

SOME REMARKS ON RENAISSANCE *MYTHOPHILIA*.
THE MEDICAL POETICS OF WONDER:
GIROLAMO FRACASTORO AND HIS THOUGHT WORLD

ALGUNOS COMENTARIOS SOBRE LA MITOFILIA RENACENTISTA.
LA POÉTICA MÉDICA DE LA MARAVILLA:
GIROLAMO FRACASTORO Y SU ENTORNO INTELECTUAL

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ABSTRACT

The following pages make a case for the important role played by Aristotle's *Metaphysics* α 2 982b11–21 in Renaissance poetics and especially in that of Girolamo Fracastoro. As this passage, and Aristotle's *Metaphysics* in general, have traditionally been denied a major role in the poetics of the Renaissance, I have been obliged to develop my argument in three sections. [1.] The first focuses on Thomas Aquinas's groundbreaking reading of the quotation in psychological and epistemological terms, and on how he and his contemporaries were able to harmonize it both with the *corpus Aristotelicum* and with the development of a place for poetry in the system of the arts. [2.] The second section illustrates how the first humanists used Aristotle's authority to invert the meaning of the passage, transforming it into an argument in defense of the primacy of poetry over the rest of the arts. This appropriation had two undesirable effects: either depriving the passage of its theoretical implications or, worse, assimilating Aristotle's words into a Platonizing vision of poetry. Only with the recovery of the Greek text of Aristotle's *Poetics* in the late fifteenth century did the passage escape its new status as a commonplace in humanist defense of poetry, and was briefly again considered as a point of departure for the analysis of concepts such as *fabula* (fiction) and *admiratio* (wonder), based on philosophical, poetic, and medical premises. [3] The last section introduces Galeotto Marzio's and Giovanni Pontano's pioneering works on these two concepts—*fabula* and *admiratio*—, as an introduction to the subsequent synthesis done by Girolamo Fracastoro, who, from the positions held by Marzio and Pontano as well as Aquinas's original intuition, was able to harmonize natural philosophy and poetry by means of their psychological implications. This is what I have called here the 'medical poetics of wonder' or, more simply, mythotherapy.

KEYWORDS: *Metaphysics* α 2 982b11–21, Renaissance poetics, *fabula*, *admiratio*, wonder, history of emotions, medicine, psychology of literature, fiction and philosophy, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Galeotto Marzio, Giovanni Pontano, Plotinus, Girolamo Fracastoro.

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RESUMEN

Este trabajo defiende un argumento en realidad muy simple: el valor teórico que un famoso pasaje de la *Metafísica* (982b11-21) de Aristóteles tuvo para la poética renacentista y, en particular, para Girolamo Fracastoro.

Dado que la *Metafísica* ha quedado habitualmente desatendida en los trabajos sobre poética renacentista, me he visto forzado a dividir mi argumento en tres partes. [1.] A partir de las citas y comentarios de Tomás de Aquino al pasaje, muestro cómo el dominico fue el primer comentarista latino en leerlo en clave psicológica y gnoseológica, y cómo tanto él como sus contemporáneos lo armonizaron con el *corpus Aristotelicum*, por un lado, y, por otro, con la clasificación de la poesía en el sistema de artes. [2.] En la segunda parte, explico cómo los primeros humanistas se apropiaron del pasaje para transferirlo al argumentario a favor de la primacía de la poesía sobre el resto de artes, con dos efectos indeseables: bien con un empobrecimiento teórico, bien asimilándolo a una visión platonizante de la poesía. Solo con la recuperación manuscrita del texto griego de la *Poética* de Aristóteles a finales del siglo XV, este pasaje consigue sustraerse de la polémica sobre la clasificación de las artes, para ser brevemente considerado como punto de partida para el análisis de *fabula* y *admiratio* desde premisas filosóficas, poéticas y médicas. [3.] La última parte aborda dos pioneros en la recuperación teórica de ambos términos en su nuevo contexto —Galeotto Marzio y Giovanni Pontano— y la labor de síntesis que sobre las posturas encarnadas por ambos, y sobre la intuición originaria de Aquino, lleva a cabo Girolamo Fracastoro, que armonizará filosofía natural y poesía a través de sus implicaciones en el intelecto, lo que he llamado aquí la ‘poética médica de la maravilla’ o, más sencillamente, mitoterapia.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Metafísica* α 2 982b11-21, *fabula*, *admiratio*, maravilla, historia de las emociones, medicina, psicología de la literatura, literatura y filosofía, Aristóteles, Tomás de Aquino, Galeotto Marzio, Giovanni Pontano, Plotino, Girolamo Fracastoro.

uati, pariter succurre medenti:
utraque tutelae subdita cura tuae est.
Ovid, *Remedia amoris*, 75–78

I realized that the poet's real work lays not in poetry;
but in the invention of reasons for poetry to be admired.
Jorge Luis Borges, *The Aleph*

The purpose of the following pages is twofold.¹ On the one hand, I aim to explore two different yet complementary manifestations of the increasing interest in the philosophical value of fiction during the Renaissance, and, on the other, to analyze how fiction served as a device for introducing and contesting philosophical, scientific, and theological issues from the 1490s to the 1550s. The reader familiar with these topics will certainly miss in my approach an extensive treatment of the tradition of the *theologia poetica*, and, though not exactly equivalent, a discussion of the composition of philosophical fables—and the theory behind it—by Poliziano, Antonio Urceo, and Erasmus, among others.

One of the reason for having neglected the first tradition is the vast amount of bibliography that has considered the problem properly; as for the second, the reader will find in this volume an article by Professor Giglioni that surpasses in expertise and scope anything that I could possibly have done. But the main motive for the research in these pages is the surprising lack of scholarly attention paid to the psychological, gnoseological, and metaphysical value accorded to the concept of *admiratio*—understood both as the emotion experienced when, while contemplating, listening to, or reading a work of art, a truth is perceived; but also as the craft necessary for producing such an emotion—in the above-mentioned period. Thus, I propose to stress in this contribution the particular set of ramifications that *admiratio* had for the development of a concept of philosophical fiction that did not correspond to the extensive discussion of rhetoric and poetics

¹ This article was first delivered as two complementary talks at the 63rd Annual Convention of the Renaissance Society of America (2017, Chicago). I want to express my gratitude to all the participants who presented their papers in the two panels, “Impact of Fiction on Early Modern Philosophy,” both for their presence and for their commentaries. I would also like to thank David Quint, Luc Deitz, and Thomas Leinkauf for being in the audience of the panels and for their comments and reservations. They have made this final version much more carefully thought-through, and now it should be read, partly at least, as a conversation with them. I would also like to thank Jon Nelson, Ignacio García Pinilla, and Darrel Rutkin for their comments and corrections on the Latin text and its translation added as an appendix to this text.

inherited from classical antiquity. As a matter of fact, my main thesis will be that this ‘philosophical’ approach to fiction evolved, to a certain extent, independently of both disciplines in their traditional forms.

To show this, I shall evaluate three separate manifestations of the philosophical notion of *admiration* and how it related to literary devices. The first is how it was incorporated in the thirteenth century as a important aspect of, so to speak, a ‘philosophy of literature,’ and how this groundbreaking approach faded in the hands of the early humanists. The second is how late-fifteenth century humanists reinterpreted the concept; and the third, departing from the major trends of ancient and medieval interpretation of *Metaphysics* α 2 982b11–21, is how it was transformed, in the late poetics of Girolamo Fracastoro, into a justification, not of the metaphysical value of poetry, but of poetry as an expression of the practical dimensions of philosophy.

1. ARISTOTLE AND AQUINAS ON *MYTHOPHILLA*

Aristotle, the least enthusiastic lover of fables of all philosophers, was the first to coin the term *philomythos* in a very well-known passage of book alpha of his *Metaphysics*:

That [the *Metaphysics*] is not a science of production is clear even from the history of the earliest philosophers. For it is owing to their wonder [διὰ γὰρ τὸ θαυμάζειν] that men both now begin and at first began to philosophize; they wondered [θαυμάσαντες] originally at the obvious difficulties, then advanced little by little and stated difficulties about the greater matters, e.g. about the phenomena of the moon and those of the sun and of the stars, and about the genesis of the universe. And a man who is puzzled and wonders thinks himself ignorant [ὁ δ’ ἀπορῶν καὶ θαυμάζων οἶεται ἀγνοεῖν] (whence even the lover of myth [φιλόμυθος] is in a sense a lover of wisdom [φιλόσοφος], for the myth is composed of wonders [ὁ γὰρ μῦθος σύγκεται ἐκ θαυμάσιων]); therefore, since they philosophized in order to escape from ignorance, evidently they were pursuing science in order to know, and not for any utilitarian end.²

