

Hobbes and prosopopoeia

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Abstract.

With this paper we intend to contribute to the debate concerning Hobbes's conception of the person of the State. To be more precise, we shall argue that the philosopher's notion of the State draws influence from what classical rhetoricians called prosopopoeia. Although this similarity has been identified by some contemporary interpreters, its chief characteristics remain underexplored. This viewpoint will allow us, on the one hand, to delve into the creative role of Hobbesian representatives in the process of actively conforming the person of the State. On the other, it will enable a novel understanding of the enemies of the State as personifications or allegories conjured up by rebellious agents.

Keywords: Hobbes; prosopopoeia; State; demons; fiction.

1. Introduction

Before we address our viewpoint, let us briefly examine the main tenets about Hobbes's person of the State. First of all, we shall focus on *Leviathan* because it is where his notion of person finds its full development. In chapter XVI in particular, Hobbes locates the State among the set of "things that are" capable "of being represented by fiction" (L, XVI.9, 246). To wit, Hobbes is referring to the "feigned persons" (L, XVI.1, 244) of inanimate things, "as a church, an hospital, a bridge", of irrational human bodies ("children, fooles and mad-men"), of an "idol" or "the gods of the heathen", of "the true God", and finally of a unified "multitude of men".

Simple forms of "artificial" representation such as the attorney-client or servant-master presuppose a mutual agreement between natural persons, where the representative (or "actor") "personate[s] or acteth" the represented party (or "author") on account of a "commission or licence" (L, XVI.4, 244). In essence, the former serves as "the representer of speech and action" (L, XVI.3, 244) of the latter.¹

Conversely, fictitious persons are not persons *per se*, so they "cannot be authors, nor therefore give authority to their actors" (L, XVI.9, 248). Quite the contrary, they "may be personated" (L, XVI.9, 248) in the sense that they may acquire personhood through a performative act of representation. To use Hobbes's terms, the "words or actions" of their representatives may be "attributed" to them "by fiction" (L, XVI.1, 244). Whereas a client might "truly" (L, XVI.1, 244) uphold the words and actions done in his or her name by an attorney, one would not expect the same of a hospital or an idol.²

Since "there are few things of which there may be no persons [*paucae res sunt, quarum non possunt esse personae*]" (L, XVI.6, 247), personation by fiction appears to be a powerful tool. Any sort of entity could have its "person borne [*persona geritur*]" (L, XVI.6, 247) or animated by a competent actor who manages to execute a convincing performance. After treating the already mentioned instances of persons by fiction, Hobbes considers how is it that a multitude of humans are transformed into one person.

A multitude of men are made *one* person when they are by one man, or one person, represented; so that it be done with the consent of every one of that multitude in particular. For it is the *unity* of the representer, not the *unity* of the represented, that maketh the person *one*. And it is the representer that beareth the person, and but one person: and *unity* cannot otherwise be understood in multitude (L, XVI.13, 248).

As he clarifies in chapter XVII, "[t]his is more than consent, or concord; it is a real unity of them all in one and the same person" (L, XVII.13, 260). Whereas interpreters tend to differ on their accounts, there is arguably a *communis opinio* about the three parties involved in the generation of this new unity.³ First, the contracting party, namely, the members of the shapeless multitude who "by covenants of every man with every man... say... *I authorise and give up my right of governing my selfe to this man or this assembly of men on this condition, that thou give up thy right to him and authorise all his actions in the like manner*" (L, XVII.13, 260). Second, the beneficiary of those covenants, that is, the artificial person "appoint[ed]... to bear their person" (L, XVII.13, 260), the sovereign representative. And third, the person in question, which is engendered simultaneously with the authorization of a representative. In view of the premise that "the Commonwealth is no person, nor has the capacity to do anything but by the representative" (L, XXVI.5, 416), we are concerned with an entity that is not a person by itself, but by fiction, constituted through the very act of being represented.

Interestingly, as regards the creative energy that brings the person of the State into being, most of the interpreters tend to locate it in the spontaneous activity of the multitude. Carl Schmitt (1996 [1938], 33), for instance, argued that: “the State as order and commonwealth... comes about by virtue of the covenant. This covenant is conceived in an entirely individualistic manner... fear brings atomized individuals together. A spark of reason flashes, and a consensus emerges about the necessity to submit to the strongest power”. Likewise, Skinner (1999, 23) thinks that “the individual members of the multitude stand –and alone stand– in an appropriate relationship of dominion with respect to the person of the state. The source of their dominion lies in the fact that the union of the multitude brings the state into existence”. More recently, Pettit (2008, 75) has claimed that “in the preferred mode of forming a commonwealth, the members of the multitude will each authorize their personation in pronouncing... equally formulaic words... [A]s by the utterance of a sacramental formula... there is a real unity of them all”.⁴

It is in contrast to this viewpoint, to our mind concentrated only on the creative force of the act of authorization, that we will raise our case. Of course, we do not intend to deny the role of the mutual covenants in Hobbes’s explanation of the institution of the commonwealth. We shall, instead, try to read the text with an alternative emphasis on what we will denominate the *poietic* capacities that the representative puts into action, establishing a link between the notion of person by fiction and the classical trope of prosopopoeia.

