alien to the abstraction and tortuosity of syllogism, that is, of scholastic logic. What characterises their novel philosophy is brevity, pleasantness and usefulness. In short, the passage above encapsulates the essence of Collenuccio's poetics of *serio ludere*.

Social satire and Christian providence in Ariosto's lunar episode

Although they differ in genre, Boiardo's and Collenuccio's Lucianic compositions share some core features, such as the theatrical dimension, as mentioned above, the reshaping of Lucian's corpus for moral purposes and a penchant for courtly ideals. Ariosto, in part, distanced himself from this model. As many scholarly studies have highlighted, his debt to Lucian concerns chiefly the so-called 'lunar episode' occurring in cantos 34 and 35 of his *Orlando furioso*.⁹¹ Here Ariosto recounts how Astolfo ascends to the moon to retrieve the wits of Orlando, who, after his beloved Angelica had fled with the Saracen warrior Medoro, fell into a state of utter insanity, thereby losing his role as the champion of Charlemagne's paladins.⁹² Ariosto's episode includes critical remarks on the court environment, absent in Boiardo and Collenuccio, and the blending of Lucianic motifs

⁹⁰ Collenuccio, *Operette morali*, p. 96.

⁹¹ There is an abundance of scholarly literature on Ariosto's lunar episode. I shall cite some of the main studies: Thomas Greene, *The Descent from Heaven. A Study in Epic Continuity*, New Haven, CT, 1963, pp. 129-135; David Quint, *Origin and Originality in Renaissance Literature. Versions of the Source*, New Haven, CT, 1983, pp. 81-92; James Thomas Chiampì, 'Between Voice and Writing: Ariosto's Irony According to Saint John', *Italica*, vol. 60, 1983, pp. 340-350; Albert Russell Ascoli, *Ariosto's Bitter Harmony. Crisis and Evasion in the Italian Renaissance*, Princeton, NJ, 1987, pp. 264-304; Mario Santoro, 'La sequenza lunare nel *Furioso*: una società allo specchio', in id., *Ariosto e il Rinascimento*, Naples, 1989, pp. 237-262; Cesare Segre, 'Da uno specchio all'altro: la luna e la terra nell'*Orlando furioso*', in id., *Fuori del mondo. I modelli nella follia e nelle immagini dell'adilà*, Turin, 1990, pp. 103-114; Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, pp. 92-100; Giulio Ferroni, *Ariosto*, Rome, 2008, pp. 206-209; Stefano Gulizia, 'L'Arcadia sulla luna: un'inversione pastorale nell'*Orlando furioso*', *MLN*, vol. 123, 2008, pp. 160-178; Ita Mac Carthy, 'Ariosto the Lunar Traveller', *The Modern Language Review*, vol. 104, 2009, pp. 71-82; Letizia Panizza, 'Ariosto and Lucian of Samosata: Partners in Ambivalence, together with St John', in Stefano Jossa and Giuliana Pieri (eds), *Chivalry, Academy, and Cultural Dialogues. The Italian Contribution to European Culture*, Cambridge, 2016, pp. 17-31. On the theme of the aerial journey in Western literature, see Aaron Parrett, *The Translunar Narrative in the Western Tradition*, Aldershot, 2004; Thibaut Maus de Rolley, *Élévations. L'Écriture du voyage aérien à la Renaissance*, Geneva, 2011.

⁹² For an interpretation of Orlando's madness based on the distinction between folly and insanity, see Grassi and Lorch, *Folly and Insanity*, pp. 96-106. On folly in Renaissance culture, see Walter Jacob Kaiser, *Praisers of Folly. Erasmus, Rabelais, Shakespeare*, Cambridge, MA, 1963; Enrico Castelli (ed.), *L'Umanesimo e 'la Follia'*, Rome, 1971; Giulio Ferroni, 'L'Ariosto e la concezione umanistica della follia', in Enrico Cerulli (ed.), *Convegno Internazionale Ludovico Ariosto*, Rome, 1975, pp. 73-92; Aloïs Gerlo (ed.), *Folie et déraison à la Renaissance*, Brussels, 1976; Giovanna Scianatico, *Il dubbio della ragione. Forme dell'irrazionalità nella letteratura del Cinquecento*, Venice, 1989.

with Christian values. What links Ariosto's narrative to his predecessors in Ferrara, on the other hand, is his predilection for vivid images, the use of the vernacular and his indebtedness to Alberti's *Intercenales*. Ariosto came to know the *Intercenales* thanks to Celio Calcagnini, a prominent Ferrarese scholar and diplomat who was acquainted with many of Alberti's works. Calcagnini also turned Lucian's *The Consonants at Law* into Latin. Interestingly, this translation, included in a volume containing Constantinus Lascaris' Greek grammar and other texts, was published in 1510 by Giovanni Mazocco dal Bondeno, the same printer who, in 1516, brought out the first edition of Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*.⁹³

The events prior to Astolfo's aerial voyage help to clarify its message. In canto 33, Astolfo helps Senapo, the king of Ethiopia, to get rid of the harpies, horrific flying monsters who relentlessly steal food from his banquets. Thanks to his magic horn, Astolfo forces his enemies to flee and, riding his winged steed, the hippogriff, he pursues them up to a high mountain near the source of the Nile.⁹⁴ The harpies take shelter in a cave at the foot of the mountain, which, Ariosto writes, is the entrance to hell. In canto 34, Astolfo undertakes a *katabasis* reminiscent of Dante's. Besides their shared portrayal of the underworld as a gloomy, dark, environment, the similarity is evident in Astolfo's encounter with the shadow of Lidia. Like the damned in Dante's *Inferno*, she tells her interlocutor her sinful story, revealing that in life she was a Lydian princess who had been sly and ungrateful to her worthy lover to the point that she caused his death. Shortly afterwards, on account of the smoke rendering the air almost unbreathable, Astolfo comes out of hell, implicitly mocking, perhaps, the far longer and more eventful descent of Dante. Yet the Dantesque subtext is present in the following lines, too. Gripped by curiosity, Astolfo, with the help of his hippogriff, reaches the top of the mountain, evocative of Dante's *Purgatorio*, and arrives in the earthly paradise, where he is welcomed by Saint John the Evangelist.

In the subsequent account of Astolfo's voyage to the moon in the company of Saint John, Ariosto abandons the Dantesque archetype and relies on other literary sources, notably Lucian's *Icaromenippus* and Alberti's *Somnium*, one of the *Intercenales*. The

⁹³ On the editorial context of Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*, see Stefano Jossa, 'L'*Orlando furioso* nel suo contesto editoriale', in Marco Dorigatti and Maria Pavlova (eds), *Dreaming Again on Things Already Dreamed. 500 Years of Orlando furioso (1516-2016)*, Oxford, 2019, pp. 147-172.

⁹⁴ Hippogriff, *ippogrifo* in the original Italian term, is a neologism coined by Ariosto. In conceiving this imaginary creature, he was inspired by a Lucianic invention in *A True Story*, Book 1, 11, pp. 258-261. See Marina Ricucci, 'Il Luciano "volgarizzato": da Leoniceo a Settembrini (passando da Ariosto)', *Italianistica*, vol. 47/3, 2018, pp. 105-117 (at pp. 116-117).

lunar episode is articulated in different stages, which we can briefly summarise as follows. At first, Ariosto, in no more than two stanzas, depicts the moon through the eyes of Astolfo. The moon gives him a novel vantage point and he reacts by displaying his astonishment. The theme of a viewpoint enabling an upper perspective is a distinctive Menippean feature, prominent in Lucian's corpus. The main model for this section of Ariosto's lunar episode is its Lucianic counterpart in *Icaromenippus*, in which Menippus stresses how small, and almost insignificant, the earth is if seen from the moon. Compared to Lucian's scene, Ariosto's further emphasises the feeling of amazement of its protagonist, Astolfo, who not only realises how small the earth appears, but also how vast the moon is.

Wisely guided by Saint John, Astolfo accomplishes his mission. He arrives in a valley comprising all the things, both material and immaterial, that men have misplaced on earth and, among them, he finds numerous ampoules with a liquid inside. As the label placed on them makes clear, these ampoules contain the wits that human beings have lost. Astolfo retrieves Orlando's wits and, with Saint John's consent, his own as well. There follows the description of the palace where the Parcae, presented as old women, live and work, and of the river Lethe, which provides the setting for Saint John's disquisition on poetry, undoubtedly one of the most ambiguous and debated passages of *Orlando furioso*.

Although influenced by Lucian and Alberti in terms of literary motifs, Ariosto bestowed a new meaning on his lunar episode, giving it a pronounced Christian twist. Numerous elements point to this direction, including the characterisation of Astolfo, who differs significantly from his literary ancestors, Lucian's Menippus and Alberti's Libripeta. In *Icaromenippus*, Menippus is eager to discover the laws governing universe. In search of answers, he addresses some philosophers, who, however, leave him even more puzzled and dubious, since all their statements conflict with each other. As a consequence, Menippus decides to ascend to heaven to solve his dilemma and fashions by himself a pair of wings, using as raw materials the wings of an eagle and a vulture. His journey to the moon represents a step toward his meeting with the gods. In *Somnium*, Libripeta begins his account by underlining that, disappointed with the foolishness that he saw all around him, he thought that the land of dreams would be the most suitable place for his character. Thanks to a priest expert in magical arts, he learnt of the shortest way to get there while being awake. Although prompted by different reasons, both Menippus and Libripeta undertake their journey after having made a conscious decision. Moreover, they

industriously equip themselves with all they need to succeed, namely, wings for the former and ‘magical advice’ for the latter.

What characterises Astolfo throughout *Orlando furioso*, by contrast, is the lack of preparation for his ventures, a trait that is replaced by spontaneity. As Mario Santoro has argued, Ariosto endowed Astolfo with the qualities that Pontano, in his *De fortuna*, ascribed to the *homo fortunatus*, an expression denoting people who rely on benevolent fate rather than wisdom and caution.⁹⁵ An example of Astolfo’s attitude is apparent in canto 34, when he comes out of hell and starts gazing at the high mountain in front of him. Abruptly, he gets on his hippogriff driven by the sudden desire to see what lies at the top of it:

Tanto è il desir che di veder lo ’ncalza,
ch’al ciel aspira, e la terra non stima.⁹⁶

When Astolfo reaches the earthly paradise, however, the overarching meaning of his deeds shifts considerably, acquiring a decidedly providential tone.⁹⁷ As soon as he meets Astolfo, Saint John reveals that divine providence is the real cause of his ascent:

O baron, che per voler divino
sei nel terrestre paradiso asceto;
come che né la causa del camino,
né il fin del tuo desir da te sia inteso,
pur credi che non senza alto misterio
venuto sei da l’artico emisperio.⁹⁸

Shortly afterwards, Saint John further emphasises how Astolfo depends on providence, to the point that even his magic horn and his hippogriff are, truly speaking, gifts of God:

Né a tuo saper, né a tua virtù vorrei
ch’esser qui giunto attribuissi, o figlio;

⁹⁵ Mario Santoro, ‘L’Astolfo ariostesco: *homo fortunatus*’, in id., *Ariosto e il Rinascimento*, pp. 185-236.

⁹⁶ Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, XXXIV, 48, p. 1185.

⁹⁷ As noted by Santoro, ‘L’Astolfo ariostesco’, p. 231.

⁹⁸ Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, XXXIV, 55, p. 1187.

che né il tuo corno, né il cavallo alato
ti valea, se da Dio non t'era dato.⁹⁹

In Ariosto's reinterpretation of the Lucianic tradition, Astolfo thus becomes an instrument at the service of providence. Two scholars, Robert Durling and Peter Marinelli, have underscored, in different although interrelated ways, the pivotal function of providence in Ariosto. In Durling's view, central to *Orlando furioso* in its entirety is an analogy between the figure of the poet, Ariosto, who, as an omniscient narrator, exercises an absolute control over his narrative, and the power of providence that governs the universe in the *Furioso*.¹⁰⁰ To quote Durling, 'like God in His regulation of the world, the Poet produces a harmony in which everything has its due importance'.¹⁰¹ Building on this argument, Marinelli has stressed that Ariosto subsumed Lucianic madness under the unifying and rational principle of providence.¹⁰² Contrary to Lucian's universe, Ariosto's is 'not relativist nor disjointed but positively haunted by responsibility'.¹⁰³ Ariosto's re-enactment of Lucian, Marinelli continues, is blended with the decisive influence of Boethius' *De consolatione philosophiae*, in which the weaving of providence produces order, unlike the work of the Fates in Lucian's *Charon*.

Another feature discloses the paramount role of providence in Ariosto's account. In both Lucian's *Icaromenippus* and Ariosto's episode there is a character, respectively the philosopher Empedocles and Saint John, who acts as the guide of the protagonist. In *Icaromenippus*, the adventure of Menippus on the moon begins with a thorny problem, since his human powers of vision does not allow him to look at the earth. Acting as a helper, Empedocles teaches him a trick to become sharp-sighted. This trick consists in flapping only the eagle's wing, keeping the other immobile. Empedocles' advice endows Menippus with a panoramic view of the world. In Ariosto's episode, Saint John has an analogous, albeit more sophisticated, function, in that he explains to Astolfo, who is puzzled by the lunar environment, the meaning of all the items on the moon. And yet Empedocles' and Saint John's roles fundamentally differ. The former finds himself on the moon by pure chance, since, as he tells Menippus, 'when I threw myself head-first into

⁹⁹ Ibid., XXXIV, 56, p. 1187.

¹⁰⁰ Robert M. Durling, *The Figure of the Poet in Renaissance Epic*, Cambridge, MA, 1965, pp. 112-181.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 127.

¹⁰² Peter V. Marinelli, *Ariosto and Boiardo. The Origins of Orlando Furioso*, Columbia, MO, 1987, pp. 166-195.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 192.

the crater, the smoke snatched me out of Aetna and brought me up here'.¹⁰⁴ Evidently, Lucian is ironically referring to the popular anecdote about Empedocles committing suicide by jumping into the volcano of Aetna. By contrast, far from accidental, the presence of Saint John, defined as 'il discipul da Dio tanto diletto', constitutes an essential part in the providential plan framing Ariosto's episode.¹⁰⁵ This suggests from yet another angle how Ariosto reshaped a Lucianic invention, imbuing it with a Christian tone.

Another key passage shedding light on the overall meaning of Ariosto's narrative is the one dedicated to the description of the valley containing all the things misplaced on earth. Ariosto availed himself here of Alberti's *Somnium*, rather than Lucian's *Icaromenippus*.¹⁰⁶ To account for this choice, Simonetta Bassi has suggested that Ariosto substantially shared Alberti's viewpoint about the world, considered as an irrational unfolding of events, and man, seen as 'a creature of contradictions'.¹⁰⁷ Given the pivotal importance of providence in *Orlando furioso*, however, Ariosto might have revived *Somnium* for other reasons. As Daniel Javitch has shown, in his *Furioso* Ariosto repeatedly drew on texts that were themselves modelled on a prior source.¹⁰⁸ The most striking example is the episode of Cloridano and Medoro, which was inspired by the adventures of Euryalus and Nisus in Virgil's *Aeneid*, but also by a passage in Statius' *Thebaid*, an epic poem dating back to the first century A.D., which was in turn indebted to the *Aeneid*. By hinting simultaneously at multiple models, Javitch argues, Ariosto probably intended to confer more prestige on his vernacular poetry and to establish himself as a member of a 'literary guild'. The lunar episode seems to conform to his general imitative practice.

Let us focus now on the relevance of this passage. Thanks to Saint John's guidance, Astolfo realises that the moon is a repository of the earth that not only stores the items that men have lost, but also acts on them by changing their appearance.¹⁰⁹ For example,

¹⁰⁴ Lucian, 'Icaromenippus', 13, p. 291.

¹⁰⁵ Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, XXXIV, 61, p. 1189.

¹⁰⁶ For Ariosto's indebtedness to Alberti's *Somnium*, see Mario Martelli, 'Una delle *Intercenali* di Leon Battista Alberti fonte sconosciuta del *Furioso*', *La Bibliofilia*, vol. 6, 1964, pp. 163-170; Cesare Segre, 'Leon Battista Alberti e Ludovico Ariosto', in id., *Esperienze ariostesche*, Pisa, 1966, pp. 85-95; Leonzio Pampaloni, 'Le *Intercenali* e il *Furioso*: noterella sui rapporti Alberti Ariosto', *Belfagor*, vol. 29, 1974, pp. 317-325.

¹⁰⁷ Simonetta Bassi, 'The Lunar Renaissance: Images of the Moon in Ludovico Ariosto and Giordano Bruno', in *Science and Literature in Italian Culture*, pp. 136-153.

¹⁰⁸ Daniel Javitch, 'The Imitation of Imitations in *Orlando Furioso*', *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. 38, 1985, pp. 215-239.

¹⁰⁹ On this point, see Silvia Volterrani, 'Il poema come specchio: l'*Orlando furioso*', *Italian Culture*, vol. 11, 1993, pp. 149-160 (in particular pp. 153-155).

ancient crowns become tumid bladders, the gifts made to kings and patrons assume the form of golden and silver hooks, flattery is transfigured into garlands and the verses in honour of people in power turn into burst cicadas. The system of allegories and metamorphoses employed by Ariosto is no means straightforward and requires Saint John's interpretation to be understood. Through this system, Ariosto elegantly satirises his social and cultural environment, targeting especially court society, as made evident by his insistence on the theme of adulation, by which courtiers aim to capture the attention and the favours of the rulers.¹¹⁰ He then criticises conspiracies, deemed as the cause of wars making towns fall into ruins:

Ruine di cittadi e di castella
stavano con gran tesoro quivi sozzopra.
Domanda, e sa che son trattati, e quella
congiura che sì mal par che si cuopra.¹¹¹

Ariosto hints also at anti-ecclesiastical satire by referring to the Donation of Costantine, which on the moon is transfigured into putrid flowers. Probably, by this metaphor, he was alluding to the corruption of the clergy, rather than questioning the Church in itself as a source of political authority.

The characterisation of the moon as the repository of earthly vanities thus functions as a literary device permitting Ariosto to examine critically contemporary society, especially the court. Social criticism is not the only interpretative key to the passage. From the stanzas composing this sequence emerges a sense of ephemerality, transience and *vanitas* that goes beyond the historical circumstances with which Ariosto dealt. Stanza 75, placed at the outset of the episode, is emblematic of this:

Le lacrime e i sospiri degli amanti,
l'inutil tempo che si perde a giuoco,
e l'ozio lungo d'uomini ignoranti,
vani disegni che non han mai loco,
i vani desiderî sono tanti,
che la più parte ingombrano di quel loco:

¹¹⁰ Ariosto's criticism of contemporary environment has been emphasised by Santoro in the aforementioned essay 'La sequenza lunare nel *Furioso*: una società allo specchio'.

¹¹¹ Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, XXXIV, 79, p. 1195.

ciò che in somma qua giù perderesti mai,
là su salendo ritrovar potrai.¹¹²

By stressing the *vanitas* of human plans and desires, Ariosto appears to be concerned with the senselessness of life. If seen in relation to the notion of providence and to the Christian vein that, as suggested, permeates his narrative, these elements, rather than representing a moralistic and generic warning against a life spent futilely, might stand for an exhortation to aim at a more meaningful existence, embracing, for example, the message of the Gospel. Indeed, we should not forget that the speaker is Saint John, the author of one of the Gospels acknowledged by the Church.

Letizia Panizza has convincingly argued for a connection between Saint John's discourse on poetry in canto 35 and the New Testament.¹¹³ At the beginning of his talk, Saint John makes a distinction between flatterers and real poets. The former are numerous and what they praise is destined to fall into oblivion in little time, whereas the latter, few in number, deserve more appreciation from their patrons, a common theme in Ariosto's oeuvre. By drawing this distinction, it seems that Saint John unreservedly extols authentic poetry. In the following verses, however, he complicates this picture by mentioning two renowned poets of antiquity, Homer and Virgil, who, in his view, distorted the truth for the sake of personal interests. Seemingly, poetry is now considered wholly deceptive, as apparent in stanza 27:

Omero Agamennón vittorioso,
E fe' i Troian parer vili et inertì;
e che Penelopea fida al suo sposo
dai Prochi mille oltraggi avea sofferti.
E se tu vuoi che 'l ver non ti sia ascoso,
tutta al contario l'istoria converti:
che i Greci rotti, e che Troia vittrice,
e che Penelopea fu meretrice.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Ibid., XXXIV, 75, p. 1194.

¹¹³ Panizza, 'Ariosto and Lucian', pp. 17-31. For an analysis of the religious meanings infusing Ariosto's lunar episode, see also Stefano Jossa, 'A difesa di sua santa fede. Il poema cristiano dell'Ariosto (*Orlando furioso*, XXXIV 54-67)', in *Chivalry, Academy, and Cultural Dialogues*, pp. 32-42.

¹¹⁴ Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, XXXV, 27, p. 1209.

To add a further layer of ambiguity, after this pointed attack on poetry, regarded as an unreliable source of truth, Saint John claims that he loves writers, recalling that in life he too was a writer.

Numerous scholars have noted that Saint John's talk is indebted to the love for paradox and to the seriocomic tone prominent in Lucian's *A True Story*.¹¹⁵ Critical of historians, poets and philosophers, charged with inventing magnificent fables passing them off as actual facts, Lucian ironically asserts that his fantastic story is far more truthful than those fables, since, at least, he explicitly declares that it is nothing but a bunch of lies. 'I am writing about things which I have neither seen nor learned from others, which, in fact, do not exist at all and, in the nature of things, cannot exist'.¹¹⁶ With these words, Lucian mocks the canonical programmatic statements by which ancient Greek historians used to introduce their accounts. The similarities between Lucian's remarks and Saint John's speech are conspicuous. In both cases, the core idea is that the subversion of poetic tradition is necessary in order to achieve a new level of truth. As Panizza has underscored, Ariosto might have intentionally revealed his indebtedness to *A True Story* in the stanza quoted above, where, in two consecutive lines, he wrote first *ver* and then *istoria*, this being the title of Lucian's text in vernacular translation.¹¹⁷ In Panizza's interpretation, the ambivalence characterising Saint John's discourse on poetry is unravelled as follows. Secular narrative and the Gospel are radically different, in that the latter, unlike the former, reveals the truth that defies both time and death, as Saint John remarks:

E sopra tutti gli altri io feci acquisto
che non mi può levar tempo né morte:
e ben convenne al mio lodato Cristo
rendermi guidardon di sì gran sorte.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ It is likely that Ariosto was acquainted with Lucian's *A True Story* via Leonicensi's vernacular translation. Ariosto probably availed himself of both the Chigi manuscript and one of the printed editions stemming from it. See Mariantonietta Acocella, 'I volgarizzamenti delle *Storie vere* e le riprese ariostesche', *Italianistica*, vol. 47/3, 2018, pp. 85-104.

¹¹⁶ Lucian, 'A True Story', Book 1, 4, p. 253.

¹¹⁷ Panizza, 'Ariosto and Lucian', p. 24. Jossa has added weight to Panizza's hypothesis in his article outlining the presence of Lucian in the Estense cultural environment. See Stefano Jossa, 'Percezioni bistabili: Ariosto e Luciano faccia a faccia', *Italianistica*, vol. 47/3, 2018, pp. 121-128.

¹¹⁸ Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, XXXV, 29, p. 1209.

By debunking mundane wisdom, Lucian anticipated the message of the Gospel, which, as the definitive truth, surpassed him.¹¹⁹

The sophisticated intertextual dialogue between Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* and Lucian's *A True Story* is enriched by another detail. In canto 34, after having retrieved Orlando's wits, Astolfo comes across his own and, Saint John being well-disposed, recovers it. Ariosto comments that Astolfo lived wisely for some time thereafter, before hinting at some future misadventures. These misadventures take place not in the *Furioso* but in the *Cinque canti*, a collection of five cantos built around the deceits and the traps with which Gano of Maganza and the witch Alcina threaten Charlemagne's paladins. Probably composed around 1518–1519 and revised in 1526, these cantos were never inserted in *Orlando furioso*. Aldus Manutius printed them for the first time in Venice in 1545 as an addendum to the *Furioso*.¹²⁰ In canto 4, Ruggiero is sailing towards Gibraltar when, all of a sudden, from the sea emerges a whale disguised as an island.¹²¹ Following a naval battle against an enemy fleet, Ruggiero is forced to leave his derelict ship and dives into the water, where the whale swallows him. This passage is reminiscent of the episode in *A True Story* in which its protagonist and his companions are similarly swallowed by a huge whale.¹²² Moreover, just as in Lucian's text, Ruggiero discovers that the inside of the whale is inhabited. Among the people that he meets there, all preys of the wicked Alcina, Ruggiero encounters Astolfo, who sorrowfully recounts how he ended up in that desolate place after a series of mishaps originating in his sinful love for the wife of a nobleman. Ariosto thus fulfils the prophecy on Astolfo made in canto 34 of the *Furioso*, intertwining the narratives of his lunar episode and Lucian's *A True Story*, which also describes a journey to the moon.

¹¹⁹ Besides Panizza, other scholars have noted some connections between Lucian's corpus and the New Testament. See Jacques Dupont, 'La Question du plan des Actes des Apôtres à la lumière d'un texte de Lucien de Samosate', *Novum Testamentum*, vol. 21, 1979, pp. 220-231; Richard I. Pervo, *Profit with Delight. The Literary Genre of the Acts of the Apostles*, Philadelphia, PA, 1987; Loveday Alexander, *The Preface to Luke's Gospel. Literary Convention and Social Context in Luke 1.1-4 and Acts 1.1*, Cambridge, 1993, pp. 23-41; Sean A. Adams, 'Lucian and the New Testament: An Evaluation of His Life, Work, and Relationship to New Testament Studies', *The Expository Times*, vol. 121, 2010, pp. 594-600.

¹²⁰ On the chronology of the *Cinque canti*, see Carlo Dionisotti, 'Per la data dei *Cinque canti*', *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, vol. 137, 1960, pp. 1-40; Cesare Segre, 'Studi sui Cinque canti', in *Esperienze ariostesche*, pp. 121-177; Stefano Jossa, *Ariosto*, Bologna, 2009, pp. 97-98.

¹²¹ For a detailed analysis of the figure of the whale in Ariosto, see Eugenio Refini, 'L'isola-balena tra *Furioso* e *Cinque canti*', *Italianistica*, vol. 37, 2008, pp. 87-101.

¹²² A similar episode is present also in *La morte del Danese* by Cassio da Narni, a poem published in Ferrara in 1521. See Mariantonetta Acocella, 'Cassio da Narni tra Ariosto e Luciano. La Storia vera e il Charon nella Morte del Danese', in Andrea Canova and Paola Vecchi Galli (eds), *Boiardo, Ariosto e i libri di battaglia*, Novara, 2007, pp. 287-324.

Of great relevance to my analysis is the discourse with which Astolfo exhorts Ruggiero to keep his faith in the providential plans of God:

Non manchi in noi contrizione e fede,
e di pregar con purità di mente;
che Dio non può mancarci di mercede:
Egli lo disse, e il dir suo mai non mente.
Scritto ha nel suo Evangelio: ‘Ch’ in me crede,
uccide nel mio nome ogni serpente,
il venen bee senza che mal gli faccia,
sana gli infermi e gli demoni scaccia’.¹²³

Whereas in the lunar episode, as we have seen, it was Saint John the spokesman of the New Testament, in the *Cinque canti* Astolfo, his former disciple, takes the baton by referring explicitly to it. Ariosto has woven an intricate tangle of allusions linking his texts, imbuing his Lucianic adventure with a pronounced Christian inspiration.

¹²³ Ludovico Ariosto, *Cinque canti*, Turin, 1977, IV, 81, p. 115.

Part II: Lucian in Northern Europe

Chapter 1. Desiderius Erasmus' and Thomas More's Translations of Lucian

To understand the Lucianic tradition in sixteenth-century Italy, as pointed out in the Introduction, we need, first, to take into account two Northern humanists, Desiderius Erasmus (1467–1536) and Thomas More (1478–1535). This is because they provided the link between Lucian and his Quattrocento admirers on the one hand and the Lucianic writings of the *poligrafi* in the Cinquecento on the other.

Erasmus and More were, first of all, the most important translators of Lucian into Latin in the sixteenth century.¹ In 1499 Erasmus paid his first visit to England and became acquainted with other scholars sharing his enthusiasm for Greek. Among them was More, with whom he started a lifelong friendship. A few years later, in 1505, he returned to England, where he stayed until the following June, reviving his friendship with More. Their command of Greek had significantly improved since their last encounter. In the range of Greek authors, they both had a penchant for Lucian. Hence their decision to turn some of his works into Latin. The outcome of this joint effort was a volume published in Paris in November 1506 by Jodocus Badius. This edition contained Erasmus' renderings of *Toxaris*, *Alexander*, *The Dream*, *Timon*, *The Tyrannicide* and *The Dependent Scholar*, More's translations of *The Tyrannicide*, *Cynicus*, *Menippus* and *The Lover of Lies*, plus Erasmus' and More's declamations, a sort of rhetorical contest between them, in reply to Lucian's *The Tyrannicide*.² Later in the year, Erasmus sent to Badius numerous other translations of Lucian's works, including those of *The Carousal*, *On Sacrifices* and many pieces from the *Dialogues of the Dead*, *Dialogues of the Gods* and *Dialogues of the Sea-Gods*, inserted in the 1506 edition. After that date, More ceased to translate Lucian, unlike Erasmus, who turned other seven pieces into Latin, among them the *Saturnalia*, *Icaromenippus* and *On Funerals*. These new translations, together with those previously undertaken, made up the 1514 edition, which was once again

¹ On Erasmus' and More's translations of Lucian, see Craig R. Thompson, *The Translations of Lucian by Erasmus and St. Thomas More*, Ithaca, NY, 1940; Erika Rummel, *Erasmus as a Translator of the Classics*, Toronto, 1985, pp. 49-70; Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, 'Motives of Translation: More, Erasmus and Lucian', *Hermathena*, vol. 183, 2007, pp. 49-62.

² On More's declamation, see Hernán Corral, 'Tyranny and Law in Thomas More's Declamation in Reply to Lucian's *Tyrannicide*', *Moreana*, vol. 49, 2012, pp. 71-88; Emily A. Ransom, 'Opposing Tyranny with Style: More, Lucian, and Classical Rhetorical Theory', *Moreana*, vol. 50, 2013, pp. 159-186.

printed in Paris by Badius. Erasmus' and More's Latin versions of Lucian enjoyed wide popularity, as attested by the abundance of editions that proliferated in various areas of Europe, from Venice to Kraków.

Many of the translations comprised in the 1506 edition are accompanied by prefaces shedding light on how Erasmus and More interpreted Lucian's texts. Overall, they deemed Lucian an author who stood out for his ability to combine a refined and pleasant style with serious content from which valuable moral lessons could be drawn. The opening of More's letter to the royal secretary, Thomas Ruthall, acting as a preface to his translations of *Cynicus*, *Menippus* and *The Lover of Lies*, is particularly eloquent:

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. Refraining from the arrogant pronouncements of the philosophers as well as from the wanton wiles of the poets, he everywhere reprimands and censures, with very honest and at the same time very entertaining wit, our human frailties. And this he does so cleverly and effectively that although no one pricks more deeply, nobody resents his stinging words.³

Unlike many Quattrocento humanists, More distinguished Lucian from the philosophers, to the point that he set him apart from them. Like his Quattrocento predecessors, he portrayed him as a champion of *serio ludere*, a trait which is emphasised by his reference to Horace. It is noteworthy that Erasmus, in the preface to his translation of *The Dream*, dedicated to the diplomat and churchman Christopher Urswick, also associated Lucian with Horace. The former, Erasmus commented, had successfully applied the Horatian precept of *miscere utile dulci*. In so doing, he revived Greek Old Comedy, depriving it of its insolence. That both More and Erasmus likened Lucian to Horace is indicative of their shared sensibility towards him.