² *Metaphysics* α 2 982b11–21, Aristotle 1924, pp. 120. Compare the new critical edition by O. Primavesi: ὅτι δ’ οὐ ποιητικὴ, δῆλον καὶ ἐκ τῶν πρώτων φιλοσοφηάντων. διὰ γὰρ τὸ θαυμάζειν οἱ ἄνθρωποι καὶ νῦν καὶ τὸ πρῶτον ἤρξαντο φιλοσοφεῖν, ἐξ ἀρχῆς μὲν τὰ πρόχειρα τῶν ἀπορῶν θαυμάσαντες, εἶτα κατὰ μικρὸν οὕτω προϊόντες καὶ περὶ τῶν πειζόνων διαπορήσαντες, οἷω περὶ τῶν τῆς σελήνης παθημάτων καὶ τῶν περὶ τὸν ἥλιον καὶ ἄστρα καὶ περὶ τῆς τοῦ παντός γενέσεως, ὁ δ’ ἀπορῶν καὶ θαυμάζων οἶεται ἀγνοεῖν (διὸ καὶ φιλόμυθος ὁ φιλόσοφος πῶς ἐστὶν ὁ γὰρ μῦθος σύγκεται

In this excerpt, Aristotle performed two important operations in coining the term. In the first place, he established an imprecise hiatus between the philosopher and the *philomythos*. By so doing, as I will mention below, book *α* of the *Metaphysics* played a major role in the recovery of the ideal of the *poeta theologus* by early humanists. Secondly, he established this relationship by stressing that wonder (θαυμάζειν) was the point of departure for the thought of both the philosopher and the *philomythos*. As a consequence, somebody interested in the history of *mythophilia* will be forced to pay attention—as wonder, together with melancholy, are so to speak the philosophical emotions *par excellence*—to its links with the history of philosophical wonder, which will prove not only to be a productive way of approaching *mythophilia*, but also of providing a general framework within which the links between philosophy and literature, or the impact of literature on philosophy, would be expanded during the Renaissance.

Despite the fact that some further commentaries on Aristotle's *philomythos* could be found in classical tradition,³ to my knowledge Thomas Aquinas was the first medieval thinker to consider the introduction of philosophical wonder in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* as a psychological and gnoseological issue. In the treatise on the passions contained in the *Summa Theologica* [1265–1273], he tackles wonder both as a cause

ἐκ θαυμάσιων). ὥστ' εἴπερ διὰ τὸ φεύγειν τὴν ἀγνοίαν ἐφιλοσόφησαν, φανερόν ὅτι διὰ τὸ εἰδέναι τὸ ἐδίωκον καὶ οὐ χρήσεως τινος ἔνεκεν," Aristotle 2012a, p. 473. William of Moerbeke's translation reads as follows: "Quia vero non activa, palam ex primis philosophantibus. Nam propter admirari homines nunc et primum incoeperunt philosophari: a principio quidem quae in promptu dubitabilium mirantes, deinde paulatim procedentes, et de maioribus dubitantes, ut de lunae passionibus, et de his quae circa solem et astra, etiam de universi generatione. Qui vero dubitat et admiratur ignorare videtur. Quare et philomythes philosophus aequaliter est. Fabula namque ex miris constituitur. Quare, si ad ignorantiam effugiendam philosophati sunt, palam quia propter scire, studere persecuti sunt, et non usus alicuius causa," in Aristotle 1982, p. 15.

³ Apart from a previous mention in passing in Plato's *Theaetetus* (155c–d), there is a short allusion to these "theologians" in Cicero's *De natura deorum* III. XXI. 53; an extensive commentary on Varro's three genres of theology (*fabulosa, naturalis, civilis*) recalled in Augustine's *De civitate Dei* (VI. v–x) (Van Nuffelen 2010, pp. 162–88)—; and a hint in Lactantius, *De ira Dei* 11: "All those who are cultivated as gods were men, and the same were the earliest and greatest kings. [...] And both the oldest Greek writers, whom they call *Theologoi*, and also the Romans, following and imitating the Greeks, teach this, and chief among them, Euhemerus and our own Ennius who point out the births, marriages, progenies, commands, deeds, passings, tombs of all of them [...]," 1962, p. 87. The idea entered into early medieval encyclopedism through Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies* VIII. VII. 2–9 (2006, pp. 180b–181a), and Rabanus Maurus, *De universo libri XXII* IV. V. *De clericis* and XV. II. *De poetis* both in *Patrologia Latina* 111, cols. 92A and 419B–C and id. *Excerptio de Arte Grammatica Prisciani*, *ibid.* cols. 666D–667A.

of enjoyment and of fear.⁴ A commonly—and wrongly—accepted solution to this paradoxical approach has been to say that Aquinas held that a contiguous relation existed between the two passions. In truth, this ambivalence of wonder (*admiratio*) stems both from the sources employed by the Dominican friar and from the lexical limitations of medieval Latin when compared to classical Greek.

Thus, Aquinas follows Aristotle when he refers to desire and enjoyment, but as he expounds his ideas on sorrow, fear, and wrath, he abandons the classical listings of *pathemata*, relying instead on John of Damascus's *De fide orthodoxa* and Nemesius's *De natura hominis*. In sum, *admiratio* refers in Aquinas to two different Greek concepts: Aristotelian θαυμάζειν (*thaumazein*) which is, in the domain of the passions, an efficient cause that motivates the agent—in other words, joy stems from the hope of understanding the object of wonder, as learning is a source of pleasure—; and Damascenian and Nemesian κατάπληξις (*kataplēxis*), which refers, on the other hand, to the process by which admiration turns into distress for the subject who experiences it, motivated by the anticipation of danger.⁵ This danger, according to Aquinas, must be understood in epistemological terms, that is, as the anticipation of a great difficulty, or the impossibility for the subject to acquire certainty on a given object of speculation.

Aquinas's approach to the topic permeates Renaissance thought deeply enough to arise in Descartes. During the seventeenth century, those philosophers involved in the study of the passions of the soul would establish a neat distinction between wonder and astonishment, although it is uncommon to quote Aquinas's *Summa* as the basis for the development of such ideas. Thus, Descartes points out in *The Passions of the Soul* [*Les passions de l'âme*, 1649] the dangers of excessive wonder, and establishes a distinction between functional wonder (*admiration*) and stupefying astonishment (*estonnement*).⁶ Whereas the former can be of use both for mnemonic purposes and for stimulating the thirst for knowledge, the latter—an “excess of wonder”—can descend into a “beclouding” of the mind of the subject who experiences it, or into a mere craving for novelty but not for real knowledge.

Although Aquinas's ideas on wonder as found in the *Summa* made an impact on European culture lasting well beyond the sixteenth century, they neither suffice

⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I^a-II^ae q. 41 a. 4.

⁵ Vega 1992, p. 36n19; cf. Daston and Park 1998, p. 113. John Damascene 1955, p. 122: “Admiratio vero est timor ex magna imaginatione. Stupor vero est timor ex inassueta imaginatione;” Nemesius 1975: 103, 1987: 81. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* III, q. 15, a. 8; see also Gondreau 2009, pp. 217ff.

⁶ Descartes 1985, pp. 354–356. Cf. Daston and Park 1998, pp. 316–17.

to offer a complete overview of his approach to wonder, nor do they completely explain my view of the problem. Therefore, another passage, this time from his *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics* [1270–1272], needs to be recalled:

It is known that doubt [*dubitatio*] and wonder [*admiratio*] both originate in ignorance: when we observe clear effects whose cause we ignore, we admire their cause. Now, as wonder [*admiratio*] is the reason for philosophy, it is clear that the philosopher is to some extent a *philomythos*, that is, a lover of fables, what is proper to poets. That is the reason why the first men who occupied themselves with the causes of things by means of fables are called theologian poets [*poetas theologizantes*]; such were Perseus and some others, which were the Seven wise men. Therefore, here is the reason why the philosopher is considered a poet: both deal with that which causes wonder. For the fable poets are concerned with what stems from certain marvellous phenomena [*quibusdam mirabilibus*]; philosophers are also lead to philosophy from wonder [*admiratione*].⁷

With regards to Aquinas's take on the theologian poets in the second excerpt: it encapsulates two important issues about the conception of philosophy (theology) and poetry for medieval scholasticism. First, while Aquinas's *admiratio* corresponds to the Aristotelian θαυμάζειν, his allusion to wonder as *mirabilia* seems to be mainly cultural.⁸ In other words, even though he states that the philosopher and the poet share a common gnoseological impulse, the latter's attention is drawn to bewilderment while the former moves to philosophical inquiry, which is far from

⁷ Aquinas, *In duodecim libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis expositio* I, lesson 3, ch. 2, §55: “Constat autem, quod dubitatio et admiratio ex ignorantia provenit. Cum enim aliquos manifestos effectus videamus, quorum causa nos latet, eorum tunc causam admiramus. Et ex quod admiratio fuit causa inducens ad philosophiam, patet quod philosophus est aequaliter philomythes, idest amator fabulae, quod proprium est poetarum. Unde primi, qui per modum quemdam fabularem de principiis rerum tractaverunt, dicti sunt poëtae theologizantes, sicut fuit Perseus et quidam alii qui fuerunt septem sapientes. Causa autem, quare philosophus comparatur poëtae, est ista, quia uterque circa miranda versatur. Nam fabulae circa quas versantur poëtae, ex quibusdam mirabilibus constituntur. Ipsi etiam philosophi ex admiratione moti sunt ad philosophandum,” Aquinas 2004, p. 96. See the important remarks by Umberto Eco 2012, pp. 198–200.