2. Poets, artificers and representatives: a similar craft

It was with the concept of personation by fiction that Hobbes seems to have finally unveiled his solution to a longstanding problem, namely, “which features” make “human nature... suitable... to construct a commonwealth [*quibus rebus ad civitatem compaginandam apta... fit natura humana*]” (DCv, Preface, 10). Beyond doubt, for the State to come about there should be a multitude of natural persons willing to be represented, to contract each with each, and to authorize an artificial person (an individual or an assembly). But, on the subject of causation, Hobbes distinguishes between the active and passive factors that jointly contribute to the generation of an effect. To be more accurate, an “entire cause” consists of “the aggregate of all the accidents of the agents, as many as they were, and of the patient, which when they are all supposed to be present, it cannot be understood but that the effect is produced at the same instant, and if any one of them be wanting, it cannot be understood but that the effect is not produced” (CB, IX.3, 121).⁵

On that account, the plurality of multitudinous individuals could be understood as “the matter” (L, XXIX.1, 498) of the commonwealth in the sense of the “material cause” that contains “the aggregate of accidents in the patient” (CB, IX.4, 122). Yet, the making of the State would also require an “agent” that “produces its determined or certain effect in the patient” (CB, IX.3, 121), *i.e.*, an “efficient cause” (CB, IX.4, 122). In accordance with *Leviathan*’s lexicon, we should identify the human component that acts “as the maker” of the commonwealth (L, XXIX.1, 498). *Stricto sensu* a multitude of people do not make, but “are made one person” (L, XVI.13, 248), in a passive formulation. Actually, multitudes “having no representative, consist only in concourse of people” (L, XXII.4, 348). Such a concourse of people may “proceed... from a similitude of wills and inclinations” (L, XXII.28, 370). So a multitude may be available as a “patient” to constitute a commonwealth due to its readiness to belong to a political community, or due to more primitive reasons such as a feeling of “panique terror... [a] passion [that] happens to none but in a throng, or multitude of people” (L, VI.37, 86). It would be problematic, though, to think of it as coherently and

simultaneously making a collective decision. That would amount to equate “one action of many men [to] many actions of one multitude” (L, XI.20, 158).⁶

As a result, an external agent with a high degree of spontaneity and initiative is needed to produce and enact the fictitious person that will encompass those simmering members of the multitude. The formative act must come from outside, “for it is the unity of the representer, not the unity of the represented, that maketh the person one” (L, XVI.13, 248). We may contend then that the willingness of individuals to weld together through reciprocal pacts is not the efficient cause, but the latent predisposition upon which the unifying personification performed by the representative operates. To use Hobbes’s terms, the sovereign representative manages to “compile” a multitude into a body politic when he or she “performs” or “conforms the wills of them all” (L, XVII.13, 260).⁷ In light of this reading, the sovereign would not be the recipient of the active initiative of the multitude. To the contrary, his or her part would consist in elaborating unity where there is plurality. That is, conjuring up and animating a fictitious person with which a heap of predisposed human beings would identify.⁸ Throughout his work, Hobbes mentions several examples of persons by fiction that conform the identity of a specific political community: the “Union of [the] realms of England and Scotland” (L, XIX.23, 304), the “people of England” (B, 224), the “peculier people of God” (B, 112), the “people of Athens” (L, XXIX.5, 500), and even the “Kingdome of God by Christ” (L, XXXV.18, 642).⁹

Following Plato, this ability could be characterized as *poietic*, since it entails a creative process by which “something comes into existence which had not existed before. The whole cause of this is creation [*poiēsis*]. The products of every craft are creations [*poiēseis*] and the craftsmen who make them are all creators [*poiētai*]” (Symposium 205b8-c2).¹⁰ In brief, the generation of the State is an act of craftsmanship and the Leviathan is an artifact produced by an “artificer” (L, Introduction, 18), similar to the creations of artists, sculptors and poets. Thus, it should not come as a surprise that Hobbes alludes to “civil philosophy” as an “art... the construction of the subject whereof is in the power of the artist himself” (SL, Epistle, 183-4).¹¹

A further reason to construe sovereign representatives as artists may be inferred from the device they employ to create. As we have already noted, few things in the world, not to say none, are reluctant to personification by fiction, the State being its most remarkable outcome. By the same token, Hobbes tells us: “there is almost nothing that has a name, that has not been... by [the gentile] poets feigned to be inanimated, inhabited, or possessed by some spirit or other” (L, XII.13, 172). This creative capacity gave poets an advantaged position in the heathen political sphere, “for their poets were their divines, had the name of prophets, exercised amongst the people a kind of spiritual authoritie, [and] would be thought to speak by a divine spirit” (AG, 56). Therefore, it would not be unwise to claim that, just as the “gods or divels” (L, XII.16, 172) of the ancients, the genesis of the State depends on the creative intervention of a *poiētēs*. After all, the sovereign also performs a sort of animation, acting as “the artificial soul... giving life and motion to the whole body” (L, Introduction, 16), and the person of Leviathan is tantamount both to a unified multitude and to a “mortall god” (L, XVII.13, 260).

Artificers, poets and sovereign representatives belong to the same generic class of creators and inventors. Proficient representatives, then, are they who possess a refined discernment regarding the availability of an amorphous plurality of individuals, and the capacity to elaborate a compelling fictitious person, with which those individuals might feel identified. In like fashion, artists “fancy shapes [they] never saw, making up a figure out of the parts of diverse creatures, as the poets make their centaures, chimaeras, and other

monsters never seen. So can he also give matter to those shapes and make them in wood, clay or metall” (L, XLV.16, 1032).¹²

To sum up, the office of the poet and that of the sovereign representative are quite alike: poietic agents utilize the same representation mechanism to account for the actions of ghosts, demons, madmen, public institutions, the commonwealth and the true God. Although interpretations that focus on the medieval legal thought as a conceptual background for Hobbes’s concept of person by fiction are certainly illuminating, we shall contend below that the power to personate has its exact paragon in classical rhetoric.¹³ On the whole, and even if Hobbes does not mention the trope by its name, it will become apparent that the description of personation by fiction matches *ad litteram* the standard version of what ancient scholars understood by ‘prosopopoeia’.