Compared to the earlier translators of Lucian, Erasmus and More stressed that his works could serve as a touchstone for scrutinising contemporary religious customs. The

³ Thomas More, *Complete Works*, Latin text with English translations by various authors, 15 vols, New Haven, CT, 1963-1997, vol. 3, part 1, tr. C. R. Thompson, p. 3: 'si quisquam fuit unquam vir doctissime, qui Horatianum praeceptum impleverit, voluptatemque cum utilitate coniunxerit, hoc ego certe Lucianum in primis puto praestitisse. Qui et superciliosis abstinens Philosophorum praeceptis, et solutioribus Poetarum lusibus, honestissimis simul et facetissimis salibus, vitia ubique notat atque insectatur mortalium. Idque facit tam scite, tantaque cum fruge, ut quum nemo altius pungat, nemo tamen sit, qui non aequo animo illius aculeos admittat.'

main fifteenth-century antecedent in this regard is probably to be found in Lapo da Castiglionchio's dedication of his version of *On Funerals* to Pope Eugenius IV. There Lapo expressed his optimism that the Pope will welcome Lucian's criticism of the superstitious practices by which men abide on the occasion of funerals. Erasmus and More went a step further. In the preface to his rendering of *Alexander*, addressed to the bishop of Chartres, René d'Illiers, Erasmus makes clear that the figure of the wicked Alexander, a symbol of false religion, helps to unmask religious deceits and mystifications in present times. In the aforementioned letter to Ruthall, More introduces Lucian's *The Lover of Lies* in similar terms: 'surely the dialogue will teach us this lesson: that we should put no trust in magic and that we should eschew superstition, which obtrudes everywhere under the guise of religion'.⁴ As early as 1506, the year in which the first edition of Erasmus' and More's translations came out of press, these observations did not seem to be particularly outrageous or irreverent. Later in the century, when the Reformation shook the foundations of Europe, they acquired different nuances of meaning. That the writings of a pagan, Lucian, could be used to instruct the Christians on how to behave would sound suspicious to the ears of both the Catholic Church and its critics. This arguably contributed to the discrediting of Lucian's reputation in the Cinquecento.

It is worth noting that Erasmus, not unlike numerous Quattrocento humanists, also stressed the didactic value of Lucian's writings, as evident in the following passage from his *De ratione studii*:

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, second to Demosthenes, and third to Herodotus; again, among the poets, first place to Aristophanes, second to Homer, third to Euripides.⁵

⁴ Ibid., p. 5: 'hunc certe fructum nobis afferet iste dialogus, ut neque magicis habeamus praestigiis fidem, et superstitione careamus, quae passim sub specie religionis obrepit.'

⁵ Desiderius Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 86 vols, translations by various authors, Toronto, 1974-2005, vol. 24, tr. C. R. Thompson, p. 669. Latin text: Desiderius Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, 9 vols, Amsterdam, 1969-2018, vol. 1, part 2, p. 115: 'nam vera emendate loquendi facultas optime paratur, cum ex castigate loquentium colloquio conuictuque, tum ex eloquentium auctorum assidua lectione, e quibus ii primum sunt imbibendi, quorum oratio, praeterquam quod est castigatissima, argumenti quoque illecebra aliqua

Erasmus' fellow humanists took his words literally. His translations of Lucian were widely used in Europe as textbooks for teaching Latin as well as an aid for those who were beginning the study of Greek.⁶ Furthermore, Erasmus' *Colloquia*, a collection of Latin dialogues of markedly Lucianic inspiration, were originally employed for teaching purposes.

discentibus blandiatur. Quo quidem in genere primas tribuerim Luciano, alteras Demostheni, tertias Herodoto. Rursum ex poetis primas Aristophani, alteras Homero, tertias Euripidi.'

⁶ Brenda M. Hosington, 'Compluria opuscula longe festivissima: Translations of Lucian in Renaissance England', in Dirk Sacré and Jan Papy (eds), *Syntagmatia. Essays on Neo-Latin Literature in Honour of Monique Mund-Dopchie and Gilbert Tournoy*, Leuven, 2009, pp. 187-205 (at pp. 194-197).

Chapter 2. Desiderius Erasmus: Lucianic Satire and *philosophia Christi*

Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium*

Desiderius Erasmus penned his foremost Lucianic work, the *Moriae Encomium*, in 1509, on his return to England after that he had spent three years in Italy visiting numerous cities, including Bologna, Florence, Venice and Rome.¹ Dedicated to his friend More, Erasmus' composition was first published in Paris in 1511.

The *Moriae Encomium* is a singularly complex text. In terms of structure, some scholars have suggested that it is thematically divided into three parts, whereas others have noted a convergence with ancient oratorical paradigms, such as those expounded by Quintilian or Aphthonius, a Greek rhetorician of the fourth century A.D.² None of these interpretations should be applied too strictly, since no clear boundary line separates the different sections in the *Encomium*. To begin with, it may be helpful to outline its structure and content. At the outset of her declamation, Folly highlights that, contrary to common practice, her speech is extempore and shies away from the subtleties of orators. She reveals her ancestry, birthplace and the identity of her most faithful devotees, among them Self-love, Flattery and Pleasure. There follows a long explanation of her powers and of the innumerable advantages that she brings to humankind. Happiness turns out to be a form of self-deception, of which Folly herself is the cause. Truly speaking, the entire life of man is no more than a play performed on the stage. Folly then further defines her concept of happiness and, assuming a markedly anti-intellectual stance, contrasts learning with nature, inviting those who aspire to be happy to follow the latter as their only guide. This section culminates in the praise of the fools and simpletons, whom Folly deems far superior to wise men, meaning men who identify the pursuit of knowledge as their chief objective. The following section in the *Encomium* is more trenchant. Folly launches a harsh attack on superstition, mostly associated with the religious practices popular among the Christians, and on the intellectual classes of Erasmus' time, namely, schoolmasters, grammarians, poets, rhetoricians, lawyers, philosophers and, above all, theologians. The satire of theologians leads to the conclusion of the piece, in which Erasmus, using Folly as his spokesman, expounds his *philosophia Christi*. Folly extols Saint Paul's teachings and the Gospel over the sophistry of scholasticism and eventually portrays the authentic

¹ For a survey on Erasmus' re-enactment of Lucian, see Lorenzo Geri, 'Da alter Lucianus a vero Momo. Il riuolo erasmiano del corpus luciano', *Italianistica*, vol. 47/2, 2018, pp. 109-123.

² Richard Sylvester, 'The Problem of Unity in *The Praise of Folly*', *English Literary Renaissance*, vol. 6, 1976, pp. 125-139; Kaiser, *Praisers of Folly*, pp. 39-50.

Christian as a fool, who, despising worldly comforts, strives to direct his soul towards God.

In his work Erasmus reshaped a wide range of themes at the core of fifteenth-century satire, such as the lampooning of grammarians, men of letters, scholastic philosophers, the criticism of superstition and of the corruption of the Church. His liking for Poggio Bracciolini and Giovanni Pontano is well-known.³ Moreover, several scholars have argued that the *Moriae Encomium* is indebted to a great extent to Lorenzo Valla's *De voluptate* (1431), notably for its anti-Stoic polemic and the revival of Epicureanism. Letizia Panizza, for instance, has stressed that Erasmus endorsed Valla's moral programme, placing, however, more emphasis on the Pauline paradox of Christian folly.⁴

Erasmus was presumably acquainted also with Maffeo Vegio's *Disputatio inter solem, terram et aurum*.⁵ Vegio, it is worth reminding, featured as a character voicing the Epicurean standpoint in the second version of Valla's *De voluptate*, which was retitled *De vero bono*.⁶ Composed in the early 1450s, the period in which Valla and Vegio were colleagues in the Curia, the *Disputatio* portrays a rhetorical contest between the Earth, the Sun and Gold. Before all the entities of the world, and their creator acting as a judge, they alternately deliver a self-congratulatory oration explaining why they deserve the title of being the major benefactor of humankind.⁷ The Earth dwells on the countless natural beauties, such as valleys, plants, animals, notably bees, and minerals, that she nurtures and fosters. The Sun highlights that all the gifts of the Earth would be worthless if deprived of his rays, authentic bearers of life and splendour. Although brief, the speech of the Sun is much appreciated, to the point that another oration seems superfluous. Nonetheless, performing his role of arbiter, the creator of the world invites Gold to deliver his declamation. Drawing on a number of sources, including Aristophanes' *Plutus* and Poggio's *De avaritia*, Vegio pens a mock encomium in which Gold flaunts his power

³ Erasmus referred to Poggio and Pontano in his letter to the theologian Maarten van Dorp dated 1515. See p. 142.

⁴ Letizia Panizza, 'Valla's *De voluptate ac de vero bono* and Erasmus' *Stultitiae Laus*: Renewing Christian Ethics', *Erasmus of Rotterdam Society Yearbook*, vol. 15, 1995, pp. 1-25. On Erasmus' indebtedness to Valla's *De voluptate*, see also Peter G. Bietenholz, *Encounters with a Radical Erasmus. Erasmus' Work as a Source of Radical Thought in Early Modern Europe*, Toronto, 2009, pp. 118-133.

⁵ On Vegio's *Disputatio*, see Sidwell, *Lucian in the Italian Quattrocento*, pp. 226-231; Mattioli, *Luciano e l'umanesimo*, pp. 156-157; Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, pp. 162-167.

⁶ On the relationship between Valla and Vegio, see Fabio Della Schiava, 'Alcune vicende di un sodalizio umanistico pavese: Lorenzo Valla e Maffeo Vegio', in Luca Carlo Rossi (ed.), *Le strade di Ercole. Itinerari umanistici e altri percorsi*, Florence, 2010, pp. 299-341.

⁷ Vegio's *Disputatio* shows some affinities with Giannozzo Manetti's *Dialogus in symposio*, composed in 1448. In the second part of Manetti's dialogue, banqueters debate which animal contributes most to the well-being of humankind. See David Marsh, 'Boccaccio in the Quattrocento: Manetti's *Dialogus in symposio*', *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. 33, 1980, pp. 337-350.

over the entire humankind. Gold's discourse satirises numerous social groups, from philosophers, poets and clergymen to farmers and merchants, underlining how human deeds are nothing but a ceaseless attempt to reach him. At the end of his lengthy speech, Gold ascribes to himself other two qualities. First, in his presence men reveal their real, hidden, nature; second, he is endowed with the capability to make people appealing regardless of their physical appearance or intellectual stature. The Sun is unable to respond to Gold, whose oration, raising unanimous approval, turns out to be the winner of the contest. Evidently, Gold's mock encomium shares some affinities with Folly's declamation, although it does not match its theoretical complexity. Vegio's *Disputatio* was popular during the fifteenth and the sixteenth century. One of its printed editions, edited in Paris by Bertholdus Rembolt, dates to 1511, the same year in which Erasmus' *Encomium* was published.

Leon Battista Alberti was, probably, yet another source of inspiration for Erasmus. A certain affinity between them in both content and style has often been noted in scholarly literature. Eugenio Garin observed that Erasmus made some of his translations of Lucian in Bologna, the same city in which Alberti had written many of the *Intercenales*.⁸ It is plausible, Garin hinted, that Erasmus came to know at least some of Alberti's Lucianic writings.⁹ My observations below tend to reinforce this possibility. In the first place, let us consider the following passage of the *Moriae Encomium*. After having flaunted her power on the life of human beings, Folly likewise praises herself for bringing joy to the gods. Shortly afterwards, she adds:

I only wish they could still hear their conduct ridiculed by Momus, as they often used to do at one time, but it isn't long since they lost their tempers and threw him and Até headlong down to earth because he disturbed the gods' carefree happiness with his pertinent interruptions. And not a single mortal thinks of offering hospitality to the exile, far from it – there's no room for him in the halls of princes

⁸ Eugenio Garin, 'Erasmus e l'umanesimo italiano', *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, vol. 33, 1971, pp. 7-17 (at pp. 9-11). In this article Garin also claimed that the manuscript Canonicianus Miscellaneus 172, the one containing most of Alberti's Lucianic compositions, was transcribed in Bologna in 1487. However, as Alessandro Perosa has pointed out, this is an error tracing back to the inaccurate description of the manuscript provided by the librarian of the Marciana Library, Iacopo Morelli, in the nineteenth century. See Perosa, 'Considerazioni su testo e lingua del *Momus* dell'Alberti', p. 47.

⁹ Garin's suggestion has been embraced by, among others, Silvia Crupano, 'Dal dio della critica al matto variopinto. Momo, follia e fools', *Estetica*, vol. 1, 2009, pp. 89-112 (at pp. 91-92); McClure, *Doubting the Divine*, pp. 85-87.

where my Kolakeia holds first place; she can no more get on with Momus than the wolf with the lamb.¹⁰

Erasmus' description of Momus as fault-finding is modelled on the Lucianic prototype. And yet in Lucian's dialogues there is no mention of the banishment of Momus from Olympus. This detail is present in one of Aesop's fables, with which Erasmus, as well as Alberti, was familiar.¹¹ The allusion to the wolf and the lamb, recurrent characters in the Aesopian corpus, seems to confirm that Erasmus used Aesop as a model for the passage above. In Aesop's tale, however, Jupiter bans Momus from Olympus, but there is no explicit reference to his exile on earth, which, by contrast, is central to Alberti's *Momus*. Although this observation does not constitute an irrefutable proof of Erasmus' acquaintance with Alberti's satire, it adds some weight to the hypothesis that he knew it.

Another section in the *Encomium* points in the same direction. At the beginning of her declamation, Folly defines speech as the least deceptive mirror of the mind.¹² She continues by saying: 'I've no use for cosmetics, my face doesn't pretend to be anything different from my innermost feelings. I am myself wherever I am'.¹³ Folly's self-portrayal might stand for an ironic reversal of what happens to Alberti's Momus. During his first exile on earth, Momus, disguised as the sister of Thersites, instructs women in the cosmetic art. Moreover, as we have seen in Chapter I.2, he exemplifies a separation between inner nature and action, or, to put the contrast in a different way, mind and speech. Folly presents herself as the opposite of Momus and, by the metaphor of the mirror, she attributes to herself the quality of speaking her mind in any occasion. And yet the continuation of her speech discloses that this is far from being true. Folly's declamation is ironic, rhetorically complicated and hard to decipher. Walter Kaiser has convincingly suggested that we regard Folly's attack on conventions and socially

¹⁰ Desiderius Erasmus, *Praise of Folly*, tr. B. Radice, London, 1993, pp. 27-28. Latin text: Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, vol. 4, part 3, p. 88: 'verum illi sua facinora a Momo audiant malim, a quo saepius quondam audire solebant; sed hunc nuper irati una cum Ate in terras praecipitem dederunt, quod sapientia sua felicitati deorum importunus obstreperet. Neque mortalium ullus exulem dignatur hospitio, tantum abest ut illi in principum aulis sit locus, in quibus tamen mea Kolakia primas tenet, cui cum Momo non magis conuenit quam cum agno lupis.'

¹¹ On Erasmus' acquaintance with Aesop, see Willis Goth Regier, 'Erasmus and Aesop', *Erasmus Studies*, vol. 39, 2019, pp. 51-74.

¹² For an interpretation of this metaphor, see Robert Kilpatrick, 'Clouds on a Wall. The Mirror of Speech in the *Adagiorum Chiliades* and the *Moriae Encomium*', *Erasmus of Rotterdam Society Yearbook*, vol. 33, 2013, pp. 55-74.

¹³ Erasmus, *Praise of Folly*, tr. B. Radice, p. 13. Latin text: Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, vol. 4, part 3, p. 74: 'nullus apud me fucis locus, nec aliud fronte simulo, aliud in pectore premo. Sumque mei undique simillima.'

accepted behaviour as a transvaluation of values, that is, a redefinition of the values under scrutiny rather than a firm rejection of them.¹⁴ Despite her claim to frankness and transparency, Folly employs language in an ambiguous and polysemic way, continuously aiming at an ulterior motive. She resembles in this respect Alberti's Momus. For instance, her criticism of sobriety, and the consequent praise of wine, does not entail a serious invitation to embrace drunkenness. On the contrary, by emphasising that wine can give relief from the pains of existence, Folly, and Erasmus with her, is showing empathy for human beings, recognising their fragility and, not least, maintaining that 'the comradeship of the symposium is a greater thing than the enmity of war'.¹⁵

Nor is their ambivalent use of language the only thread linking Erasmus' Folly to Alberti's Momus. It is almost superfluous to recall that Alberti endowed his character with a 'metamorphic nature'. Flexibility is, arguably, his only stable characteristic. Similarly, metamorphosis represents a useful standpoint from which one can interpret Erasmus' *Encomium*.¹⁶ Both Folly as a character and the concept of folly that she expresses undergo a process of transformation, culminating in the notion of Christian folly. It is remarkable that, from the very beginning of her speech, Folly stresses her ability to exercise influence on the life of men and to alter their behaviour. To quote Wayne A. Rebhorn, 'Folly places herself squarely in the family of Renaissance enchantresses and enchanters who, from Alcina and Atlante to Armida, Acrasia, and Comus, trace their lineage back ultimately to Circe, the archetypal witch'.¹⁷ My analysis suggests that Alberti's Momus deserves a place in Rebhorn's list.

A final consideration should be added as far as the relationship between Alberti and Erasmus is concerned. From the pages of the *Moriae Encomium* there emerges at various times a theme prominent in Alberti's satirical compositions, namely, the critique of humanism when practised as sterile erudition and unoriginal imitation of classical authors. Two passages are particularly pertinent. Referring to the schoolmasters of Erasmus' time, whom we can identify with his fellow humanists, Folly ironically remarks that:

¹⁴ Kaiser, *Praisers of Folly*, pp. 51-62.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

¹⁶ Lynda Gregorian Christian, 'The Metamorphoses of Erasmus' Folly', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 32, 1971, pp. 289-294; Wayne A. Rebhorn, 'The Metamorphoses of Moria: Structure and Meaning in *The Praise of Folly*', *PMLA*, vol. 89, 1974, pp. 463-476.

¹⁷ Rebhorn, 'The Metamorphoses of Moria', p. 464.

Whenever one of them digs out of some mouldy manuscripts the name of Anchises' mother or some trivial word the ordinary man doesn't know, such as neatherd, tergiversator, cutpurse, or if anyone unearths a scrap of old stone with a fragmentary inscription, O Jupiter, what a triumph! [...] And again, when they keep on bringing out their feeble verses, their own hopeless efforts, and find no lack of admirers, of course they believe the spirit of Virgil is reborn in themselves.¹⁸

Likewise, when comparing the so-called wise man to the fool, Folly points out that the former considers ancient books his refuge and tries to imitate the rhetorical subtleties exposed in those volumes. Such characterisation of humanists is reminiscent, for example, of the rhetorician present in *Corolle* and of Neophronus, one of the two interlocutors in *Defunctus*, who, after his death, remembers how in life he used to spend sleepless nights buried in his library. To conclude, Erasmus' acquaintance with Alberti's Lucianic works, if not indisputable, seems a distinct possibility.

Let us now turn to the Lucianic elements of the *Encomium*. Erasmus explicitly reveals his indebtedness to Lucian in the prefatory letter to More, where he places his piece in the tradition of seriocomic literature, notably the mock encomium.¹⁹ He states that his critics will deem his composition as frivolous, accusing him of reviving Old Comedy or Lucian. He replies, in an ironic vein, by recalling that many great writers of antiquity praised unworthy objects, among them Homer, Seneca, Plutarch and Apuleius. Significantly, he cites Lucian twice, alluding to three of his works, *The Fly*, *The Parasite* and *Lucius or the Ass*. The repeated mention of Lucian suggests that Erasmus was particularly keen on reinventing his, Lucian's, corpus rather than that of the other authors.

Erasmus drew heavily on Lucian when lampooning philosophers. Towards the middle of her speech, Folly recounts the myth of the Golden Age, that is to say, an idealised period lost in time in which men used to live in accordance with their instinct, ignorant of learning. 'They were also too pious in their beliefs to develop an irreverent curiosity for probing the secrets of nature, measuring stars, calculating their movements

¹⁸ Erasmus, *Praise of Folly*, tr. B. Radice, p. 79. Latin text: Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, vol. 4, part 3, p. 138: 'quoties istorum aliquis Anchisae matrem aut voculam vulgo incognitam in putri quapiam charta deprehenderit, puta bubsequam, bouinatorem aut manticulatorem, aut si quis vetusti saxi fragmentum, mutilis notatum literis alicubi effoderit: O Iupiter, quae tum exultatio [...] Quid autem cum frigidissimos et insulsissimos versiculos suos passim ostentant neque desunt qui mirentur: iam plane Maronis animam in suum pectus demigrasse credunt.'

¹⁹ For a study analysing Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium* in the context of sixteenth-century seriocomic literature, see Silvia Longhi, *Lusus. Il capitolo burllesco nel Cinquecento*, Padua, 1983.

and influence, and seeking the hidden causes of the universe', Folly continues.²⁰ The ridicule of philosophers on account of their presumption that they can fully comprehend any natural law is a standard motif in Lucian. The following passage, from his *Icaromenippus*, seems to be the closest to Erasmus'. Alluding to the philosophers whom he has recently met, Menippus tells his interlocutor that 'they claimed to discern the boundaries of Heaven, they measured the sun, they visited the spheres beyond the moon, and you would have thought they had fallen from the stars from the way they told about their magnitudes'.²¹ Later on, Folly reiterates her criticism of philosophers, underlining how arrogant and contentious they are. Once again, it is likely that Erasmus took inspiration from Lucian's *Icaromenippus*, as the reference to geometrical shapes suggests. In Folly's words, 'and how they despise the vulgar crowd whenever they bring out their triangles, quadrilaterals, circles, and similar mathematical diagrams'.²² Menippus similarly remarks that 'by the description of circles and the construction of triangles on squares and of multiple spheres they actually measured out the cubit content of the Heavens'.²³ In this as in other instances, Erasmus tends to attenuate Lucian's hyperbolic descriptions.

A Lucianic flavour infuses also Erasmus' satire of theologians.²⁴ Erasmus polemicises with them for two main reasons. First, he criticises their overuse of scholastic terminology and argumentation, which, in his view, unnecessarily complicates the treatment of fundamental theological issues. Second, he pokes fun at their division into a myriad of groups, such as realists, nominalists, Thomists, Albertists, Ockhamists and Scotists. In many of his dialogues, notably in his *Hermotimus* and *Philosophies for Sale*, Lucian likewise targeted the division of philosophers in many different sects in perpetual conflict with each other.

As for the portrayal of the rhetoricians, Erasmus might have used as a model Lucian's *A Professor of Public Speaking*. At the beginning of her declamation, Folly

²⁰ Erasmus, *Praise of Folly*, tr. B. Radice, p. 51. Latin text: Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, vol. 4, part 3, p. 110: 'porro religiosiores erant quam ut impia curiositate arcana naturae, syderum mensuras, motus, effectus, abditas rerum causas scrutarentur.'

²¹ Lucian, 'Icaromenippus', 6, pp. 277-279.

²² Erasmus, *Praise of Folly*, tr. B. Radice, p. 85. Latin text: Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, vol. 4, part 3, p. 144: 'tum vero praecipue prophanum vulgus aspernantur, quoties triquetris, et tetragonis, circulis, atque huiusmodi picturis mathematicis.'

²³ Lucian, 'Icaromenippus', 6, p. 279.

²⁴ On Erasmus' criticism of conservative scholastic theologians as expressed in his letters, see Charles G. Nauert, 'A Remarkably Supercilious and Touchy Lot: Erasmus on the Scholastic Theologians', *Erasmus of Rotterdam Society Yearbook*, vol. 22, 2002, pp. 37-56. On Erasmus and scholasticism, see also István Bejczy, *Erasmus and the Middle Ages. The Historical Consciousness of a Christian Humanist*, Leiden, 2001, pp. 62-103.

distances herself from the common practice of the rhetoricians of Erasmus' time, whom she blames for delivering over-elaborate speeches replete with abstruse terms. 'Then, if they still need something out of the ordinary, they dig four or five obsolete words out of mouldy manuscripts with which to cloud the meaning for the reader', she ironically notes.²⁵ Analogously, in Lucian's dialogue, an experienced rhetorician gives the following advice to his young pupil: 'hunt up obscure, unfamiliar words, rarely used by the ancients, and have a heap of these in readiness to launch at your audience'.²⁶

In outlining Folly's concept of happiness, Erasmus hinted at Lucian's *The Dream*. According to Folly, happy people are those who favour their instinct over the sophistication of learning. Even in the animal kingdom one may distinguish different levels of happiness. Bees, for instance, are marvellous and happy creatures that exceed architects and philosophers in, respectively, building structures and organising a state. Horses, by contrast, have come to acquire an almost human sensibility making them subject to some of the same misfortunes that men suffer. Folly then extols 'the famous cock who was really Pythagoras'.²⁷ This is an allusion to Lucian's *The Dream*, in which a speaking cock reveals to his master, the cobbler Micyllus, that he has undergone countless metamorphoses. He has been, among others, Pythagoras, Crates the Theban, a king, a poor man and some animals. Folly claims that this cock, after having experienced both human and animal life, drew the conclusion that the latter is preferable, since animals, unlike men, are satisfied with the natural limitations inherent to their condition. By this example, Folly supports from yet another angle her argument that it is best to live simply and to reject learning. It seems that Erasmus purposely accentuated an aspect, not the main one, of Lucian's work. In line with the Cynic tradition, *The Dream* voices criticism of the life of the wealthy, depicted as troublesome and distressing, and, conversely, praises the merits of poverty. The dualism between human and animal life is not central to the dialogue. There is, however, a passage pointing in this direction. While recounting his story to Micyllus, the cock asserts that 'of late I have often been a cock, for I liked that sort of life'.²⁸ Evidently, Erasmus stressed this motif since it particularly fitted Folly's idea of happiness.

²⁵ Erasmus, *Praise of Folly*, tr. B. Radice, p. 14. Latin text: Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, vol. 4, part 3, p. 76: 'porro si desunt exotica, e putribus chartis quatuor aut quinque prisca verba eruunt, quibus tenebras offundant lectori.'

²⁶ Lucian, 'A Professor of Public Speaking', 17, in [Lucian], vol. 4, p. 157.

²⁷ Erasmus, *Praise of Folly*, tr. B. Radice, p. 54. Latin text: Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, vol. 4, part 3, p. 112: 'gallum illum Pythagoram.'

²⁸ Lucian, 'The Dream', 20, in [Lucian], vol. 2, p. 213.

The next section in the *Encomium* continues in a Lucianic vein. Folly presents fools and simpletons as the happiest people on account of many reasons. They are not afraid of death nor do they fall prey to ambition, envy and other common feelings. Moreover, they are in the good graces of kings and, contrary to those deemed wise, they are allowed to speak frankly with impunity. Such portrayal is clearly based on the mock encomium of the parasite contained in Lucian's *The Parasite*, a text, it is worth pointing out, that had also inspired Alberti's mock encomium of the vagabond in his *Momus*. Erasmus probably blended the Lucianic model with elements peculiar to the medieval tradition of the Carnival and the Feast of Fools, as the following passage, a lively description without counterpart in Lucian, seems to suggest:

Add the fact that they are always cheerful, playing, singing, and laughing themselves, and bring pleasure and merriment, fun and laughter to everyone else wherever they go as well, as if the gods had granted them the gift of relieving the sadness of human life.²⁹

Erasmus' attack on superstition, a primary theme in the *Encomium*, is permeated with a Lucianic vein, too. Folly, at first, ridicules those who pay heed to implausible tales concerning ghosts, the dead and miracles of various kinds. Disconsolately, she remarks that the more such tales shy away from truth, the more they are believed. These lines are reminiscent of Lucian's *The Lover of Lies*, one of the works translated into Latin by More. In this dialogue, Tychiades reports to his friend Philocles a discussion recently held at the house of Eucrates, an old man keen on philosophy. The conversation took place among many reputable philosophers representative of a variety of schools of thought. All these eminent characters told each other improbable stories about spectres, miraculous healings and other supernatural events, assuring their companions of the truthfulness of their accounts. Tychiades was the only one intent on unmasking the falsehood of those tales. At the end, after having left the meeting in anger, he comments along with his interlocutor that truth and reason are the best antidote to the poison of lies.

²⁹ Erasmus, *Praise of Folly*, tr. B. Radice, p. 55. Latin text: Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, vol. 4, part 3, p. 114: 'adde huc quod non solum ipsi perpetuo gaudent, ludunt, cantillant, rident, verum etiam caeteris omnibus, quocumque sese verterint, voluptatem, iocum, lusum risumque adferunt, velut in hoc ipsum a deorum indulgentia dati, ut humanae vitae tristitiam exhilararent.' On Erasmus' indebtedness to the medieval tradition of Carnival, see Donald Gwynn Watson, 'Erasmus' *Praise of Folly* and the Spirit of Carnival', *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. 32, 1979, pp. 333-353.

Folly then surveys a number of superstitious practices. She satirises the excesses of the cult of saints, a theme that recalls Pontano's *Charon*, the sale of the indulgences, the use of votive offerings as a means to express trivial wishes, a motif integral to both Lucian's and Alberti's writings, the venality of priests and the exaggerated attention paid to burial ceremonies, in a manner akin to that of Lucian's *On Funerals*. As we shall see shortly, Erasmus treated these issues at greater length in his *Colloquia*. This is indicative of the importance that he attributed to his battle against superstition.

Finally, Erasmus borrowed from Lucian the metaphor of life as a theatrical performance. In underscoring the relation between life and self-deception, Folly maintains that human existence is nothing but a play, where the same actor may assume different roles depending on the situation, representing, for example, first a king and then a slave. By this image, she emphasises how changeable and unpredictable life is. Erasmus might have equally drawn on *Menippus* or *Nigrinus*, two dialogues in which Lucian formulated this metaphor in similar terms.³⁰ Subsequently, before starting off with her satirical overview of the intellectual classes of Erasmus' day, Folly employs the Lucianic technique consisting in adopting a vantage point from above, in order to describe the innumerable despicable acts that men are used to commit. In doing so, she explicitly mentions the name of Menippus as her precursor. This passage is manifestly indebted to *Icaromenippus*, in which Menippus, after his arrival to the moon, beholds the behaviour of human beings, who are mainly engaged in dishonest activities.³¹

My analysis has shown how Erasmus relied on Lucian's corpus with regard to key points of the *Moriae Encomium*. His reworking of Lucian's writings not only added liveliness and wittiness to his satire, but also played a part in delineating his theoretical position. Lucian's lampooning of philosophers, for instance, contributed to the shaping of his anti-intellectual stance. His reinterpretation of *The Dream*, which emphasised the idea of living in harmony with nature, may be seen as a critique of Stoicism, with which Erasmus, in other passages, openly polemicalised. Needless to say, Lucian's attack on superstition and gullibility represented a significant antecedent for Erasmus' own criticism of the superstitious practices widespread across early modern Europe.

Revealingly, in the final section, dedicated to his *philosophia Christi*, Erasmus ceased to regard Lucian as the main model for his work. In an apparent shift of tone, the

³⁰ Lucian, 'Menippus', 16, pp. 98-101; id., 'Nigrinus', 18-20, pp. 118-121.

³¹ Id., 'Icaromenippus', 17, pp. 296-299.

chief figure becomes Saint Paul.³² Folly presents him as a living example of faith and charity, the authentic pillars of Christian religion, which do not require the subtleties of scholastic reasoning. In these pages Erasmus sharpens the contrast between knowledge, notably scholasticism, and a more genuine religious experience. Saint Paul's letters and the Gospel, rather than the syllogisms of schoolmen, are meant to shed light on this kind of experience.

The relationship between the Lucianic and the Pauline sections of the *Encomium* is intricate. Erasmus, I would suggest, conceived the former as a preliminary and yet essential step towards the latter. Before inviting readers to welcome a form of Christianity deprived of its most cerebral aspects, he saw the necessity of pointing out a number of flaws affecting the intellectual and religious elite of his time, not least the corruption of many clergymen, including popes. His Lucianic satire, concerned with all the matters discussed above, prepared the ground for the message that he intended to convey, namely, the Pauline paradox of Christian folly. This means that, rather than being one in opposition to the other, Lucian and Saint Paul were allies in Erasmus' exhortation to rethink Christianity. In other words, unlike scholastic theologians, Erasmus viewed Lucianic satire rather than philosophy as the propaedeutic to true faith.