⁸ See, for instance, Aquinas, *De memoria et reminiscencia Commentarium* 450a32 (2005, pp. 199 and 249n9): “Yet it does happen that one firmly retains in his memory things that he encounters as a child. The vigor of a motion may cause things we marvel at to be more deeply impressed upon our memory. We chiefly wonder about new and unusual things and newborn children tend to marvel at things still more because they are not used to them, and for this reason too they remember firmly. On the other hand, with respect to the fluid condition of their body, children are naturally liable to slips of memory,” and the *Expositio super Iob ad Litteram*, chs. 4, 18 and 35.

being a slip of the pen by the Dominican theologian.⁹ Second, Aquinas stresses that the link between the *philomythos* and the philosopher could be loose insofar as their historical order of appearance is neglected. That is, *mythophilia* possesses barely more than an archaeological interest—as philosophy’s arcane predecessor—for (true) philosophy, since poetry’s function is simply to move a person to virtue, as he states in his well-known preface to Aristotle’s *Analytica priora* [1270].¹⁰

Nonetheless, Aquinas’s masters, contemporaries, and heirs could manifest more daring in this regard, as they usually construed Aristotle’s assertion in *Metaphysics* α 2 982b11–21 as a direct comparison, rather than a hiatus, between philosophy and poetry. As a matter of fact, a casual reader could easily see the implications involved in this equivalence simply by paying attention to direct glosses and commentaries on the Aristotelian passage. Thus, in Albert the Great’s *Metaphysics* [1263–1267]¹¹ and in Ulrich of Strassburg’s *Liber de sumo bono* [c.1265–1269?],¹² poetry is presented as an art with a threefold nature: with respect to its

⁹ See, for instance, the parallels with Bacon’s (2000, pp. 148–149) treatment of *instantiae deviantes*.

¹⁰ “At other times only an estimation [*existimatio*] inclines to one part of the contradiction, on account of some representation, in the way that a man may conceive disgust at a certain food if it is represented to him under similitude of something disgusting; to this the Poetics pertains, for it is the poet’s function to lead us to virtue through a fitting representation. All of these pertain to rational philosophy, for it is the function of reason to lead from one thing to another” (*Quandoque vero sola existimatio declinat in aliquam partem contradictionis propter aliquam repraesentationem, ad modum quo fit homini abominatio alicuius cibi, si repraesentetur ei sub similitudine alicuius abominabilis. Et ad hoc ordinatur poetica; nam poetae est inducere ad aliquod virtuosum per aliquam decentem repraesentationem. Omnia autem haec ad rationalem philosophiam pertinent: inducere enim ex uno in aliud rationis est*) Aquinas 2009, p. 791.

¹¹ *Metaphysicorum libri XIII* I, treat. I, chap. VI. *In quo ostenditur, quod ista scientia non est activa, sed contemplativa*. “Est enim admiratio motus ignorantis procedentis ad inquirendum, ut sciat causam eius de quod miratur, cuius signum est, quia ipse Philomythes secundum hunc modum Philosophus est, quia fabula sua construitur ab ipso ex mirandis [...]. Sicut enim in ea parte logicae, quae poetica est ostendit Aristoteles, poeta fingit fabulam ut excitet ad admirandum, et quod admiratio ulterius excitet ad inquirendum, et sic constet philosophia. Sicut est de Phaetonte et sicut de Deucalione monstrat Plato, in qua fabula non intenditur nisi excitatio ad mirandum causas duorum diluviorum aquae et ignis ex orbitatione stellarum erraticarum provenientium, ut per admirationem causa quaeratur et sciatur veritas, et ideo poesis modum dat philosophandi sicut aliae scientiae logices [...]. Licet ergo quoad mensuram metri poetria sit sub grammatica, tamen quoad intentionem logicae est poesis quaedam pars” (Albertus Magnus 1890b, col. 30b).

¹² *Liber de sumo bono*. I, treat. II, chap. IX. *De multis specialibus modis theologiae*: “Habet secundo modo, modum poeticum, quando veritatem sub integumentis ponit, ut in parabolis Sacre Scripture, et hic modus etiam convenit huic scientie, quia, ut dicitur primo *Metaphysice*,

form—verse—it should be linked to the domain of grammar, but according to its intention it should be connected to rhetoric and, finally, to the extent that it pursues the manifestation of truth through premises whose role is to cause acts of imagination,¹³ it should be ascribed to logic.¹⁴ The ground of this stance is as follows: if poetry were exclusively considered as dependent upon grammar and rhetoric, i.e., as a discipline occupied with the knowledge of metrical norms and of the embellishment and effectiveness of language (*ornatus* and *pathos*), truth would be completely absent from its concerns, and poetics could not be considered as a science, not even an ancillary one. The position had been held, though with varying lines of reasoning, in Al-Farabius's *Catalogue of the Sciences*, Avicenna's *Commentary on Aristotle's Poetics*, and Averroes's *Middle Commentary on the Poetics*; and soon thereafter echoed in Dominicus Gundissalinus's *On the Division of Philosophy* (*De divisione philosophiae*, ca. 1150), in Hermannus Alemannus's translation of Averroes's *Middle Commentary*, finished in 1256, in the *Anonymous Question on the Nature of Poetry* (Minnis and Scott 1991, pp. 280–1), or in Vincent de Beauvais *Speculum doctrinale*, to mention but a few.¹⁵

philomicos [sic], id est, poeta amans fingere fabulas, philosophus est, eo quod poeta ad hoc fingit fabulam: ut excitet ad admirandum, et admiratio ulterius excitet ad inquirendum, et sic constat scientia, ut dicit Philosophus in sua Poetica [Rbet. 1371a32ff.]. Unde patet quod ipsa dat modum sciendi per modum admirandi, sicut alie partes logice dant eum quantum ad modum arguendi, propter quod etiam poesis est pars logice quantum ad intentionem, licet quandum ad mensuram metri sit sub grammatica. Eadem ergo ratione pertinet iste modus ad hanc scientiam, sed tamen propter hoc non estimandum est scripturam hanc aliquid habere fabulosum et falsum; quia, ut dicit Augustinus, ad veritatem parabolae non requiritur quod sensus literalis verus sit, sed sufficit quod secundus sensus sit verus, quia oratio est vera vel falsa, per hoc quod res per ipsam significata est vel non est. Res autem significata principaliter per parabolam non est significatum verborum, sed significatum illius significatum quod verba mediante significato suo significat, et ideo patet propositum,” Ulrich de Strasbourg 1930, pp. 51–52. Ulrich combines the passage of the *Metaphysics* with Aristotle's *Rhetoric* a 11 1371a32–b10; the emphases in the quotation are mine.

¹³ Minnis 2005, pp. 239–274.

¹⁴ It was commonly accepted that poetry was the lowest part of logic, as its main device was the imaginative syllogism (Black 1989 and 1990, pp. 209–246). On the implications of the use of imaginative syllogisms and their imbrication with the rhetorical tradition, see Mehtonen 2006, pp. 299–303.

¹⁵ On the place of poetry in the medieval systems of the arts, see Hardison Jr. 1962, pp. 3–23, Weisheipl 1965, pp. 54–90, Hugonnard-Roche 1984, pp. 41–75, and Dahan 1990, pp. 5–27. On the influence of these systems and of the inclusion of poetry in logic in Renaissance poetics, esp. Savonarola's *Apologeticus*, see Godman 1988, pp. 31–37.

Albert the Great provides yet another commonplace for understanding the influence of *Metaphysics* α 2 982b11–21 during the late middle ages. Through his analysis of *transpositiones* or *traslationes*, Albert claims that figurative language—i.e., the language of poetry—can be used as a means for philosophical and theological reflection, relying both on the authority of the Sacred text itself and on the tradition of allegorical exegesis, and echoing some accents on hermeneutics and philosophy previously developed by the Arabic philosophical tradition, mainly Averroes. However, when it comes to the possibility of poetry expressing theological truth, Albert makes a distinction that would have an echo not only in Aquinas himself, but also in scholastic thought after him,¹⁶ and even in Dante—the figurative language of poetry could not be compared to that of the Bible for two reasons: the truth behind the ‘poetry’ of the Bible emanates from God’s intelligence, and therefore it is divine, whereas the *mirabilia* found in poetry are crafted by human minds and delivered for human minds’ consumption, and, according to another famous passage on poetry in *Metaphysics* α , ‘poets are liars.’¹⁷

These positions would be contested by fourteenth-century classicists such as Mussato, Petrarch, Boccaccio, and, later, by Salutati, among others. Their battle against scholasticism is usually considered as an intellectual fight to reclaim the place of honor for poetry among the arts and, thereafter, to open up a path to classical learning as the core concern of the study of literature, whether worldly or divine.¹⁸ Even though it is commonly accepted that their standpoints—no matter

¹⁶ Minnis 2010, pp. 135–145.