3. Personation by fiction: an epigone of prosopopoeia

In *De Oratore*, a text with which Hobbes was very well acquainted, Cicero had already detected an instrument of ornamentation through which the orator may accomplish a “fictitious attribution of persons [*personarum ficta inductio*]” (1892, III.53.205, 115).¹⁴ However, it is Quintilian who, embracing this previous contribution, provides a finished description of the trope in his *Institutio Oratoria*:

A bolder form of figure, which in Cicero’s opinion demands greater effort [*maiorum laterum*], is impersonation [*fictiones personarum*] or *prosopopoīa*. This is a device which lends wonderful variety and animation to oratory. By this means... [and] without sacrifice of credibility we may introduce conversations between ourselves and others, or of others among themselves, and put words of advice, reproach, complaint, praise or pity into the mouths of appropriate persons [*personas idoneas damus*]. Nay, we are even allowed in this form of speech to bring down the gods from heaven and raise the dead [*inferos excitare*], while cities also and peoples may find a voice [*Urbes etiam populi que vocem accipiunt*] (1922, IX.2.29-31, 391).¹⁵

It is noteworthy how in his description Quintilian captures a fair bit of the entities that Hobbes mentions as personable by means of fictional representation.¹⁶ Considering the fact that the study of *De Oratore* and the *Institutio* constituted a mandatory instance in the humanist formation of early modern schools, it is not unreasonable to presume that prosopopoeia operated as a model for Hobbes’s observations about the concept of person by fiction.¹⁷

Moreover, Hobbes’s familiarity with prosopopoeia may be conjectured from a large number of early modern texts. We should start with Omer Talon’s *Rhetorica* (1548), present in the old catalogue of Hardwick Library.¹⁸ According to this treatise “prosopopoeia, or the feigning of a person, occurs when we counterfeit through speech the person of another [*prosopopoeia, fictio personae, qua velut alienam personam oratione nostra loquente fingimus*]” (1588 [1548], 50). Curiously, Dudley Fenner’s English adaptation of this text was published as an anonymous opusculum, the *Art of Rhetoric plainly set forth with pertinent Examples*, and later in 1681 wrongly attributed to Hobbes.¹⁹ Irrespective of this anecdotal trait, Talon, as Quintilian, acknowledges that “this figure allows us to confer words to voiceless and inanimate things [*eadem figura licet mutis et inanimatis rebus sermone dare*]” (1588 [1548], 54). Equally germane to our approach is the fact that he includes gods as products of prosopopoeia: “But enough said about the figure of prosopopoeia, through which, as a piece of machinery in the stage, the person of anyone, not

only men, but also gods, could be introduced by the poets [*sed satis de prosopopeiae schemate, quo tanqua aliquo in scenis pegmate, quaeuis non solum hominum, sed etiam deorum persona a poetis effingitur*]” (1588 [1548], 55).

Other reconstructions of the trope in sixteenth century Britain do not differ much either from Quintilian’s version.²⁰ Perhaps the most interesting for the purposes of our thesis is Henry Peacham’s *Garden of Eloquence*: “prosopoeia [*sic*]” is “the faining of a person, that is, when to a thing sencelesse and dumbe we faine a fit person, or *attribute a person to a commonwealth or multitude*: This figure Orators do use as well as Poetes: the Orator by this figure maketh ye commonwealth to speake, to commend, to dispraise, to aske, to complaine” (1577, O3r-v, our emphasis). Orators and poets are, as Hobbesian sovereign representatives, the agents through which the person of a political group speak.²¹

Abraham Fraunce’s description of the figure in *The Arcadian Rhetorike* (1588, xxxi) is almost identical to Talon’s: “Prosopopoia is a fayning of any person, when in our speach we represent the person of anie, and make it speake as though he were there present: an excellent figure, much vsed of Poets”. The following year, in *The Art of English Poesie*, George Puttenham (2007 [1589], 324) argues that “if ye wil fayne any person with such features, qualities and conditions, or if ye wil attribute any humane quality, as reason or speech to domb creatures, or other insensible things, and do study... to give them a humane person, it is... prosopopeia”. As examples, Puttenham mentions allegories of the *Roman de la Rose*, “the persons of Avarice, Envy, and Old Age” (2007 [1589], 324). Besides, Philip Sidney contends in his *Defence of Poesy* (1890 [1595], 6) that “David’s Psalms are a divine poem”, which includes “notable prosopopoeias, when he makes you, as it were, see God coming in His majesty, his telling of the beasts’ joyfulness and hill’s leaping”.

All in all, inanimate things, animals, the State or God itself are entities that, in terms very close to those of our philosopher, Renaissance rhetoricians registered as personable through a specific poietic device: prosopopoeia. Aside from these conspicuous resemblances, there is a further link that, to our knowledge, has not been spotted yet. Coming back to Quintilian, it could be argued that he prefigured the Hobbesian distinction between artificial representation and representation by fiction.

There are some authorities who restrict the term *prosopopoeia* to cases where both bodies and words are feigned [*et corpora et verba fingimus*], and prefer to call imaginary conversations between men by the Greek name of *dialógous*, which some translate as *sermocinationes*. For my own part, I have included both under the same generally accepted term, since we cannot imagine a speech without we also imagine a person to utter it (1922, IX.2.31, 390; modified translation).