Unsurprisingly, the *Moriae Encomium* raised suspicion in theological circles of traditional orientation. In 1514 Maarten van Dorp, a theologian based at the University of Leuven, sent Erasmus an epistle manifesting his perplexity about the content of the *Encomium*. In his reply, dated 1515, Erasmus listed a number of authors, both ancient and of the recent past, who, despite their sharp criticism of either the clergymen or some aspects of Christian doctrine, could, nevertheless, be included in the canon of reputable writers by virtue of the knowledge or the stylistic elegance displayed in their writings:

How much impiety, indecency and invective is there in Poggio's writings? Yet he is cherished everywhere as a Christian author and translated into nearly every language. Doesn't Pontano attack the clergy with insult and abuse? But he is read for his elegance and wit. How much obscenity is there in Juvenal? But people think he provides a useful lesson even in the pulpit. Tacitus wrote insultingly and

³² On the relationship between Erasmus and Saint Paul, see Riemer A. Faber, 'Desiderius Erasmus' Representation of Paul as Paragon of Learned Piety', in R. Ward Holder (ed.), *A Companion to Paul in the Reformation*, Boston, MA, 2009, pp. 43-60; Greta Grace Kroeker, *Erasmus in the Footsteps of Paul. A Pauline Theologian*, Toronto, 2011. The centrality of Lucian and Saint Paul in the *Moriae Encomium* has been underscored by Fabio Frosini, 'Illusione, immaginazione e vita nell'*Elogio della follia* di Erasmo tra San Paolo e Luciano', *Accademia. Revue de la Société Marsile Ficin*, vol. 11, 2009, pp. 79-95.

Suetonius with hostility against Christians: Pliny and Lucian both scorned the idea of the immortality of the soul; yet they are read by everyone for their learning, and rightly so.³³

A much harsher attack on Erasmus was that launched by Luther with the publication of his *De servo arbitrio* in 1525. Luther penned his theological pamphlet in polemical reaction to Erasmus' *De libero arbitrio*, which had appeared the year before. As these titles make clear, the main theme under debate was whether or not human beings were endowed with free will.³⁴ Luther accused Erasmus of disguising his real, sacrilegious, thoughts under a mask and associated his name disparagingly with those of Lucian and Epicurus:

[Erasmus] is a blasphemer against God, he believes in nothing at all, but conceals an Epicurean and Lucianic atheist in his breast, saying in his heart: There is no God, or if there is, He does not care for human affairs.³⁵

In the course of his composition, Luther reiterated this line of attack on Erasmus. 'You do nothing else but nourish in your heart a Lucian or some other pig from Epicurus' herd, who, since he believes there is no God, mocks all who believe and profess their faith', he continued.³⁶ Luther also fuelled his controversy with Erasmus in some of his letters, where he portrayed him as a mocker of religion after the manner of Lucian.³⁷

³³ Erasmus, *Praise of Folly*, tr. B. Radice, p. 150. Latin text: Desiderius Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, 12 vols, Oxford, 1906-1958, vol. 2, pp. 99-100: 'quam impia, quam spurca, quam pestifera scripsit Pogius? at hic ut autor Christianus passim habetur in sinu, in omneis pene versus linguas. Quibus probris, quibus maledictis clericos insectatur Pontanus? at hic ut Lepidus ac festivus legitur. Quantum obscoenitatis est in Iuuenale? at hunc quidam putant concionatoribus etiam utilem esse. Quam maledice scripsit in Christianos Cornelius Tacitus, quam inimice Suetonius, quam impie derident immortalitatem animarum Plinius et Lucianus! at hos tamen eruditionis gratia legunt omnes, et merito quidem legunt.'

³⁴ On the controversy between Erasmus and Luther, see Roberto Torzini, *I labirinti del libero arbitrio. La discussione tra Erasmo e Lutero*, Florence, 2000; Fiorella De Michelis Pintacuda, *Tra Erasmo e Lutero*, Rome, 2001.

³⁵ Quotation taken from Panizza, 'Vernacular Lucian', p. 74. Latin text: Albano Biondi, 'La giustificazione della simulazione nel Cinquecento', in Luigi Firpo and Giorgio Spini (eds), *Eresia e riforma nell'Italia del Cinquecento. Miscellanea I*, Florence, 1974, pp. 5-68 (at p. 31): 'blasphemus est in Deum, nihil omnino credit, sed Epicurum ac Lucianicum atheon celat in pectore, dicens in corde suo: Non est Deus, aut si est non curat res mortalium.'

³⁶ Panizza, 'Vernacular Lucian', p. 75. Latin text: Biondi, 'La giustificazione della simulazione', p. 32: 'aliud nihil facis, quam quod significas te in corde Lucianum aut alium quendam de grege Epicuri porcum alere, qui, cum ipse nihil credat esse Deum, rideat occulte omnes qui credunt et confitentur.'

³⁷ Lauvergnat-Gagnière, *Lucien de Samosate*, pp. 137-138.

As Christiane Lauvergnat-Gagnière has argued, the quarrel between Erasmus and Luther represented the turning point in the history of Lucian's reputation.³⁸ Luther's insinuations took root in the cultural environment of the Cinquecento, greatly contributing to undermining the fame of Lucian as, essentially, a witty satirist. Lucian, often in the company of Erasmus, came to be increasingly regarded as an impious author.³⁹ And yet, in different areas of Europe, there persisted the tradition of using his works as textbooks. In England, for instance, this practice was widespread even in the seventeenth century.⁴⁰ In France, in 1549 the Provincial Synod of Cologne included Lucian in the group of authors recommended for teachers.⁴¹ These contrasting responses to him were characteristic of early modern attitudes to secular learning in an age of religious conflict.

Erasmus' *Colloquia*

Erasmus' *Colloquia* also draw on Lucian extensively and present a substantial conceptual continuity with the ideas expressed in the *Moriae Encomium*. The chief differences concern the form and the purpose of publication. Whereas the *Encomium* is a monologue pronounced by Folly, the *Colloquia* are a collection of dialogues featuring a variety of figures. Initially, they were published as a manual for those learning Latin. The first edition dates back to 1518. Erasmus then added new material and reprinted his work numerous times until 1533. Lucian's corpus was arguably the main literary model for Erasmus, though this is not to deny that he also drew on other ancient sources, notably Greek and Latin comedy. In the light of the numerous connections between Alberti and Erasmus discussed above, it is possible that the *Intercenales* provided another model for the *Colloquia*. In both works Lucian's influence is apparent, comic elements are blended with philosophical discussions, and, more importantly, dialogues are used as a means of social and intellectual criticism. At least two major traits, however, distinguish the *Intercenales* from the *Colloquia*. First, Alberti often employed mythological settings and characters, contributing significantly thereby to the Renaissance revival of the Greek pantheon. Erasmus, by contrast, set the *Colloquia* in the contemporary world, using ordinary people as characters. One might go as far as to claim that he imbued his compositions with a proto-journalistic slant. Second, the gloomy vein infusing some of

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 135-137.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 138-150. On this point, see also Robinson, *Lucian*, pp. 96-98.

⁴⁰ Hosington, 'Translations of Lucian', pp. 196-203.

⁴¹ Christopher Robinson, 'The Reputation of Lucian in Sixteenth-Century France', *French Studies*, vol. 29, 1975, pp. 385-397 (at p. 394).

the *Intercenales* is absent in the *Colloquia*, which are mostly characterised by a lighter, albeit equally sharp, tone.

The dominant theme in the *Colloquia* is the criticism of superstition or, in other words, of Christianity when conceived merely as a set of exterior religious practices, devoid of the evangelical message. In this respect two pieces stand out: *De votis temere susceptis* and *Naufragium*. *De votis* targets the ritual of pilgrimages, deemed as an expedient that the Church exploits so as to make a profit. Its outset is modelled on the beginning of *Menippus*. Two old friends, Arnoldus and Cornelius, meet each other after a long time and the former asks the latter where he has been lately. Cornelius, at first, sarcastically replies that he comes from hell, before clarifying that he is back from a journey to Jerusalem. With slight variations, Erasmus repeated this opening pattern in several of his *Colloquia*, such as, for example, in *Peregrinatio religionis ergo* and *Funus*. The beginning of Alberti's *Defunctus* is also based on a *mise-en-scène* of this kind.

Cornelius then points out that he has benefited from his pilgrimage in one respect at least, since he delights in inventing fantastic stories about his travel. 'And I'll take equal pleasure in listening to others lie about things they never heard or saw', he continues.⁴² These lines are redolent of the opening of *A True Story*, a passage that enjoyed notable fame during the Renaissance, where Lucian humorously claims that he is about to narrate events that he has neither seen nor learned from others. At the end of the piece, Arnoldus and Cornelius poke fun at the avarice of the Church, by ironically remarking that in Rome indulgences are sold even to the dead.

Naufragium deals with the irrationality of vows in dangerous situations. Adolphus, one of the few survivors of a tremendous shipwreck, recounts his sorrowful vicissitudes to his friend Antonius. When a storm hit the ship on which he was sailing, mariners and passengers alike fell prey to superstition and behaved absurdly. An Italian diplomat was reluctant to throw his heavy jewel coffer into the sea in order to save his life. Most sailors were busy pronouncing whimsical vows:

Some did nothing but get sick. Many made vows. There was an Englishman who promised heaps of gold to the Virgin of Walsingham if he reached shore alive. Some promised many things to the wood of the cross at such and such a place; others, again, to that in some other place. The same with respect to the Virgin Mary,

⁴² Erasmus, *Collected Works*, vol. 39, tr. C. R. Thompson, p. 38. Latin text: Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, vol. 1, part 3, p. 148: 'deinde non minus capiam voluptatis, quum alios audiam mentientes de rebus, quas nec audierunt nunquam nec viderunt.'

who reigns in many places – and they think the vow worthless unless you specify the place.⁴³

The ridicule of men's endless requests to the gods is a prominent motif in Lucian's corpus. Among the many relevant instances should be mentioned *Icaromenippus*, in which Lucian treated this theme at length.⁴⁴ As we have seen in relation to the *Moriae Encomium*, *Icaromenippus* was one of Lucian's dialogues inspiring Erasmus most. As for fifteenth-century Lucianic literature, Alberti was the humanist who satirised humankind's reliance on vows more insistently, as evident in both his *Momus* and some of the *Intercenales*, notably *Somnium* and *Religio*. The specificity of Erasmus' reshaping of this motif is that he directed it with greater accuracy at some practices widespread in his time, thus accentuating its critical function.

Naufragium also contains, in a disguised form, some elements peculiar to Erasmus' theological outlook. Shortly after the passage quoted above, Antonius expresses his astonishment that no one addressed the apostle Paul, who survived himself a shipwreck during one of his journeys. Adolphus confirms that nobody thought of Paul. This brief exchange can be interpreted as a veiled critique by Erasmus towards his contemporary theological milieu, guilty, in his view, of neglecting the importance of Paul in the Christian tradition. Later on, Adolphus emphasises how he acted differently from his companions. Whereas they invoked various saints or uttered magic spells, he recited the *Pater Noster*. 'Seeing everything in an uproar, I confessed silently to God, condemning my unrighteousness before him and imploring his mercy'.⁴⁵ Erasmus is here advocating a direct and genuine religious experience, in which God is fundamental. Similarly, when referring to a Dominican friar who was in danger of his life, Adolphus observes that he beseeched a number of saints, but not Christ. As more extensively expounded in the *Moriae Encomium*, Erasmus is exhorting to re-embrace some basic, although often overlooked, Christian principles, underlining that the centrality of Christ for believers should be restored.

⁴³ Erasmus, *Collected Works*, vol. 39, tr. C. R. Thompson, p. 355. Latin text: Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, vol. 1, part 3, pp. 327-328: 'quidam nihil aliud quam vomebant, plerique vota nuncupabant. Aderat Anglus quidam, qui promittebat montes aureos Virgini Vualsamgamicae, si vivus attigisset terram. Alii multa promittebant ligno crucis quod esset in tali loco, alii rursus quod esset in tali loco. Idem factum est de Maria Virgine, quae regnat multis in locis, et putant votum irritum, nisi locum exprimas.'

⁴⁴ Lucian, 'Icaromenippus', 25-26, pp. 310-313.

⁴⁵ Erasmus, *Collected Works*, vol. 39, tr. C. R. Thompson, p. 357. Latin text: Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, vol. 1, part 3, p. 329: 'ego videns omnia plena tumultus tacite confessus sum Deo, damnans apud illum meam iniusticiam et implorans illius misericordiam.'

Erasmus explored the most detestable consequence of false religion, war, in *Charon*.⁴⁶ This piece had an unusual publication history. It was published in the *Colloquia* in the March 1529 edition, but was printed for the first time in 1523 as part of the *Catalogus omnium Erasmi Roterodami lucubrationum*, a volume comprising various writings by Erasmus and Jacob Ziegler, a German theologian favourably disposed towards Erasmus' positions. That Erasmus decided to reprint his *Charon* after six years, and in a different work, is indicative of the significance that he attributed to its message, namely, its firm condemnation of the state of war afflicting sixteenth-century Europe, for which clergymen were, supposedly, not exempt from blame.

Set in Hades, the dialogue features Charon and Alastor, who, in Greek mythology, is the personification of revenge. The former reports to the latter what Ossa, alias Fama, has recently told him. On earth, three powerful rulers are waging war against each other, imperilling the safety of Christendom in its entirety. This is an allusion to the numerous conflicts that took place in the 1520s between Charles V, Henry VIII and Francis I. Charon and Alastor maliciously rejoice in foreshadowing the profit they will make by ferrying innumerable dead across the Acheron. Charon is even worried that human beings, fickle by nature, might change their mind and aspire to peace. 'I hear there is a certain Polygraphus up there who is incessantly attacking war with his pen and urging men to peace', he adds.⁴⁷ This 'polygraphus' is, of course, Erasmus himself, as confirmed by the following words of Alastor, who refers to Erasmus' *Querela pacis*, a pamphlet in favour of peace published in 1517.

Shortly afterwards, using Alastor as his spokesperson, Erasmus launches a harsh attack on monks and friars. He charges them with instilling love for war both in the courts and among ordinary people, ensuring the French, the English and the Spanish alike that God is on their side. Avarice is the cause of their behaviour. 'They make more profit from the dying,' Alastor remarks, 'than from the living. There are wills, masses for kinsmen, bulls, and many other sources of revenue not to be despised'.⁴⁸

This dialogue contains many Lucianic motifs. Erasmus drew mainly on *The Dialogues of the Dead* 14 and 20 and *The Downward Journey*. In the first of these works,

⁴⁶ On Erasmus' *Charon*, see Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, pp. 146-147; Geri, *A colloquio con Luciano*, pp. 217-225.

⁴⁷ Erasmus, *Collected Works*, vol. 40, tr. C. R. Thompson, p. 822. Latin text: Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, vol. 1, part 3, p. 577: 'nam audio apud superos esse polygraphum quendam, qui calamo suo non desinit insectari bellum et ad pacem cohortari.'

⁴⁸ Erasmus, *Collected Works*, vol. 40, tr. C. R. Thompson, p. 822. Latin text: Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, vol. 1, part 3, p. 579: 'quia plus emolumenti capiunt e morientibus, quam ex vivis. Sunt testamenta, parentalia, bullae multaque alia non aspernanda lucra.'

Charon owes some money to Hermes, who has provided him with materials and equipment to repair his boat, which was in bad condition. Erasmus accentuates this point. Charon's boat is in fact so run-down that it sinks and he needs to procure a new one. Moreover, in Lucian's dialogue Charon expresses the wish that an epidemic or a war would provide the underworld with a large crowd of dead souls, so that he could overcharge on his fare and prosper economically. Erasmus' Charon, as we have seen, hopes that men keep engaging in wars. In *The Dialogues of the Dead* 20, in order to avoid that his boat becomes overloaded, Charon orders the dead to divest themselves of all their belongings, meaning not only physical objects, but also their personal characteristics, such as pride for a tyrant and contentiousness for a philosopher. Likewise, Erasmus' Charon, referring to the dead, affirms that 'they come loaded not only with debauchery and gluttony but even with bulls, benefices, and many other things'.⁴⁹ Once again, Erasmus has reshaped a Lucianic motif adapting its content to his own time and directing it at a more specific target, the venality of the Church. In *The Downward Journey*, before embarking Charon's boat, the dead complain about all what they have left on earth, such as, for example, houses, farms and the wine that they have produced.⁵⁰ Similarly, Erasmus' Charon recounts to Alastor that the dead whom he is used to ferry regret the kingdoms, abbeys and gold that they have abandoned in the upper world.

Erasmus thus remoulded and encapsulated in his *Charon* a number of Lucian's literary inventions. There are, nevertheless, two significant differences between Erasmus' text and its models, one stylistic and the other conceptual. Lucian's *The Dialogues of the Dead* and *The Downward Journey* are endowed with a dramatic structure, making them resemble theatrical pieces. Erasmus' *Charon* is less dynamic. Its focus does not lie in the action of the characters, but in their speeches, dealing with the current situation in Europe.⁵¹ This leads to the conceptual difference, to which David Marsh has drawn attention. Whereas Lucian's remarks on contemporary political circumstances are often vague, Erasmus provides a detailed commentary on sixteenth-century Europe. In Marsh's words, 'the universality of Lucian's underworld has been replaced by lively reportage of western Europe in the early 1520s'.⁵²

⁴⁹ Erasmus, *Collected Works*, vol. 40, tr. C. R. Thompson, p. 824. Latin text: Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, vol. 1, part 3, p. 581: 'nec solum veniunt onustae crapula et abdomine; verum etiam bullis et sacerdotiis aliisque rebus plurimis.'

⁵⁰ Lucian, 'The Downward Journey', 20, pp. 38-41.

⁵¹ Robinson, *Lucian*, p. 174; Michele Margetts, 'Erasmus' *Colloquia*: Dramatic Elements Real and Metaphorical', *Renaissance and Reformation*, vol. 8, 1984, pp. 1-18 (at pp. 9-11).

⁵² Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, p. 147.

As in the *Moriae Encomium*, in his *Colloquia* Erasmus is also critical of the divisions among churchmen, with special attention paid to mendicant orders. Among the many pieces dealing with this theme, I shall treat briefly *Funus* and *Senile colloquium*. In the former, Phaedrus recounts to Marcolphus that two of his dearest friends, Georgius Balearicus and Cornelius Montius, have recently died.⁵³ He assisted them and witnessed their last hours. From Phaedrus' account it emerges that Georgius and Cornelius embodied two radically diverse kinds of life. Georgius was a military commander who became rich thanks to robberies, plunders and frauds. Before dying, he planned the future of his wife and his four children, establishing that each of them should join a different religious order, and left instructions for arranging a sumptuous funeral for himself. Cornelius, by contrast, spent a peaceful and honest existence. On his deathbed, he exhorted his wife to double her care and devotion towards their children, so that they would not feel orphans, and, after having beseeched Christ to receive his soul, he serenely expired.

Erasmus' criticism of mendicant orders concentrates on the first part of this literary diptych. Phaedrus reports that, as Georgius lay on his deathbed, there broke out a quarrel between a parish priest and members of the Franciscan and Dominican orders, who blamed him for lacking any preparation in theology. The parish priest, conveying Erasmus' own standpoint, replied:

Where did Dominic and Francis, the founders and heads of your orders, learn the Aristotelian philosophy, or the reasonings of Thomas, or the speculations of Scotus? Or where were they granted their bachelor's degrees? You crept into a world still credulous, but you were few, humble, and some of you even learned and holy. You nested in fields and villages. Soon you migrated to some of the wealthiest cities and to the best part of town. You used to work in whatever fields could not support a shepherd; nowadays you are never anywhere but in rich men's houses. You boast of papal favour, but your privileges are worthless unless a bishop, pastor, or his vicar is inactive. [...] If I lack any learning, I will not seek it from you. Or do you believe the world is still so stupid that whenever it sees the garb of Dominic or Francis it thinks their sanctity is present too?⁵⁴

⁵³ On Erasmus' *Funus*, see Achille Olivieri (ed.), *Erasmus e il Funus. Dialoghi sulla morte e la libertà nel Rinascimento*, Milan, 1998.

⁵⁴ Erasmus, *Collected Works*, vol. 40, tr. C. R. Thompson, p. 768. Latin text: Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, vol. 1, part 3, p. 540: 'autores et principes ordinum vestrorum, Dominicus et Franciscus, ubi didicerunt philosophiam Aristotelicam aut argumenta Thomae aut speculationes Scoti? Aut ubi donati sunt titulo

This passage can be considered as a manifesto of Erasmus' criticism of the mendicant orders. First of all, he draws a distinction between the founders of these orders and their followers, who have, he claims, deviated from their teachings. In this regard we can note another parallel with Lucian. The latter's lampooning of philosophers targets the disciples of numerous philosophical schools (Pythagoreans, Platonists, Stoics, among others) rather than the philosophers who initiated those traditions, as apparent, for instance, in *Philosophies for Sale* and *The Dead Come to Life*. Erasmus' and Lucian's stances are remarkably similar.

Erasmus then specifies how Franciscans and Dominicans have departed from their masters' ideals. We can summarise his view in three points. First, they have overemphasised the importance of learning, notably Aristotle's philosophy, which represented the basis for the development of scholasticism. Second, they abandoned the countryside, where the needy lived, and moved to cities so as to find wealth and comforts. Third, they put themselves at the service of the Pope in order to obtain privileges. In short, they betrayed the original spirit and mission of their orders.

Later in *Funus*, Erasmus underscores yet another shortcoming of mendicant orders, that is, that they are in perpetual conflict with each other. The following scene is indicative. Phaedrus recounts that, in the room where Georgius lay dying, there were friars belonging to the four principal mendicant orders, namely, Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians and Carmelites. When some members of fifth order, the Crutched Friars, came in, there began soon a virulent dispute, since the newcomers were deemed as exponents of an illegitimate and spurious order. The representatives of the Crutched Friars rebutted that Augustinians and Carmelites did not have the right to include themselves in the mendicant orders, before retreating, shouting and threatening their opponents. There followed a dispute between Franciscans and Dominicans on one side, Augustinians and Carmelites on the other. 'This argument raged so furiously that I was quite afraid it would come to blows', Phaedrus relates.⁵⁵ The tone imbuing this passage is reminiscent of Lucian's *The Carousal*, one of the dialogues translated by Erasmus, a

baccalaureorum? Irrepsistis in mundum adhuc credulum, sed pauci humiles, quidam etiam docti ac pii. Nidulabamini in agris ac vicis, mox in opulentissimas quasque civitates et in florentissimam civitatis partem demigrastis. Tot sunt agri qui pastorem alere non possunt. Ibi locus erat vestrae operae. Nunc nusquam adestis, nisi in aedibus divitum. Iactatis nomen Pontificium, at vestra privilegia nihil valent nisi quum cessat episcopus, pastor aut huius vicarius. [...] Si quid mihi deest doctrinae, a vobis non petam. An creditis etiam nunc mundum esse tam stupidum, ut ubicunque viderit vestem Dominici aut Francisci, putet adesse illorum sanctimoniam?

⁵⁵ Erasmus, *Collected Works*, vol. 40, tr. C. R. Thompson, p. 770. Latin text: Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, vol. 1, part 3, p. 542: 'haec rixa sic incruduit, ut plane vererer, ne veniretur ad manus.'

prominent example of mock symposium in which Lucian satirises the shameful behaviour of a group of quarrelsome philosophers at a banquet.

In *Senile colloquium* Erasmus stresses how the exterior behaviour of the monks does not mirror true devotion.⁵⁶ Four friends in their old age, who have not seen each other for long, accidentally meet during a journey to Antwerp. They are eager to discover what each of them has done since the period they spent together in Paris in their youth. Thanks to this literary expedient, Erasmus compares different models of life as well as the ethical tenets underlying those models. Glycion has led his existence in accordance with reason and moderation, resembling a Stoic sage. Polygamus, who exemplifies standard Epicurean clichés, identified the goal of his life as pleasure. Eusebius, while intent on a Socratic quest for self-knowledge, was offered a prebend, which he was glad to accept.

The longest section of the piece is dedicated to Pampirus. He defines himself as always eager to become acquainted with new languages, countries and foreign customs. After a shipwreck, a recurrent motif in the *Colloquia*, had put an end to his aspirations as a merchant, he decided to embrace the monastic life. He roamed across Europe, from Ireland to Scotland and France, trying out a variety of religious orders, including the Carthusian and the Benedictine. And yet he was constantly dissatisfied, since he noted that the behaviour and the ceremonies of the monks did not reflect their inner feelings nor did they express authentic devotion. ‘My heart was afire with the love of holiness but nowhere found satisfaction’, he sadly confesses.⁵⁷

Eventually, disillusioned with religion, Pampirus embarked on various ventures. He became first a fortune-teller and then a soldier, before returning to his first activity, trade. Impressed by this story, Glycion asks him the following question: ‘tell me: since you changed costume so often and were transformed into a different creature, so to speak, how could you play each role fittingly?’⁵⁸

These lines seem to allude to Lucian’s *The Dream*, a text that Erasmus not only translated, but to which he also referred in his *Moriae Encomium*. Just as in Lucian’s dialogue, the cock, by virtue of the countless metamorphoses that he has undergone, is source of wisdom, so in Erasmus’ composition Pampirus has acquired deep knowledge

⁵⁶ For a detailed analysis of this piece, see Brenda Dunn-Lardeau, ‘Érasme, pédagogue du bonheur, dans les *Colloques*’, *Renaissance and Reformation*, vol. 30, 2006, pp. 103-118.

⁵⁷ Erasmus, *Collected Works*, vol. 39, tr. C. R. Thompson, p. 458. Latin text: Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, vol. 1, part 3, p. 384: ‘ardebat animus amore sanctimoniae, nec usquam satis fiebat animo meo.’

⁵⁸ Erasmus, *Collected Works*, vol. 39, tr. C. R. Thompson, p. 459. Latin text: Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, vol. 1, part 3, p. 386: ‘dic mihi, quum tam subinde novam vestem sumeres ac velut in aliud animal transformareris, qui potuisti servare decorum?’

about life through his own experiences and ‘transformations’. This parallel is corroborated by the following exchange between Eusebius and Pampirus, in which the latter expounds the concept that, since no existence is deprived of inconveniences, one should be happy with one’s lot. This is in keeping with the chief message of Lucian’s piece, in which the cock encourages the humble cobbler Micyllus to welcome and even rejoice in his state of destitution.

Pampirus’ story also shows some affinities with the second book of Alberti’s *Momus*. At a banquet with the Olympian gods, Momus relates how, during his exile on earth, he experienced numerous ways of life, including the military one, before judging that being a vagabond brought the greatest advantages. Although they reach a different conclusion, since Pampirus opts for trade, both characters display similar features, especially a longing for experience and an inclination to travel, of paramount importance for the emergence of the picaresque novel in sixteenth-century Europe.

Besides the criticism of superstition in all its forms, a further link between the *Moriae Encomium* and the *Colloquia* is the idea that rhetoric can be easily employed to convey falsehood instead of truth. *Pseudochei et Philetymi*, a dialogue with distinctive Lucianic traits, points to this direction. Philetymus and Pseudocheus discuss the aim of rhetoric and its relationship to truth. The former supports the traditional view that rhetoric is the art of speaking eloquently, with the latter replying that eloquence is nothing else than lying without making the lies evident. There follows a lively exchange in which Philetymus proves to be unable to detect a number of subtle lies and sophisms concealed in Pseudocheus’ words. This passage presents striking similarities with Lucian’s *The Sham Sophist*, a text that, as we have seen in Chapter I.3, probably inspired also the scene of the ‘grammarians’ duel’ in Pontano’s *Charon*. At the end of the piece, both interlocutors maintain their own initial position, without any convergence.

With this dialogue, Erasmus presumably intended to ridicule the excessive reliance on sophistic techniques in rhetoric. This does not mean that he naively believed that speech always expresses straightforward truth. Quite the opposite, he was keenly aware of the ambiguous nature of language, as evident in his *Moriae Encomium*. Not too dissimilarly from Lucian, he wanted, nevertheless, to distinguish between a productive use of language, which arouses multiple interpretations, from sterile sophistic argumentation.

Chapter 3. Humanism and Religious Concerns in Thomas More's

Utopia

Along with Desiderius Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium* and *Colloquia*, Thomas More's *Utopia* represents another important work that, as we shall see in the following chapters, fostered the Lucianic tradition in sixteenth-century Italy. *Utopia*, first published in Louvain in 1516, can be read in continuity with Erasmus' writings, notably his *Encomium*, since it outlines a kind of satire that, while amusing, similarly deals with issues at the core of the intellectual and religious debate in the early Cinquecento. Compared with Erasmus, the presence of Lucian in More's text is less pervasive and self-evident and yet, for all that, it is equally significant. Although More did not rely heavily on Lucian's corpus in terms of textual references, his *Utopia* is conceptually heavily indebted to him.

Divided into two books, *Utopia* is structured as a dialogue featuring three interlocutors, namely, More himself, Peter Giles, a Flemish humanist to whom More also dedicated the work, and Raphael Hythlodæus, a fictitious character. At the outset, More recounts that, after having been to Bruges on account of diplomatic affairs, he moved to Antwerp, where he met his friend Peter Giles. While in Antwerp, Giles makes him acquainted with Raphael Hythlodæus, a Portuguese ship's captain who followed Amerigo Vespucci in his voyages around the globe. After Vespucci's last voyage, before returning to Portugal, he travelled extensively in the company of five other sailors. Among the many countries he visited, some were endowed with excellent political and social institutions. More, eager to listen to a complete account of his adventures, invites him, together with Giles, to his house. Sitting on a bench in the garden, they start conversing. At first, Giles asks Hythlodæus if he has ever considered the possibility of putting his experience at the service of a king. The latter shows no interest in doing so. Hypocrisy and flattery, he comments, reign supreme at the court of people in power. As an example, he reports a meeting that he had in England at the house of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Cardinal Morton. While discussing social justice, Hythlodæus voiced ideas in sharp contrast with those that the majority of the attendees held, thus arousing their resentment. As soon as they realised that the Cardinal was sympathetic to his view, however, they turned their reproach into praise. Besides displaying Hythlodæus' criticism of the court, this section of *Utopia* represents a biting attack on the English economic and juridical system of the sixteenth century, which Hythlodæus firmly

condemns for promoting poverty and high levels of social inequality. He points to the growing farming practice of the enclosures as one of the chief causes of this unequal distribution of wealth. At the end of the first book, in disagreement with More, he identifies private property in itself as the origin of injustice. To add weight to his argument, he maintains that the inhabitants of Utopia, an island where he lived more than five years, shaped a commonwealth in which private property was forbidden and citizens had an abundance of all things. Curious about these people wholly unknown to him, More asks Hythlodæus to describe their institutions and way of life.

In the second book, Hythlodæus fulfils More's request, giving a long and detailed account of Utopia. He touches upon numerous aspects related to the laws, economy, political and military practices, culture, philosophy, religion and customs of the Utopians, infusing his narration with a markedly encomiastic vein. Work is organised efficiently, nobody suffers from poverty and the common good turns out to be their supreme goal. In short, 'the whole island is like a single family'.¹ Hythlodæus has no doubt that Utopia is the best commonwealth in the world and that its inhabitants are the happiest people. Yet the dialogue ends on an ambiguous note. More is far from sharing Hythlodæus' enthusiasm for the Utopians and, in particular, he is sceptical of their economic system, in which there is no exchange of money. Nevertheless, he does not express his perplexity to his interlocutor, leaving the matter unresolved.

Utopia can be regarded as an original and elaborate blending of two literary traditions, travel writing and the utopian literature of classical origins. Travel narrative, a genre already in vogue in Europe during the Middle Ages, gathered new momentum in the sixteenth century following the increasing number of voyages of discovery beyond Europe. The deeds of Columbus, Vespucci and other explorers were recent history when More penned his *Utopia*. It is not by chance that Hythlodæus is presented as a former sailor of Vespucci. From these voyages stemmed a copious literary tradition, at times mingling historical events with the fantastic. This is the case, for example, of *Delle navigationi et viaggi*, an anthology of travel accounts, pre- and post-*Utopia*, divided into three volumes published in Venice between 1550 and 1559, edited by Giovanni Battista Ramusio.

In More's *Utopia* the fantastic, needless to say, predominates, since the entire second book is dedicated to the description of an imaginary island. As often mentioned in scholarly literature, Lucian's *A True Story* represents a significant antecedent of *Utopia*,

¹ More, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, trs E. Surtz and J.H. Hexter, p. 149: 'tota insula velut una familia est.'

in two respects particularly.² First, the protagonist of Lucian's composition, driven by intellectual curiosity, goes beyond the Pillars of Hercules, symbolising the boundary of civilisation and inhabited territories, and heads for the unknown western ocean. This is the beginning of a long series of adventures leading him and his crew to become acquainted with numerous new lands, including the Isle of the Blest, which might have provided a source of inspiration for More's *Utopia*.³ Likewise, what characterises Hythlodæus is his eagerness to travel and explore the world. In Giles' words, 'he importuned and even wrested from Amerigo permission to be one of the twenty-four who at the farthest point of the last voyage were left behind in the fort'.⁴ Hythlodæus' landing on *Utopia* is thereby a consequence of his love of travel. It should be noted, however, that the fantastic is much more prominent in Lucian's than in More's work. *A True Story* is in fact replete with fabulous and outlandish episodes, such as, for example, a voyage to the moon and the discovery of settlements in the belly of a whale. Such occurrences are absent in More's narrative, which, overall, is more realistic.