¹⁷ “AD PRIMUM ergo dicendum, quod *sacra Scriptura poeticis utitur ex divina sapientia formatis et figuratis*, in quorum figuris secundum proportionem similitudinum resultant infigurabilia et immaterialia, eo quod ab illis et ad illa formata et figurata sunt, et ideo certissima sunt: *ex certissimis enim oriuntur et ad certissima dirigunt*. In *poesi* autem Philosophorum, *mira ex quibus fabula componitur, ex fictione humana oriuntur, et per repraesentationem ad humana dirigunt, et ideo deceptoriam sunt et mendosa*. Unde Aristoteles in primo *Metaphysicorum*: ‘Secundum philosophiam poetae multa mentiuntur canentes.’ *Summa Theologiae* part I, treat. 1, quest. 5, memb. 2 (Albertus Magnus 1895, col 24b), the emphases are mine. Aristotle’s original passage reads: “Ἀλλ’ οὐτε τὸ θεῖον φθονερόν ἐνδέχεται εἶναι, ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὴν παροιμίαν πολλὰ ψεύδονται ἄνθρωποι, οὐτε τῆς τοιαύτης ἀλλήν χρη’ νομίζειν τιμιωτέραν,” Aristotle, 2012: 474; “Sed nec divinum invidium esse convenit, *sed secundum proverbium: ‘multa mentiuntur poëtae.’* Nec ea aliam honorabiliorem oportet existimare,” in the translation by William of Moerbeke (Aristotle 1982, pp. 19); my emphasis. See also Albert’s *Topica* VIII. 1. 3 (1890a, col. 498a).

¹⁸ A handful of classical studies on the subject in Curtius 1940, pp. 1–15, Walker 1972, pp. 1–41ff, Witt 1977, pp. 538–563, Zaccaria 1986, pp. 281–311, Kallendorf 1995, pp. 41–62, and Trinkaus 1995, II, pp. 683–720.

the differences between them—are to be seen as revolutionary in the context of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century humanism, they most certainly sounded like rudimentary outbursts to the ears of their contemporary scholastic thinkers, and there is no discussion of the fact that early humanism was united in its lack of interest in a philosophical approach to poetry or, at least, a milder interest than the one they were aiming to attack.¹⁹ This can be seen in the early debate between Mussato, who appraised the topic defending the possibility of a divinely inspired poetry, and Giovannino of Mantua, who, as a Dominican, closely adhered to Aquinas's denial of the identification of poetry with theology.²⁰ Petrarch himself, in several places, made use of the passage on the *philomythos*, as would Boccaccio and Salutati after him.²¹ In contrast to Mussato, however, all of them would deploy the idea of the possibility of theological poetry, lessening the sacred overtones in their defense of poetry, with 'sacral' ones, in Minnis and Scott's (1991: 390) terms.

In sum, although the value of early humanists' defense of poetry cannot be reduced to mere manifestos, their take on some philosophical issues related to poetry meant a step backwards when compared to thirteenth- and fourteenth-century scholasticism. Aristotle's *Metaphysics* α 2 982b11–21, which had been critically discussed every time the philosophical and theological value of poetry was under examination, became fossilized, a-critically mentioned, and tacitly glossed in the "poetics" of early humanists. As a matter of fact, from the late-fourteenth century onward, the triumphant parading of this excerpt—after Petrarch set it in motion—demonstrates that the art of poetry could occasionally exceed philosophy and even theology in achievement and profundity, although the arguments to support the idea did not match the boldness of the statement.²² Consequently, any chance for the figure of the *philomythos* and the concept of *mythophilia* to pave the way for creating a 'philosophy of literature' soon began to fade in favor of Neoplatonism and the much more systematic exploration of poetry provided by Aristotle's *Poetics*, conferring on the passage an almost exclusively ornamental role.

¹⁹ My assertion here seems to go against the grain (Garin 1987, pp. 69–71, 1981, pp. 52–68), but I rely on the venerable discussion of the subject in Curtius 2013, pp. 214–227, Kristeller 1961, pp. 101ff., and Ronconi 1976.

²⁰ Greenfield 1981, pp. 80 and 87–88.

²¹ Trinkaus 1979, pp. 18–19 and 99–106, Greenfield 1981, pp. 99, 118–119, and 137.

²² Examples of the a-critical use of the passage and its links with Neoplatonism are collected in Chevrolet 2007, pp. 73ff. However, there were early criticisms not only of the theological, but also of the philosophical value of literary fables, as for instance Poggio's remark on a manuscript copy of his *De avaritia* held in the Convento di San Marco, see Garin 1961, pp. 36–37.

2. TOWARDS A PSYCHOLOGY AND AN AESTHETICS OF *ADMIRATIO*. MARZIO AND PONTANO (1490–1499)

Aristotle's *Metaphysics* α 2 982b11–21, standing between the line of defense based upon theological poetry and the development of Neoplatonism, on the one hand, and the eclosion of Neo-Aristotelian poetics, on the other, enjoyed a theoretical revival between 1490 and 1540 whose importance, as far as I know, has never been treated with the attention it deserves.²³ It would be tempting to think that its refashioning happened hand in hand with the maturation of literary criticism in humanist Italy, but it seems more likely to me that the reason behind it was the discovery of the Greek text of Aristotle's *Poetics* and the problems it posed with regards to the topical comparison of poet (*philomythos*) and philosopher contained in the *Metaphysics*.²⁴

²³ It will suffice to point out that in such a monumental work as Weinberg's (1961), *Metaphysics* is only mentioned twice.

²⁴ The systematic translation of Aristotle's *Opera* into Latin took place during the first half of the thirteenth century, see now Hasse 2010. As for the *Poetics*, the work was translated twice into Latin during the middle ages. The first translation was based on Averroes's *Talkhīṣ kītab al-shī'r*, rendered from Arabic into Latin by Hermannus Alemannus, a monk settled in Toledo, in 1256—edited by L. Minio-Paluello in 1968 as *De arte poetica cum Auerrois expositione*—and usually referred as *Poetria Aristotelis* during the middle ages. In 1278, William of Moerbeke authored a second translation directly from Greek, which was edited by E. Valmigli in 1953. Although much more accurate, the latter has survived in two manuscripts and its only known readers during the fourteenth century were precisely Mussato and Petrarch (Kelly 1979, pp. 205–6, 1993, pp. 117–8); Alemannus's version, on the other hand, has survived in 24 manuscripts. According to Minnis (2005, p. 252) and others, the reason behind the good fortune of Alemannus as a translator is that he did a better job of harmonizing his version with scholasticism, both in its take on literary composition and in the ethical approach to poetry. Alemannus's work was the first translation into Latin of Aristotle's *Poetics* printed during the Renaissance—*Determinatio in poetria Aristotelis*, Venice: Philipus Venetus (1481), reissued in 1515—, and Averroes's epitome had another two translators into Latin in the sixteenth century: Abraham de Balnes in 1523 and Jacob Mantinus in 1550 (Cranz and Schmitt 1984). For the transmission of Aristotle's *Poetics* during the middle ages, see Tigerstedt 1968, pp. 7–24, Boggess 1970, pp. 278–294, Allen 1976, pp. 67–81, and once more Kelly 1979, pp. 161–209. On the fate of the medieval versions of Aristotle's *Poetics* during the Renaissance, see Weinberg 1961, I, pp. 351–6 and Cirillo 2004, pp. 287–303, and a highly-valuable overview of the critical tradition of passages of the *Poetics* in Schrier 1998. In the late fifteenth century, however, a number of humanists—Ermolao Barbaro and Angelo Poliziano among them—had access to the Greek version of Aristotle's *Poetics*, see Branca 1983: 3–36, and the commentaries by Giglioli in this volume.

According to the constraints of early humanism, the exhumation of the *Poetics* meant, on the one hand, that, as scholasticism had claimed, poetry's function was mainly civic, and therefore its aim was somehow shared with rhetoric.²⁵ Revealed poetry, on the other hand, remained subjected to Plato and to a number of secondary authorities that served to expand the idea of a veiled truth behind poetic fables. So, paradoxically, Aristotelian *Poetics* found itself constrained by a Platonic framework. To resolve this issue and open up a path to scientific poetry and philosophical fable, a number of humanists reappraised *Metaphysics* α 2 982b11–21, focusing on the meaning or meanings of *fabula* (*mythos*) and *admiratio*, attempting to develop their theoretical implications. Thus, depending on how *fabula* and *admiratio* were defined, they offered different responses to the following questions: Where does *admiratio* lie in poetry? What are the effects and function of poetic *admiratio*? Is verse necessary for the *fabula* to exist? Do poetic and philosophical *admiratio* respond to the same emotion, that is, excitement at the intellectual perception of (hidden, either philosophical or theological) truth? And, if so, which consequences can be drawn from the fact that there is truth in poetry, and how, therefore, should *fabula* be defined? This was the first theoretical encounter between Aquinas's approach to *admiratio* and the so-called humanistic tradition, a melding that, as I will show, would be radically transformed by Girolamo Fracastoro.