Despite encompassing both cases under the set of ‘personifications’, Quintilian understands that it is not the same to speak on behalf of someone, as a lawyer does, than to personate something (or someone) unable to speak by itself: “it is not merely true that the variety [*varietates*] required in prosopopoeia will be in proportion to the variety presented in a [legal] case, for prosopopoeia demands even greater variety, since it involves the portrayal of the emotions of children, women, nations, and even of voiceless things, all of which require to be represented in their characters [*suus decor*]” (1922, XI.3.41, 178-80). On top of that, the Roman rhetorician underscores that when we incur in personation by fiction, we must take into account the specific traits of the person we are about to represent: “For we introduce fictitious personages and speak through other’s lips, and we must therefore allot [*accommodamus*] the appropriate character to those to whom we lend a voice” (1922, XI.3.39, 176) Hobbes himself seems to hold this position when he postulates in his *Answer to Gondibert* that “the most remarkable [of the indecencies]

are those that shew disproportion between the persons and their actions” (AG, 61). As he states with respect to “inanimate things” in *Leviathan*, representatives must “procure [the] maintenance” (L, XVI.9, 246) of the persons by fiction they represent, caring for their interests and identities, and acting as they are expected to. Therefore, the sort of performance required for the personation of a hospital may not be appropriate for “a town, an university, or a college, or a church” (L, XXII.16, 360).²² As if on a stage, the actor that speaks on behalf of a fictitious person should conform to the expectations of the audience.

Lastly, Quintilian observed that *prosopopoeia* “makes flexible what nature forbids [*quae natura non permittit, hoc modo mollior fit figura*]” (1922, IX.2.32, 392, our translation). Hobbes for his part defined “fiction” as the “composition” of “monsters which are not in *rerum natura*” (EoL, III.4, 28). Since “the multitude is naturally not one, but many” (L, XVI.14, 250), personification acts as the device that allows for the creation of a group entity, a monstrous composition of a unified person.²³ As its name suggests, *prosopopoeia* amounts to *prosopon poiein*, roughly, to make masks or persons. In Hobbes’s words, “*prosopon*... signifies the face, as *persona* in latine signifies the disguise or outward appearance of a man, counterfeited on the stage, and sometimes more particularly that part of it which disguiseth the face, as a mask or vizard” (L, XVI.3, 244).

To conclude, *prosopopoeia* should be taken as a relevant precedent for construing Hobbes’s notion of personation by fiction in light of the above expounded considerations.²⁴

4. Poetic dangers: *Leviathan*, a demon among demons

In this last section, we shall focus on the consequences of the poetic aspect of personation by fiction. Sure enough, the most prominent product of *prosopopoeia* is the person of the State, a unified multitude to which we may attribute a *prosopon* and human features such as a voice or the ability to act. However, this monstrous ability of personation is not only conducive to the creation of a commonwealth, but also to its dissolution. Following the same procedure that constitutes the person of the State, rebellious poets may start personating fractions of that community and generating “worms in [its] entrayles” (L, XXIX.21, 516), namely, “private bodies regular, but unlawfull... that unite themselves into one person representative, without any publique authority at all” (L, XXII.27, 368). It is no accident that Hobbes asserted that “plain rebellion... may be resembled to the effects of witchcraft” (L, XXIX.20, 516). Attentive to the “seditious roaring of a troubled nation” (L, VIII.21, 114) rebels act as poets. They infuse life to demon-like persons and turn latent masses likely compelled by those fictions into a coherent collective. If the person of *Leviathan* is both a corporate group and a mortal god, then the person by fiction of these false gods may also unify a shapeless multitude: “Such was the case of St. Paul at Ephesus, where Demetrius, and a great number of other men, brought two of Pauls companions before the magistrate saying with one voyce, *Great is Diana of the Ephesians*” (L, XXII.34, 374). In a nutshell, personating a new demon entails personating a new group identified with it.²⁵ In spite of Hobbes’s claim that these fictions cannot “be personated before there be some state of Civil Government” (L, XVI.9, 246), we come to learn that they are personated against it.

As we elucidated earlier, an agent with a precise grip on the rhetorical requirements of *prosopopoeia* is able to allocate a person in almost any type of entity as long as it accommodates to the expectations of the audience. For this same reason, Hobbes considered that poets, skilled in that domain, were the essential pillars of ancient societies.²⁶ Since “there was nothing which a poet could introduce as a person

in his poem, which they did not make either a god, or a divel" (L, XII.17, 172), poets helped to build a demonology "whose ends were only to keep the people in obedience and peace" (L, XII.21, 176). *A fortiori*, heathen demonology evinces the political potential of feigning persons:

[people] have feared them [demons] as things of an unlimited power to do them good or harme, and consequently, given the occasion to the governours of the heathen commonwealths to regulate their fear, by establishing the DAEMONOLOGY (in which the poets, as principall priests of the heathen were especially employed, or revered) to the public peace, and to the obedience of subjects necessary thereunto (L, 1014, XLV.2).

With a whiff of nostalgia, Hobbes yearns for the "golden age" (DCv, Preface, 9) in which "the shadowy outlines of allegory [*alegoriis adumbratum*]... prevent[ed] what one might call the high and holy mystery of government from being contaminated" (DCv, Preface, 7). Somehow, in ancient times prosopopoeia was performed always in tune with sovereign power.²⁷

Yet, with the advent of God on Earth and the advancement of science, that close alliance of sovereign power and religious poets deteriorated. Wary of prophetic discourse and its tendency to impinge upon political affairs, Hobbes seeks to undermine the grounds of its authority: "Seeing that miracles now cease, we have no sign left, whereby to acknowledge the pretended revelations of inspirations of any private man" (L, XXXII.9, 584).²⁸ Nevertheless, seditious preachers who "love rather to be thought to speak by inspiration, like a bag-pipe" (AG, 57) seem to proliferate. Instead of gods that act as protectors of civil institutions, present day poets have turned to create the demons that destroy them.²⁹ "[I]n the use of the spirituall calling of divines, there is danger sometimes to be feared, from want of skill, such as reported by unskilfull conjurers... For when they call unseasonably for zeal, there appears a spirit of cruelty... that tended to subversion or disturbance of the commonwealth" (AG, 56). The dreams of prosopopoeia, we shall discover, produce monsters.