The second affinity between *A True Story* and *Utopia* is what we can define as the ironic stance underlying both texts.⁵ At the outset of *A True Story* Lucian mocks historians, poets and philosophers of his time and of the past, charging them with inventing implausible stories that they intend, nevertheless, to pass off as truthful accounts. In opposition to them, Lucian declares that what follows is wholly false. 'But my lying is far more honest than theirs, for though I tell the truth in nothing else, I shall at least be truthful in saying that I am a liar', he concludes.⁶ More frames his fiction similarly. In his dedication to Giles, he ironically presents his composition as a faithful recollection of Hythlodæus' speech, adding, however, that he might not remember some details exactly. He continues by saying that 'if there is doubt about anything, I shall rather tell an objective falsehood than an intentional lie, for I would rather be honest than wise'.⁷ Both Lucian and More are investing their narrative with an ambiguous tone, calling into

² Numerous scholars have underlined the importance of Lucian's *A True Story* for More's *Utopia*. See, for example, Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, pp. 193-196; Alberto Camerotto, 'Et Luciani quoque facetiis ac lepore capiuntur, ovvero del successo della satira antica nell'isola di Utopia e nell'Europa moderna', *Italianistica*, vol.47/2, 2018, pp. 125-137.

³ Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, p. 186.

⁴ More, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, trs E. Surtz and J.H. Hexter, p. 51: 'curavit enim atque adeo extorsit ab Amerigo, ut ipse in his XXIII esset qui ad fines postremae navigationis in Castello relinquebantur.'

⁵ Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, pp. 194-195; Chloë Houston, 'Traveling Nowhere: Global Utopias in the Early Modern Period', in Jyotsna G. Singh (ed.), *A Companion to the Global Renaissance. English Literature and Culture in the Era of Expansion*, Malden, MA, 2009, pp. 82-98 (at pp. 86-88).

⁶ Lucian, 'A True Story', Book 1, 4, p. 253.

⁷ More, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, trs E. Surtz and J.H. Hexter, p. 41: 'si quid sit in ambiguo, potius mendacium dicam, quam mentiar, quod malim bonus esse quam prudens.'

question the reliability of the narrator. Lucian reveals that his frankness consists in nothing other than being sincere about the falsehood of his story. More makes clear that we can trust his honesty rather than his wisdom, that is to say, his accuracy in reporting the account of Hythlodæus, a fictitious figure. Both authors openly play with the ideas of veracity and trustworthiness, confounding the reader about the real meaning of their works.

The dialogic nature of *Utopia* constitutes a further complication. More as a character, the persona More, and Hythlodæus embody different views in both books of *Utopia*. In the first, the contrast between them is apparent in relation to the theme of political engagement. More seconds the opinion that men of learning have a duty to act as counsellors of kings. He refers to Plato, defined as the favourite author of Hythlodæus, recalling how he argued that, in order for a state to be happy, philosophers should become kings or vice versa. Hythlodæus stresses that Plato was right in maintaining that, if kings themselves did not embrace philosophy, they would never pay heed to them. And yet his experience makes him sadly conclude that people in power are too corrupt to turn to philosophy and wisdom. ‘If I proposed beneficial measures to some king and tried to uproot from his soul the seeds of evil and corruption, do you not suppose that I should be forthwith banished or treated with ridicule?’, he rhetorically asks, perhaps alluding to the myth of the cave in the seventh book of Plato’s *Republic*.⁸ In the second book of *Utopia*, as mentioned above, More has strong reservations about the customs and the laws of the Utopians, so vehemently praised by Hythlodæus.

Scholars have interpreted such divergence of opinions in various ways. Robert Bracht Branham, for instance, has suggested that, in his *Utopia*, More purposely reversed the dialogic dynamic at work in *The Cynic*, one of the texts of Lucian that he had translated.⁹ *The Cynic* is a dialogue between Lycinus, spokesman for common sense, and a disciple of the Cynic sect, who rebuts the criticism of his interlocutor and proudly defends the Cynic lifestyle. In Branham’s view, the Cynic, although illusorily victorious in his verbal contest with Lycinus, is in fact ironically undermined, since his apology for Cynicism turns out to be a grotesque self-caricature.¹⁰ Lycinus and the Cynic have

⁸ Ibid., p. 87: ‘an non me putas, si apud aliquem regum decreta sana proponerem, et perniciosam malorum semina, conarer illi evellere, protinus aut eiscendum aut habendum ludibrio?’ At the end of his narration of the myth, Socrates discloses that if the prisoners who had been freed, and who have acquired a higher level of knowledge, went back to cave to rescue their former companions, they would run the risk of being mistreated or even killed.

⁹ Robert Bracht Branham, ‘Utopian Laughter: Lucian and Thomas More’, *Moreana*, vol. 86, 1985, pp. 23-43.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 26.

counterparts in *Utopia* in, respectively, More, ‘the advocate of the world’s point of view’, and the idealist Hythlodæus.¹¹ Differently from *The Cynic*, Branham argues, it is the figure of the idealist ‘who is clearly given the upper hand rhetorically’ and, ultimately, appears as triumphant.¹² Joshua Avery has recently responded to this argument.¹³ He agrees with Branham on his interpretation of *The Cynic*, but, unlike him, he suggests that More reproduced in his *Utopia* the same dialogic structure characterising Lucian’s work. His analysis underscores the analogies between the Cynic and Hythlodæus. Both characters are wanderers, share a utilitarian ethic and overwhelmingly dominate the narration. The last feature is the most significant. To quote Avery, ‘in both dialogues, the dominant, verbose figure is undermined by his very strength, like a ju-jitsu expert using his or her opponent’s own force to outmanoeuvre that opponent’.¹⁴ If Branham and Avery, albeit in disagreement with each other, read *Utopia* in terms of a discussion between an authoritative speaker and his antagonist, other scholars, such as David M. Bevington and Alistair Fox, have suggested that the two interlocutors have similar intellectual status.¹⁵ For the former, ‘Hythlodæus and *persona* More represent the two polarities of More’s own mind’.¹⁶ In other words, More took the side of neither of the two characters. Rather, he used the dialogic form to ponder over political and social issues of his time, without drawing a definitive conclusion. Fox has placed *Utopia* in the context of More’s literary production. In this light, *Utopia* proves to be ‘the last occasion on which More succumbed to the temptation of airing the innermost complexities of his private thought in public’.¹⁷

This scholarly debate is symptomatic of the complexity and ambiguities enveloping *Utopia*. Perhaps, instead of focusing entirely on the role played by More and Hythlodæus, it might be worth concentrating on the thematic structures emerging from the text. A particularly productive approach consists in examining the relationship between the Latin and the Greek worlds, a concern central to *Utopia*. Two scholars, Eric Nelson and Jane Raisch, have already adopted this standpoint.¹⁸ For the former, More

¹¹ Ibid., p. 38.

¹² Ibid., p. 39.

¹³ Joshua Avery, ‘Raphael Hythlodæus and Lucian’s Cynic’, *Moreana*, vol. 54, 2017, pp. 225-237.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 233.

¹⁵ David M. Bevington, ‘The Dialogue in *Utopia*: Two Sides to the Question’, *Studies in Philology*, vol. 58, 1961, pp. 496-509; Alistair Fox, *Thomas More. History and Providence*, Oxford, 1982, pp. 50-74.

¹⁶ Bevington, ‘The Dialogue in *Utopia*’, p. 498.

¹⁷ Fox, *Thomas More*, p. 73.

¹⁸ Eric Nelson, ‘Greek Nonsense in More’s *Utopia*’, *The Historical Journal*, vol. 44, 2001, pp. 889-917; Jane Raisch, ‘Humanism and Hellenism: Lucian and the Afterlives of Greek in More’s *Utopia*’, *ELH*, vol. 83, 2016, pp. 927-958.

established a dichotomy between Latin and Greek culture, notably in regard to the theory of justice. Nelson, drawing in turn on Quentin Skinner's scholarship, argues that classical Latin authors, such as Cicero, Livy and others, emphasised the concept of liberty as a means to pursue virtue and, eventually, justice, which comprised respect for private property among its pillars. This perspective, which permeated much of Renaissance 'republican' thought, was firmly rejected by More, who, through Hythlodæus' description of Utopia, expounded a notion of justice, originating chiefly in Plato's philosophy, as 'an arrangement of elements that accords with nature'.¹⁹ To understand this polemical stance, we should take into consideration More's association with a circle of humanists, with Erasmus at its centre, who, in the first half of the sixteenth century, sought to revive Greek studies in England, making explicit their preference for Greece over Rome.²⁰

While substantially endorsing the idea of a dichotomy between the Latin and the Greek worlds in *Utopia*, Raisch has raised the question of what Greek meant to More. She notes some analogies between Lucian's and More's attitude towards their literary past. Just as Lucian, who had a sense of coming after the apogee of Greek culture, related himself to this glorious past by mocking its most prestigious authors, so More, at times, reinterpreted classical antiquity in an ironic way. For instance, he turned Plato's discourse on the ideal commonwealth into 'a thoroughly un-Platonic, tangible world of travel narrative and New World exploration'.²¹

Building on Nelson's and Raisch's analyses, I shall focus on how Lucian can be regarded as the link between More's conception of humanism and his religious outlook. In the first place, it is worth highlighting the main passages in which More displays his fascination with Greek. His portrayal of Hythlodæus is an appropriate starting point. When describing him to More, Giles stresses that his voyage was not comparable to that of Palinurus, Aeneas' helmsman, but to that of Ulysses and Plato, two prominent Greek personages. The reference to Plato, at first glance hard to decipher, points to Diogenes Laertius, who, in his *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, presented him as an experienced sailor.²² Giles continues by saying that, although Hythlodæus is not a bad Latin scholar, he is, nonetheless, better versed in Greek. In fact, 'he had studied that language more than Latin because he had devoted himself unreservedly to philosophy, and in that subject he

¹⁹ Nelson, 'Greek Nonsense', p. 895.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 897-901.

²¹ Raisch, 'Humanism and Hellenism', p. 937.

²² Ibid., pp. 937-938.

found that there is nothing valuable in Latin except certain treatises of Seneca and Cicero'.²³

The enthusiasm of the Utopians for Greek points in the same direction. In the second book of *Utopia*, Hythlodæus recounts that, upon his arrival on the island, the Utopians manifested an intense desire to learn Greek, while showing no interest in Latin. Together with his companions, he therefore began to give public lessons of Greek, in a manner reminiscent of the Byzantines who taught Greek in Quattrocento Italy. The Utopians were so predisposed to learn Greek, that in a short time they mastered it. Hythlodæus even conjectures that Greek is somehow related to their own language, as the names of their cities seem to suggest. He then lists the works of Greek authors with which the Utopians became acquainted:

They received from me most of Plato's works, several of Aristotle's, as well as Theophrastus on plants, which I regret to say was mutilated in parts. During the voyage an ape found the book, left lying carelessly about, and in wanton sport tore out and destroyed several pages in various sections. Of grammarians they have only Lascaris, for I did not take Theodore with me. They have no dictionaries except those of Hesychius and Dioscorides. They are very fond of the works of Plutarch and captivated by the wit and pleasantry of Lucian. Of the poets they have Aristophanes, Homer, and Euripides, together with Sophocles in the small Aldine type. Of the historians they possess Thucydides and Herodotus, as well as Herodian.²⁴

In this passage More depicts an exemplary Greek library of a sixteenth-century English humanist. The mishap involving the ape and Theophrastus' book on plants seems to hint at More's awareness of how the recovery of ancient texts was inevitably accompanied by episodes of cultural loss or fragmentation, making harder scholars'

²³ More, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, trs E. Surtz and J.H. Hexter, p. 51: 'cuius ideo studiosior quam Romanae fuit, quoniam totum se addixerat philosophiae: qua in re nihil quod alicuius momenti sit, praeter Senecae quaedam, ac Ciceronis extare latine cognovit.'

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 181-183: 'habent ex me [...] Platonis opera pleraque, Aristotelis plura, Theophrastum item de plantis, sed pluribus, quod doleo, in locis mutilum. In librum enim dum navigabamus negligentius habitum, cercopithecus incidit: qui lascivians ac ludibundus, paginas aliquot hinc atque inde evulsas laceravit. Ex hiis qui scripsere grammaticam, Lascarem habent tantum, Theodorum enim non advexi mecum, nec dictionarium aliquem praeter Hesychium, ac Dioscoridem: Plutarchi libellos habent charissimos, et Luciani quoque facetiis ac lepore capiuntur. Ex poetis habent Aristophanem, Homerum, atque Euripidem: tum Sophoclem minusculis Aldi formulis. Ex historicis Thucydidem atque Herodotum: necnon Herodianum.'

enterprise.²⁵ The reference to Sophocles' tragedies in the Aldine type, that is, the format of printed books typical of Aldus Manutius' press, alludes to the important role that the printing press played in the restoration and circulation of those texts. Shortly after the lines quoted above, Hythlodæus tellingly reveals that he and his companions taught the Utopians the art of printing and how to make paper. More is thus allegorically treating different aspects connected with the revival of Greek studies in sixteenth-century England. As for the authors mentioned by Hythlodæus, we should note the centrality of Lucian, whom the Utopians came to appreciate because of his pleasantry and wittiness, the two principal features of seriocomic literature, a genre to which *Utopia* itself can be ascribed.

Hythlodæus' account of how the Utopians welcomed Christianity presents notable similarities with their disposition towards Greek. He underlines that they readily embraced the new faith, either thanks to the inspiration of God or because they found it consonant with the religious belief most widespread on the island. This passage echoes the debate on the relationship between revelation and salvation, a central issue in Christian theology, no less in More's time than previously. More seems to mirror the position of authors such as Thomas Aquinas, Marsilio Ficino or Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, who held that salvation was possible also for people who, either because they lived before the coming of Christ or were unaware of him for geographical reasons, had, nevertheless, developed a form of religiosity with some elements in common with Christianity.

Hythlodæus then adds that the Utopians lauded the communal way of life of Christ's disciples, resembling in some respects their own. The Utopians therefore accepted Christianity as a practice of life rather than as an ensemble of doctrines. This is redolent of More's interpretation of Lucian's *The Cynic*. In his letter to Ruthall, mentioned in Chapter II. 1, he makes a comparison between the Cynic and the Christian lifestyle, since both are characterised by temperance and frugality. Once again, not dissimilarly from Erasmus, More is interested in highlighting the experiential component of Christianity. He regards Lucian's moral outlook as a path leading to a reconsideration of, rather than a diversion from, it. A Lucianic undertone thereby pervades two crucial sections in *Utopia*, those dedicated to how the Utopians positioned themselves in relation to, first, Greek culture and, second, Christianity.

²⁵ For a detailed analysis of this passage, see Raisch, 'Humanism and Hellenism', p. 945.

This approach clarifies More's criticism of scholasticism.²⁶ More expresses his views in both the first and the second book of *Utopia*. In the latter, Hythlodæus discloses that the Utopians are knowledgeable about many disciplines, such as music, arithmetic and geometry, but they are far from the achievements of modern logicians. 'In fact, they have discovered not even a single one of those very ingeniously devised rules about restrictions, amplifications, and suppositions which our own children everywhere learn in the *Small Logicals*', he remarks.²⁷ Shortly afterwards, he questions the ability of the Utopians to speculate on second intentions and universals, two key notions in scholastic logic. The tone of these lines is overtly satiric. More is playing on the Utopians' ignorance to lampoon the abstract and purposeless nature of scholastic dialectics.

This becomes evident if we read this passage in relation to More's letter to Maarten van Dorp.²⁸ More's lengthy letter, composed in 1515, the same period in which he was writing his *Utopia*, purports to be a defence of Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium*, which van Dorp had bitterly criticised. More's text goes well beyond this declared aim and sheds light on many aspects of his conceit of humanism, including the significance that he attributed to Greek studies. His criticism of scholasticism is clearly articulated. He underscores that the scholars based at the universities of Louvain and Paris, the two strongholds of sixteenth-century scholasticism, which van Dorp unreservedly praised, are at odds with each other with regard to the interpretation of Aristotle's logic, of which, nevertheless, they both claim to be faithful exegetes. This quarrel has resulted in a radical departure from Aristotle. Modern schoolmen have corrupted his logic, which, according to More, was structured in an unambiguous and relatively concise way, engendering an oversophisticated and, ultimately, trifling system of learning. More's standpoint recalls not only Erasmus' writings, but also the works of numerous fifteenth-century Italian humanists, notably Giovanni Pontano's *Charon*. As we have seen in Chapter I.3, Pontano identified the supposedly misleading interpretations of Aristotle by medieval and modern logicians as one of the chief causes of the decay of dialectics.

More then mentions an encounter, presumably fictitious, that he had with a certain dialectician, poking fun at his intellectual pride:

²⁶ On this theme, see Edward Surtz, *The Praise of Pleasure. Philosophy, Education, and Communism in More's Utopia*, Cambridge, MA, 1957, pp. 87-118; Warren W. Wooden, 'Anti-Scholastic Satire in Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*', *The Sixteenth-Century Journal*, vol. 8, 1977, pp. 29-45.

²⁷ More, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, trs E. Surtz and J.H. Hexter, p. 159: 'nam ne ullam quidem regulam invenerunt earum, quas de restrictionibus, amplificationibus, ac suppositionibus acutissime excogitatis in parvis logicalibus passim hic ediscunt pueri.'

²⁸ This relation has been highlighted by Surtz, *The Praise of Pleasure*, pp. 87-90.

These days, he said, schoolboys get so wonderfully grounded in their *Small Logicals* that I am pretty well certain that if Aristotle rose again out of his grave and picked an argument with them they would shut him up good, not only in sophistry but in his logic, too.²⁹

More's reference to the *Parva Logicalia* establishes an evident correlation with the passage in *Utopia* discussed above. The *Parva Logicalia* were the last tract belonging to the *Summulae Logicales* of Peter of Spain, a thirteenth-century scholar whose identity is still shrouded in mystery. His treatise, commented upon by schoolmen of different orientation, enjoyed widespread popularity in European universities until, approximately, 1520. From that moment onwards, its *fortuna* started to decline, partly on account of humanist attacks on it.³⁰

More also deals with scholasticism in the first book of *Utopia*. On this occasion, he does not broach the subject by focusing on logic. Rather, he brings up the issue in the middle of the conversation about political engagement between the persona More and Hythlodæus. The latter takes as an example of virtuous ruler the king of the Macarians, a fictional people, whose name, of Greek origin, recalls the ideas of happiness or blessing. This king instituted a law by which none of his successors would be allowed to possess treasure of more than a thousand pounds of gold. This decree, symbol of temperance, brought advantages to the whole country in many respects. And yet Hythlodæus intimates that most kings would be deaf to such wise counsel. Advising people in power is therefore a vain effort. More concedes that the majority of rulers would not pay heed to suggestions of that kind, but defines Hythlodæus' argumentation as *philosophia scholastica*, that is to say, a way of reasoning appropriate for discussions at university, but not for the councils of kings. After Hythlodæus has reiterated that there cannot be any tie between philosophy and rulers, More replies:

Right, I declared, that is true, not for this academic philosophy which thinks that everything is suitable to every place. But there is another philosophy, more practical

²⁹ More, *Complete Works*, vol. 15, tr. D. Kinney, p. 29: 'nunc sunt (inquit) pueri in parvis Logicalibus suis tam mirabiliter fundati quod bene credo certe quod si Aristoteles a sepulchro suo resurrexerit et argueret cum eis illi bene concluderent eum non solum in sophistria sed etiam in logica sua.'

³⁰ Surtz, *The Praise of Pleasure*, p. 94.

for statesman, which knows its stage, adapts itself to the play in hand, and performs its role neatly and appropriately. This is the philosophy which you must employ.³¹

More is thus considering Hythlodæus' method of argument, which is not concerned with logic or theology, as scholastic in the sense that it is abstract and lacks a connection with reality. Significantly, in presenting his alternative model of philosophy, resembling practical wisdom, he availed himself of the simile of the stage. This metaphor, which Erasmus also used in the *Moriae Encomium*, is present in several dialogues of Lucian, including *Menippus*, a text that More had translated. In the continuation of his speech, the persona More clarifies his standpoint, evincing an inclination to political realism reminiscent of Alberti's *Momus* and Niccolò Machiavelli's thinking. 'What you cannot turn to good,' More the interlocutor maintains, 'you must make as little bad as you can. For it is impossible that all should be well unless all men were good, a situation which I do not expect for a great many years to come'.³²

In short, in his *Utopia* More targeted scholasticism for two reasons. He regarded it as an overcomplicated system of logic, departing from its Aristotelian matrix, and as an abstract form of knowledge. His criticism, overall, may be subsumed under the contraposition between Greek and Latin culture characteristic of *Utopia*, scholasticism being a system of learning that developed itself through and in the Latin language.

To conclude, I would like to draw attention to the substantial conceptual affinity between More's *Utopia* and Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium*.³³ Besides the critique of scholasticism, both works have in common the use of paradox and the notion of Christian folly.

In *Utopia*, a paradoxical vein imbues some practices of the Utopians, notably those related to their use of gold and precious stones. Considering gold as inferior to iron, they employ it to produce humble tools, such as chamber pots and vessels. Moreover, they make the chains of the slaves and some ornaments that criminals have to wear out of gold. Gems are nothing more than toys with which children delight themselves. This

³¹ More, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, trs E. Surtz and J.H. Hexter, p. 99: 'imo inquam est verum, non huic scholasticae, quae quiduis putet ubivis convenire, sed est alia philosophia civilior, quae suam novit scenam, eique sese accomodans, in ea fabula quae in manibus est, suas partes concinne et cum decoro tutatur. Hac utendum est tibi.'

³² *Ibid.*, p. 101: 'quod in bonum nequis vertere, efficias saltem, ut sit quam minime malum. Nam ut omnia bene sint, fieri non potest, nisi omnes boni sint, quod ad aliquot abhinc annos adhuc non expecto.'

³³ Many scholars, from different perspectives, have underlined this affinity. See, for example, H. A. Mason, *Humanism and Poetry in the Early Tudor Period. An Essay*, London, 1959, pp. 59-103; Elisa Bacchi, 'Non sum Oedipus, sed Morus. A Portrait of Erasmus' *Moria*', *Erasmus Studies*, vol. 39, 2019, pp. 75-91.

paradox reaches its peak in the episode revolving around the Anemolian ambassadors. Unaware of the attitude of the Utopians towards riches, they arrived in Amaurotum, the most important city on the island, covered in ostentatious golden jewels. Ambassadors from other countries, who had already visited Utopia, came in simple dress. As a consequence, the Utopians who were looking at the parade mistook the latter for masters and the former for slaves, showing them no deference.

This and similar passages may be interpreted in the light of Walter Kaiser's theory of the transvaluation of values, the one that he applied to his analysis of Erasmus' *Encomium*. Just as Folly's witty criticism of conventions and values seems to imply a redefinition rather than a rejection of them, so Hythlodæus' enthusiastic account of the Utopians' customs appears as an invitation to reflect critically on common practices and beliefs. In this specific case, More is presumably warning against the overestimation of wealth, instead of advocating the banishment of it. As for the literary sources of More's episode, we should not forget that the contempt for riches is a standard motif in Lucian's corpus. In particular, as Carlo Ginzburg has argued, More's stance in the second book of *Utopia* is akin to Lucian's in the *Saturnalia*, a text translated by Erasmus.³⁴ At the core of this work lies a critique of the gap between the poor and the rich, deemed as often unworthy of their privileges. To remedy this situation, albeit temporarily, Cronus has set up a week-long festival in which, with social hierarchies abolished, everyone enjoys equal prosperity. An analogous concern, the abolition of inequality, underlies the society that the Utopians established.

The concept of Christian folly, of paramount importance for Erasmus, pervades the first book of *Utopia*. To support his argument that the laws devised by Plato and put in practice by the Utopians, although considered meaningless by many kings, are, nonetheless, sensible, Hythlodæus explicitly refers to Christ as follows:

Truly, if all the things which by the perverse morals of men have come to seem odd are to be dropped as unusual and absurd, we must dissemble almost all the doctrines of Christ. Yet He forbade us to dissemble them to the extent that what He had whispered in the ears of His disciplines He commanded to be preached openly from

³⁴ Carlo Ginzburg, 'Il vecchio e il nuovo mondo visti da Utopia', in id., *Nessuna isola è un'isola. Quattro sguardi sulla letteratura inglese*, Milan, 2002, pp. 17-44.

the housetops. The greater part of His teaching is far more different from the morals of mankind than was my discourse.³⁵

Through the character of Hythlodæus, More brings out the Pauline idea that the morals of Christ, on the one hand, and of human beings, on the other, diverge radically. The subsequent step, here hinted at, is that the authentic Christian is a fool in the eyes of all those who have not embraced Christianity. The Erasmian flavour of these lines is unmistakable. We should also bear in mind that it is Hythlodæus who conveys this message and that his name alludes to the Greek word *hythlos*, meaning ‘nonsense’. Hythlodæus is thus a fool in that he is the spokesperson of the notion of Christian folly and in name, too. Other allusions to the *Moriae Encomium*, albeit less evident, may be found in the second book of *Utopia*. Hythlodæus first reveals that the Utopians are fond of fools and take pleasure in what they do or say. This is reminiscent of Folly’s extensive panegyric of the fools. He then explains that the Utopians deem cosmetics as disreputable affectation, not dissimilarly from Folly, who, at the outset of her declamation, points out that she has no use for cosmetics.

These links, notably the passage quoted above, are significant. They clarify how More aligned himself with Erasmus in championing the *philosophia Christi*. It is noteworthy that both authors did not discuss this ideal in theological or philosophical treatises, but rather in satirical pieces of markedly Lucianic inspiration. This choice may be regarded as a further attack on the schoolmen. By availing themselves of satire as a vehicle for fostering the debate on crucial theological matters, Erasmus and More sought to undermine the authority of traditional scholastic theologians.

³⁵ More, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, trs E. Surtz and J.H. Hexter, p. 101: ‘equidem si omittenda sunt omnia tanquam insolentia atque absurda, quaecunque perversi mores hominum fecerunt, ut videri possint aliena, dissimulemus oportet, apud Christianos, pleraque omnia quae Christus docuit, ac dissimulari usqueadeo vetuit, ut ea quoque quae ipse in aures insurrasset suis, palam in tectis iusserit praedicari. Quorum maxima pars ab istis moribus longe est alienior, quam mea fuit oratio.’

Part III: Lucian and the *poligrafi*

Chapter 1. The Reception of Lucian in Cinquecento Italy

If the Quattrocento had seen the predominance of a ‘Latin Lucian’, in the Cinquecento a ‘vernacular Lucian’ prevailed. An important role was played by the Chigi manuscript, the one containing Niccolò Leonicensi’s vernacular renderings of Lucian.¹ From this codex, dating to the 1470s, derived seven printed editions of Leonicensi’s translations.² Their arrangement is the same in the manuscript and in the books, with one exception. *Lucius or the Ass*, placed at the outset of the codex, was not inserted in the printed volumes. Another difference pertains to *A True Story*. As Mariantonietta Acocella has shown, the translation of this piece contained in the Chigi manuscript was based on the original Greek text, whereas the version included in the printed editions stemmed from Benedetto Bordon’s Latin rendering.³

The *editio princeps* of Leonicensi’s translations came off the Venetian press of Nicolò di Aristotele, better known as Zoppino, in 1525, with the title *Gli dilettevoli dialogi, le vere narrationi, le facete epistole di Luciano philosopho, di greco in volgare novamente tradotte et historiate*. This title reveals a few key features of Zoppino’s view of Lucian. First, he regarded him as a philosopher rather than as a satirist or a rhetorician. Second, by defining his dialogues as *dilettevoli* and his epistles, the *Saturnalia*, as *facete*, he stressed the humorous tone of his writings. Since they exhibited a ‘philosophical humour’, we can conclude that, for Zoppino, Lucian was a master of *serio ludere*.⁴

Besides the textual variations mentioned above, there are two significant differences between the Chigi manuscript and the 1525 edition.⁵ Whereas the former is without miniatures, the latter is adorned with numerous woodcuts, as are later printed versions. More importantly, as for the language, Zoppino revised and modified Leonicensi’s northern vernacular, making it resemble the Tuscan vernacular that had imposed itself as the benchmark for the printing industry. The six editions after the *princeps*, of which one,

¹ On the Chigi manuscript, see Chapter I.1, pp. 31-32.

² On the printed editions derived from the Chigi manuscript, notably the *editio princeps*, see Panizza, ‘Vernacular Lucian’, pp. 82-91. See also footnote 3 below.

³ Acocella provides a critical edition of both versions of *A True Story* in the vernacular, preceded by a detailed analysis of the Chigi manuscript and the printed editions derived from it, in her volume *La fortuna di Luciano nel Rinascimento*.

⁴ As emphasised by Panizza, ‘Vernacular Lucian’, p. 82.

⁵ Panizza, ‘Vernacular Lucian’, pp. 82-83; Acocella, *La fortuna di Luciano*, pp. 381-383.

dated 1529, was prepared by Zoppino, were all printed in Venice by different publishers, in the period between 1527 and 1551.

If Zoppino substantially disseminated the image, inherited from the Quattrocento, of an ‘innocent’ Lucian, Lodovico Domenichi led to the establishment in Italy of the alliance between Lucian and Desiderius Erasmus. Usually regarded as one of the *poligrafi*, Domenichi was a translator, a versatile writer and, during his years in Venice, a collaborator of the noted printer Gabriele Giolito de’ Ferrari.⁶ He may well be associated with the Italian Evangelicals, a term used to indicate religious dissenters who positioned themselves close to the ideals of the Reformation without abandoning the Catholic Church. In 1547 he published his rendering in the vernacular of Agrippa’s *De incertitudine et vanitate omnium scientiarum et artium*. The following year saw the publication of his vernacular translations of Lucian’s *The Carousal* and *Philosophies for Sale*, with the title of, respectively, *Il convito* and *L’incanto delle vite*, in Florence, probably Lorenzo Torrentini’s press. Both works satirically target philosophers. The former debunks their hypocrisy and quarrelsomeness, the latter parodies numerous philosophical traditions.

As Letizia Panizza has demonstrated, Domenichi filtered his translations, notably his version of *The Carousal*, through an Erasmian lens.⁷ He based his renderings on the first *opera omnia* of Lucian in Greek and Latin translation, edited by Micyllus, the pseudonym of the German humanist and university professor Jakob Moltzer.⁸ This collection, first published in Frankfurt in 1538, comprised translations made by different scholars and preceded by an *argumentum* setting out the translator’s viewpoint on the pieces. In the case of *The Carousal*, the translator, and author of the respective *argumentum*, was Erasmus. Domenichi did not limit himself to translating Erasmus’ Latin version of Lucian into the vernacular, but he also faithfully translated his *argumentum*, along with a few comments inserted in the text. He therefore spread Erasmus’ interpretation of *The Carousal* in Italy. Lucian’s condemnation of arrogant and contentious philosophers offered an opportunity for a pointed attack on corrupt religion

⁶ For a survey on Domenichi’s literary production, see Roberto Gigliucci, ‘Virtù e furti di Lodovico Domenichi’, in Paolo Procaccioli and Angelo Romano (eds), *Cinquecento capriccioso e irregolare. Eresie letterarie nell’Italia del classicismo*, Rome, 1999, pp. 87-97.

⁷ Letizia Panizza, ‘Lucian and the Italian Reformation of the 1500s: Lodovico Domenichi’s *Due Dialoghi di Luciano*. Translation as Transgression’, *Italianistica*, vol. 47/3, 2018, pp. 13-26 (at pp. 16-20). On Domenichi’s *Il convito*, see also Luca Piantoni, ‘Elogio dell’incontinenza. Erasmo, Luciano e Lodovico Domenichi a banchetto’, in Achille Olivieri and Massimo Rinaldi (eds), *L’utopia di cuccagna tra ‘500 e ‘700. Il caso della Fratta nel Polesine*, Rovigo, 2011, pp. 465-480.