In the 1490s, tentative answers were articulated in at least three different approaches to *Metaphysics* α 2 982b11–21. None of them, however, tried to respond to all the aforementioned questions at once, nor were they formulated in keeping with a shared conceptual framework developed in the context of the same disciplines or written with the same readership in mind. As has been said, these new views on the problem transcended late-medieval scholastic ideas on transferences or *translationes*, as well as the inheritance of Platonic myth-making, the institution of medieval allegory, and the common agreement that poetry should hold no more than an ancillary relation to philosophy. The decade's first discussion on the topic appeared in chapter 21 of *De doctrina promiscua* [ca. 1490] by Galeotto Marzio, whose first edition and translation we present as an appendix to these pages. The second was the opposition to Florentine Neoplatonism expressed through the radical response to the question about the philosophical, and eventually theological,

²⁵ For wonder as a response to the three components of a plot—*peripeteia*, *anagnorisis*, and *alagon*—and for the Aristotelian theories on wonder in tragedy and epic in Renaissance poetics, see Herrick 1947, pp. 222–226 and esp. Minsas 2003, pp. 145–171.

value of fables, first discussed and enacted by Poliziano's *Lamia* [1492],²⁶ much developed and played with by Antonio Urceo in his *Sermo I* [1494–1495],²⁷ and taken to its limits by Erasmus in the *Praise of Folly* [1509–1511].²⁸ The third can be found in the most important treatise on poetics of the decade—with the possible exception of Bartolomeo della Fonte's *Poetica* [ca. 1492]—: Giovanni Pontano's *Actius* [1494–1499], whose examination of *admiratio* would prove highly influential during the sixteenth century. For clarity's sake, I will give my attention only to Marzio and Pontano in these pages, leaving for a better occasion the particularities and existing links between the approaches of Poliziano, Urceo, and Erasmus to *mythophilia* and the role played by Aristotle in the adoxographic tradition.

Galeotto Marzio—much better remembered today for his condemnation for heresy due to some chapters of his miscellany *On Matters Generally Unknown* [*De incognitis vulgo*, ca. 1478], finished a second miscellany, *On Many Different Affairs* [*De doctrina promiscua*], in 1490, the year of his death.²⁹ Although the product of intermittent work over several years—some of the chapters had circulated previously—the final version of *De doctrina promiscua* was addressed to Lorenzo de Medici and remained in manuscript [Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 52. 18] until it was printed in Florence in 1548, and thereafter in 1552 and 1602. As far as I know, chapter 21 of the work has not received any critical attention despite its undeniable interest. In it, Marzio provides an apparently disarranged

²⁶ For the concept of *mythophilia* in the later Poliziano and its implications and contrast with his previous fables, see esp. Mutini 1972, pp. 86ff., Batkin 1990, pp. 149–156, Candido 2010, pp. 103–107, and Giglioni in this same volume.

²⁷ A summary of the fourteenth *Sermones* of Antonio Urceo in Raimondi 1987, pp. 129–147. On *Sermo I*, see Chines 1990, pp. 209–220, 1998, pp. 125–150, and Chines and Severi 2013, pp. 51–59.

²⁸ On the links between Antonio Urceo's *Sermo I* and another *prolusio* written in 1509, and fictionally declaimed by Dame Folly in front of the students and professors of Theology at the University of Paris, see Forni 2012, p. 59 and Chines 2013, pp. 42–43. The textual coincidences between the two texts exceed the number indicated in the bibliography, and the early editorial history of Urceo's *Opera omnia*—the princeps was published in Bologna in 1502, where Erasmus spent part of 1507, and the second edition was printed by Aldus in Venice in 1506, where Erasmus spent 1508 at the Aldine press—leaves little doubt about Erasmus's familiarity with the text.

²⁹ Good introductions to Galeotto Marzio in Vasoli 1980, pp. 38–63, Pastore Stocchi 1983, pp. 15–50, and Anselmi 2008, pp. 57–103. On *De doctrina promiscua*, see besides Freza's (1949, pp. xiii–xlix) introduction to his partial edition and translation (chapter 21 is not included); Miggiano 2001, pp. 207–240; and Vasoli 2001, pp. 185–205.

and peripheral discussion both of the relation between fiction and philosophy and of the concepts of *fabula* and *admiratio*.

Thus, after succinctly introducing the many acceptations of *fabula* in dramatic poetry, in the Scriptures, and in mythology, its relation to both truth and verisimilitude, and the distinction between *fabula* and oratory (§§ 1–2), Marzio discards all of them for the simple reason that they refer to different and irreconcilable instances and, therefore, do not allow for a satisfactory and univocal definition. What is interesting about this passage, however, is that, without acknowledging it, Marzio has explored and jettisoned as unsatisfactory all the extant acceptations of *mythos* in the Aristotelian corpus. To solve the problem of the lack of a precise definition, Marzio offers two differing yet complementary arguments. Following Aristotle's passage on the *philomythos*, his first argument is that *fabulae* should not be defined by their actuality or their plausibility (§§ 1–2), but rather by their capacity to encapsulate a hidden truth (§ 3). As a matter of fact, Marzio would completely sever form from truth—hence the history of the defeat of Argos by Hermes Trismegistus (§ 11)—through the comparison of poetry with painting (§ 12). As a consequence, the form in which *fabulae* are delivered is only important for the less intellectually gifted, because form catches their attention and allows them to participate in the truth it hides; meanwhile, for philosophers, whose attention is drawn to that hidden truth, *fabulae* require full command of many disciplines, astrology among them, to fully disclose their meaning and awaken wonder.

Marzio, in interpreting the truth of the *fabulae*, is not limiting himself to an Euhemeristic view (§ 3), but rather considers them as devices whose interpretation permits a full disclosure of the whole building—the *encyclopaedia*—of the liberal arts. Expanding the link established by Aquinas in the *Summa Theologica* between *mythophilia* and the passions of the soul, the second argument shifts in Marzio from the realm of the active intellect and supernatural life to the effects that *fabulae* produce in the passive intellect and the lower reason of their listeners and readers (§ 5-9). For Marzio, a physician himself, the argument is clear in this regard: even though the term *fabula* may have multiple acceptations, physicians understand it univocally (§ 4), that is, by the effect it produces on the intellect of the listener or reader. The implicit consequences could hardly be more extreme: *fabula* should be defined according to the effect it produces in the reader or the listener; accordingly, it should be considered as the sum of the factuality of the object (of art), the physiological disposition and intellectual capacity of the spectator, together with his proficiency in fully comprehending what the object (of art) is representing. (Not bad for a fifteenth century scholar!)

It would be difficult to think of a treatise more antithetical in its premises to Marzio's approach to *mythophilia* than Pontano's *Actius* [1495/1499]. As we have seen, the former is almost insulting in its apparently unstudied approach to poetry (*fabula*) as an object of inquiry, while the latter is obsessed precisely with the opposite, that is, in offering a coherent definition of poetry based on an exhaustive analysis of form over content, with the aim of differentiating his object of study from any other forms and disciplines of discourse. Nonetheless, it is undeniable that both texts share a remarkable number of issues, many of them introduced by the Spanish physician Juan Pardo—psychology, the physiology of dreams, astrology, the effect of poetry on imagination and intellection—, by Altilius—such as the relation between poetry and history, the comparison of poetry with painting, and the truth and verisimilitude of poetry—and even by Paulus Prassicius and Pardus in their important discussion on the relation between poetic wonder and rhetoric *pathos*. It could be argued, not without reason, that these are minor concerns when the dialogue as a whole and its main topics are considered, and given that Pontano attempted with the *Actius* to provide an extensive answer to the following questions: Where does *admiratio* lie in poetry? What are the differences between poetry, history, and oratory? And which are the requisites, function, and effects of poetic *admiratio*? It is surprising that none of the scholars of his work have considered the part played by *Metaphysics* α 2 982b11–21—even as a minor factor—in the *Actius*;³⁰ because, as I hope I have demonstrated already, from the thirteenth century onward this passage showed the ability to trigger at least the following theoretical questions: Are philosophy and poetry related in any way? If so, how should poetry be categorized in the system of the arts: as a subrogate

³⁰ As a matter of fact, Haskell (1998, pp. 507), following Deramaix (1987, p. 210), has denied any possible influence of the *Metaphysics* on the *Actius*, and Deramaix (2008, p. 142) himself has recently stated: “L’*Actius* réinvente le genre de l’art poétique sans Aristote, concilie imitation de Virgile et poétique de la variété.” Even if it is true that Pontano, as far as I know, does not mention directly Aristotelian *Metaphysics* in any of his major works, and that the link between Pontano's idea of *admiratio* has been linked to his treatment of *magnificentia* over and over, it is equally true that Pontano had in his personal library a printed (as Roick 2017, pp. 65 and 219n105 correctly points out), not a manuscript, copy of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (undoubtedly the one published by Aldus in June 1, 1497) and that he acquired Aldus's Greek *Aristotle* as soon as the volumes came from the press; that his knowledge of Aristotle cannot be denied, and that, even if he had not had a copy of the *Metaphysics*, the passage was so frequently quoted and mentioned that it is almost impossible that he was unaware of its existence, not to mention the theoretical aspects involved in its discussion during the last two decades of the fifteenth century.

of grammar, rhetoric, and even logic, or differentiated from the rest of the arts of discourse? Is *admiratio* fundamental to poetry, and, in that case, which kind of *admiratio*, and based on what criteria? Should *admiratio*, as an emotion, be compared to rhetorical *pathos*, or, following Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, would it be better compared to philosophical (intellectual, so to speak) emotions such as melancholy? And, such being the case, should poetic *admiratio* be restricted to the domain of ethics and politics, as Plato in the *Republic* and Aristotle in the *Poetics* seem to suggest or, on the contrary, should it give itself up to philosophical wonder, and therefore explore the hidden causes of nature? With all this in mind, should we infer that content (*fabula*) is more important than form in poetry and, should it therefore be considered as an artistic manifestation of other disciplines; or is poetry a discipline in itself?