Now, Hobbes intends to fathom the cause of this flourishing rebellious *poiesis*: "Whence comes it, that in Christendom there has been, almost from the times of the apostles, such justling of one another out of their places, both by forraign, and civill war?" (L, XLIV.2, 958), he inquires. A "Kingdome of Darknesse" was set up by a "confederacy of deceivers... to obtain dominion over men" (L, XLIV.1, 956). The Catholic Church, to be more precise, has been consistently promoting the dissemination of fictitious beings that imperil the standing of sovereign States. In *Behemoth*, he ventures an explanation of its success: "I do not remember that I have read of any kingdom or state in the world, where liberty was given to any private man to call the people together, and make orations to them frequently... except onely in Christendome" (B, 127). Moreover, Hobbes repeats his concern with "the liberty that men have upon every Sunday and oftner, to harangue all the people of a nation at one time, whilst the State is ignorant of what they will say" (B, 189). Rebellious preachers trained in the poetical arts will always find a rich soil, since most human beings "are enclined to suppose, and feign unto themselves several kinds of powers invisible, and to stand in awe of their own imaginations" (L, XI.26, 162).³⁰

Originated "in the operatories of the clergy... well enough known to be the universities" (L, XLVII, 1122), ingenious fictions are devised so that the masses would fear them and resort to the priests in order to obtain protection against them. "[F]or fairies and walking ghosts, the opinion of them has, I think, been on purpose either taught, or not confuted, to keep in credit the use of exorcism and crosses, of holy water, and other such inventions of ghostly men" (L, II.8, 34). On the one hand, these personifications serve to uphold the power of their creators, since "who that is in fear of ghosts will not bear great respect to those

that can make the Holy Water, that drives them off?" (L, XLVI.18, 1082). Only the poietic agents who invoke these fictitious persons are able to allay them. But, above all, the chief feature of these creative process is the displacement of responsibility. As fairies "are not to be seized on and brought to answer for the damage they do. So also, the ecclesiastics vanish away from the tribunals of civil justice" (L, XLVII.26, 1120). The clergy's performance is so convincing that their fictions are considered to be the real agents of mischievous acts. But, at the same time and owing to their ghostly nature, religious personifications cannot be held accountable, except through the intervention of their poets.

In a supplementary analogy, we could think of these *poietic* agitators as if they were ventriloquists, who promote factionalism, but in a way that makes us believe that the demons they invoke act autonomously:

A man that has practiced to speak by drawing in of his breath (which kind of men in ancient times were called *Ventriloqui*) and so make the weakness of his voice seem to proceed, not from the weak impulsion of the organs of speech, but from a distance of place, is able to make very many men believe it is a voice from Heaven, whatsoever he pleases to tell them (L, XXXVII.12, 692).³¹

Perhaps the most shocking of all personifications created by the Church are the "hypostases which the people understand not" (B, 183). The subject of the Trinity and, in particular, the intricacies of its third facet, the Holy Ghost, were highly problematic for Hobbes. Catholic malicious workshops have crafted a person which cannot be "but the blowing into a man some thin and subtile aire" or "a phantasme, which is improper to say, and impossible, because phantasmes are not, but only seem to be somewhat. That word therefore is used in the Scripture metaphorically onely" (L, XXXIV.25, 630). No matter how metaphorical its nature may be, the representation of this person was a subject of intense dispute. In effect, who is the *poietés* authorized to speak and act on behalf of the Holy Ghost? Hobbes's solution is an Erastian one: only civil sovereigns have the power to personate, or delegate the personation of, the Holy Ghost.³² Independent of the criticism it received,³³ in practical terms the sort of representation that Hobbes conceives for this Person does not differ from that which pagan priests made of their demons. Once again, the philosopher is fully aware of the perilous potential of freewheeling prosopopoeias. Because of the immense crowd that believes in and identifies with the Holy Ghost, the sovereign power must "jostle" other poietic agents for its personation.

To be sure, these seemingly autonomous fictions that gather and articulate multitudes of human beings are not restricted to the religious domain. "Liberty", for instance, was a personification animated by "democraticall gentlemen... cover'd with the cloak of godlinesse" (B, 141) during the civil wars, that served as a rallying allegory for their "design of changing the government from monarchicall to popular" (B, 141). As with the Catholic ghosts, "it is an easy thing for men to be deceived by the specious name of Libertie" (L, XXI.8, 334). Hence, it should come as no surprise that Hobbes would combat Liberty's alluring aura by portraying her as a decrepit old maiden in the frontispiece of *De Cive*.

Far from a contrived picture, this is exactly the tenebrous landscape over which a sovereign State must exert its power.³⁴ Surrounded by fearful ghosts and charming idols made of such stuff as he is made on, *i.e.*, personation by fiction, Leviathan faces a tragic destiny. Although "[t]here is nothing... on earth to be compared with him" (L, XXVIII.27, 496), the resemblance he bears to those other prosopopoeias defy his trumpeted incommensurability. If the State "is mortal and subject to decay" (L, XXVIII.27, 496), it is in part due to its ontogenetic similarities with the rest of the fictions.³⁵ In fact, its most notorious enemy is an equally awe-inspiring demon that unifies the people of Rome (and, allegedly, of the whole Christendom), "the Papacy, [which] is no other than the ghost of the deceased Roman Empire" (L, XLVII.21, 1118).