⁸ On Micyllus’ edition of Lucian’s works, see Lauvergnat-Gagnière, *Lucien de Samosate*, pp. 51-53; Zappala, *Lucian in the Two Hesperias*, pp. 127-132.

and false Christians, as evident in the following passage, quoted from Domenichi's vernacular version:

Onde manifestamente si vede che questa sorte d'huomini la quale predica la virtù della fortezza, et sotto coperta di religione si fa adorare dal vulgo, non solamente all'età nostra (la qual cosa nondimeno è gravissima, facendo infiniti di loro professione di esser Christiani, e d'avanzare tutti gli altri d'honestà di vita e di costume), ma anticamente anchora haver usato la medesima simulatione et gl'istessi inganni.⁹

Domenichi's translations were brought out in a period in which Erasmus' influence on the heterodox fringes of Italian culture was rapidly growing, often in conjunction with Lucian's.¹⁰ The *Moriae Encomium* was published in Italy in 1515 in Venice and, three years later, in Florence. Shortly afterwards, it started to inspire imitations and adaptations in both Latin and the vernacular, such as *De triumpho stultitiae* (1524), a poem in hexameters by Fausto Perisauli, and the anonymous prose piece *La Pazzia* (1541). The most original reworking of the *Encomium* was Antonio Brucioli's *Dialogo della sapientia et della stultitia*, first published in 1526. Born in Florence, Brucioli received a humanist education before moving to Venice, where he spent most of his life associating himself with some of the *poligrafi*.¹¹ The novelty of his *Dialogo* lies in his choice to rewrite Erasmus' *Encomium* in the form of a dialogue between Folly and Wisdom.¹² Antonio Pellegrini's *La Moria d'Erasmus novamente in volgare tradotta*, published in Venice in

⁹ Quotation taken from Panizza, 'Lucian and the Italian Reformation', pp. 18-19.

¹⁰ On the fortunes of Erasmus in early modern Italy, see Augustin Renaudet, *Érasme et l'Italie*, Geneva, 1954; Silvana Seidel Menchi, *Erasmus in Italia. 1520-1580*, Turin, 1987; Luca D'Ascia, *Frontiere. Erasmo da Rotterdam, Celio Secondo Curione, Giordano Bruno*, Bologna, 2003.

¹¹ On Brucioli's life and work, see Giorgio Spini, *Tra Rinascimento e Riforma. Antonio Brucioli*, Florence, 1940; W. Theodor Elwert, 'Un umanista dimenticato: Antonio Brucioli, veneziano d'elezione', in Vittore Branca (ed.), *Rinascimento europeo e Rinascimento veneziano*, Florence, 1967, pp. 75-96; Andrea Del Col, 'Il secondo processo veneziano di Antonio Brucioli', *Bollettino della società di studi valdesi*, vol. 146, 1979, pp. 85-100; id., 'Il controllo della stampa a Venezia e i processi di Antonio Brucioli (1548-1559)', *Critica storica*, vol. 3, 1980, pp. 457-510; Aldo Landi, 'A proposito di Antonio Brucioli', *Archivio storico italiano*, vol. 146, 1988, pp. 331-339; Élise Boillet (ed.), *Antonio Brucioli. Humanisme et évangélisme entre Réforme et Contre-Réforme*, Paris, 2008; Outi Merisalo, 'Translating the Classics into the Vernacular in Sixteenth-Century Italy', *Renaissance Studies*, vol. 29, 2015, pp. 55-77 (at pp. 56-63).

¹² Reinier Leushuis, 'Antonio Brucioli and the Italian Reception of Erasmus: The *Praise of Folly* in Dialogue', in Karl A. E. Enenkel (ed.), *The Reception of Erasmus in the Early Modern Period*, Leiden, 2013, pp. 237-260. On the relationship between Erasmus and Brucioli, see also Silvana Seidel Menchi, 'La circolazione clandestina di Erasmo in Italia: i casi di Antonio Brucioli e di Marsilio Andreasi', *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa*, vol. 9, 1979, pp. 573-601; Reinier Leushuis, 'Erasmian Rhetoric of Dialogue and Declamation and the Staging of Persuasion in Antonio Brucioli's *Dialogo della morale filosofia*', *Erasmus of Rotterdam Society Yearbook*, vol. 31, 2011, pp. 61-84.

1539, was the first proper translation in the vernacular of the original text.¹³ In Venice there were also published two editions of the *Colloquia*, in 1536 and 1539, and, in 1545, thanks to the printer Vincenzo Valgrisi, the translation in the vernacular made by Pietro Lauro. By the middle of the sixteenth century, Erasmus and Lucian became a hendiadys, standing for religious criticism, social satire and intellectual liberty.

Unsurprisingly, in the second half of the Cinquecento, a period of mounting religious censorship, the Church targeted Lucian as an author inimical to its interpretation of Christian beliefs, ideals and practices.¹⁴ The Congregation of the Inquisition issued an Index of Forbidden Books, which was sent to Florence in 1553 and to Milan and Venice in late 1554, banning his corpus, along with some works of many other authors, such as, for example, Erasmus, Ortensio Lando and Giambattista Gelli. In Venice, the publication of this Index, which came out of the press of Gabriele Giolito, provoked a decisive reaction from printers and booksellers, who held that their trade was being jeopardised. On 7 March 1555 they handed the Venetian Inquisition a document in which they pled their cause. Special attention was paid to Lucian:

Dicemo adunque prima [...] quanto a le opere stampate in Venetia, che alcune, com'è Luciano greco et altri simili, sempre sono stati stampati, dappoi che la stampa è stampa, et che mai fino dal tempo di santo Giovanni apostolo in qua, che sono più de mille quattrocento anni, nel qual tempo visse Luciano sotto Traiano imperatore, in tanti et tanti concilii che si sono celebrati da quel tempo in qua è stato proibito detto Luciano, anzi tolerato continuamente da la santa chiesa, come sono molti altri autori simili per beneficio publico, sapendosi da ogn'uno di quanta utilità et giovamento sia questo autore a li studiosi per conseguire la cognitione de le buone lettere greche, onde si vede, com'è notissimo a tutti, che di questi Luciani sono tutte le parti del mondo piene, dove siano in prezzo li studii et le buone lettere.¹⁵

The extract above shows how Venetian printers and booksellers leveraged the tradition of Lucian as an author used for teaching purposes so as to claim the right to deal in his works. After this and other petitions, the 1554 Index was eventually suppressed.

¹³ Jolynn Bennett, 'Antonio Pellegrini's Translation of the *Moriae Encomium*', *Erasmus of Rotterdam Society Yearbook*, vol. 4, 1984, pp. 37-52.

¹⁴ On Lucian and censorship, see Robinson, 'The Reputation of Lucian', pp. 394-395; Paul F. Grendler, *The Roman Inquisition and the Venetian Press, 1540-1605*, Princeton, NJ, 1977, pp. 93-100 and 116-117.

¹⁵ Quotation taken from Michele Jacoviello, 'Proteste di editori e librai veneziani contro l'introduzione della censura sulla stampa a Venezia (1543-1555)', *Archivio storico italiano*, vol. 151, 1993, pp. 27-56 (at p. 46).

This, however, did not end the story between Lucian and the Inquisition. Paul IV placed on his Index, promulgated in Rome in 1559, two dialogues of Lucian, *The Passing of Peregrinus* and *The Patriot* (probably spurious), which were perceived as anti-Christian. Sixtus V's Index, dated 1590, extended the ban to his whole corpus. Lucian's fame as an impious author thereafter became well-established.

As this survey highlights, in sixteenth-century Italy Lucianic literature gathered new momentum in the cultural milieu of the *poligrafi*. Rather than an organised intellectual movement, this term is used by modern scholars to designate a group of authors who shared some common features. One of the most important of these features is that, at one time or another, they all resided in Venice, which, in the first half of the Cinquecento, had become the capital of printing, not only in Italy but in Europe. The *poligrafi* usually combined an abundant and multifarious literary production with an activity as collaborators of the main Venetian printers, working as editors, revisers and, at times, translators.¹⁶ They penned their compositions mostly in the vernacular, critical as they were of the idea that Latin should be the principal language of literature. Satire, often mordant if not aggressive, was their favourite genre. Lucian's corpus represented their foremost ancient model, which they frequently blended with the works of Erasmus and Thomas More discussed in the previous chapters. Cornelius Agrippa's *De incertitudine* also exerted a significant influence on them, chiefly for its ostensibly anti-intellectual stance.¹⁷ Another reference point for the *poligrafi* was Pietro Aretino, the 'scourge of princes', who acted as a patron to some of them.¹⁸ Their fascination with Lucian partly stemmed from Aretino, who was himself an admirer.¹⁹

¹⁶ On the *poligrafi* and the printing press, see Claudia Di Filippo Bareggi, *Il mestiere di scrivere. Lavoro intellettuale e mercato librario a Venezia nel Cinquecento*, Rome, 1988; Brian Richardson, *Print Culture in Renaissance Italy. The Editor and the Vernacular Text, 1470-1600*, Cambridge, 1994 (in particular pp. 90-126); Renzo Bragantini, 'Poligrafi e umanisti volgari', in Enrico Malato (ed.), *Storia della letteratura italiana*, 14 vols, Rome, 1995-2005, vol. 4, pp. 681-754.

¹⁷ On the fortunes of Agrippa in Cinquecento Italy, see Simonetta Adorni Braccesi, 'Fra eresia ed ermetismo: tre edizioni italiane di Enrico Cornelio Agrippa di Nettesheim', *Bruniana & Campanelliana*, vol. 13, 2007, pp. 11-29.

¹⁸ On Aretino and the *poligrafi*, see Christopher Cairns, *Pietro Aretino and the Republic of Venice. Researches on Aretino and His Circle in Venice 1527-1556*, Florence, 1985; Giovanni Aquilecchia, 'Pietro Aretino e altri poligrafi a Venezia', in id., *Nuove schede di italianistica*, Rome, 1994, pp. 77-138.

¹⁹ On the relationship between Aretino and Lucian, see Giovanni Aquilecchia, 'Aretino's *Sei giornate*: Literary Parody and Social Reality', in Letizia Panizza (ed.), *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society*, Oxford, 2000, pp. 453-462; Irene Fantappiè, 'Rewriting, Re-figuring. Pietro Aretino's Transformations of Classical Literature', in Helmut Pfeiffer, Irene Fantappiè and Tobias Roth (eds), *Renaissance Rewritings*, Berlin, 2017, pp. 45-69; id., 'Re-figuring Lucian of Samosata: Authorship and Literary Canon in Early Modern Italy', in Eloisa Morra (ed.), *Building the Canon through the Classics. Imitation and Variation in Renaissance Italy (1350-1550)*, Leiden, 2019, pp. 187-215.

Until quite recently the *poligrafi* enjoyed modest popularity among scholars. This started to change following Paul F. Grendler's pioneering study *Critics of the Italian World*, published in 1969.²⁰ Grendler argued that the *poligrafi* reflected in their writings the state of social injustice and war characterising sixteenth-century Italy. They had a pessimistic vision of life, in contrast with that of Quattrocento humanists, who were generally more inclined to believe in the possibility to improve their political and cultural environment. Among the numerous writers constituting the group of the *poligrafi*, Grendler concentrated on Anton Francesco Doni, Niccolò Franco and Ortensio Lando, underlining their affinities. They were sceptical of the literary academies popular in their age, which they denounced as being authoritarian institutions that gave a prominent position to Aristotle's philosophy in various fields of learning and to the predilection of the ideals and practices of the Catholic Reformation. The blending of these elements, the *poligrafi* contested, had led to a new form of scholasticism, in the pejorative meaning of the term, one that relied on the principle of authority and abstract thinking rather than experience. Although critical of this cultural model, at the core of which there was a separation between reality and learning, the *poligrafi* did not, in Grendler's interpretation, express a concrete demand for change and limited themselves to satirising the status quo, and in so doing revealed a deep sense of disillusionment. They sought refuge in utopian literature, without suggesting an alternative paradigm of society or organised political structure. In the conclusion of his volume, Grendler pointed out that, by mocking the idols of their time, the *poligrafi* prepared the ground 'for later and intellectually better equipped men', such as Giordano Bruno and Galileo Galilei, who contributed to forging the modern world.²¹

Grendler's work raised some challenging issues. An important one regards the relationship between the *poligrafi* and the classical tradition. In Grendler's view, they substantially abandoned it, considering it as alien to their own concerns. Recently, scholars have begun to reassess this aspect of his study, arguing that the *poligrafi* did not reject the classical heritage outright.²² Rather, they related to it in an anti-dogmatic way, criticising the literary practice of close imitation of ancient authors, especially Cicero. In

²⁰ Paul F. Grendler, *Critics of the Italian World. 1530-1560: Anton Francesco Doni, Niccolò Franco & Ortensio Lando*, Madison, WI, 1969.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

²² Paolo Procaccioli, 'Cinquecento capriccioso e irregolare. Dei lettori di Luciano e di Erasmo; di Aretino e Doni; di altri peregrini ingegni', in *Cinquecento capriccioso e irregolare*, pp. 7-30; Maria Cristina Figorilli, 'Poligrafi e irregolari', in Giulio Ferroni (ed.), *Il contributo italiano alla storia del pensiero. Letteratura*, Rome, 2018, pp. 229-235.

this respect the standpoint of the *poligrafi* may be likened to that of some humanists, notably Leon Battista Alberti, who also satirised the slavish imitation of classical models.

Among the group of the *poligrafi*, my analysis will focus on the trinity Franco, Lando and Doni, for the simple reason that their writings are the most indebted to Lucian's. Franco's *Dialogi piacevoli*, discussed in the following chapter, display mainly thematic affinities with Lucian's oeuvre, whereas Lando's and Doni's compositions evince a more sophisticated relationship to it.

Chapter 2. Anti-Ecclesiastical Satire and Anti-Pedantry in Niccolò Franco's *Dialogi piacevoli*

Born in Benevento, Niccolò Franco (1515–1570) received a literary education, which included the study of Latin, thanks to his brother Vincenzo, a local teacher.¹ After a short period in Naples, where he initiated his career as a man of letters, in 1536 Franco moved to Venice. He quickly ingratiated himself with Pietro Aretino and started to work as his secretary. His friendship with him, however, was as intense as it was fleeting, in that, in 1538, they argued bitterly, never to be reconciled. At first, this did not prevent Franco from achieving a certain success. In 1539 he brought out three works in the vernacular, namely, *Le pistole vulgari*, an assemblage of epistles inspired by Aretino's *Lettere*, *Il Petrarchista*, a satire of the unoriginal fashion for imitating Petrarch, and the *Dialogi piacevoli*, a collection of ten dialogues.² Eventually, on account of his enmity with Aretino, Franco was forced to leave Venice and began to travel ceaselessly in Italy. His life ended tragically. The Inquisition imprisoned and tortured him for the *pasquinate*, that is, the virulent literary attacks on popes and members of the Curia, that he had written against Pope Paul IV. In 1570, they delivered him to the hands of the secular authorities in Rome to meet the fate that they deemed appropriate for his *pasquinate*.³

It seems likely that Franco became acquainted with Lucian's corpus mainly through Niccolò Leonicensi's vernacular translations, printed numerous times in Venice. One of these editions dates back to 1536, the same year in which Franco arrived in Venice.⁴ His penchant for Lucian is evident in some of his *Pistole vulgari*, notably in the fictional exchange of letters with his lamp, *lucerna*, and, to a greater extent, in his *Dialogi*

¹ On Franco's life, see Carlo Simiani, *Niccolò Franco. La vita e le opere*, Turin, 1894; Grendler, *Critics of the Italian World*, pp. 38-49.

² On Franco's *Il Petrarchista*, see Pasquale Sabbatino, 'Il Petrarchista di Niccolò Franco', in Michele Cataudella (ed.), *Petrarca e Napoli*, Pisa, 2006, pp. 75-106; Rinaldo Rinaldi, 'O petrarchisti, che vi venga il cancro. Niccolò Franco e la parte del vero nel codice lirico cinquecentesco', in Loredana Chines (ed.), *Il Petrarchismo. Un modello di poesia per l'Europa*, 2 vols, Rome, 2006, vol. 1, pp. 443-463; Roland Béhar, 'Il ridervi de la goffezza del dire: Niccolò Franco et la satire napolitaine du pétrarquisme', *Renaissance and Reformation*, vol. 40, 2017, pp. 187-210. For a survey on Petrarchism and anti-Petrarchism in Cinquecento Italy, see Stefano Jossa, 'Bembo and Italian Petrarchism', in Albert Russell Ascoli and Unn Falkeid (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Petrarch*, Cambridge, 2015, pp. 191-200.

³ On Franco's trial, see Angelo Mercati, *I costumi di Niccolò Franco (1568–1570). Dinanzi l'Inquisizione di Roma, esistenti nell'Archivio Segreto Vaticano*, Vatican City, 1955. A number of *pasquinate* have been collected in the following volumes: Valerio Marucci, Antonio Marzo and Angelo Romano (eds), *Pasquinate romane del Cinquecento*, 2 vols, Rome, 1983; Antonio Marzo (ed.), *Pasquino e dintorni. Testi pasquineschi del Cinquecento*, Rome, 1990.

⁴ Panizza, 'Vernacular Lucian', p. 82.

piacevoli.⁵ The *Dialogi* were published by Gabriele Giolito, who also brought out *Il Petrarchista* in 1539. They were reprinted several times in the 1540s and in the 1550s.⁶ In the late 1570s they were translated into French by Gabriel Chappuys, who published them in Lyons in 1579.⁷

Franco's *Dialogi* include some stock characters. The most significant are Sannio, standing for the *alter ego* of the author, Momus, Charon and Jove. Departing from the Lucianic model, Franco added to these fictional and mythological figures other characters who, not too covertly, embody men of letters and philosophers of his time. In most cases, these men of learning were the butts of his satire. For the setting, in several instances Franco employed as a background for his scenes either Olympus or the underworld, thus hinting at the Lucianic traditions, as they had evolved earlier in the Renaissance, of the dialogues of the gods and of the dead. Compared to Lucian, in Franco's *Dialogi* the setting is invested with a less crucial role, to the point that in some pieces it is undefined. A reason for this might be that, whereas Lucian's dialogues are characterised by an accentuated dramatic structure, Franco's are, overall, more static, mainly in the sense that movement of characters from one place to another is less frequent.

Along with Lucian, the other undisputed reference point for Franco is Desiderius Erasmus. Franco explicitly displays his admiration for him in the second dialogue, using as a spokesman the character of Borgio, who alludes to the humanist and historian Girolamo Borgia. After his death, Borgio finds himself in Hades, where he is eager to deliver an oration before Pluto and, then, to meet the writers, of both classical antiquity and the recent past, who now inhabit the underworld. Although, in the first part of the dialogue, Franco lampoons Borgio on account of his pedantry, in the second he avails himself of him to praise Lucian and Erasmus:

Fatta l'Oratione, anderò a trovare Luciano, perché sempre gli volsi bene, gli darò mille basci e farò seco un'amicitia eterna. Il simile farò con Erasmo, al quale farò intendere che gli Erasmici tutta via regnano al dispetto de i Ciceroniani.⁸

⁵ On Franco's debt to Lucian in his exchange with the *lucerna*, see Letizia Panizza, 'Removable Eyes, Speaking Lamps and a Philosopher-Cock. Lucianic Motifs in the Service of Cinquecento Reform', in Chrysa Damianaki, Paolo Procaccioli and Angelo Romano (eds), *Il Rinascimento italiano di fronte alla Riforma: letteratura e arte*, Rome, 2005, pp. 61-88 (at pp. 83-88).

⁶ Franco Pignatti, 'Invenzione e modelli di scrittura nei *Dialogi piacevoli* di Niccolò Franco', in *Cinquecento capriccioso e irregolare*, pp. 99-129 (at p. 100).

⁷ On Chappuys' translation of Franco's *Dialogi*, see Patrizia De Capitani, 'Da pedante a poeta: la figura dell'uomo di lettere nei *Dialoghi piacevoli* di Niccolò Franco tradotti da Gabriel Chappuys', *Studi di letteratura francese*, vol. 19, 1993, pp. 199-214.

⁸ Niccolò Franco, *Dialogi piacevoli*, Rome, 2003, p. 186.

Through the image of the ‘eternal friendship’, Franco states that his work follows the satirical path that Lucian opened up and Erasmus developed in an original way. In 1590, after Franco had attracted the attention of the Catholic censors, a new version of his *Dialogi*, renamed *Dialogi piacevolissimi*, was published, one from which the editor, the Dominican Girolamo Giovanni, scrupulously expurgated any reference to Erasmus.⁹

Franco’s satire is concerned with social and religious questions as well as with cultural and sociocultural issues, such as a critical evaluation of the humanist tradition in light of the intellectual and aesthetic values of the *poligrafì*, the role of the poet in the Italy of the first half of the sixteenth century and the rise of the publishing industry.¹⁰ As for religious issues, his primary target is the corruption of the Church. This matter is particularly prominent in the first dialogue, which is also the piece containing the most borrowings from Lucian.

At the outset of the piece, Sannio complains with Virtue, presented as his companion, about his disastrous economic situation. The latter tries to console him, pointing out that Jove sent her to earth to give comfort to the poor and to avoid the rich, who would easily corrupt her with their depraved behaviour. This exchange recalls the opening of Maffeo Vegio’s *Philalethes*, which was included as an authentic composition of Lucian in Leoniceno’s translations.¹¹ Convinced by Sannio, Virtue consents to accompany him on a journey to heaven, with the aim of beseeching Jove to elevate Sannio’s state. The motif of the aerial journey clearly points to Lucian’s *Icaromenippus*.¹² Along the way, as Sannio and Virtue get close to the moon, they ridicule those who call themselves *strolagi*, meaning astrologers, who arrogantly believe that they are able to uncover any mystery regarding the moon. This section, again, vividly evokes the caricature of natural philosophers in *Icaromenippus*, although, in the structure of Franco’s narrative, it is not as crucial as its Lucianic counterpart. Whereas, in Lucian, Menippus’ discontent with philosophers is the starting point of his aerial journey, in Franco’s tale Sannio’s remarks on astrologers are little more than an incidental detail. To their chagrin, Sannio and Virtue realise that Jove is reluctant to welcome them, despite the efforts of Momus, his loyal counsellor, who appears well disposed towards Sannio. In order to get

⁹ Ugo Rozzo, ‘Erasmus espurgato dai *Dialogi piacevoli* di Nicolò Franco’, in Achille Olivieri (ed.), *Erasmus, Venezia e la cultura padana nel ‘500*, Rovigo, 1995, pp. 193-208.

¹⁰ For an interpretation stressing the philosophical significance of Franco’s *Dialogi piacevoli*, see Nicola Badaloni, ‘Niccolò Franco ovvero la difficoltà di non scrivere satire’, in id., *Inquietudini e fermenti di libertà nel Rinascimento italiano*, Pisa, 2004, pp. 53-91.

¹¹ Franco Pignatti, ‘Introduzione’, in Franco, *Dialogi piacevoli*, pp. 7-50 (at p. 20).

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

rid of his unwanted guests, Jove orders the other gods to confront Sannio and Virtue and to persuade them to abandon their plan. Eventually, given the obstinacy of Sannio, he finds that he has no other choice but to meet them.

The central part of the piece is particularly rich in themes and provides decisive elements for an interpretation of the point that Franco wishes to convey. Sannio, who evidently stands for Franco himself, displays as his distinctive trait the practice of *parrhesia*. It is the straightforward and transparent *parrhesia* typical of Lucian's dialogues rather than the sophisticated and ambivalent version characteristic of Alberti's *Momus*. A couple of examples will clarify this difference. As soon as they reach the heaven, Virtue encourages Sannio to speak frankly with the gods, since her presence alone affords solid protection for him. Almost irritated by these words, the latter replies by saying 'de la libertà del mio dire lascia il pensiero a me', thus attributing to himself the quality to express his thoughts openly.¹³ Sannio further emphasises his frankness while conversing with Diana. He maintains that he is ready to face any kind of danger to preserve his free speech, adding:

Né questo ti paia strano, perché son huomo schietto, né so malignare chi merita qualche loda. Et accadendomi a parlare di chi tengo per buono, così predico la sua bontà dove egli non è, come farei de la tristitia del tristo, dove egli si trova. È di maligna natura chi fa il contrario. Si sa ch'io non so lodare huomo alcuno per disegno d'acquistar gratia, né per paura lascio di biasimare quel che è di debito.¹⁴

Momus corroborates the portrayal of Sannio as a *parrhesiastes*. In his attempt to convince Jove to receive his guests, he commends Sannio, 'un cervello il più gagliardo e bizzarro che fusse mai', presenting him as the archetype of the poet deserving of being redeemed from his poverty.¹⁵ Momus' praise of the poets concentrates on their imaginative power, 'hanno l'audacia e la bizzaria ne gli ingegni', and on their critical attitude prompted by the destitute circumstances in which they live: 'hanno poi la fame e la sete, che gli fanno dire de le cose che no stan bene'.¹⁶

Sannio's criticism addresses numerous deities, whom he encounters and blames for being impious, insincere and lustful. Behind his caustic remarks lies the real target of

¹³ Franco, *Dialogi piacevoli*, p. 96.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

Franco's satire. Numerous clues reveal that his depiction of the Olympian gods, infused with a Lucianic tint, refers to the Church, with Jove representing the Pope. 'Hoggi mi trovo tanto intrigato fra i pensieri del mondo [...] che non sarei per dare udienza, se in persona ci venisse l'imperadore', Jove claims when he finds out that Sannio and Virtue want to meet him.¹⁷ Shortly after, Momus explicitly associates Jove with the Pope, by telling him: 'mi rido che tu stavi hoggi come un Papa assiso in cotesta sedia'.¹⁸

If Jove is the Pope, Paul III in particular, the other gods stand for the Pope's ministers. Sannio incessantly reprimands them for their lascivious behaviour while underlining the poverty of men of letters and, more generally, the social injustice dominating in the world. The biting tone of his invectives, not accidentally, reaches a peak in the dialogue with Priapus, the god associated with the erotic:

E se guardar debbiamo al tuo essere fatto Iddio, a tutte l'ore ne veggiam fare. Si sa che hoggi i pari tuoi sono adorati et i Priapi a' di nostri son fatti Dei. [...] E, quel che è meglio, non sono chiamati Priapi [...] ma tutti son chiamati Re, Prencipi, Vescovi, Arcivescovi, Cardinali, Patriarchi, Papi et Imperadori al dispetto tuo.¹⁹

At the end of the piece, Sannio and Virtue manage to talk with Jove, without, however, achieving the expected result. On behalf of Jove, Momus reads a decree that does not substantially improve the miserable living conditions of Sannio, who has as his only solace the presence of Virtue by his side. This passage hints possibly at the conclusion of Lucian's *The Parliament of the Gods*, which likewise presents Momus reading a decree, although on different issues.

The figure of Momus merits further consideration. Overall, Franco depicts him positively, since he repeatedly promotes the cause of Sannio. Nevertheless, he appears sometimes to be deprived of the anti-servile attitude peculiar to the Lucianic prototype. 'E sono pure un verme al paragone di Giove', he remarks at the beginning of the dialogue.²⁰ In the concluding scene, he invites Sannio to kneel before Jove and to kiss his feet as a sign of deference, an allusion to the ritual of kissing the Pope's feet. Momus almost acts as a courtier of Jove, the mask concealing the Pope, rather than as a harsh critic of him, as he does in Lucian's dialogues. This is not to say that he draws near the

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 97.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 103.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 141-142.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 97.

level of complexity and ambiguity characteristic of Alberti's Momus. The significance of Franco's Momus consists primarily in abetting Sannio's deeds and, simultaneously, confirming the identification of Jove with the Pope. The authentic heir of the Lucianic *parrhesia* is the virulent Sannio.

Franco's anti-ecclesiastical stance is central to the sixth dialogue, too. The affinity between the two pieces is highlighted by the presence of Momus and Jove as their protagonists. This time, Momus reads a series of papers, exposing men's discontent with their social environment, which Jove's eagle has taken up to heaven. Among the numerous social groups satirised are the priests, charged with hurriedly administering religious ceremonies. The main butt of Franco, however, is the Pope, Paul III, disguised yet again as Jove. After having listened to the countless complaints from human beings, he decides to summon an assembly of the gods so as to deal with this burning issue, but he proves to be vague when Momus asks him about the exact date of the meeting. 'Il tempo vo' che stia in arbitrio de la mia mente. Né vo' che si sappia né dove né quando. Basti solamente fare intendere che tutti gli Dei si mettano in ordine per lo Concilio', he remarks.²¹ Jove's wavering, as Franco Pignatti has pointed out, hints at Paul III's uncertainty about the convocation of a council in response to the Reformation.²² Eventually, Paul III convened the council in 1545, six years after the publication of the *Dialogi piacevoli*. The literary model inspiring the sixth dialogue was probably Lucian's *The Double Indictment*, notably in relation to the figure of a hesitant Zeus.²³ On account of the many grumbles from people on earth, Hermes prompts his king to dedicate more time to coping with their problems. 'Well, what do you think, Hermes? Shall we open a session of court for them, or do you wish we should announce it for next year?', Zeus replies.²⁴ Contrary to what happens in Franco's piece, Zeus, pressed by Hermes, proclaims a session of court right away.

Franco's focus on social matters concerns the poor economic situation of sixteenth-century Italy. This trait has been emphasised by Paul F. Grendler, according to whom the *poligrafî*, including Franco, were particularly critical of the unequal distribution of wealth and power and of the consequent moral decay of what he, Grendler, defined the *misera Italia*.²⁵ More recently, Patrizia De Capitani has interpreted Franco's fourth dialogue as his most outspoken denunciation of his dissatisfaction with the impoverishment of Italian

²¹ Ibid., p. 269.

²² Pignatti, 'Invenzione e modelli di scrittura', p. 120.

²³ Ibid., p. 120.

²⁴ Lucian, 'The Double Indictment', 4, in [Lucian], vol. 3, p. 91.

²⁵ Grendler, *Critics of the Italian World*, pp. 70-103.

society.²⁶ Set in the underworld, this piece portrays Charon and Mercury quarrelling with a number of shades unable to pay the obol that Charon requires to ferry them across the Acheron. The ‘infernal gathering’ comprises Giulia, a prostitute, the tyrant Lico, Harpagio, a merchant, Anisio, a pedant alluding to the Neapolitan humanist Giano Anisio, lampooned also in the second dialogue, and the soldier Thrasymacho, a character that Franco borrowed from *Confessio militis*, one of Erasmus’ *Colloquia*, in which a soldier is named, indeed, Thrasymachus. Franco’s dialogue is clearly Lucianic and recalls especially *The Downward Journey*. Besides the setting and the general atmosphere, there are two precise parallels between them. Cyniscus and Micyllus do not have the obol for Charon and the tyrant Megapenthes dies by poison, just like Franco’s Lico.²⁷

Through the variegated assemblage of shades, all of whom have equally ended their lives in misery, Franco displays the poverty affecting all social classes, from prostitutes to merchants. Among the various reasons accounting for the ruin of Italy, he singles out for special consideration the wars and, in particular, the sack of Rome (1527). He refers to it in two instances, namely, in the fourth dialogue, evoked by Thrasymacho, and, with far greater emphasis, in the sixth, when Momus reads the lamentation of Rome itself:

Altissimo Padre Giove, la infelice Roma, non più capo del mondo, non più albergo d’imperadori, non più triumphatrice de’ barbari e non più carro di vittorie, ma stanza d’ogni miseria, vi fa intendere come, assalita pur dinanzi da molte squadre d’assassini e di ladri, è stata tutta saccheggiata e posta in bordello.²⁸

Although the distressing social and economic conditions afflicting Italy and its inhabitants are not irrelevant to the *Dialogi*, nonetheless Franco’s chief polemical object, I believe, remains what he deemed to be the debasement of the Church, with special attention paid to the inadequacy of the Pope in facing the challenges of his time. This criticism does not entail that Franco considered Christian religion itself as false or dangerous. On the contrary, several passages in the *Dialogi* intimate that he favoured a form of religiosity of fideistic nature.²⁹ The ninth dialogue, in which he contrasts poetry and philosophy, is indicative of his position. Addressing Nipho – the name alludes to the Aristotelian philosopher Agostino Nifo – Sannio remarks that ‘dove è la pura e semplice

²⁶ De Capitani, ‘Da pedante a poeta’, p. 206.

²⁷ Pignatti has noted the latter parallel. See Franco, *Dialogi piacevoli*, p. 222.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

²⁹ On Franco’s religiosity, see Grendler, *Critics of the Italian World*, pp. 108-111.

credulità è la vera religione, e non dove è la superstizione di voi huomini iniqui, che per altro non valete che a fare gli inquisitori'.³⁰ Franco thus seems to maintain that true religion consists in simple devotion and warns against the complicated and theoretical version of it promulgated by the Roman Catholic Church.