For my interest here, I would like to stress only two ideas present in the *Actius*. The first can be found in the section where, after referring to Platonic frenzy and Aristotelian psychology, Juan Pardo comes to the conclusion that it is verse—in other words, the distinction (*excellencia*) or magnificence of the craft of the poet reflected in the poem—which leads to wonder. As a matter of fact, this premise would allow Pontano to establish a neat distinction between poetry and oratory, not only from the point of view of their approach to language but, more importantly, from the effect that they foster in their audience. Thus, oratory seeks persuasion, that is, an appeal to the passions, while poetry seeks the recognition of the craft of the poet, and consequently his fame and glory. This, as should be evident to us, is an intellectualized passion, wonder, although the *Actius* does not go further. The second idea appears, again, linked to Pontano's treatment of poetry as a device fundamentally crafted under the premise of being excellent—through the means of poetry itself—and therefore made to excite wonder in the reader or listener. In the context of the object of imitation, *fabula*, this marks *grosso modo* a neat distinction between poetry and history. This distinction is not limited to the different aims—verse vs. prose—, or to the *dispositio*, brevity, or quality of the language employed, but rather is found in the object of imitation itself. Following Garin's summary of the problem, history is related to the imitation of all that is human, but poetry is related to the imitation of nature, a view that would justify Pontano's own scientific poetry, mainly the *Meteora* and the *Urania*.

3. MYTHOPHILIA AS MYTHOTHERAPY. GIROLAMO FRACASTORO (1478–1553)

Marzio and Pontano had an uneven impact on Fracastoro. Marzio pioneered in his chapter of the *De doctrina promiscua* the maturing of what could be called

a proto-psychology of literature. The fact that some of his intuitions were developed in works by Pomponazzi or Fracastoro should be attributed more to the common speculative milieu of late-fifteenth and early-sixteenth century Italy than to any direct knowledge of Marzio's work. On the other hand, the influence of Pontano's *Actius* on Fracastoro is undeniable, since it is mentioned in the *Naugerius* [ca. 1540]. As I have argued, Marzio and Pontano should be seen as two radical responses to the theoretical problems posed by *Metaphysics* α 2 982b11–21, but Fracastoro would also profit from Aquinas's ideas for his theoretical approach to the problem of *mythophilia* and philosophy, as well as those of Plotinus. The last section of these pages will discuss it under the label of *mythotherapy*, which I will use to refer to the set of tools employed by Renaissance philosophers to develop the epistemic power of wonder in order to surpass the limitations of (natural) philosophy.

Girolamo Fracastoro, a physician, astronomer, poet, and literary critic, played a major and frequently neglected role in the history of *admiratio* during the Renaissance. This role—in its aim and implications—goes well beyond the therapeutical qualities of poetry, as found in the bombastic assertions made by Ficino or Pico at the end of the fifteenth century, or even in the perpetual mythographical tradition of Apollo as the god of both disciplines.³¹ Fracastoro's ideas on intellection, found in his trilogy on the human mind—*Naugerius*, *Turrius*, and *Fracastorius*—written from the 1530s to the 1550s, hint at one of the reasons why sixteenth-century physicians produced such a vast amount and variety of poetry.

However, before tackling Fracastoro's treatises on intellection, it is necessary to recall his critique of wonder as found in his *Concerning Sympathy and Antipathy*. Printed in 1546 for the first time by Bernardo Giunta in Venice, Chapter 20 of the first book offers a succinct approach to the psychology of *admiratio*, which

³¹ See Pico, *Conclusiones nongentae* 7.8 (1998, p. 469, music should be understood here in a classical fashion, that is, as music and poetry) and Ficino, *Epistles* I. 22 (1495, fol. 14r). Together with this tradition, a number of renowned literary commonplaces regarding the relation between medicine and poetry survive during the Renaissance, among the most successful being the image of poetry as honey to sweeten the medicine of knowledge, as found in Lucretius's *De rerum natura* I, 935–950; IV, 10–25 (cf. Plato, *Laws* 659e–660a). For a different tradition, sustained in consolatory literature as a medicine for the soul, see Cicero's *Tusculan disputations* III.1.1, III.2.4ff, etc.; Seneca, *Consolation to Marcia* 1.8; Puttenham 1999, p. 206; etc. For the therapeutics of poetry and music in medieval medical treatises, see, as an introduction, Olson 2005, pp. 275–287. On the Apollonian character as related to disciplines (prophecy, poetry, music, and medicine), see Ficino's *Argumentum et commentaria in Phaedrum* 30.6 (2008, pp. 160–161).

Fracastoro divides into three kinds. The first is clearly linked to Aristotelian *thaumazein*, as found in *Metaphysics* α : “If something new is presented as unknown and it does not produce the fantasy of an inconvenient evil, there is no fear, just wonder. Wonder is nothing other than the suspension or fixation and careful commitment of the soul.”³² Fracastoro complements this wonder that predisposes individuals to philosophical enquiry with a second sort, which he names ecstasy. He explains it as follows:

When the unknown is presented in a magnitude that by far exceeds what we are accustomed to, in the guise of something that we revere and love for our own belief, there is ecstasy, that is, a certain excess of the mind and the fantasy in wonder. Through ecstasy we become distracted, indifferent, and insensitive to anything else. This happens either to those who are truly saints, or to the melancholics.³³

The third and last category of wonder addressed by Fracastoro clearly recalls Aquinas’s *kataplexis* or, for that matter, Descartes’s *estonnement*, albeit he does not give it a name:

When something is presented as admirable, but produces fear, as demons or spirits, then affection goes beyond ecstasy and lacks a name, but is defined by its effect, horror, as we shiver and become rigid.³⁴

In sum, Fracastoro is interested in wonder insofar as it provides a stimulus to actual knowledge. As will be shown, this approach determines his conception both of philosophy and poetry. Ecstasy, though mentioned in other treatises of his, does not contribute to the constitution of scientific or philosophical knowledge and, therefore, will not be included in this discussion.³⁵ Horror—and consequently catharsis, compassion, and any plain appeal to the passions—is

³² “Si vero novum aliquid uti ignotum offeratur, non tamen phantasiam faciens imminentis mali, tunc non timor fit, sed admiratio sola. Nihil enim aliud est admiratio, quam suspensio animae seu fixio et applicatio intenta,” Fracastoro 2008, p. 138.

³³ “Si vero quod offertur uti ignotum sub ratione offeratur cuiusdam magnitudinis consueta longe excedentis, sed rei tamen quam per opinionem veneramur et amamus, tunc ecstasis vocata fit, hoc est mentis phantasiaeque excessus quidam in admiratione, per quam ab omni alia re distracti immotique reddimur, et insensitivi. Quod maxime iis accidit, qui aut vere sancti sunt aut sibi ex melancholiis videntur,” Fracastoro 2008, p. 138.

³⁴ “Si vero res sub ratione magnitudinis oblata sit, sed rerum timendarum, ut daemonum et manium, tunc affectus supra ecstasim fit, qui nomen non habet, sed ab effectu horror appellatur: horrescimus enim et rigidi evadimus,” Fracastoro 2008, p. 138.

³⁵ Fracastoro 2006, pp. 200–202; 1999, p. 90.

entirely absent from his aesthetics, to the point that he hesitates over including lyric and dramatic poetry in the catalogue of legitimate poetic forms throughout his *Naugerius* [ca. 1540].³⁶ Notwithstanding that it is also mentioned in the *Naugerius*, poetic frenzy is far from easily integrated into his general conception of poetry, nor can Fracastoro's Neoplatonism be maintained when the remaining titles of his trilogy on human mind—*Turrius* and *Fracastorius*—are considered as part of a general approach to poetics.

It seems to me that the disputed adscription of Fracastoro to either Neoplatonism or Neo-Aristotelianism with regard to his aesthetics³⁷ has been motivated by the fact that scholars, as far as I know, have failed to find the source of his ideas on the relation between poetry and philosophy. While Fracastoro is undoubtedly aware of the passage of *Metaphysics* α 2 982b11–2 and of the scholastic and the humanistic traditions as presented above, he complements them with another authority to give an original treatment to the problem: the book eight (1–2) of the fifth *Ennead* of Plotinus.³⁸ It should be noted, nonetheless, that Fracastoro could not be merely making use of Marsilio Ficino's rendering of Plotinus, whose *editio princeps* was published in 1492 and reissued in 1540;³⁹ rather, he could be employing the pseudoepigraphic version found in the *Theologia Aristotelis*,⁴⁰ first printed in Rome in 1519 and whose attribution to the Stagirite remained disputed during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁴¹ That being the case, Fracastoro would have been incorporating Platonic elements to his aesthetics while supposing that he was just further developing Aristotelian premises.

³⁶ Fracastoro 2005, pp. 82–85. See also Muñoz Martín 2004, pp. 341–343.

³⁷ Fracastoro's anti-Platonic literary criticism has been held by Spingarn 1963, pp. 14–15, Bundy 1924, pp. 15, and Weinberg 1961, II, pp. 725–729, although their arguments are founded on different grounds. Brann (2002, pp. 300–309) argues in favor of Fracastoro's Neoplatonism through his treatment of poetic frenzy, with such reputed antecedents as Patterson 1935, p. 935 and Moss 1999, pp. 100–101. An intermediate approach in Trabalza 1915, pp. 126 and 211, Brisca 1950, pp. 545–565, Mazzacurati 1977, esp. pp. 56–7, Peruzzi 2005, pp. 8–11 and 2006, pp. 217–228, and Chevrolet 2007, pp. 154 and 569–577.