Hobbes's effort to compare the Pope's authority to that of the "universall King, which some poets of ours call King Oberon" (L, XLVII.21, 1118), and his Kingdom of Darkness to a Kingdom of fairies, evokes Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*.³⁶ Quite unambiguously, Hobbes is suggesting that the Papacy and other political entities personated by fiction are to be construed as the allegories displayed in Spenser's work.³⁷ Indeed, the ninth Canto of Book II of *The Faerie Queene* is known for the presentation of three sages who personify the creative capacities of the human mind. Among the artifacts produced by these poietic abilities, Spenser mentions the representation "of commen wealthes, of states, of pollicy" (2006 [1596], II.9.53, 154). By means of this simple reference, our prosopopoeitic approach of Hobbesian persons by fiction accrues further corroboration. A demon among several other demons, the mortal god inhabits a political arena where its superiority cannot be taken for granted, and engages in a combat of allegorical agents, akin to a *Psychomachia*.³⁸

Far from dissonant either for our contemporary ears, Hobbes's political battlefield of persons by fiction strikes a chord with later developments of ghostly politics, such as Marx's *Gespenst des Kommunismus* or Derrida's *hantologie*. Now then, if the challenge faced by Leviathan is tragic, it is because even after the "late troubles" were over, in times of Restauration, Hobbes still held out a gloomy prospect: "How we can have peace while this is our Religion, I cannot tell. *Haeret lateri lethalis arundo*" (B, 181). And, more peremptory: "we never shall have a lasting peace till the universities themselves... be reformed" (B, 183). State prosopopoeias, Hobbes fears, are destined to be all too mortal on account of the deleterious creativity of competing poets and preachers. There resides the soft belly of Leviathan, where the lethal spears might cling with ease.³⁹

V. Conclusion

In summary, our reading of Hobbes's person by fiction in the terms of a prosopopoeia allowed us to explore traits of the State's personhood that received little attention. First of all, it led us to focus on the creative and poietic role of the representative in the generation of political fictions, and to underplay the need for a spontaneous contract prompted by the represented multitude. In parallel, it emphasized the genetic resemblances between the State and other persons by fiction such as pagan demons, catholic ghosts and political allegories. If Leviathan is not only a group person, but also a demon, then monsters and ghosts fancied by poets and preachers may be conceived of as group persons as well. In view of this reasoning, we were able to disclose a new dimension of the Hobbesian political conflict: the "Kingdom of Darkness", a demonological battlefield where the State, as a prosopopoeia, is forced to compete against other similarly designed persons by fiction.

Probably, paraphrasing Jorge Luis Borges' (1975, 149) verses, "at the hour of anguish and dim light", Hobbes "would pose his eyes on his Golem", wondering if he might have incurred in some "error... despite that high witchcraft act". The fact that we are still interested in his political creature, however, is a sufficient proof of its resilience. Besides, "who could tell us what sort of things God felt, when He looked at His" philosopher of Malmesbury?

¹ Hobbes often uses the servant-master example as an illustration of an individual acting as a proxy for another, e.g., L, XV.12, 228. The sovereign-public minister relation could also be construed as a case of artificial

representation, cf. L, XXIII.2, 376. Pitkin (1972, 116) labels this model as “representation as acting for”. Pettit (2010, 69-72), for his part, describes it as “delegative” or “of directed responsiveness”.

² The importance of this split between a attributing an action “truly” to the represented party and an attribution “by fiction” has been highlighted by Pitkin (1972, 22), Runciman (2000, 269-70) and Pettit (2008, 71).

³ The Skinner (1999) versus Runciman (2000) debate ended with significant consensus (see Skinner, 2018, 358). Brito Vieira (2005, 167-8, and with some caveats, 185-7), Pettit (2008, 74-5), Simendic (2012, 153), Martinich (2016, 327), Turner (2016, 213-5, and 220), and Fleming (2017, 5-6), would also comply with this tripartite division of the institution of the sovereign State. Chwaszcza (2012, 127) agrees that “[t]his threefold account [is] a commonsense contemporary understanding”.

⁴ Other similar contentions have been held by Pitkin (1972, 29-30): “men create a commonwealth by contracting each with every other to authorize one among them to represent them all... this action welds the multitude... into a single, lasting whole”. Runciman (2000, 273): “the multitude... acting as natural persons... authorize the sovereign to act in their names. By this act, they create the conditions which allow the actions of the sovereign to be attributed to them as a single unit”. Newey (2008, 114) “The person represented by the sovereign is thought of as coming into being via a covenant or agreement between subjects”. For Martinich (2016, 332) the institution of the person of the commonwealth is subsequent to “the conferral of power upon the sovereign”.

⁵ For a summary of Hobbes’s notion of integral causality, see Frost (2010, 81) and Stanton (2011, 112).

⁶ As Chanteur (1969, 225) asserts: “The multitude is not thinkable. You cannot talk about it, and nobody can speak on its behalf. To talk about the multitude is to get out of it”. Objections to this paradoxical trait of Hobbes’s contractualism (*i.e.*, how is it possible for the dissolved multitude to act in a coordinated manner and institute a sovereign power) may be traced to Fichte (Duso, 2006, 106) or to Hegel (Dotti, 1983, 189-90). See also von Pechmann (2005, 266-7) on the issue of “circularity” in Hobbes.

⁷ According to Tuck (1996, p. xli), “in the copies as printed ‘performe’ appears instead of ‘conforme’. This obvious error was spotted by a corrector”. The irony of the erratum is that, either way, it captures the action of the sovereign person, since it *conforms* the wills of the multitude by *performing* a brand new one.