Let us now turn to the cultural issues that Franco discussed in his *Dialogi*. Grendler's analyses constitute a significant starting point. He argued that Franco, no less than the other *poligrafi*, expressed a 'rejection of learning', that is, a dismissal of the humanist tradition, perceived as too detached from reality and often trivial.³¹ Grendler did not neglect the ironic vein often infusing the *poligrafi*'s writings but, he claimed, 'even in the humorous passages, it was evident that the classical heritage had lost much of its meaning for these men'.³² As an example of Franco's attitude towards the *studia humanitatis*, he adduced the seventh dialogue, in which Mercury, Minos, Aeacus and Rhadamanthus, in order to comply with the will of Jove, pronounce sentence against many of the most renowned authors of the Greek and Latin worlds, including Hesiod, Aeschylus, Homer, Lucretius, Virgil, Horace and Seneca. In Grendler's view, this piece, together with numerous other excerpts from Franco's corpus, is emblematic of his condemnation of, and departure from, humanist culture.

And yet Franco's preface to the seventh dialogue seems to suggest a different interpretation. It addresses Bonifacio Pignoli, to whom Franco also dedicated *Il Petrarchista*, the secretary of the cardinal Franciotto Orsini, and, later on, of his grandson, Leone Orsini. Franco compares his personal tribulations, chiefly of economic nature, to the pains of the 'poveri poeti martiri' that he is about to expose.³³ 'Né crediate che sia molta differenza tra me e loro, se ben tra 'l mondo e l'inferno sia differenza', he emphasises.³⁴ The punishment of the poets in Hades thus represents a lively, and Lucianic, metaphor for their allegedly uncomfortable living conditions, rather than Franco's rejection of the humanist tradition.

Instead of dismissing humanism *tout court*, Franco criticised heavily and repeatedly its degeneration, in fine, humanist pedantry. He aimed his satirical darts especially at the two main forms that pedantry assumed in the literary establishment of his day, Petrarchism and Ciceronianism, terms referring to the slavish imitation of, respectively, Petrarch's poetry and Cicero's rhetoric.

³⁰ Franco, *Dialogi piacevoli*, pp. 328-329.

³¹ Grendler, *Critics of the Italian World*, pp. 136-161.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 150.

³³ Franco, *Dialogi piacevoli*, p. 273.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 273.

Franco's lampooning of pedantry is prominent in the second and in the third dialogue. The former, mentioned above, is built around the Lucianic pattern of a conversation between Charon and a character who has lately died, in this case the pedant Borgio. The latter decides to compose an oration in praise of Pluto to gain his favour. His eagerness to adhere obsequiously to the precepts that 'Cicero' expounded in his *Rhetorica ad Herennium* leads him to the fashioning of a grandiloquent and pompous speech.³⁵ This passage is a manifest critique of the mechanical emulation of Ciceronian norms that Franco considered a widespread practice among sixteenth-century intellectuals.

In the second section of the piece, as previously pointed out, Franco employs the figure of Borgio to express his own ideas. Following his explicit homage to Lucian and Erasmus, Franco/Borgio prefigures his meeting with numerous writers, both ancient and of the recent past, inhabiting the underworld, in a manner reminiscent of Menippus' encounter with philosophers, mythological heroes and historical characters in *Menippus*. 'Al Petrarca dirò che i Petrarchisti, cioè quegli che gli rubbano le parole, sono dileggiati e posti in bocca del vulgo', he asserts, perhaps alluding to his own work *Il Petrarchista*.³⁶ Besides attacking uninspired imitators of Petrarch, Franco displays his appreciation for certain authors, namely, Giovanni Pontano, one of the great Lucianic satirists of the previous century, and several members of the Neapolitan Academy: 'me ne andrò a [...] toccar la mano al Pontano, al Sannazaro, al Carbone, al Summontio et al Gravina'.³⁷

In the third dialogue, Franco's criticism of pedantry reaches its peak. Sannio pokes fun at Eolophilo (the name is a Greek coinage for 'windbag'), the stereotype of the mediocre writer who aspires to achieve fame and success by conforming to the literary tendencies in vogue in his time. The latter drones on about his intention to pen an epic poem in *ottave*, thus placing himself under the aegis of Matteo Maria Boiardo and Ludovico Ariosto, or his plans to translate Latin works, such as Terence's comedies, in the vernacular. He then reveals his profound admiration for Petrarch, of whom he would like to reproduce not only the writings, but even his life, to the point that he dreams of moving to Avignon and falling in love with a woman named Laura. Eventually, he explains to Sannio that men of letters are essentially divided into two camps, depending

³⁵ The attribution of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* to Cicero had been called into question from the late fifteenth century. See Virginia Cox, 'Machiavelli and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*: Deliberative Rhetoric in *The Prince*', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, vol. 28, 1997, pp. 1109-1141 (at pp. 1136-1138). Perhaps, Franco intended to lampoon Borgio (and, more broadly, the sixteenth-century imitators of Cicero) by showing that, great humanist though he thought himself to be, he did not realise that his model was spurious.

³⁶ Franco, *Dialogi piacevoli*, p. 187.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 187-188.

on their preference for Cicero or Erasmus. Since those who are esteemed as the most learned side with the *Ciceroniani*, inevitably he also pledges allegiance to that group. It is not fanciful to interpret these lines as an allusion to Erasmus' *Ciceronianus*, a satirical dialogue on the humanist cult of Cicero, first published in Basel in 1528, which had sparked vigorous debate among European intellectuals.³⁸

At the end of the piece, Sannio frustrates Eolophilo's hopes, ridiculing his vain projects. As for the controversy between *Ciceroniani* and *Erasmici*, he underscores that Cicero and Erasmus were equally leading men of learning in the period in which they lived, addressing his interlocutor as follows:

Che pertinenza puote essere tra te e Cicerone, non essendo a lui simile ne lo scrivere e nel parlare? I Ciceroniani e gli Erasmici non sono i baiatori, ma i dotti e quegli che sputano in un giorno i libri interi. Fu stupore del suo secolo Cicerone e del nostro il divino Erasmo. In tanto che niuno veramente de le lor sette si può chiamare salvo se dal cielo have ottenuto che ne la eloquenza e ne la prontezza sia simile a i loro ingegni.³⁹

The adjective *divino* applied to Erasmus intimates that Franco, albeit not hostile to Cicero, had a predilection for the former, as apparent in several passages of the *Dialogi*. For instance, it is Sannio again who, in the eighth dialogue, praises Erasmus by rhetorically asking: 'che manca al buono Erasmo, ch'egli non sia eloquente, catholico e mirabile nel suo dire?'⁴⁰

In terms of structure and tone, Franco's third dialogue shows some affinities with Lucian's *The Ship*, which was available in Leonicensino's vernacular translation. In Lucian's text, a visit to the Piraeus, where a large ship from Egypt had just arrived, sparks the imagination of four friends, who start daydreaming about what they would ask if their wishes could magically become real. Adimantus and Samippus long for, respectively, boundless wealth and military power, whereas Timolaus craves a set of rings endowed with supernatural faculties. Lycinus, playing the role of the Cynic, derides the foolishness

³⁸ On Erasmus' *Ciceronianus*, its literary and ideological context and the intellectual debate that it initiated, see H. C. Gotoff, 'Stylistic Criticism in Erasmus' *Ciceronianus*', *Illinois Classical Studies*, vol. 7, 1982, pp. 359-370; Luca D'Ascia, *Erasmus e l'Umanesimo romano*, Florence, 1991; Kenneth Gouwens, 'Erasmus, Apes of Cicero, and Conceptual Blending', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 71, 2010, pp. 523-545; Eric MacPhail, 'Erasmus and Christian Humanist Latin', *Reformation*, vol. 22, 2017, pp. 67-81. I have provided the bibliography on Ciceronianism and anti-Ciceronianism in Renaissance Italy at p. 41.

³⁹ Franco, *Dialogi piacevoli*, p. 215.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 304.

of his companions and adds that laughing at their vain desires is all he needs. Franco's piece, as we have seen, is modelled around a similar pattern, with the difference that it features two characters instead of four. In the brief introduction to his translation, Leonicensino writes that Lucian's dialogue concerns those who *fanno castelli in aere*, an expression absent in Lucian.⁴¹ Analogously, Franco states that in his dialogue 'si fa beffe de le chimere e de le alchimie da alcuni trovate per haver fama'.⁴²

Given his recurrent criticism of pedantry and slavish imitation, it may at first glance be a surprise that Franco was, in modern terms, a plagiarist. As Paolo Cherchi has shown, Franco's endless lists of attributes of the Olympian gods in the first dialogue are nothing but transcriptions, almost word for word, of excerpts from the *De cognominibus deorum*, an erudite work of Pier Jacopo di Montefalchio, published in Perugia in 1525. Cherchi's meticulous analysis has also demonstrated that Franco's indebtedness to Montefalchio extends well beyond the first dialogue.⁴³ How can we square Franco's criticism of pedantry with his evident plagiarism? Cherchi has argued that Franco's insertion of lengthy and tedious passages borrowed from Montefalchio, in striking contrast with the context in which they are placed, constitutes an example of mock erudition that does not contradict, but rather corroborates, his anti-pedantic orientation.⁴⁴ Similarly, Nicola Bonazzi has made the case that Franco's literary practice stands for a conscious departure from classicist tendencies. Bonazzi has underscored the role of the printing press in the shaping of his poetics.⁴⁵

The centrality of the printing press in Franco's intellectual horizon is unquestionable, as evident, for example, in the eighth dialogue. Sannio provides his interlocutor, Cautano, with numerous suggestions on how to trade in books. He recommends that he have at his disposal books of any genre and quality, since readers' taste varies. He should also include vernacular translations of classical works, regardless of the haughty condemnation of the learned. 'Non sai che sono più le ciurme del volgo che l'accademie de i dotti?', he asks Cautano.⁴⁶ This exchange mirrors the key function of the printing press in fostering a wider circulation of vernacular texts, notably translations,

⁴¹ For a detailed analysis of the expression *far castelli in aria* in the context of sixteenth-century literature and art, see David Zagoury, 'Vasari's Castle in the Air', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 81, 2018, pp. 249-267.

⁴² Franco, *Dialogi piacevoli*, p. 195.

⁴³ Paolo Cherchi, *Polimatia di riuso. Mezzo secolo di plagio (1539-1589)*, Rome, 1998, pp. 88-98.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

⁴⁵ Nicola Bonazzi, *Il carnevale delle idee. L'antipedanteria nell'età della stampa (Venezia, 1538-1553)*, Bologna, 2007, pp. 75-77.

⁴⁶ Franco, *Dialogi piacevoli*, p. 300.

challenging thereby the dogma of the most stalwart supporters of Latin as the main, if not the only, language for the dissemination of knowledge. By facilitating the diffusion of compendia and manuals in both Latin and the vernacular, the printing press, and the ideology connected to it, accounts partly for Franco's inclusion of lists and mythological anecdotes in his *Dialogi*. These elements, as suggested by the modern scholars mentioned above, may be understood as a form of lampooning of what we can define as humanist or classicist tradition. Nevertheless, the patina of (mock) erudition characteristic of Franco's *Dialogi* tends to dim their inventiveness. His anti-pedantic stance is apparent, but, at times, expressed in a rather mechanical way. The *Dialogi* represent, nonetheless, an innovative literary experiment blending together Lucianic satire, the aesthetic and ideological values promoted by the printing press and the 'recycling' of erudite materials.

Chapter 3. Ortensio Lando and the Apogee of Lucianic Paradox

Ortensio Lando (ca. 1512–ca. 1555) is an elusive figure, whose restless life, still partly unknown, is mirrored in his copious and enigmatic literary production.¹ Born in Milan around 1512, in his youth he received a humanist education and joined the Augustinian order under the name of Hieremias Landus. At the beginning of the 1530s he studied medicine in Bologna before repudiating monasticism and embarking on a career revolving around the printing press. In 1534 he went to Lyons, where he established contacts with the humanist Étienne Dolet, a fervent admirer of Cicero, the printer Sebastian Gryphius and, probably, François Rabelais. He then travelled extensively in Switzerland, Germany, France and, above all, Italy, visiting numerous cities such as Ferrara, where, under the pseudonym ‘Tranquillus’, he was introduced into the Accademia degli Elevati, Brescia, Piacenza and Venice, which proved to be particularly attractive to him. He became acquainted with Pietro Aretino and other *poligrafi*, including Anton Francesco Doni, besides starting a long-lasting collaboration with the printer Gabriele Giolito de’ Ferrari. In 1548 he provided the typographer Aurelio Pincio with his rendering, the first into Italian, of Thomas More’s *Utopia*, which was edited by Doni and published without the name of the translator.² Lando’s paternity of the translation was revealed by Francesco Sansovino in his *Del governo de’ regni e delle repubbliche così antiche come moderne* (1561). A letter to the Cardinal Cristoforo Madruzzo dating to 1554 or 1555 represents the last trace of Lando’s activity. It is likely that he died shortly afterwards.

Lando’s biography, with its significant lacunae, is still a debated topic among scholars. Silvana Seidel Menchi, for instance, has identified Lando tentatively with Giorgio Filalete, also known as ‘Turchetto’, a propagandist of the Reformation who did

¹ On Lando’s life, see Conor Fahy, ‘Per la vita di Ortensio Lando’, *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, vol. 142, 1965, pp. 243-258; Grendler, *Critics of the Italian World*, pp. 21-38. For a survey on Lando’s works, see Sergio Blazina, ‘Ortensio Lando tra paradosso e satira’, in G. Barberi Squarotti (ed.), *I bersagli della satira*, Turin, 1987, pp. 71-87.

² On the fortunes of More in early modern Italy, see Thomas Wheeler, ‘Thomas More in Italy: 1535-1700’, *Moreana*, vol. 7, 1970, pp. 15-23; Luigi Firpo, ‘Thomas More e la sua fortuna in Italia’, *Il pensiero politico*, vol. 9, 1976, pp. 209-236. Lando’s translation of *Utopia* is contained in Vinicio Abbundo, *Tommaso Moro. Saggio*, Naples, 1962, pp. 1-114. On Lando as translator of *Utopia*, see Riccardo Scrivano, ‘Ortensio Lando traduttore di Thomas More’, in id., *La norma e lo scarto. Proposte per il Cinquecento letterario italiano*, Rome, 1980, pp. 139-149; Silvana Seidel Menchi, ‘Ortensio Lando cittadino di Utopia: un esercizio di lettura’, in *La fortuna dell’Utopia di Thomas More nel dibattito politico europeo del ‘500*, Florence, 1996, pp. 95-118; Ana Cláudia Romano Ribeiro, ‘Le utopie di Thomas Morus e Ortensio Lando’, *Morus – Utopia e Rinascimento*, vol. 10, 2015, pp. 15-28; Paola Spinuzzi, ‘Italian Translations and Editions of Thomas More’s *Libellus vere aureus*’, *Utopian Studies*, vol. 27, 2016, pp. 505-520 (at pp. 506-509).

not leave any text that we know of.³ By admission of Seidel Menchi herself, this conclusion is not indisputable and is indicative of the ambiguity and uncertainty enveloping Lando's life. Nor is this ambiguity limited to his life. His writings have in fact aroused a number of different, often contrasting, interpretations. On a general level, scholarly literature has shifted from the description of him as an all-round *poligrafo*, anti-classicist, provocative but, in some respects, lacking a deep theoretical dimension, to a reappraisal of the religious meanings infusing his works. This reconsideration, largely due to the studies of Seidel Menchi, has led to a new portrayal of Lando as a radical heterodox, close to, if not wholly in line with, the values and the doctrines of the Reformation. Without downplaying the affinities linking Lando to the other *poligrafi*, his distinctive trait, I believe, lies in this religious persuasion.

Unlike Niccolò Franco, Lando did not rely heavily on Lucian's corpus in terms of motifs, characters or setting. His main debt to Lucian consists in the use of irony, notably in the form of paradox, as a means to endow serious issues with a seriocomic, and ambiguous, style. Such a choice was primarily a way to convey and simultaneously conceal messages, chiefly of religious nature, that could not be exposed openly. In other words, Lando found in Lucian a precursor, a master of ambivalence who equipped him with literary techniques that were essential in an age of restricted intellectual liberty. Before examining the most Lucianic compositions of Lando, namely, his *Paradossi*, a collection of thirty paradoxes, and *La sferza de' scrittori antichi et moderni*, I shall treat briefly a couple of his earlier Latin works, so as to show how ambivalence is, indeed, his hallmark.

Lando made his debut in the literary scene with the bipartite dialogue *Cicero relegatus et Cicero revocatus. Dialogi festivissimi*, published in the same year, 1534, in Lyons, Leipzig and Venice.⁴ This work is emblematic of his interest in the controversies about the imitation of Cicero, a theme that gathered new momentum across Europe following the publication of Erasmus' *Ciceronianus*. Set in Milan, the first part of Lando's dialogue depicts a circle of friends reunited on the occasion of the illness of Philoponus, who, despite a few attempts, has not been yet persuasively identified with a historical character.⁵ Along with other intellectuals of the time, the group includes Fra Geremia Lando, the *alter ego* of the author. Their conversation concentrates on the figure

³ Silvana Seidel Menchi, 'Chi fu Ortensio Lando?', *Rivista storica italiana*, vol. 106, 1994, pp. 501-564.

⁴ For a detailed analysis of Lando's work in its historical context, see Conor Fahy, 'The Composition of Ortensio Lando's Dialogue *Cicero relegatus et Cicero revocatus*', *Italian Studies*, vol. 30, 1975, pp. 30-41.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

of Cicero, who is unreservedly condemned for his vices and flaws, among them vanity, avarice, an unrestrained quest for glory and even stylistic imperfections in his orations. Eventually, he is sentenced to exile in Scythia. Still set in Milan, the second section, with the exception of Fra Geremia Lando, features different characters. By delivering a series of speeches, they refute all the criticisms that had previously targeted Cicero, who, at the end, is recalled to Italy to much acclaim.

Lando's Ciceronian diptych has been variously interpreted. In Donato Gagliardi's view, it points to an increasing distrust in Cicero as a cultural authority in the Cinquecento, being the *Cicero revocatus* nothing but 'una difesa d'ufficio [...] ove la confutazione delle accuse è generica e fatta senza convinzione'.⁶ Paul F. Grendler, by contrast, was inclined to explain the dialogue as a clear example of Lando's irreverent attitude towards those that were perceived as momentous issues in the contemporary intellectual establishment.⁷ Seidel Menchi's reading is more nuanced. By emphasising the *Cicero revocatus*, which apparently shows how the 'Republic of Letters' cannot do without Cicero, she considers the whole composition as a veiled criticism of Erasmus' standpoint in the *Ciceronianus*.⁸ As a young scholar imbued with humanist culture, she continues, Lando was still sympathetic to the idea of convergence between classical studies and Christian religion, a position, akin to Erasmus' prior to the publication of the *Ciceronianus*, which changed considerably in his later writings, as we shall see shortly.

This scholarly debate is symptomatic of how ambiguity is intrinsic to Lando's first work, which, ultimately, resists a definitive interpretation. Remarkable, in my view, is that Lando found paradox congenial from the beginning of his literary career. The same love for a paradoxical manner of expression is apparent in the *Desiderii Erasmi funus*, a dialogue, published anonymously in Basel in 1540, fictitiously presented as an excerpt from the conversations between Philalethes, citizen of Utopia (a pseudonym that Lando employed in several occasions), and his friends.⁹ Built around the death of Erasmus and redolent of Lucianic motifs, some at second remove, this work consists in an exchange between the Italian Anianus and the Dutch Arnoldus. Whereas the former is an imaginary

⁶ Donato Gagliardi, 'Il ciceronismo nel primo Cinquecento e Ortensio Lando', *Le parole e le idee*, vol. 6, 1967, pp. 7-20 (at p. 20).

⁷ Grendler, *Critics of the Italian World*, pp. 148-149.

⁸ Silvana Seidel Menchi, 'Sulla fortuna di Erasmo in Italia: Ortensio Lando e altri eterodossi della prima metà del Cinquecento', *Rivista storica svizzera*, vol. 24, 1974, pp. 537-634 (at pp. 570-574).

⁹ For a critical edition of Lando's dialogue accompanied by an Italian translation, see Ortensio Lando, *I funerali di Erasmo da Rotterdam*. In *Des. Erasmi Roterodami funus*, tr. L. Di Lenardo, Udine, 2012.

figure, at times regarded as the spokesman of the author, the latter alludes to the man of letters and bookseller Arnold van Eynthouts.¹⁰

The opening of the piece is reminiscent of the outset of both Lucian's *Menippus* and some of Erasmus' *Colloquia*, such as *De votis temere susceptis* and *Funus*, which, in turn, had been modelled on Lucian's text. After the mutual greetings, Anianus asks his interlocutor why he has been away for such a long time and discovers that Arnoldus had travelled to Strasbourg. Unable to refrain from tears, the latter recounts that Erasmus, whom he highly commends for his countless virtues, has lately died, to the dismay of Christendom. The monks, however, often targets of Erasmus' sharp satire, celebrated his passing during his funeral and, at night, horrifically mutilated his corpse. This passage might hint at Lucian's *The Downward Journey*, when the tyrant Megapenthes, in Hades, remembers how his valet Cario committed acts of physical violence against his cadaver right after his death.

On Anianus' demand, Arnoldus carries on with his account, reporting the extraordinary vision of a hermit. Surrounded by a multitude of saints and angels, Erasmus received the palm of martyrdom, on the road to his celestial triumph. Distant from him, condemned to atrocious pains, were the wicked, that is, those who in life had dared to criticise him. Among them, one figure stood out, an unidentified German-speaking man who had been particularly harsh to Erasmus. In the final section the dialogue shifts in tone. To Arnoldus' great surprise, not only is Anianus insensitive to Erasmus' death, but he, Anianus, also blames Erasmus for immorality, refers to his illegitimate birth and questions his Latin style, which he deems as too facetious. Eventually, Anianus sings the praises of the monks, before saying farewell to his companion and leaving.

Like Lando's Ciceronian dialogue, the *Desiderii Erasmi funus* has provoked a proliferation of analyses. Three interpretative strands may be distinguished. According to Grendler and Eric Nelson, it represents a defence of Erasmus against his critics.¹¹ Grendler, in particular, has argued for the identification, and the consequent condemnation, of the monks desecrating Erasmus' tomb with Protestant reformers who had departed from his teachings. For Myron P. Gilmore and Seidel Menchi, on the

¹⁰ For the identification of Anianus with Lando, see Grendler, *Critics of the Italian World*, p. 116; Seidel Menchi, 'Sulla fortuna di Erasmo in Italia', p. 576.

¹¹ Grendler, *Critics of the Italian World*, pp. 113-117; Eric Nelson, 'Utopia through Italian Eyes: Thomas More and the Critics of Civic Humanism', *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. 59, 2006, pp. 1029-1057 (at p. 1045).

contrary, Lando's work was an attack on Erasmus.¹² The former has argued that Arnoldus' exaggerated suffering, his panegyric of Erasmus' virtues as well as the hermit's vision of him in heaven are no more than parodies of the traditional encomia on Erasmus. Lando's composition would actually reflect the themes staple to the anti-Erasmus propaganda in Italy, namely, the description of him as a precursor of Luther, reluctant to abide by the Ciceronian norms of style and critical of the cultural inheritance of Rome. Seidel Menchi has based her reading on the dream of the hermit, reminiscent, in her view, of Celio Secondo Curione's *Pasquillus ecstaticus*.¹³ By portraying Erasmus' glorification, Lando charged him with not having abandoned the Roman Church. The German-speaking man, mentioned above, was Ulrich von Hutten, with whom Erasmus had been in dispute over this and similar issues. Finally, in Conor Fahy's interpretation, the *Desiderii Erasmi funus* ridicules the opposite extremes of praise and blame that the figure of Erasmus aroused in certain intellectual milieus.¹⁴

The arguments accounting for the anti-Erasmian leanings of Lando's dialogue seem to be more convincing. Arnoldus, the devout supporter of Erasmus, resembles, indeed, a caricature. In this respect, two elements may be added. At the beginning of his exchange with Anianus, he claims that he is astonished because the gods, to whom nothing is unknown, have not marked Erasmus' death with plentiful and apparent signals.¹⁵ Evidently, these remarks sharply contrast with Erasmus' criticism of superstition, a distinctive feature of his satirical writings. Secondly, Arnoldus points out that Erasmus' soul joined all the others souls of the blessed, as God had preordained at the beginning of time.¹⁶ Once again, he misunderstands Erasmus' thinking, to the point that he seems to mistake it for Luther's. The concept of predestination had been object of an intense debate involving Luther and Erasmus, being supported by the former and criticised by the latter, who deemed free will as an essential component of human beings.¹⁷ In short, Arnoldus' repeated distortion of Erasmus' ideas suggests that Lando, in his *Desiderii Erasmi funus*, did not identify himself with Erasmus' religious stance. Nevertheless, their

¹² Myron P. Gilmore, 'Anti-Erasmianism in Italy. The Dialogue of Ortensio Lando on Erasmus's Funeral', *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, vol. 4, 1974, pp. 1-14; Seidel Menchi, 'Sulla fortuna di Erasmo in Italia', pp. 574-591.

¹³ On *Pasquillus ecstaticus* and its intellectual context, see Chrysa Damianaki and Angelo Romano (eds), *Pasquin, Lord of Satire, and His Disciplines in 16th-Century Struggles for Religious and Political Reform*, Rome, 2014.

¹⁴ Conor Fahy, 'Landiana', *Italia medioevale e umanistica*, vol. 19, 1976, pp. 325-387 (at pp. 325-359).

¹⁵ Lando, *I funerali di Erasmo*, p. 49.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹⁷ I have summarised the debate on free will between Erasmus and Luther, providing the relevant bibliography, in Chapter II.2, p. 143.

intellectual relationship was, all said, an ambivalent one. Throughout his career, Lando reshaped numerous Erasmian themes, especially in his works in the 1550s.¹⁸

Lando's *Paradossi*

My analysis so far has shown how Lando was immersed in crucial cultural issues of his day and dealt with them in an ambiguous way, often employing paradox. His predilection for paradox reached its peak in his *Paradossi, cioè sentenze fuori del comun parere*. Divided into two books, the *Paradossi* are Lando's first published composition in the vernacular. They were printed anonymously in Lyons in 1543 and in Venice in 1544 and 1545.¹⁹ Shortly after their first publication, the *Paradossi* also enjoyed popularity in France and England.²⁰ With this work Lando revived the multifaceted tradition of paradox, comprising among its ancient practitioners Cicero and Lucian.²¹ Being markedly didactic, Ciceronian paradox aimed at making clear its authentic significance. By contrast, its Lucianic counterpart, which melded jest and erudition, was by far more ambiguous and called into question the reliability of its author, as apparent at the outset of *A True Story*.²² Mocking Greek historiography, Lucian states that all the tales he is about to narrate are false, warning the reader not to trust them.

Lando's standpoint is akin to Lucian's. In the preface to the first book of the *Paradossi*, he addresses Cristoforo Madruzzo saying that he has penned his composition 'sol per fuggir la molestia del caldo'.²³ By these words, he presents his work as mere *divertissement*, purposely concealing its content, which is largely concerned with controversial, and potentially dangerous, religious matters. Lucian's parodic techniques

¹⁸ Silvana Seidel Menchi, 'Spiritualismo radicale nelle opere di Ortensio Lando attorno al 1550', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, vol. 65, 1974, pp. 210-277.

¹⁹ On the publishing history of Lando's *Paradossi*, together with an interpretation stressing their theological significance, see Ugo Rozzo, 'I *Paradossi* di Ortensio Lando tra Lione e Venezia e il loro contenuto teologico', *La Bibliofilia*, vol. 113, 2011, pp. 175-209. On the Venetian editions of the *Paradossi*, see Conor Fahy, 'Le edizioni veneziane dei *Paradossi* di Ortensio Lando', *Studi di filologia italiana*, vol. 40, 1982, pp. 155-191.

²⁰ On the reception of Lando's *Paradossi* in France and England, see Patrizia Grimaldi Pizzorno, *The Ways of Paradox from Lando to Donne*, Florence, 2007.

²¹ The difference between Ciceronian and Lucianic paradoxes and their influence on early modern Italian culture are discussed in Letizia Panizza, 'The Semantic Field of Paradox in 16th and 17th Century Italy: From Truth in Appearance False to Falsehood in Appearance True. A Preliminary Investigation', in Marta Fattori (ed.), *Il vocabolario della République des lettres. Terminologia filosofica e storia della filosofia, problemi di metodo*, Florence, 1997, pp. 197-220. For the use of paradox in Renaissance literature, see A. E. Malloch, 'The Techniques and Function of the Renaissance Paradox', *Studies in Philology*, vol. 53, 1956, pp. 191-203; Rosalie L. Colie, *Paradoxia Epidemica. The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox*, Princeton, NJ, 1966; Francine Daenens, 'Encomium mendacii ovvero del paradosso', in Franco Cardini (ed.), *La menzogna*, Florence, 1989, pp. 99-119.

²² As underlined by Panizza, 'The Semantic Field of Paradox', pp. 209-210.

²³ Ortensio Lando, *Paradossi, cioè sentenze fuori del comun parere*, Rome, 2000, p. 81.

are put at the service of a strategy of dissimulation, aligning Lando with Nicodemism, that is, the subterfuge, employed at times by the followers of the Reformation, of dissimulating one's creed and of conforming to Catholicism on the surface.²⁴ Despite these attempts at camouflage, the *Paradossi* were placed on Paul IV's Index. In 1594, Comin Ventura printed in Bergamo an expurgated edition. Interestingly, the censorial intervention focused on the passages displaying prominent criticism of political and cultural institutions, but, generally, failed to detect the numerous marks of religious heterodoxy scattered across the text, and thereby fostered their diffusion.²⁵

In 1544, a year after the publication of Lando's *Paradossi*, John Calvin launched a severe attack on the Nicodemites in his *Excuse à Messieurs les Nicodémistes*, a text translated into Italian by Lodovico Domenichi, explicitly defining them as admirers of Lucian or Epicurus.²⁶ Although there is no explicit connection between Calvin and Lando, this pamphlet discloses that, in the second half of the sixteenth century, Lucian and religious dissimulation were closely associated.

In terms of textual references, the principal model for Lando's *Paradossi* was Petrarch's *De remediis utriusque fortunae*.²⁷ Permeated with a Stoic vein, Petrarch's work exhorted the reader to face with temperance both fortunate and unfavourable fate, without falling prey to intense emotions. As Paolo Cherchi has argued, Lando infused the motifs that he borrowed with a different meaning, adapting Petrarch's pivotal idea of moderation to his own purposes.²⁸ His reshaping of *De remediis*, I suggest, might also be part of his strategy of dissimulation. By hinting at an 'innocuous work', meaning a work not involved in religious controversies, Lando added a further layer of ambiguity to his *Paradossi*.

Let us now turn to the content of the *Paradossi*. In the cornucopia of topics that Lando discussed, four core themes stand out: poverty, liberty, criticism of political power, with special emphasis placed upon the court environment, and of the most prestigious cultural authorities. Significantly, the book opens with a paradox maintaining the

²⁴ On Nicodemism, see Carlo Ginzburg, *Il nicodemismo. Simulazione e dissimulazione religiosa nell'Europa del '500*, Turin, 1970; M. Anne Overell, *Nicodemites. Faith and Concealment between Italy and Tudor England*, Leiden, 2018. On Lando's Nicodemism, see Antonio Corsaro, 'Ortensio Lando letterato in volgare', in *Cinquecento capriccioso e irregolare*, pp. 131-148 (at pp. 143-145).

²⁵ Antonio Corsaro, 'Tra filologia e censura. I *Paradossi* di Ortensio Lando', in Ugo Rozzo (ed.), *La censura libraria nell'Europa del secolo XVI*, Udine, 1997, pp. 297-324; Panizza, 'The Semantic Field of Paradox', pp. 214-215.

²⁶ Lauvergnot-Gagnière, *Lucien de Samosate*, p. 152. On Domenichi's translation, see Enrico Garavelli, *Lodovico Domenichi e i Nicodemiani di Calvino*, Rome, 2004.

²⁷ Cherchi, *Polimatia di riuso*, pp. 99-102; Elisa Tinelli, 'Per le fonti umanistiche dei *Paradossi* di Ortensio Lando', *Archivum Mentis. Studi di filologia e letteratura umanistica*, vol. 6, 2017, pp. 155-181.