³⁸ Plotinus 1984: 236–249.

³⁹ The passage in Plotinus 1492, sigs. ii10r–kk2r; 1540, fols. 92r–93v. On the editorial fate of Plotinus during the Renaissance, see O'Meara 1992, pp. 55–74. For a comprehensive approach to the links between Plotinus's thought and the philosophy of Fracastoro, see Pennuto 2008.

⁴⁰ Ps-Aristotle, *Theologia sive Mistica philosophia* IV. 4. *Quanta sit dignitas Mundi Intellectivi et qua ratione ad illum perveniatur* 1519, sigs. c3r–c4r (fols. 20r–21v). With regard to *admiratio*, see also VI. 2 (sigs. g3r–g4r, fols. 28r–29r) and XIV. 15 (sigs. z2r–z3r, fols. 91r–92r).

⁴¹ Kraye 1986, pp. 265–286.

Therefore, in *Turrius*, his dialogue on epistemology, he recalls not only the Aristotelian idea that philosophers—a name he takes for himself—are to admire new and great things and to concentrate their research on them, but also that they should explore the more hidden and remote causes in order to produce an imitation of the universals.⁴² This necessity of moving beyond the common knowledge of things, he states, is the reason why philosophers are prone to melancholy.⁴³ However, this paradoxical pleasure is not exclusive to them. Quite the contrary, poets are equally accustomed to being seized by greatness and beauty, in Fracastoro's own words:

They [the poets] also voluntarily apprehend the causes behind the things and they enjoy them. For this reason, many among the poets were great philosophers and many among the philosophers were great poets.⁴⁴

Still, there is a difference: whereas the philosopher is primarily devoted to the study of causes, the poet remains captivated by the inner beauty of reality. The latter's love of things is so intense that if he happens to find any fault in the beauty and elegance of his object of contemplation, he corrects it. For Fracastoro, this procedure does not lead to considering the poet as a fabricator, as tradition dictates. Quite the contrary: the poet becomes a source of perfection as the poem outshines reality. Moreover, this course of action marks a neat distinction between the poet and the philosopher: "Poets experience satisfaction for what they conceive (as if they were giving birth), whereas philosophers prefer to keep their conceptions to themselves."⁴⁵ As a result, if we are forced to consider the

⁴² These 'universals' should not be confused with Platonic ideas. See Fracastoro 2006, pp. 96–102.

⁴³ "Ergo philosophi natura sunt, qui apte possunt et universalia facere, et observare, non publica tantum, sed et abdita quoque: atque in iis maxime gaudent. Qua de causa et admirabundi maxime sunt. Admirari enim solemus valde nova, et magna. In abditis autem semper magnitudo quaedam est, maior autem in iis, quae nobilia per se sunt, unde et in iis quum potissimum gaudeant. Causas etiam eorum solent inquirere, qui philosophi sunt. Atque in hoc praecipue natura philosophi est, quod abditorum causas maxime amat perquirere. Propter quod et natura cogitabundi sunt, et taciturni, in quibus non nihil potest melancholia," Fracastoro 2006, p. 236.

⁴⁴ "Quapropter et ipsi causas rerum libenter discunt, et in iis delectantur. Unde et poetarum multi philosophi etiam magni fuere, sicuti et philosophorum multi simul poetae fuere," Fracastoro 2006, p. 236.

⁴⁵ "Unde poetae quasi parere gaudent, philosophi intra tenere foetum," Fracastoro 2006, p. 238. And he follows: "Unde philosophi ad sciendum magis nati sunt, minus ad imitandum: poetae vero ad imitandum magis. Siqui vero aequaliter ad utrunque sint apti, hi et philosophi simul et poetae sunt."

possibility of a poet-philosopher, his thirst for wisdom and his love for imitation should be made equal.⁴⁶

Fracastoro goes one step further in his *Naugerius*, though it is a previous work. In the final pages of this treatise on poetics, devoted to the utility of poetry, he recreates the arguments contained in Plato's *Ion*—i.e., that there is no science in poetry, and the poet ultimately is a mere imitator of other sciences—simply in order to allow Navagero, the main character of the dialogue, to pronounce the following passage, centered on the psychological aspects of learning:

If some philosopher, using unadorned language, should teach that some mind pervades the universe, I should fall in love with this idea as being a noble idea. But if this same philosopher should tell me the same thing in poetic fashion, and should say:

Know first, the heaven, the earth, the main
The moon's pale orb, the starry train
Are nourished by a soul,
A bright intelligence, which darts
Its influence through the several parts
And animates the whole

If, I say, he presents the same thing to me in this way, I shall not only love, but be struck with wonder, and I shall feel that a divine something has entered into my soul.⁴⁷

Navagero introduces two important ideas. On the one hand, wonder is not simply a precondition of actual learning, but rather an instrument that can be manipulated to awaken the thirst for knowledge. The poem is not just a composition crafted with rhetorical or poetic finesse, but also the aftermath of

⁴⁶ This opposition is merely suggested at the end of the treatise, when Fracastoro poses the difference between a 'pure' philosopher and a 'pure' poet taking Vergil's *Bucolics* as an example of poetic frenzy (2006, p. 240). It should be noted that poetic madness is due to nature itself, not divine intercession.

⁴⁷ Fracastoro 1924, p. 71. For a modern edition of the text, Fracastoro (2005, p. 102): "Si enim philosophus quispiam, nos erudiens, simplici oratione doceat mentem quandam esse per omnia diffusam, adamabo quidem rem isthanc, utpote rem magnam edoctus. At vero, si idem ille poetico modo eandem mihi rem referat et declaret: Principio coelum ac terras camposque liquentes/ lucentemque globum Lunae titaniaque astra/ spiritus intus alit, totamque infusa per artus/ mens agitat molem et magno se corpore miscet. [Vergil, *Aeneid*, VI, 724–727] Si, inquam, eandem rem hoc pacto referat mihi, non adamabo solum, sed admirabor et divinum nescio quid in animum mihi immissum existimabo."

true learning on a given object of imitation. On the other, the poet, invested with this demiurgical role, recreates reality truer than it could possibly be perceived. Thus truth, as presented in the poem, does not stem from poetic frenzy or divine intercession. On the contrary, it is necessary for the poet to approach his subject as a philosopher and to write his composition down with the skills bestowed by rhetoric and poetry. This twofold refutation goes even further. As in nature, wonder that stems from a poem is nothing but a precondition for accessing hidden aspects behind the sensible world.⁴⁸ And Navagero offers yet another argument to prove the superiority of poetry over philosophy: in its capacity to reflect the process of creation and to appraise the “ideas” behind this process, poetry denounces the fallacies in the materiality of the world and (re)presents its chaotic and mutable nature in order. As a result, poetry becomes the only cure—or, at least, a relief—for the philosopher’s melancholy.

Natural philosophy—medicine included—and poetics are challenged in several ways by the theoretical framework provided by Fracastoro. First, wonder is common to poetry and philosophy. Nonetheless, whereas in natural philosophy it is wonder that moves a person to research the causes of a given natural phenomenon, poetry aims to reproduce the creative processes behind that natural event and, by doing so, brings Nature’s perfection to light. This crafted perfection constitutes poetic wonder and also responds to Renaissance polemics about Book α of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* insofar as Fracastoro’s conception of poetry forges a link between physics and metaphysics.⁴⁹ Therefore, mimesis serves as a medium between the processes that establish the material world and the intellectual soul. This means that Fracastoro distances himself both from Pontano’s treatment of

⁴⁸ Fracastoro’s comments on this passage by Vergil in the *Fracastorius*—the last of his works on intellection—offer a neat distinction between the theologian and the philosopher, and therefore between poetic frenzy and poetry: “Theologi vero nostri de his exactius et diligentius scripserunt. Quod vero et coelestes orbis organica quoque sint corpora manifestum est, quoniam idipsa dissimilaribus constant partibus, aliis quidem densioribus, aliis rarioribus, et magnitudine et ordine et situ differentibus, verum consensu tanto, tam mira virtute ad certos fines et operationes constitutis, ut omnia, quae in universo sunt, corpora inde gubernentur. Quae vero eos orbis agitat et regit anima ipsorum est, quam philosophi intelligentiam et mentem vocant. Non est autem haec mens mundi anima, sed particularis quaedam natura, quae et esse et virtutem recipit a mundi anima, operatur autem secundum illam, quam recepit, virtutem,” Fracastoro 1999, p. 94.

⁴⁹ On the origin of the problem in the Renaissance, mainly found in the 1527 translation of Alexander of Aphrodisias’s *Commentary on the Metaphysics* by Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, see Kraye 1991, pp. 137–160.

poetic *admiratio* in the *Actius*—although fundamental to understand his *Naugerius*—and from the concept of mimesis as presented by Plato.⁵⁰ Second, Fracastoro refines Aristotle’s attribution of melancholy to poets and philosophers in *Problem* 30 of the *Physics*. For the philosopher, melancholy stems from the inner difficulty of discovering the hidden causes for the multiplicity of phenomena that compose the sensible world. The craft of a poem aims to provide an explanation for the meaning of the hidden causes through mimesis—a mimesis (as has been stated before) that outdoes nature and, as a result, serves as a cure for the philosopher’s melancholy. Hence, the triumph of the poet in healing the philosophers could be understood as the victory of human mind over Nature.