⁸ In Stanton’s (2011, 165) terms, “it is in and by understanding themselves as being represented by one sovereign that many individuals become a single people, and a multitude becomes a civil society”.

⁹ We agree with Lewis (2003, 43), who alleges that “following the import of his distinction between man as artificer and man as matter, Hobbes emphasizes the need for those who have political initiative, be it an existing sovereign or a victor”. Also illuminating in this respect, Pettit (2010, 76) labels this sort of representation as “interpretive responsiveness”, which involves “a constructive interpretation in virtue of which the multitude is imputed a coherent mind or mentality”.

¹⁰ Hobbes refers to this work in EoL, IX.17, 57. About this extended sense of poetics, Philip Sidney (1890 [1599]: 6-7) stated: “It cometh from the word *poieîn*, which is ‘to make’. I know not whether by luck or wisdom we Englishmen have met with the Greeks in calling him a ‘maker’... Only the poet... lifted up with the vigor of his own invention doth grow, in effect, into another nature, in making things either better... or anew”.

¹¹ Of course, this feature of body politics, that is, the fact that “we make the commonwealth ourselves” (SL, 184), is what homologates them to geometrical objects. Jaume (1986, 44-5), branded this as Hobbes’s “epistemological artificialism”. Malcolm (2002, 151) argues that “behind all this talk about matter and workmanship, there hovers... an Aristotelian argument about the relation between ‘matter’ and ‘form’”.

¹² Bredekamp (2007, 34) argues that “the gods of the Asclepian statue cults” mentioned in the *Codex Hermeticum* are “[c]omparable to Leviathan”.

¹³ With regard to the medieval legal background of Hobbes’s theory of personation, cf. Springborg (1976, 175-6): “Hobbes’s notion of the ‘feigned or artificial person’ is a new angle on an old theory. *Persona ficta*, according to Roman Law as reinterpreted in the medieval juristic tradition was the term used to signify a corporation enjoying the legal rights and immunities of a natural person”. Maclean (1999, 14) compares Hobbes’s “artificial action” theory to Ulrich Zazius’s, and traces the concept of *per fictionem* back to the Roman *Digest*, 14.1. Hespe (2005, 222-7) evinces the medieval precedents of the idea of *persona ficta* and concludes: “By means of this figure of juridical person, Hobbes shuts down the possibility of a division within the sovereign person”. Also, Pettit (2008, 77): “Hobbes follows the lead of medieval theorists in taking the notion of corporation as given”. Foisneau (2011, 81): “Drawing on medieval legal theories, the philosopher gives reality to the State by means of a fiction”.

¹⁴ Hobbes quotes a passage of *De Oratore*, II.24.101 in L, XVI.3, 244, and refers explicitly to that work in the Introduction to his translation of *The Peloponnesian Wars* (1843, xiii, xxiii and xxxi).

¹⁵ According to Paxson's (1994, 16) reconstruction of the history of personification, "[Quintilian's] description of personification is the most thorough and complete up to the middle of the first century A.D.". As Skinner (2018, 15, n.18) notes, a copy of the *Institutio* was included in the Hardwick library catalogue.

¹⁶ Even the "raise of the dead" might count as an object of fictitious personation for our philosopher since the persons by fiction conjured by the gentiles encompasses "larvae, lemures, ghosts of men deceased" (L, XII.16, 172).

¹⁷ Cf. Vickers (1970, 16 and 46), and, most significantly, Skinner (1996, 10, 21-3 and 34-5).

¹⁸ Cf. Talaska (2013, 112). On the influence of Talon and Ramism in Hobbes's intellectual environment, cf. Zappen (1983, 70-1 and 78-9) and Skinner (1996, 60-2 and 65). Ong argues that Hobbes was actually a Ramist thinker (1951, 266-7).

¹⁹ Indeed, we can read it in the sixth volume of Molesworth's *English Works of Thomas Hobbes*, 511-528. For an account of the history of this misattribution, cf. Ong (1951, 265) and Cromartie (2005, lxvii).

²⁰ For an exhaustive survey of the notion of prosopopoeia in the 16th and 17th centuries, see Paxson (1994, 23-7), Alexander (2007, 102-7), Plett (2012, 52-4), Mackay (2014, 204), and Skinner (2018, 15-6).

²¹ This Renaissance trend of state personifications has been detected by Kantorowicz (1957, 382): "At any rate, the Crown in late mediaeval England was not the fictitious person which the continental 'State' became during and after the sixteenth century, a personification in its own right which is not only above its members, but also divorced from them", Schmitt (1950, 116): "in the 16th century the personification process of –spatially restricted as well as other sorts of– political power complexes entered into force and was promoted by the allegorical tendency of the Renaissance", and Crignon (2012, 416-25), who investigates this phenomenon in the 17th century.

²² Pitkin (1972, 33), Runciman (2000, 276) and Simendic (2012, 156-7) have interpreted the syntagma 'to procure its maintenance' in this sense.

²³ Disraeli detected this same connection between monster and fictitious creature (1814, 101): "[Hobbes] conjured up a political phantom, a favourite and fanciful notion that haunted him through life... he personified it by the image of Leviathan". He later adds that the philosopher "employed the engraver to impress the monstrous personification on our minds, even clearer than by his reasoning". Skinner (1996, 388) suggests a "contrast with the *Elements* and *De Cive*... there the powers were described as those of a legal person, here [in *Leviathan*] the person has been transfigured into a monstrous beast".