²⁸ Cherchi, *Polimatia di riuso*, p. 101.

superiority of poverty over wealth. After some generic remarks underlining that virtuous men have always been needy, Lando presents poverty as the bedrock of the Church: ‘O Povertà casta e umile sopra la quale come sopra d’un stabil fondamento fondata fu la santa e vera Chiesa de Iddio!’²⁹ By associating poverty with chastity and humility, central values of the Church at its origins, Lando is implicitly polemicising with the Church of his day, to which he imputes a departure from those ideals. In the following lines, however, as if wanting to divert attention from this matter, he concentrates on the ‘civic role’ that poverty played in ancient societies, describing it as founder of cities and arts:

Scrissero già alcuni nobilissimi ingegni che la povertà negli antichi secoli fusse edificatrice di tutte le città e inventrice di tutte le buone arti, e essa sola ritrovarsi senza difetto, tutta gloriosa, e piena d’ogni vera lode.³⁰

This praise might be a parody of a passage in Aristophanes’ *Plutus*, translated into Latin by Leonardo Bruni around 1440, in which Chremylus extols Wealth for similar reasons:

And every art existing in the world, and every craft, was for thy sake invented. For thee one sits and cobbles all the day, one works in bronze, another works in wood, one fuses gold, the gold derived from thee.³¹

Lando then sets forth other essential features characterising poverty. It acts as a criterion for distinguishing real and false friends, thus resembling the notion of *parrhesia* as conceived by Plato, Plutarch and other Greek authors, and outdoes philosophy in teaching ethical principles. This anti-intellectual stance pervades the entire collection and is complementary to the numerous references to Jesus, Saint Paul and the Gospel. Particularly significant in this respect is the third paradox, *Meglio è d’esser ignorante che dotto*, a re-elaborated version of an earlier and unpublished work entitled *Dialogo contra gli uomini letterati* (1541).³² In a manner reminiscent of Cornelius Agrippa’s *De*

²⁹ Lando, *Paradossi*, p. 85.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

³¹ Aristophanes, ‘*Plutus*’, 160-165, in [Aristophanes], tr. B. B. Rogers, 3 vols, London, 1924, vol. 3, p. 377.

³² On this dialogue, see Silvana Seidel Menchi, ‘Un inedito di Ortensio Lando: il *Dialogo contra gli uomini letterati*’, *Rivista storica svizzera*, vol. 27, 1977, pp. 509-527. For a detailed study on the mock encomium of ignorance in sixteenth-century literature, see Maria Cristina Figorilli, *Meglio ignorante che dotto. L’elogio paradossale in prosa nel Cinquecento*, Naples, 2008.

incertitudine, Lando seeks to undermine the value and the validity of knowledge. Initially, perhaps simply complying with a literary motif, he observes that many learned men bitterly regretted the time spent on their vain studies before dying. Shortly afterwards, he enters the theological sphere, highlighting the link between doctrine and heresy and, above all, explicitly mentioning Saint Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, in which the apostle affirms that worldly wisdom is foolishness to God. Lando goes as far as to ask himself: 'crederò io esserci chi dubiti che la scienza non sia invenzione del dimonio, poi che dimonio vol dir sciente?'³³ Rather than indulging in sophisticated theoretical reasoning, he seems to suggest, Christians should re-embrace the evangelical simplicity and purity of faith. Given that Europe had been shaken by the turmoil of the Reformation, these claims might sound suspicious, if not subversive, to the ears of the Roman Church. It is probably for this reason that Lando inserted this passage in the middle of more conventional and innocent topics, such as the uselessness of letters in public affairs and a description of famous deaths of ancient philosophers.

Lando's ideas on poverty and knowledge are intertwined with his outlook on liberty. In the twenty-third paradox, for instance, he argues that being of humble birth brings liberty. In the fifth this view emerges more distinctly. Reminiscent of Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium*, the paradox *Meglio è d'esser pazzo che savio* portrays the fool as the only one who dismisses riches, honours, any kind of social obligations and, by doing so, achieves a level of liberty unknown to everyone else. In Lando's words, the fool 'a niuno finalmente è soggetto, ma vive più d'ogn' altro libero e franco; può dir ciò che vuole sì de principi come de private persone, senza riceverne pugnalate o minaccie udire'.³⁴

This passage outlines a concept of liberty as detachment from conventions and social aspirations. Lando reiterates an analogous view throughout his book. In the ninth paradox, he makes the case that living in exile is preferable to living in one's own country, since expatriation liberates a person from civic discord and responsibility. An even more radical, and existential, position is expounded in the nineteenth paradox, tellingly titled *Meglio è d'essere in prigione che in libertà*. 'E chi è in questa vita che nel vero prigionier non sia e libero si possa mai dire se non quando ei muore?', Lando wonders, portraying death as the liberator of humankind.³⁵

Lando's conceit thereby blends spiritual concerns with his criticism of social and political institutions, a criticism that recurs persistently in the *Paradossi*. Peculiar to his

³³ Lando, *Paradossi*, p. 107.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

polemical stance is what Seidel Menchi has defined as ‘ottica a volo d’uccello’, that is, a vantage point from above and in constant motion.³⁶ This vantage point could be plainly regarded as Lucianic, bearing in mind works such as *Charon* and *Icaromenippus*. An instance of this technique is apparent in the twenty-third paradox, in which Lando surveys cases of insane ambition in both Italian and European cities. To mark his move from Naples to Switzerland, he uses the periphrasis ‘con sì fatto pensiero colà diritto me ne volai’, as if he were a novel Menippus flying in an unrelenting search of truth.³⁷

Like Franco, Lando was disenchanted with life at court, which he depicted characterised by betrayal, envy and deception. To give just one example, in the nineteenth paradox he writes that ‘chiunque ben avvertisce troverà più sembianza di morte e maggior similitudine d’inferno ne’ reali palazzi che nelle prigioni’.³⁸ Consequently, rulers are deemed as the main cause of the innumerable armed conflicts afflicting sixteenth-century Italy. Referring to the war, Lando sarcastically remarks ‘ringraziamo Iddio ch’abbi posto nel cuore a’ nostri principi di non lasciarcene mai mancare’.³⁹

Lando’s critical attitude also targets the cultural icons of his time, namely, Cicero, Boccaccio and Aristotle, with the exclusion of Petrarch. An indirect attack on him, and mostly on his imitators, might be concealed in his polemic against the Florentine vernacular, to which I shall turn shortly.

In the paradox dedicated to Cicero, Lando makes a reference to his earlier dialogue *Cicero relegatus*, adding that, since then, he has found many other flaws in Cicero’s corpus. His remarks seem, nevertheless, purposely exaggerated. Ultimately, his real thoughts about the so-called ‘Ciceronian quarrel’ remain hard to decipher.

The paradox on Boccaccio sheds light on Lando as a man of letters. He blames Boccaccio for a trivial vernacular style, attributing his imperfections to his lack of proper education in Latin and Greek. Although Boccaccio’s supposed ignorance of Latin is questionable, Lando’s insinuations apparently point to the pride in the humanist training that he underwent in his youth, which was probably more thorough than that of the other *poligrafì*. Lando’s criticism is in keeping with his distaste for the Florentine vernacular in vogue in the Cinquecento.⁴⁰ In his letter to Nicola Maria Caracciolo, bishop of Catania, which serves as a preface to the second book of the *Paradossi*, he legitimises, not without

³⁶ Seidel Menchi, ‘Ortensio Lando cittadino di Utopia’, pp. 100-101.

³⁷ Lando, *Paradossi*, p. 217.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

⁴⁰ On Lando’s *antitoscanismo*, see Corsaro, ‘Lando letterato’, pp. 141-143.

a certain dose of irony, his choice to use the Milanese rather than the Florentine vernacular as follows:

Ricordandomi d'esser nato nella città di Milano, e fra' Longobardi longamente vissuto, mi venne al cuore una certa diffidenza la quale di sorte m'impaurì che subito abbandonai il pensiero di scrivere toscaneamente, e ricorsi a quella forma di parlare che già preso avea, parte dalla mia nudrice, parte ancora da' migliori scrittori.⁴¹

Lando also questions the content of Boccaccio's *Decameron* and of other of his works, which he deems as frivolous and lascivious. He wonders that his texts are widely read, whereas Luther's are forbidden, and even hints at burning his, Boccaccio's, writings. As several scholars have argued, however, these lines should be interpreted in accordance with Lando's deceptive way of expression and, instead of resentment against Boccaccio, might stand for a cryptic condemnation of the growing censorial practices in the second half of the sixteenth century.⁴² What appears to be more genuine is, indeed, Lando's rejection of the fashionable Florentine vernacular.

Some final considerations are due on the paradoxes on Aristotle. Lando's mockery of him turns out to be a pretext permitting him, Lando, to find fault with uncritical subjection to any form of power and to reaffirm his anti-intellectual stance, especially in relation to religious matters. 'O temerità insupportabile, o tirannia incredibile! Qual Fallari, o qual Dionisio avrebbe osato di por tal legge a' suoi vassalli?', Lando exclaims referring to the status that Aristotle enjoyed as the philosophical authority.⁴³ Behind the mention of the tyrant Phalaris might lie an allusion to Lucian, who dedicated to him a mock encomium. Lando is particularly harsh in decrying the application of Aristotle's philosophy to all branches of knowledge, including the explanation of the Scriptures. The Reformation is regarded as an inversion of this tendency:

Sopraggiunse poi M. Lutero senza favore di Aristotele, senza soccorso delle formalità di Scoto, *solo armato delle scritture sante a suo modo intese*, e volse in

⁴¹ Lando, *Paradossi*, p. 174.

⁴² See, for example, Maria Cristina Figorilli, 'Contro Aristotele, Cicerone e Boccaccio: note sui *Paradossi* di Ortensio Lando', *Filologia e critica*, vol. 33, 2008, pp. 35-64 (at p. 61). On Lando and Boccaccio, see also Piotr Salwa, 'Il giudizio sul Boccaccio di Ortensio Lando nei *Paradossi*', *Letteratura italiana antica*, vol. 7, 2006, pp. 453-462.

⁴³ Lando, *Paradossi*, p. 254.

fuga tutti quelli reverendi teologi aristotelici di Lipsia, di Lovanio e di Colonia, facendoli ravedere quanto sia gran fallo lasciar il grano per mangiare delle ghiande.⁴⁴

Besides underlining how Lando was wary of the sophistry of scholasticism, this passage draws attention to Luther. The expression above in italics, as Antonio Corsaro has noted, is remarkably ambiguous.⁴⁵ It might mean that Luther interpreted the Bible in his own way or, on the contrary, in conformity with its authentic significance. Once again, Lando's Nicodemitic writing, Lucianic in its style, proves to be hard to decipher.

Following his *Paradossi*, in 1544 or 1545 Lando published anonymously in Venice the *Confutatione del libro de paradossi*, divided into three sections. Pretending to ignore the identity of the author of the *Paradossi*, Lando refutes all the thirty paradoxes previously formulated, thereby employing the same pattern already experimented with his *Cicero relegatus et Cicero revocatus*. Two elements are worth highlighting. First, Lando associates the author of the *Paradossi*, that is to say, himself, with the ideas of dissimulation and fickleness. In the confutation of the first paradox he insinuates that his *alter ego* was familiar with the abundant literature against poverty, including a poem, of which the title is not mentioned, by Callimachus. And yet the author of the *Paradossi* concealed his knowledge: 'certo, che dubbio non mi è, che sovente letto no l'habbia, benché hora lo dissimuli, e celato lo tenghi'.⁴⁶ While refuting the third paradox, he describes the inconsistency of his satirical target by these words: 'non sono così volubili le ruote, che il grano tritano, quanto parmi volubile il cervello di costui: ama e disama in un punto: vuole e non vuole: non è per mia fe sì mutabile il Camaleonte'.⁴⁷ In light of Lando's profile, these remarks appear to be a self-portrait corroborating the argument that ambiguity and dissemblance constitute the main traits of his corpus, as well as an important interpretative key to it.

Secondly, Lando, at times, seemingly disproves his paradoxes while keeping intact their authentic meaning, as apparent in the refutation of the first paradox. To emphasise how despicable poverty is, he ironically claims that even clergymen and monks try to avoid it by seeking refuge in the courts of powerful rulers. Lando's denunciation of the corruption of the Church, central to his first paradox, is thus left unaltered.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 260. The italics are mine.

⁴⁵ Antonio Corsaro, 'Introduzione', in Lando, *Paradossi*, pp. 1-25 (at p. 21).

⁴⁶ Ortensio Lando, *Confutatione del libro de paradossi*, Venice, 1563, sig. a5^r.

⁴⁷ Ibid., sig. a7^v.

Lando's *La sferza de' scrittori antichi et moderni*

The palinodic structure characterising the diptych *Paradossi/Confutatione* moulds also *La sferza de' scrittori antichi et moderni*. Published in Venice in 1550, *La sferza* consists in a critical and satirical examination of numerous authors both ancient and modern, followed by a praise of the *humanae litterae* that entirely contradicts the first section. Lando employs the expedient of the dream, claiming that he has had a vision of a library packed with books. He then addresses its fictitious owner, named Signor Toso, warning him that amassing countless books does not make one more learned or eloquent. It is likely that Lando drew on Lucian's *The Ignorant Book-Collector*, of which several translations into Latin were available.⁴⁸ In this work, Lucian lampoons a man who surrounds himself with books as if they were merely pieces of furniture. There is, nonetheless, a difference between the two texts. Lucian's is biting invective, an attack *ad personam*, a rarity in his corpus, against another Syrian who was presumably well-known to his audience, as we can deduce from the following sentence: 'come now, as far as I know – and I too am a Syrian – if you had not smuggled yourself into that old man's will with all speed, you would be starving to death by now!'⁴⁹

Lando's composition, by contrast, is not concerned with an individual. The figure of Toso and his library serve to introduce the reader to the real theme under discussion, that is, Lando's condemnation of both famous and obscure writers, including Lucian, whom he describes in these terms:

Luciano neanche porger vi puote alcun vero diletto, per esser sprezzatore de gli huomini et de gli Iddij, pieno de freddi motti, usurpatore de novi vocaboli per diffetto della propria lingua, ch'altrimenti pensar non posso. Si ride questo sciagurato di Christo, sotto nome di Prometteo, et lo chiama alcuna volta sophista; n'essorta alla sodomia; insegna alle donne doventar meretrici et fingendo d'esser in asino tramutato, insegna vari congiungimenti carnali. Fu già christiano, se il vero mi dice Raffaele Volterano, et Lucio nomossi. Fatto poi rubello et contumace a Christo, chiamossi Luciano.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Lucian's text had been translated by, among others, Philip Melanchthon, who published his rendering, together with other works, in Venice in 1527. See Ní Chuilleanáin, 'Motives of Translation', p. 58.

⁴⁹ Lucian, 'The Ignorant Book-Collector', 19, in [Lucian], vol. 3, pp. 197-199.

⁵⁰ Ortensio Lando, *La sferza de' scrittori antichi et moderni*, Rome, 1995, pp. 45-46.

The portrayal of Lucian as ‘sprezzatore de gli huomini et de gli Iddij’ recalls vividly Lactantius’ severe judgement on him as an author who spared neither gods nor men. From the following lines we can infer that Lando was acquainted with many works of Lucian, namely, *To One Who Said ‘You’re a Prometheus in Words’*, *The Passing of Peregrinus*, *Amores*, *Dialogues of the Courtesans* and *Lucius or the Ass*. In a preceding passage, moreover, Lando incidentally mentions *A True Story*, too.⁵¹

Yet another reference to Lucian is concealed towards the end of *La sferza*. Lando, this time, regards as worthless the voluminous tomes of jurisprudence filling Toso’s library and rhetorically poses a question to his imaginary interlocutor: ‘et forsi che troverete fra queste peccore qualche faceta narratione mescolata con philosophico sapore?’⁵² Covertly, these words allude to Niccolò Leonicensi’s vernacular translation of Lucian’s dialogues, which, it is worth remembering, is entitled *Gli dilettevoli dialogi, le vere narrationi, le facete epistole di Luciano Philosopho*.

As for the meaning of Lando’s *La sferza*, once again ambiguity predominates. His use of the catalogue as a means to mock writers and philosophers might represent an attack on the excesses of humanist culture, notably its inclination to erudition. Nevertheless, core intellectual values of the *poligrafî* are equally questioned, in that he satirises the increasing trend to render Greek and Latin texts into the vernacular.⁵³ Perhaps Lando intended to distance himself from both traditions, flaunting the same irreverent and ambivalent attitude marking many other aspects of his enigmatic oeuvre.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 44.

⁵² Ibid., p. 67.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 64.

Chapter 4. Anton Francesco Doni's *I mondi e gli inferni*: Lucian, Leon Battista Alberti, Desiderius Erasmus and Thomas More in Dialogue

Anton Francesco Doni (1513-1574) was born to a family of humble origin in Florence.¹ In his youth he entered the monastery of the Santissima Annunziata as a novice, but he soon decided to repudiate the religious life, as had Ortensio Lando. He started to travel extensively in Italy. A significant moment in his peregrinations was his stay in Piacenza, where he joined the Accademia Ortolana and met, among others, Lodovico Domenichi.² Like the other *poligrafi*, he was then captivated by the vibrant cultural environment of Venice, the city in which he published most of his works. Yet he never stopped travelling. In the biennium 1546-1547, for instance, he resided in his hometown, Florence, where he ran his own printing shop. He spent the last years of his existence in Monselice, a town near Venice.

Doni's biting satire is concerned with cultural and social issues as well as with religious ones. Similarly to Lando, he employed Lucianic irony as a means to infuse his writings with ideals of Erasmian flavour. Unlike him, he did not use the paradox, but he composed lively dialogues and visionary narrations. More than the other *poligrafi*, Doni was keen on combining themes and motifs borrowed from prominent exponents of the Lucianic tradition as a whole. Besides Lucian, he drew on Leon Battista Alberti, Desiderius Erasmus and Thomas More. Explicit and implicit references to Saint Paul also play a significant role in his corpus.

The text that best exemplifies Doni's distinctive features is *I mondi e gli inferni*, published in Venice, by the press of Francesco Marcolini, between 1552 and 1553. In 1578 Gabriel Chappuys, who also translated Niccolò Franco's *Dialogi piacevoli*, brought out his French rendering of Doni's work.³ In *I mondi e gli inferni* Doni accentuated an

¹ On Doni's life, see Grendler, *Critics of the Italian World*, pp. 49-65. For a monograph on Doni's life and oeuvre, see Giuseppe Candela, *Manierismo e condizioni della scrittura in Anton Francesco Doni*, New York, NY, 1993. For a catalogue of editions of Doni's works, see Cecilia Ricottini Marsili-Libelli, *Anton Francesco Doni. Scrittore e stampatore*, Florence, 1960.

² On the Accademia Ortolana, see Gianmarco Braghi, *L'Accademia degli Ortolani (1543-1545). Eresia, stampa e cultura a Piacenza nel medio Cinquecento*, Piacenza, 2011. For a study on the main academies in early modern Italy, see Jane E. Everson, Denis V. Reidy and Lisa Sampson (eds), *The Italian Academies 1525-1700. Networks of Culture, Innovation and Dissent*, Cambridge, 2016.

³ On Chappuys' translation, see Giovanna Rizzarelli, *Se le parole si potessero scorgere. I Mondi di Doni tra Italia e Francia*, Rome, 2007, pp. 109-176; Lina Bolzoni, 'Il mondo utopico e il mondo dei cornuti: plagio e paradosso nelle traduzioni di Gabriel Chappuys', in id., *Il lettore creativo. Percorsi cinquecenteschi fra memoria, gioco, scrittura*, Naples, 2012, pp. 193-216.

aspect characteristic of the aesthetic values of the *poligrafi*, that is to say, an inclination towards fragmentation. He relentlessly mixed linguistic registers, forms of expression, alternating frequently between dialogue and monologue, characters, including both mythological and fictitious figures, and settings.⁴ Nor is the content of his work less multifaceted. It ranges from philosophical and theological matters to narrative scenes imbued with sparkling humour and mordant satirical attacks targeting mainly, but not exclusively, the intellectual class.

The fragmentation, regarding both style and content, marking Doni's *I mondi e gli inferni* is reflected in its composite structure. Although this lengthy work was originally published in two distinct parts, with *I mondi* appearing in 1552 and *Gli inferni* in 1553, it represents a diptych, a single work divided into two books. Each book is further subdivided into seven sections. The former contains the *Mondo piccolo*, *Mondo grande*, *Mondo imaginato*, *Mondo misto*, *Mondo risibile*, *Mondo savio e pazzo* and *Mondo massimo*. The second book purports to be the logical continuation of the first. After having explored the human, and celestial, worlds from many angles, Doni offers his vision of the underworld. In Dantesque fashion, each section is dedicated to a specific group of sinners.

The introduction to the *Mondi* discloses some elements framing the entire work. It is formulated as a speech delivered by Elevato, a notable member of the Accademia Pellegrina, who acts as the spokesperson of his academy.⁵ In a language replete with Neoplatonic allusions, he maintains that the *Mondi* constitute an enquiry into the mysteries of nature, man and God and into the relations between them. He then comments: 'se non si conferma con la parola di Dio, tutto ho per favola e per chimera, per non dir castelli in aria, come saranno molti di questi *Mondi*'.⁶ These lines display a remarkably ambiguous and ironic outlook. On the one hand, Elevato, or, better, Doni, deems as senseless everything that falls outside the word of God. On the other, he makes the readers aware that some of his *Mondi* are nothing else than *castelli in aria*, that is, mere fantasies. By ironically undermining his own writings, after the manner of Lucian in the opening of *A True Story*, Doni is, somehow, claiming a space for intellectual liberty without putting himself in contrast with the religious authority. The ruse did not deceive

⁴ For a detailed analysis of Doni's use of language, see Rosanna Marsico, *Anticlassicismo e sperimentalismo linguistico nei Mondi Celesti, Terrestri e Infernali di Anton Francesco Doni*, Alessandria, 2009.

⁵ On the Accademia Pellegrina, see Giorgio Masi, 'Coreografie doniane: l'Accademia Pellegrina', in *Cinquecento capriccioso e irregolare*, pp. 45-85.

⁶ Anton Francesco Doni, *I mondi e gli inferni*, Turin, 1994, p. 6.

the censors. In 1597 and 1606 were printed, respectively in Vicenza and Venice, two expurgated editions of *I mondi e gli inferni*, in which many passages were either removed or modified.⁷

Later in his introduction, Doni lists his main models, defining them as those who have written in order to teach, amuse and elevate the human mind by means of dreams, fables and the conception of abstract worlds. Among others, he cites Dante, Virgil, Ovid, Aesop, Lucian, who ‘per vere narrazioni ha scritto di dotte cose’, and some unspecified Christian saints, who have revealed the truth through visions.⁸ The reference to Lucian clearly points to *A True Story*, a piece which, with its brilliant inventiveness, was particularly consonant with Doni’s taste.

It is not by chance that, along with *Icaromenippus*, *A True Story* inspired the first part of the *Mondo piccolo*, probably the section of the *Mondi* in which Lucian’s influence is most perceptible. At the outset, a group of *academici peregrini* get together and wonder whether it would be possible to ascend to heaven. During the discussion, it comes up that some members of another academy, the Accademia dei Vignaiuoli, have already succeeded in this endeavour. Some astrologers had in fact predicted a bad harvest due to an imminent inundation. Having decided to send someone up to heaven to ask the gods if the astrologers were right, the *Vignaiuoli* faced the dilemma of how to achieve their goal, to the point that ‘ogni Vignaiuolo si stilava il cervello, imaginandosi per acqua come le navi di Luciano, per terra per via di qualche selva come Dante’.⁹ This is a reference to a passage in *A True Story* in which a whirlwind raises the ship of the protagonist and takes it to the moon.¹⁰

The opening of Doni’s *Mondo piccolo* is also redolent of *Icaromenippus*, since both texts contain the motif of the voyage to heaven. There is, however, a significant difference between them. In Lucian’s dialogue, Menippus undertakes his aerial journey driven by his intellectual curiosity. The triggering factor is the disappointment that he experienced following his encounter with a number of philosophers, who proved to be unable to satisfy his thirst for learning. In Doni’s narrative, by contrast, what leads the academics to begin their voyage is, rather than the desire for knowledge as an end in

⁷ On the 1597 edition, see Francesco Sberlati, ‘La pia ecdotica. L’edizione censurata degli *Inferni* di Anton Francesco Doni’, *Lettere italiane*, vol. 49, 1997, pp. 3-39. For a survey on Doni and censorship, see Gigliola Fragnito, ‘Anton Francesco Doni all’Indice’, in Giovanna Rizzarelli (ed.), *Dissonanze concordi. Temi, questioni e personaggi intorno ad Anton Francesco Doni*, Bologna, 2013, pp. 335-351.

⁸ Doni, *I mondi*, pp. 8-9.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁰ Lucian, ‘A True Story’, Book 1, 9, pp. 258-259.

itself, the compelling necessity to find out if the catastrophic previsions of the astrologers will actually take place. It seems that Doni is here seconding the idea that knowledge should be practical and applicable to tangible problems, a theme that, expressed in different forms, is staple to his writings.

As the story continues, we hear that three *academici vignaiuoli*, humorously named Carota, Radice and Cardo, had indeed managed to reach heaven. From this point onwards, the piece becomes essentially a satire of geographers and astrologers. First, drawing largely on Agrippa's *De incertitudine*, Doni ridicules the geographical notions of renowned ancient authors, such as Strabo, Claudius Ptolemy and Aristotle. Then, he targets the astrologers, the forecasts of whom turn out to be totally inaccurate. Moreover, he highlights that, just like the natural philosophers in Lucian, they are in perpetual disagreement with each other. Doni's narrative jokingly ends with Jove, who, wearying of the heavenly visitors, transforms them into vegetables.

Central to the *Mondo piccolo* is the technique, recurrent in Lucian, of adopting a cosmic vantage point from which to view the world. Doni availed himself of this literary device not only in his *Mondi*, but also in *I Marmi*, a collection of dialogues, divided into four sections, published in Venice between 1552 and 1553, the same years in which *I mondi e gli inferni* appeared, by the same typographer, Francesco Marcolini.¹¹ All the dialogues of the *Marmi* are set on the marble steps leading up to the cathedral of Florence, from which the title of the work derives. Similarly to the *Mondi*, at the outset of the collection a member of the Accademia Pellegrina, in this case Svegliato, delivers a monologue. Significantly, he mentions Lucian, 'quando Luciano armeggiava, ei faceva castelli in aria', Plato and Ovid, thus revealing Doni's indebtedness to them.¹² He then imagines that he could turn himself into a large bird and so watch how human beings conduct their lives:

Eccomi a casa: io volo in aria, sopra una città, e mi credo esser diventato un uccellaccio grande grande che vegga con una sottil vista ogni cosa che vi si fa dentro, e scuopro in un batter d'occhio tutta la coperta di sopra; onde a un medesimo tempo io veggo ciascun uomo e donna far diversi effetti: chi nella sua casa piange, chi ride, chi partorisce, chi genera, chi legge, chi scrive, chi mangia,

¹¹ On Lucian's influence on Doni's *I marmi*, see Gianluca Genovese, 'Parlo per ver dire. Generi d'invenzione morale nei *Marmi*', in Giovanna Rizzarelli (ed.), *I Marmi di Anton Francesco Doni: la storia, i generi e le arti*, Florence, 2012, pp. 151-167 (at pp. 153-154).

¹² Anton Francesco Doni, *I marmi*, 2 vols, Florence, 2017, vol. 1, p. 6.

chi vòta. Uno grida con la famiglia, un altro si solazza; eccoti che quello cade per la fame in casa per terra, e quell'altro per troppo mangiar vomita. O che gran diversità veggo io in una sola città e a un tempo medesimo!¹³

In the continuation of this speech, he shifts attention to the cathedral in Florence and the conversations taking place on its steps, marking the opening of the series of dialogues. The source for the passage above is *Icaromenippus*, when Menippus, after he has landed on the moon thanks to his bird's wings, beholds the world underneath.¹⁴ 'Bending down toward earth, I clearly saw the cities, the people and all that they were doing, not only abroad but at home, when they thought they were unobserved', Menippus recounts, providing, subsequently, numerous examples of human behaviour on these occasions.¹⁵

Doni's *Marmi* is thereby intrinsically Lucianic, being framed in its entirety by this characteristic motif of Lucian. As a conclusion to his work, Doni inserted an exchange of letters with Francesco Spirito da Verona, a still unidentified 'scolare in Padova', followed by a sonnet.¹⁶ In his letter to Doni, Spirito, while making distinction between different types of lies, cites Lucian, hinting at his *A True Story*: 'Luciano, che vedde ancora lui che molti scrittori dicevan le bugie, fu galantuomo, perché scrivendo le sue bugie per vere narrazioni, protestò inanzi per avisargli che scriveva bugie'.¹⁷ In a sort of ring composition, *I marmi*, which Doni programmatically initiates under the banner of Lucian, terminates with yet another reference to him.

Doni mentions *A True Story* in the fourth book of the *Marmi*, too. In a dialogue between three *academici peregrini*, Pellegrino, Viandante and Romeo, he establishes a relation between the second book of Lucian's fantastic account and his own project to compose the *Seme della zucca*, that is, an addition to his *La zucca*, an outlandish collection of short narrative pieces published in 1551. The *Seme della zucca* was eventually printed as part of an expanded edition of *La zucca* fourteen years later, in 1565. The link between Lucian's and Doni's compositions lies in a passage in *A True Story* in which Lucian humorously describes the fierce Pumpkin-pirates, mariners who

¹³ Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁴ Doni's passage shows some affinities also with Alberti's *Defunctus*, in which Neophronus looks at what happens on earth after his death.

¹⁵ Lucian, 'Icaromenippus', 15, p. 293.

¹⁶ Doni, *I marmi*, vol. 2, p. 655.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 653-654.

build their ships with pumpkin and use pumpkin seeds as a weapon.¹⁸ In the words of Viandante/Doni, the *Seme della zucca*, which at the time of the publication of the *Marmi* was no more than a plan, takes its cue from this invention of Lucian.

These remarks clarify how, of Lucian's corpus, Doni found *Icaromenippus* and *A True Story* particularly appealing. From the former, he adopted and reshaped the technique of the cosmic vantage point as well as the satirical portrayal of natural philosophers. The latter intrigued him because of its opening, visionary images and utopian undertones. Doni's leanings toward utopian literature will become apparent shortly when we come to analyse his relationship with Alberti and More.

Let us now return to *I mondi e gli inferni* so as to trace other borrowings from Lucian. Doni's debt to him shines through his use of theatrical metaphors and the employment of the character of Menippus in the *Inferni*.¹⁹ The presence of another conspicuous Lucianic figure, Momus, points to Alberti more than Lucian, as we shall see. As for the theatrical metaphors, the *Mondo grande* comprises a dialogue in which the *academici peregrini* Svegliato and Selvaggio stress how human existence is changeable and uncertain and how, in spite of that, men show an irrational inclination to worldly goods. Selvaggio praises those few people who avail themselves of these goods as if they were wayfarers, being aware of their fleeting nature. He then goes even further, comparing life to a game of masks:

O grande errore de' miseri mortali, che tutti siamo di sì varia volontà! Ora paremo gravi e temprati, ora prodighi e ora vani. Né stiamo molto che ci mutiamo la maschera, ponendocene un'altra contraria a quella che noi ci abbiamo levata.²⁰

Selvaggio's speech recalls *Menippus* and *Nigrinus*, two dialogues of Lucian that represented a model also for Erasmus in his *Moriae Encomium*.²¹ That Doni might have had in mind Erasmus is suggested by the sentence following the lines quoted above, in which Svegliato alludes to Saint Paul by maintaining that 'la sapienza di questo mondo è pazzia apresso a Dio'.²² The coexistence of Lucianic and Pauline elements, indeed a hallmark of Erasmus' satire, confers an Erasmian flavour on Doni's exchange.

¹⁸ Lucian, 'A True Story', Book 2, 37, pp. 342-343.

¹⁹ Doni's use of theatrical metaphors has been emphasised by Raffaele Girardi, *La società del dialogo. Retorica e ideologia nella letteratura conviviale del Cinquecento*, Bari, 1989, pp. 161-186.

²⁰ Doni, *I mondi*, p. 65.

²¹ Lucian, 'Menippus', 16, pp. 98-101; id., 'Nigrinus', 18-20, pp. 118-121.