²⁴ While some researchers have identified the stamp of prosopopoeia in Hobbes's work (e.g., Paxson, 1994, 143; Kelley, 1999, 54-5; Tambling, 2010, 140; and Skinner, 2018, 16), the only one who has delved considerably into that connection is Escobedo (2017, 105-6). Pace Pacini, to whom Hobbes "disabled the trope of prosopopoeia or the rhetorical practice of introducing personification to an abstract thing" (2008, 103).

²⁵ We disagree with Pettit (2008, 73), who claims that "the personation of a multitude is a transformative act. Unlike the personation of things, it gives rise to a novel creation".

²⁶ A similar contention appears in Quintilian (1922, II.16.9, 321): "Never in my opinion would the founders of cities have induced their unsettled multitudes to form communities had they not moved them by the magic of their eloquence". In B, 227, Hobbes cites Diodorus of Sicily to uphold the contention that in "the most ancient kingdom... priests had the greatest power in civil affairs". Springborg (1994, 564-6) argues that Hobbes's direct source in matters of paganism were Vossius's *De Theologia Gentili* and Johann Clüver's *Historia totius mundi*. Collins (2005, 50-1) presumes a more mediated influence through John Selden's *Titles of Honors* and *De Dis Syris*.

²⁷ As Kraynak (1983: 96) holds: "At this time there were priests, poets, and prophets who sought knowledge of the divine and natural order. Yet, surprisingly, they generally were obedient to authority, even apologists for their political sovereigns".

²⁸ Hoekstra (2004, 107) explains that Hobbes tries to defer the validity of prophetic discourse: "[d]espite claims from all sides to have discovered... the prophesied last days in the setting of contemporary England, Hobbes seems to have been of the opinion that now is always a bad time for apocalypse".

²⁹ According to Condren (2006, 112), in early modern England "the office of the poet is dangerous", since it is "the ultimate form of misrule that contaminates" the others.

³⁰ Ginzburg (2008, 8) argues that Hobbes "wanted to understand, through Tacitus' paradoxical formula [*"fingebant simul credebantque"*] how religion... could be so effective". Leijenhorst (2007, 102) has pointed out that "priests and vicars only stimulated [the people's] idolatrous and hence potentially seditious inclinations based on a massive reification of what are merely figments of the mind". As Butler (2006, 476) reconstructs, in his continental tours Hobbes witnessed and described how the "papists" accomplished "the manipulation of human imagination" by means of "Catholic images" or "the solemnity" of Mass.

³¹ Cooren (2011, 102-3) has carefully studied the political consequences of ventriloquism, especially when the dummy not only emancipates, but also dominates the ventriloquist that makes it speak.

³² This issue is quite thorny and exceeds the scope of our paper. Suffice it to say that Hobbes incurs in a problematic ambiguity. First, he claims that “the Apostles and their successors... had received the Holy Spirit [and] represented him ever since” (L, XLII.3, 602). This means that “the power ecclesiasticall was in the apostles, and after them... was delivered again to others by these ordained... by imposition of hands” (L, XLII.2.). But, this transmission ended with the first Christian sovereigns: “For in that he is a Christian, he allows the teaching, and in that he is the sovereign (which is as much to say, the church by representation), the teachers he elects, are elected by the church” (L, XLII.69, 852). Since it is in “the Church [where] the Holy Ghost resideth” (L, XLIV.32, 998), we may presume that it is the sovereign who personate the Holy Spirit. For Hobbes’s Erastianism, see Collins (2005, especially, 5-7, 13-5, 21-4, 26).

³³ Bramhall (1844 [1658], 530) summarizes: “he must needs fall into these absurdities, who maketh but a jest of inspiration”. For Springborg (1996, 362) “[t]his is a symptom of the fundamental incoherence of Hobbes’s doctrine of religious authority. To be consistent he had to accommodate kings to that order of representatives constituted by the apostles and their successors”.

³⁴ Tönnies (1896, 61) described Hobbesian political conflict as follows: “[Behemoth] is the counterpart of Leviathan. The State is a monster [*Ungetüm*], revolution another”. Similarly, Farneti (2001) conceives Leviathan as a counter-myth confronted with the kingdom of Christ. For Tralau (2007, 74): “Hobbes’s monster state and monster sovereign end up in unorthodox company: among demons, gods, and idols of the heathen”. For a disavowal of Schmitt’s and Farneti’s reading, cf. Malcolm (2007, 23-4).

³⁵ In this sense, Coleman (1998, 991) is wrong to define the State as a kind of artifact different from the idols due to the fact that “the human component in its creation is... unrecognized but recoverable”. Pace Turner (2016, 224), as well, who differentiates fictions “invisible and mysterious like the ghosts of the schoolmen” from “Leviathan... always visible in the form and body of the sovereign”.

³⁶ Oberon is mentioned in *The Faerie Queene*, Book II, Stanza 75, 180. Springborg (1994, 565) recognizes “Hobbes’s indebtedness to Spenser”.

³⁷ This connection has been revealed by Paxson (1994, 143). Concerning the commonwealths as entities subject to representation, Spenser conceives them “as topifications – personified geographical spaces – [that] may resemble the visualized Body Politic of the kind we see in... the title page of Hobbes’s *Leviathan*”.

³⁸ Fletcher (2012, 41, n.31) mentions Hobbes’s demonology as an example of “the wealth of daemonic agencies controlling the citizen’s daily life” (44). Later (157) he explains that psychomachia is a paradigm for understanding allegorical action as an “ideological warfare”.

³⁹ Schmitt (1996 [1938], 82) compared Hobbes to a “magician who summons forces that cannot be matched by... his ability”, eliciting “the tragedy of the fate of this famous symbol”. Wright (2006, 245) adopts a similar scope: “One might say that Hobbes was indeed haunted by the very ghost he sought to lay”.

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