²² Doni, *I mondi*, p. 66.

In the *Inferni* Menippus is a recurrent presence, acting as one of the guides who accompany the *academici peregrini* to the discovery of the circles of hell. Moreover, Doni makes a few references to him as a character of Lucian's *Menippus*, the first of which occurs at the beginning of the *Inferni*, when the academic Disperato reveals what has led him to undertake his infernal journey. After both the woman he loved and many of his friends had passed away, Disperato strove to find a way to see them again. Some past experiences of famous men convinced him that the descent to the underworld would provide the solution to his problem. He mentions Dante, Virgil's Sybil, who helped Aeneas with his endeavour, Orpheus and Menippus. 'Menippo ebbe al suo tempo quella ventura d'uno incantatore, d'un negromante che lo volle servire', he recalls.²³ This represents an allusion to *Menippus*, when Menippus recounts that, upon his arrival in Babylon, he met the magician Mithrobarzanes, securing his support for his journey to hell.²⁴ Subsequently, Disperato relates that he reached the underworld by way of a dream, having fallen asleep in a cave.

As we have seen in relation to both *I mondi* and *I marmi*, Doni often declares his principal literary models at the outset of his compositions. The *Inferni* is an example. His depiction of the underworld turns out to be an original attempt to merge Dantesque and Lucianic features. For instance, the division of hell into circles and the figure of Lucifer, although it departs in some aspects from its Dantesque prototype, stem from Dante's *Commedia*. Besides the presence of Menippus and Momus, the chief Lucianic trait is that, instead of focusing on moral vices in a Dantesque manner, Doni satirises the professional categories of his day, from scholars and soldiers to artists and prostitutes.²⁵ The lampooning of society at different levels, it is worth reminding, is a prominent element of the Renaissance Lucianic tradition. Suffice it to mention Alberti in the Quattrocento and Erasmus in the Cinquecento.

Doni pays special attention to scholars, among whom he identifies, as a subset, pedants, and poets.²⁶ The anti-pedantic polemic is as integral to Doni's writings, and not only in his *I mondi e gli inferni*, as it is to the corpus of other *poligrafi*, notably Franco. A link between Franco and Doni is that in both authors, more markedly in the former than in the latter, this polemic encompasses the mockery of the fashionable imitation of Petrarch.

²³ Ibid., p. 214.

²⁴ Lucian, 'Menippus', 6-7, pp. 82-87.

²⁵ As underlined by McClure, *Doubting the Divine*, p. 120. On Doni's underworld, see also Pasquale Terracciano, 'Progettare l'altrove. Una nota su inferni e utopie alla metà del Cinquecento', *Rinascimento*, vol. 58, 2018, pp. 407-426.

²⁶ The scholars whom Doni satirises have not been identified with historical characters yet.

In the *Mondo misto*, Momus discusses with numerous souls, including one who, not without a certain irony on the part of Doni, defines himself as a ‘scarpellino e poeta’.²⁷ To flaunt his poetic skills, this soul utters some verses relying heavily on the standard Petrarchan lexicon, thus arousing the derisive reaction of Momus: ‘o tu cicali in versi sì petrarchevolmente! Io ne vo’ fare una querella in Parnaso. Andrai pur là, che tu non istai bene fra noi altri, va’, fatti infrascare di quei lauri’.²⁸ Overall, the criticism of the poets, a common theme in the cultural milieu of the *poligrafi*, seems to acquire in Doni a particularly trenchant tone, as evident in the words of the Sibilla da Norcia: ‘o poetacci bestie, che sempre dite l’un dell’altro male, o scrittoracci infami, che scoprite i vostri occulti vituperi, raffrenate tanta insolenza’.²⁹

Besides Lucian, Doni drew on Alberti, More and Erasmus. His *Mondo imaginato* has affinities with Alberti’s *Momus* with regard to its main topic, Jove’s project to reform the world, and the figure of Momus. The piece opens with the myth of the deluge and Deucalion and Pyrrha and with Jove’s commitment to repopulate the earth. At first, he meets a number of souls on the verge of returning to the world to enter new bodies. Jove’s encounter with them is, however, profoundly disappointing. Through a series of dialogues of pronounced Lucianic inspiration, it emerges that the astrologers are charlatans, people in power are keen on pursuing their personal interests instead of justice, historians disregard the truth and the doctors are incompetent. Confronted with this desolate situation, Jove enacts a plan of radical reformation of the world, investing chance with a crucial role. On the advice of Momus, he decides to match souls with bodies randomly, so that the soul of a lout could enter the body of a master or vice versa. Later on, he sends Momus to earth in order to reverse the appearance of things. Here are the instructions that he gives to him:

Una notte, mentre che dormano tutti, entrar per tutto (che io ti darò l’autorità) e scambiare i vestimenti. [...] Quei del dispiacere mettergli indosso al piacere, quelli delle dolcezze addosso alle amaritudini, quel del bene al male, perché, avendo costoro i panni intorno, non se gli lasceranno mai più cavare, onde coloro, credendo abbracciare una cosa, ne stringeranno un’altra.³⁰

²⁷ Doni, *I mondi*, p. 114.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 114.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 350.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 93.

Momus accomplishes his mission and yet the human condition does not improve. Injustice keeps reigning supreme in the world. As Momus tells Jove, men will soon lose their confidence in the king of the gods and will start addressing other entities in search of help. ‘Il sole adoreranno, il fuoco, la luna, un toro’, he continues.³¹ Both of these assertions are based on Lucian’s *Zeus Rants*, a text representing also an important source for Alberti’s *Momus*.³²

Momus then recounts his experiences on earth to Jove. Since human beings are corrupt and unreliable, it is essential to be flexible and even deceptive:

Bisogna saper fare un certo gioco di carte, sapere essere adulatore, saper fingere, esser doppio, darsi al buffone, far professione, con gran paroloni di bravo, di voler tagliare, sbranare, rompere, spezzare e rovinare il mondo, altrimenti ciascuno rimane una bestia.³³

Momus’ soliloquy in Doni’s *Mondo imaginato* is modelled on the portrayal of Alberti’s Momus. Just like his literary precursor, Doni’s Momus has learnt that duplicity, deception and flattery stand for most valuable tools to empower oneself. Nor are the similarities between them confined to these traits. Immediately after the passage quoted above, Momus and Jove discuss the best way of living. The former finds fault with many professions, namely, ruler, sculptor, painter, architect, doctor, banker and courtier, but sings the praises of the innkeeper: ‘oste son stato e ho avuto il più bel tempo che uomo che viva’.³⁴ Evidently, Doni took inspiration from the mock encomium of the vagabond in the second book of Alberti’s *Momus*.³⁵

The piece ends with Momus suggesting to Jove that he remedy the injustice oppressing men by dividing earthly goods and lands equally among them. In the *Mondo misto*, the continuation of the *Mondo imaginato*, we hear that any attempt at redemption is doomed to failure. In a bucolic vein, Momus invokes shepherds and farmers as those who, with their honest labour, can bring the world back to the purity of its origins. One of the souls conversing with him, however, rejoins that the world is beyond salvation given that wickedness and ambition are so deeply rooted. Disconsolate, Momus addresses Jove

³¹ Ibid., p. 105.

³² Lucian, ‘Zeus Rants’, 19-22, pp. 118-123 and 42, pp.154-155.

³³ Doni, *I mondi*, p. 106.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 107.

³⁵ Both affinities between Alberti’s and Doni’s Momus have been noted by Simoncini, ‘L’avventura di Momo nel Rinascimento’, pp. 447-449.

with a vehement speech, exhorting him to oppose the power of chance by imposing order on a chaotic and wholly flawed world.

It is noteworthy how Doni relied on Alberti's *Momus* as a source of ideas and motifs to fuel his criticism of the social conditions characterising sixteenth-century Italy as well as his questioning of the notion of divine providence. This observation makes clear how Paul F. Grendler's argument, which posited a sharp divide between the civic and optimistic ideals of Quattrocento humanists on the one hand and the sharp pessimism of the *poligrafi* on the other, needs a reassessment.³⁶ Rather than in opposition, Doni's standpoint may be seen in continuity with that strand of Renaissance humanism, of which Alberti's Lucianic satire constitutes a primary example, focusing, from various perspectives, on the failings of Italian society.

Despite their many similarities, there are also significant differences between Doni's and Alberti's texts. One pertains to the setting. As George McClure has noted, whereas Alberti frames his story in a completely mythological environment, Doni constantly entwines pagan and Christian elements.³⁷ To quote McClure, 'Doni creates parallel universes that allow him to lay out certain theological criticisms in mythic settings and then putatively disclaim them in an overtly pious closing'.³⁸ The 'pious closing' to which McClure refers is the *Mondo massimo*, the final part of the *Mondi*, which substantially represents a praise of the omnipotence of God. In this way, Doni softens the most controversial theological aspects of his work.

Another difference regards Momus' concern with the allocation of land. This theme, absent in Alberti's *Momus*, points rather to More's *Utopia*. We should not forget that, in its first book, Hythlodæus roundly criticises the enclosures, which he considers as a decisive factor accounting for the unequal distribution of wealth in sixteenth-century England.

Doni converses explicitly with More, and with Erasmus as well, in the *Mondo savio e pazzo*, the penultimate of his *Mondi*.³⁹ This piece presents a discussion between Savio

³⁶ As argued also by Simoncini, 'L'avventura di Momo nel Rinascimento', p. 441. Grendler established a relation between Alberti's *Momus* and Doni's *Mondo immaginato*, but he interpreted the two texts as, essentially, in opposition to each other. See *Critics of the Italian World*, pp. 80-81. It seems that he partially revised his position in a more recent article, in which he wrote that Doni 'expanded Alberti's themes in much sharper words and expressive cynicism directed against the Italian political and social hierarchy'. See Paul F. Grendler, 'Humanism: Ancient Learning, Criticism, Schools and Universities', in Angelo Mazzocco (ed.), *Interpretations of Renaissance Humanism*, Leiden, 2006, pp. 73-95 (at p. 90).

³⁷ McClure, *Doubting the Divine*, pp. 111-113.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

³⁹ On Doni's *Mondo savio e pazzo*, see Paul F. Grendler, 'Utopia in Renaissance Italy: Doni's New World', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 26, 1965, pp. 479-494; *id.*, *Critics of the Italian World*, pp. 170-177; Paolo Cherchi, 'A. F. Doni: the *Concordanze delle Historie* and the Ideal City', in Marion Leathers Kuntz

and Pazzo, two *academici peregrini*, in which the former recounts to the latter a dream that he has recently had about an ideal city and its ruling principles. Built in the form of a star, this city has at its centre a high temple endowed with hundred doors from which an equal number of streets radiate, linking them to the hundred gates of the walls. In terms of shape, Doni's city thus resembles the Sforzinda, the ideal city that the Florentine architect commonly known as Filarete devised in the second half of the fifteenth century.⁴⁰ As for its economic system, there is no exchange of money and work is organised efficiently, as in the society described by More. Where it differs from More's Utopia is the higher degree of specialisation characteristic of the agricultural and artisanal production in Doni's city.⁴¹ Agriculture, to which an important role is attributed, works on a single crop basis. Similarly, every artisan is trained in and actively practices only one craft.

Another major feature of Doni's utopia is that there are no families. Citizens do not even know who their parents are. Women are raised by other women and men by other men. Once they have reached a certain age, they are steered towards the profession to which they are inclined by nature. A consequence, positive in the eyes of Savio, of the lack of family units is that sentiments, notably love, are extirpated and numerous social problems avoided. This points to the general meaning of Doni's utopia. The final goal of his ideal city is the establishment of a community socially ordered, in which everyone works according to their ability and poverty is abolished. The price to pay for this is the suppression of passions, deemed as a source of chaos.

The dialogic structure of the *Mondo savio e pazzo*, however, complicates this picture. Just as, in More's *Utopia*, Hythlodæus commends the customs of the Utopians whereas the persona More has some reservations, so in Doni's composition Pazzo voices criticism of his interlocutor's account several times. For instance, when Savio explains that love has to give way to a more rational approach to establishing relationships among people, Pazzo rebuts: 'la non mi piace cotesta ordinazione, a esser privo d'uno ardente desiderio amoroso e d'uno infervorato desio'.⁴² Analogously, Pazzo is puzzled when Savio tells him that newborn children with serious malformations are thrown into a well to die. In other words, it is unclear who is the real *pazzo*, 'madman', and who is the *savio*,

(ed.), *Postello, Venezia e il suo mondo*, Florence, 1988, pp. 291-304 (at pp. 298-304); Allan Cameron, 'Doni's Satirical Utopia', *Renaissance Studies*, vol. 10, 1996, pp. 462-473; Christian Rivoletti, *Le metamorfosi dell'utopia. Anton Francesco Doni e l'immaginario utopico di metà Cinquecento*, Lucca, 2003; Lina Bolzoni, 'Le città utopiche del Cinquecento italiano: giochi di spazio e di saperi', in *Il lettore creativo*, pp. 173-191 (at pp. 179-185).

⁴⁰ As noted by Grendler, 'Utopia in Renaissance Italy', p. 488.

⁴¹ Cameron, 'Doni's Satirical Utopia', p. 470.

⁴² Doni, *I mondi*, p. 168.

‘wiseman’. It is hard to say to what extent Doni is seconding the ideas expressed by Savio.

The short story introducing the *Mondo savio e pazzo* also shows that Doni, in an Erasmian manner, questions the distinction between folly and wisdom. The plot of his novella is the following.⁴³ A group of astrologers predicted that, after a prolonged period of drought, it would start raining heavily and some exhalations from the ground would cause an ‘epidemic of madness’ affecting all those inhaling them. Rather than divulging their prediction, the astrologers kept it secret and built a sealed house to protect themselves, with the intention of seizing power at a later time, imposing their will on those who had been driven mad by the exhalations. And yet their ambitious plan ended up in failure. After having left their shelter, they actually found that everyone was behaving absurdly. The madmen, however, were anything but obedient and forced the astrologers to conform to them. ‘Così i savi entrarono nel numero dei matti contra a loro voglia’, the story ends.⁴⁴

Doni’s novella problematises the connections between wisdom, knowledge and folly, and notably the dichotomy between folly and wisdom. First of all, as Christian Rivoletti has underlined, the portrayal of the devious astrologers, intent on making the most of their technical abilities to pursue political power, epitomises the divorce between knowledge and moral wisdom.⁴⁵ Rivoletti has also suggested that the sealed house in which the astrologers seek refuge, thus isolating themselves from all the other people, might stand for a veiled critique of pedantry, understood as a form of sterile culture discarding any social aim.⁴⁶ The blurring of wisdom and folly starts to appear in Doni’s description of the conduct of the astrologers in their small fort:

E qui fra loro facevano un guazzabuglio di frappe, un saltar d’alegrezza, un fregar le mani l’una con l’altra e il cul per terra, un rider smascellatamente. Brevemente, egli erano in frega come i gatti di gennaio là dentro [...].⁴⁷

The astrologers, supposedly wise, were celebrating fulsomely their future glory, which never came into being. They were, in their own way, mad. As the conclusion of the story tells us, when they re-entered society, their wisdom was not recognised as such by

⁴³ On the literary sources of Doni’s novella, see Rivoletti, *Le metamorfosi dell’utopia*, pp. 19-24.

⁴⁴ Doni, *I mondi*, p. 161.

⁴⁵ Rivoletti, *Le metamorfosi dell’utopia*, pp. 27-28.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

⁴⁷ Doni, *I mondi*, p. 160.

the madmen, who held a radically different scale of values. Doni is presumably intimating that folly and wisdom, rather than being objective and fixed qualities, depend largely on the set of beliefs most widespread in a certain community.

Focusing especially on the lack of emphasis on religion and education in Doni's ideal city, Grendler argued that his utopia, compared to the other major Renaissance utopias, was more destructive than constructive. 'His New World was a total rejection of the Cinquecento', he wrote.⁴⁸ The remarks above, however, reinforce the idea, expressed earlier on, that Doni purposely shrouded in ambiguity the overall meaning of the *Mondo savio e pazzo*. If the boundary between folly and wisdom is tenuous and unstable, it follows that Savio, the character recounting his vision, is not endowed with higher moral or intellectual authority than his sceptical interlocutor, Pazzo. Furthermore, at least from a literary point of view, it seems exaggerated to maintain that Doni's utopia was a total rejection of his century, in that he reshaped techniques and concepts derived from sixteenth-century works such as More's *Utopia* and Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium*.

My analysis so far has indicated how, in his *I mondi e gli inferni*, Doni combined numerous sources ascribable to the Lucianic tradition as it had evolved during the fifteenth and early sixteenth century. We should now concentrate on the key aspects of his work, not a simple task given its fragmented nature. Perhaps, a suitable starting point is the theme of the 'rejection of learning', which, in Grendler's interpretation, would represent a major feature of his writings, as well as of those of the other *poligrافي*. As in the case of Franco and Lando, this supposed rejection of learning may well be a simplification. No doubt Doni was critical of a certain manner of conceiving and transmitting culture. It is the manner exemplified by the astrologers of the novella discussed above, in which knowledge, confined to a restricted circle of people, is instrumentally used as a means to acquire power. With his story, Doni implicitly championed the opposite position, that is, that culture should enjoy a wider circulation and be applied to solve problems. As Rivoletti has pointed out, the novella of the astrologers might also constitute a critique of pedantry, understood as a form of culture detached from reality. The anti-pedantic orientation is, indeed, central to Doni's intellectual horizon. Besides the direct attacks on the pedants, such as the circle of hell dedicated to them or Momus' sharp response to the slavish imitator of Petrarch, his visionary stance in itself voices criticism of pedantry. It should be added that, no less than the other *poligrافي*, Doni exploited the possibilities offered by the printing press to

⁴⁸ Grendler, 'Utopia in Renaissance Italy', p. 493.

'recycle' erudite materials, as the studies of Paolo Cherchi and Giovanna Rizzarelli have shown.⁴⁹ Yet this does not detract from the numerous elements of originality present in his works, the blending of the Dantesque and Lucianic underworld being one of the most noticeable examples. All of this is to say that, rather than rejecting learning *in toto*, Doni found fault with some aspects characterising part of his contemporary cultural environment, notably the diffusion of knowledge among small groups of scholars and a pedantic approach to literature. His Lucianic satire is directed mainly at these targets.

Some final considerations concerning Doni's religious standpoint might be in order. As we have seen in the analysis of the *Mondo immaginato* and *Mondo misto*, he seems to call into question the notion of divine providence. The world, very likely a metaphor for sixteenth-century Italy, is depicted as a place irremediably corrupt, where the wicked prevail and those who are good succumb. Any attempt by Jove to remedy this situation turns out to be a failure. At the end of the *Mondo misto*, Momus expresses his suffering addressing directly the king of the gods:

O Giove, non odi tu i pianti de' buoni, i lamenti de' giusti, i sospiri dei semplici, l'afflizioni dei poveri, le stride degli assassinati a torto, le angoscie dei furti fatti forzatamente a coloro che si sudano il pane, e miserie degli abitatori meschini? [...] Oimè, Giove, tutto si spezza, tutto è mescolato, confuso e voltato sottosopra!⁵⁰

It is not certain, however, that Doni intended to undermine the concept of divine providence. Perhaps he used the character of Momus to voice his pessimism about the social and economic conditions of Cinquecento Italy, a theme, needless to say, which he shared with the other *poligrafi*, without trespassing on the theological sphere. Jove's inability to exert a positive influence on the world, a motif fuelled by Doni's reading of Lucian and Alberti, can be read as a reaction to the allegedly dreadful state of Italy rather than as a critique of God's providential plans for humankind.

The distinctive feature of Doni's religious stance seems to be its affinity with Erasmus' positions. In some passages of his *I mondi e gli inferni*, especially in the *Mondo massimo*, Doni polemicalises with the sophistication of the theologians and exhorts his readers to direct their mind and their soul towards God, with the aspiration of a more authentic religious experience. In this light we should also interpret the numerous

⁴⁹ Paolo Cherchi, 'Nell'officina di Anton Francesco Doni', *Forum Italicum*, vol. 21, 1987, pp. 206-216; id., *Polimattia di riuso*, pp. 143-165; Rizzarelli, *Se le parole si potessero scorgere*, pp. 39-86.

⁵⁰ Doni, *I mondi*, p. 128.

allusions to Saint Paul, whose ideals Erasmus revived, scattered across the text. At the outset of the *Mondo grande*, for instance, Doni almost paraphrases the First Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians by saying: ‘il saper le cose umane, l’esser esperto in questa carnale sapienza non è altro che essersi affaticato in cose della morte, ma l’aver posto tutto l’intelletto alle cose dello spirito farà che noi ritroveremo vita e pace’.⁵¹ Just like Erasmus before him, Doni did not deem Lucianic satire and Pauline theology incompatible. Rather, they complemented each other in shaping a work that, beyond its patina of playfulness, combined social and cultural criticism with an invitation to rethink Christianity in accordance with its original spiritual principles.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 57.

Conclusion

My thesis has described how the re-enactment of Lucian's corpus in the fifteenth and sixteenth century constituted a significant and multifaceted cultural phenomenon. In this Conclusion I wish, first, to concentrate on the conceptual significance of this phenomenon and, second, to indicate two lines of future research.

The revival of Lucian in the West, which began, for pedagogical reasons, at the school of Manuel Chrysoloras in Florence, assumed several forms, serving generally both as a vehicle for intellectual, political and religious criticism and, especially at its early stage, as a form of literary experimentation. Leon Battista Alberti conceived his *Intercenales* as a way to create a new kind of dialogue in humanist literature, distancing himself from the Ciceronian model that he regarded as dominant. With his *Momus* he went one step further, composing a novel that, on account of its inventiveness, theoretical complexity and variety of sources, is unparalleled in the field of Renaissance satire and, perhaps, of neo-Latin literature outright. Giovanni Pontano was also an innovator, in that, in his *Charon*, he managed to blend harmoniously Lucianic satire with the Ciceronian ideals of eloquence and decorum. Pandolfo Collenuccio's *Filotimo* and *Specchio d'Esopo* were the first, original, compositions in the vernacular modelled primarily on Lucian's oeuvre. The humanist fascination with Lucian, as these and other moments suggest, gave impetus to a quest for new creative paths in Renaissance literature.

For the most part, this quest went hand in hand with the deployment of Lucian to undertake a critical examination, at multiple levels, of the world in which his humanist admirers found themselves. Criticism of scholasticism, from different angles, was probably the most common theme. In Alberti, such criticism was intended to call into question a paradigm of excessively abstract and verbose learning, as his caricature of philosophers in *Momus* makes clear. Pontano shared Alberti's standpoint and, moreover, charged scholastic philosophers with misleading translations and interpretations of Aristotle. In the less trenchant version of Lucianic satire exemplified by Collenuccio's *Specchio d'Esopo*, the logic of syllogism is contrasted with a more useful and pleasant model for transmitting knowledge, one inspired by Lucian's dialogues and Aesop's fables, and discarded as worthless by comparison.

Besides underlining the supposed failings of scholasticism, fifteenth-century Lucianic satire warned against the degeneration of humanism, from its lofty aspirations to be a creative intellectual movement to its implementation as sterile erudition, in particular

in the form of contemporary obsession with the slavish imitation of a few ancient writers, above all Cicero. Alberti was certainly the author most engaged in this cultural polemic, as the preface to the seventh book of the *Intercenales* and *Defunctus* in particular demonstrate. The scene of the ‘grammarians’ duel’ contained in *Charon* discloses that Pontano also employed Lucianic satire to ridicule pedantic humanists.

If scholasticism and certain excesses of humanism were the chief intellectual targets of fifteenth-century Lucianic literature, the critique of people in power and the corruption of the Church represented its principal political and religious focus. The embryonic and pre-Machiavellian form of political realism that Alberti envisioned in his *Momus* constitutes the most sophisticated unmasking of the hidden mechanisms of court life that we find in Quattrocento satire. Political criticism, however, was not integral to Lucianic literature in its entirety. In Ferrara, Matteo Maria Boiardo and Collenuccio reshaped Lucianic themes and motifs in order to advance courtly values, while their successor, Ludovico Ariosto, criticised the adulation and flattery that reigned supreme at court in the lunar episode of his *Orlando furioso*. This Lucianic episode also shows how Ariosto reinvented his main models, that is, Lucian’s *Icaromenippus* and Alberti’s *Somnium*, by infusing them with a Christian vein, as suggested by the crucial role attributed to providence in Astolfo’s adventure.

Anti-ecclesiastical satire, as mentioned above, was a key trait of fifteenth-century Lucianic literature, as evident in the writings of Maffeo Vegio, Poggio Bracciolini, Alberti and Pontano. These authors placed special emphasis on the venality and greed of clergymen. Alberti and Pontano, more than the others, satirised the superstitious practices associated with Christianity, from the abundance of votive offerings to the excessive attention paid to burial places. Humanist criticism was directed against the vices of clergymen and some Christian rituals, but it did not, for the most part, seek to undermine the doctrines of the Catholic Church. An exception might be Alberti’s intimations of doubt about providence. However, as discussed in Chapter I.2, it is hard to say to what extent he intended to push his criticism and if he actually denied Christian providence. By his day anti-ecclesiastical satire was not a novelty in the Italian literary tradition. It was well embedded in the compositions of distinguished writers preceding the rediscovery of Lucian, from Dante to Giovanni Boccaccio, and, until the Catholic Reformation, was widely tolerated.

At the beginning of the sixteenth-century, Lucianic literature assumed a new face in the works of Desiderius Erasmus and Thomas More. Not only did they draw on Lucian’s

corpus to fuel their criticism of scholasticism and other intellectual trends of their day, in the manner of Alberti and Pontano, but they also added a theological strand to their satire. This is particularly apparent in Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium*, a milestone in the history of the revival of Lucian. In his *Encomium*, Erasmus combined satire of pronounced Lucianic inspiration with his *philosophia Christi*, which was largely based on his reading of Saint Paul. In the *Colloquia*, he expressed his theological outlook in a different literary form, besides criticising the reduction of Christianity to a set of exterior practices. By implicitly presenting Lucian and Saint Paul as allies in his Christian humanism, Erasmus introduced Lucian into the theological sphere. The controversy between Erasmus and Luther concerning free will, a polemic in which the name of Lucian was mentioned by Luther multiple times, reinforced Lucian's presence in theological debate.

The image of Lucian that established itself in Italy from the 1530s onwards was, by and large, filtered through the Lucianic compositions of Erasmus and More. Niccolò Franco, Ortensio Lando and Anton Francesco Doni fashioned a kind of satire in which cultural and social issues were merged with religious ideas imbued with an Erasmian flavour. Franco's *Dialogi piacevoli*, although not devoid of this Erasmian undertone, lean toward a cutting anti-ecclesiastical satire, whereas in both Lando's *Paradossi* and Doni's *I mondi e gli inferni* theological issues emerge more distinctly. In the course of the Reformation, the Catholic Church became less and less tolerant of the circulation of texts casting doubt on its ideals and practices. Hence the choice or, better, the necessity on the part of the *poligrafi* to camouflage their criticism by means of, for instance, the use of paradox, Lando's *Paradossi* being the most notable example, or visionary narrations, as in the case of Doni's *I mondi e gli inferni*. In the event, most of the *poligrafi*'s works fell foul of ecclesiastic censorship.

Along with religious heterodoxy, with their Lucianic satire the *poligrafi* expressed their aversion to conforming with what they perceived as the mainstream literary tendencies of their age. Their rejection of Pietro Bembo's aesthetic and stylistic principles, which were gaining influence rapidly in the Italian peninsula, could not have been firmer. It is no accident that the lampooning of the fashionable imitation of Petrarch's poetry recurs insistently in their writings, especially in those of Franco and Doni. More broadly, the *poligrafi* found fault with pedantry, the obsequious cult of a limited number of authors and the conception of humanism as mere erudition. The *poligrafi* thus acted as a 'critical conscience' in sixteenth-century literature, in a manner not dissimilar to that of some of Lucian's Quattrocento admirers, Alberti above all.

In fine, my thesis makes the case that the rediscovery of Lucian in Renaissance Italy took the shape of a journey. Lucian's corpus travelled from Byzantium to Florence in the hands of Chrysoloras. Throughout the entire Quattrocento it provoked keen interest among Italian humanists, who revived and refashioned it in different ways. At the beginning of the Cinquecento, Northern humanists, namely Erasmus and More, took up the baton, giving Lucianic satire a new direction. Later in the century, the Lucianic impulse returned to Italy thanks to the *poligrafi*, whose recreation of Lucian was profoundly influenced by their acquaintance with Erasmus' and More's works. This process gradually led to the establishment of a Lucianic tradition, as apparent in the compositions of the *poligrafi*. The *poligrafi* were aware they were following in the footsteps of authors who had already experimented with Lucian's oeuvre. This awareness surfaces in various forms. Franco, for instance, in his *Dialogi piacevoli* explicitly paid homage to Lucian, Pontano and Erasmus, positioning himself as their heir. Doni's *I mondi e gli inferni* may be regarded as the apogee of the Renaissance Lucianic tradition, in that they represent a complex literary construction indebted to several of Lucian's dialogues, notably *Icaromenippus* and *A True Story*, and Lucianic works of the Renaissance, namely, Alberti's *Momus*, Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium* and More's *Utopia*.

The principal element of originality of my thesis, I believe, is its stress on the way in which the Italian Renaissance revival of Lucian constituted a tradition that, in the developed form that it assumed with the sixteenth-century *poligrafi*, drew on the Lucianic literature of Erasmus and More. In presenting the Lucianic journey, my thesis has sought to enrich the study on Lucian in the Renaissance in various respects. I shall summarise here the main points. My thesis has suggested new sources for some of the works that I have discussed, namely, Plutarch's *How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend* for Alberti's *Momus* and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* for Collenuccio's *Filotimo*. It has traced some borrowings from Lucian in Renaissance literature that have gone unnoticed so far, the majority of which pertain to Erasmus' *Colloquia*. It has provided a detailed analysis, indebted to the works of several scholars, of the notion of *parrhesia*, one that concentrates on the trinity Lucian, Alberti and Franco. Drawing, again, on previous scholarship, it has attempted to bring out and conceptualise the relation between satire and theology, a trait prominent in the sixteenth century.

My thesis points to two promising lines of future research. The first consists in a reappraisal of the relationship between Quattrocento humanists and the *poligrafi*. Chapter III.4 broaches this subject with respect specifically to how Doni drew on Alberti's *Momus*

in his *Mondo immaginato*. Here I should add that many issues concerning humanists and *poligrafi* have not been fully explored as yet. Did Quattrocento humanists other than Alberti anticipate some of the ideas usually considered as peculiar to the *poligrafi*? What were the *poligrafi*'s views of the classical heritage? My research, which in part addresses these themes, offers, I like to think, a new perspective from which to look at these and other related questions.

Second, Lucian's fortunes in Italy did not end with Doni's *I mondi e gli inferni*. In the second half of the Cinquecento and in the Seicento, Lucian appealed to, among others, Giordano Bruno, Traiano Boccalini and Ferrante Pallavicino.¹ A Lucianic vein persisted, indeed, in Italian literature beyond the Seicento and occasionally re-emerged in the writings of certain authors, such as, for example, Giacomo Leopardi, who employed the character of Momus in some of his *Operette morali*.² In the twentieth century, Italo Calvino's liking of Lucian, manifest in his *Cosmicomiche*, is well-known. No doubt many other Italian writers were indebted, in varying extent, to Lucian's corpus. The history of Lucian's influence in modern and contemporary Italian culture is still to be written. My thesis, I hope, may provide a secure chronological foundation for further research of this kind.

¹ On Bruno and the Lucianic tradition, see Simoncini, 'L'avventura di Momo nel Rinascimento', pp. 431-440; Olivia Catanorchi, 'Luciano, Alberti e Bruno. Note su alcune linee di ricerca', *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa*, vol. 8, 2003, pp. 31-52; id., 'Lo Spaccio e il Momus', in Olivia Catanorchi and Diego Pirillo (eds), *Favole, metafore, storie. Seminario su Giordano Bruno*, Pisa, 2007, pp. 71-102. On the relationship between Lucian, Boccalini and Pallavicino, see Panizza, 'Vernacular Lucian', pp. 105-111.

² On Lucian and Leopardi, see Emilio Mattioli, 'Leopardi e Luciano', in *Leopardi e il mondo antico*, Florence, 1982, pp. 75-98; Ugo Dotti, 'La missione dell'ironia in Giacomo Leopardi', *Belfagor*, vol. 39, 1984, pp. 377-396.

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