This intellectualized aesthetic partly counters Empedocles’s expulsion from Mount Helicon in Aristotle’s *Poetics*,⁵¹ a condemnation also imposed on Lucretius, Pontano’s *Meteora* and *Urania*, Marullus’s *Hymni naturales*, and on Fracastoro’s *Syphilis* by sixteenth-century Neo-Aristotelian literary criticism.⁵² It can hardly be denied that, despite its somewhat disordered presentation, Fracastoro offers a powerful response derived from both Aristotelian poetics and metaphysics. Furthermore, it could be equally argued that Fracastoro’s concerns on this topic start as early as 1510, when he begins to compose poetry in the vein of classical scientific masterpieces such as Lucretius’s *De rerum natura*:

Yet I am hardly unaware of the difficulties either in describing what heaven ordained and how it played out, or in seeking with certainty the causes of all these events: for sometimes heaven achieves its results over many years, and sometimes (which can mislead you) chance and varied accidents account for each event.⁵³

⁵⁰ The English translation of Pontano’s passage from the *Actius* devoted to *admiratio* was included as an appendix to Fracastoro’s *Naugerius* (1924, pp. 75–86). Important discussions on Pontano’s conception of *admiratio* in the *Actius* and beyond can be found in Tateo 1972, esp. pp. 104–132; Ferrà 1983; Grassi 1984, pp. 135–155, esp. 143–149; Deramaix 1987, pp. 171–212; and Grassi 1993, pp. 71–78.

⁵¹ Aristotle, *Poetics* I 1447b16–20. See Fracastoro 2005, pp. 64–68 and 91–95 and cf. the fragments from Aristotle’s lost dialogues—*Sophista* (Diogenes Laertius VIII. 2. 53, IX. 5. 12; Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. Math.* VII. 6–7) and *De poetis* (Diogenes Laertius VIII. 2. 57–8), Aristotle 2008, pp. 142 and 522–524—which pose a fundamental problem for the application of Pontano’s ideas on *admiratio* to Fracastoro’s own praxis.

⁵² See, for instance, Castelevetro 1978 I: 43, 45, and 254. Cf. Fracastoro’s inclusion from Neo-Aristotelianism in Scaliger 2003 V, pp. 204ff, or from Neoplatonism in Patrizi 1969–1971, II, pp. 160–161 and III, pp. 400–401, 413–414, 437, and 444.

⁵³ “Quamquam animi haud fallor, quid agat quove ordine caelum/dicere et in cunctis certas perquirere causas/difficile esse: adeo interdum per tempora longa/effectus trahit, interdum

4. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Let me summarize the main argument of this paper. I have attempted to trace the evolution of one of the more famous passages of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (α 982b11–21) from the thirteenth century to the beginning of the sixteenth century, focusing on four different moments: its reception by Thomas Aquinas and his contemporaries during the (Latin) thirteenth century, its appropriation by the early humanists to defend the preeminence of poetry, the recovery of its theoretical implications for the history of poetics and the history of emotions by a number of Renaissance scholars in the decade of the 1490s, and its radical transformation in the hands of a physician and humanist like Girolamo Fracastoro.

As I have shown, the apparent simplicity of the passage, where Aristotle merely mentions that the ancient philosophers were also lovers of myths (*philomythi*), as wonder was common among them, had an impressive potential to tackle some of the fundamental issues of poetics during at least four centuries. During the thirteenth century, it served to establish a theory of wonder (*admiratio*), an archaeology of poetry, to present the subaltern role of poetry to philosophy—and, therefore, to justify the place of poetry among the system of arts—to establish a neat distinction between the revealed poetry of the Bible and the poetry of the pagans, etc. In the fourteenth century, it was used for the opposite purposes by humanists, because they understood that Aristotle was affirming that poetry was the very origin of philosophy and theology, and therefore, that there was something divine in it and, as such, that it should be considered not as an ancillary discipline but as the pinnacle of all of them. As I have explained, this led to a theoretical impoverishment of the passage and somehow Platonized Aristotle's conception of poetry. With a number of exceptions, between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries this was the predominant reading of Aristotle's passage on the *philomythos*. As I have argued, between the 1480s and 1490s the situation radically changed in Italy, most probably thanks to the recovery of the Greek manuscript of Aristotle's *Poetics*.

As is known, Aristotle's *Poetics* offers a perspective on poetry very distant from Platonic assumptions and even more so from the Neoplatonic defense of poetry's divine character; so humanists, or at least a number of them, started to reflect on

(quod fallere possit)/miscetur fors [*sic.*, read “sors”] et varii per singula casus,” *Syphilis* I. 256–60, Fracastoro 2013, pp. 16–19. See the comments on the passage in Haskell 2007, pp. 191–192, and see also the poorly cited and studied fragment of Fracastoro's letter on his *Syphilis* 1955, pp. 25–34, which provides further support to the thesis presented in these pages.

the meaning of wonder (*admiratio*) and myth (*fabula*) in the passage of the *Metaphysics* with differing aims. Some tried to justify the power of fiction as a philosophical device, some to claim that poetry should be simply a tool for instruction in other disciplines, some to approach the psychology of fiction, some to argue for the production of scientific poetry, and some to play with fundamental concepts in their field of expertise. This was the case of physicians such as Galeotto Marzio, humanists such as Pontano, philologists such as Poliziano, rhetoricians such as Antonio Urceo, and, some time later, theologians such as Erasmus. What seems appealing to me is that all their reflections and practices on fiction can be analyzed and at least partially explained in the tradition of interpretations of *Metaphysics* 982b11–21.

As their responses to the problem manifested themselves in very different formats and with very different results, I have focused on chapter 21 of Marzio's *De disciplina promiscua* and Pontano's *Actius*. The two texts defend almost opposite positions: Marzio uses Aristotle's mention of the *philomythos* to discuss *avant la lettre* the physiology and psychology of literature—that is, its reception as a possibility for its definition. Pontano's efforts are focused on offering a definition of poetry as a discipline based upon the excellence of its form—a standpoint greatly supported by sixteenth-century poetics—, on differentiating poetry from any other genre of discourse and on defining which kind of wonder poetry should awake.

I chose both Marzio and Pontano, and spent some time explaining Aquinas's approach, as they offer the background to Fracastoro's treatment of the problems posed by *Metaphysics* 982b11–21. As I have discussed and stressed, Fracastoro presents a very original slant on the problem thanks to his use of Plotinus's *Enneads* as a complementary source, as he argues for a symbiosis between the poet and the philosopher with regard to wonder. His standpoint on the problem is what I have called here the medical poetics of wonder, or, plainly, mythotherapy.

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APPENDIX

Galeotto Marzio, *De doctrina promiscua* [ante 1490, princeps 1548]¹

| [174] ***De philosophis, qui viventes sunt mortui. Cap. XX.***

[...]

| [183] Mortuus ergo Palemon ex viuento factus illecebras corporis abiiciens, quae sunt philosophorum secutus est. Hi enim, vitae inspectivae addicti, vbi aliquid considerandum est speculantur, vnde in prima philosophia dicitur: “Philosophum quodammodo amatorem esse fabularum, ex miris nanque constant.” Admiratio igitur philosophum ad rerum contemplationem inuitat. Hinc est quod fabularum, vbi admiranda ponuntur, est quodammodo, vt diximus, amicus sapiens, quem mortuum esse dudum ostendimus.

| [184] ***De multis generibus fabularum etiam verarum, et cur fabulae varia operentur in homine et quae constellatio faciat amatores fabularum. Cap. XXI.***

1. Fabulam Cicero *Ad Herennium*² finit eam quae nec vera nec verisimilis est, ex cuius sermone comprehendimus fabularum aliam non veram, ut comoediae et tragoediae, et aliam non verisimilem,³ ut homo in leonem lupumue conuersus.⁴ Co- | [185]moedias⁵ autem fabulas dici Terentius testatur, cum ait: “Populo vt placerunt,⁶ quas fecisset fabulas.”⁷ Sed in his et tragoediis non verisimilitudo, sed veritas deest, ficta enim narrantur; et in conuersione hominis in bestias aliasue res veri similitudo abest, cum veritas subesse possit, Sacra enim historia vxorem Lot in statuam salis versam esse commemorat. Ita vt secundum Ciceronem, et quosdam doctrina ingenioque praestantes, fabularum nomine contineantur, quae vera aliquando fuerunt, hoc nominis fortita, quoniam abest verisimile.

2. Narratio oratoris non constituit⁸ verum, non verisimile, vnde dicitur narrationem esse oportere veram, aut verisimilem; ita tamen, vt quod verum est, etiam verisimile appareat, cum verisimile ei sit satis absque vero; ex verisimili nanque nascitur credulitas, id est, persuasio, et haec est vna fabulae acceptio:⁹ ita vt sit fabulosa res vera non verisimilis, et eodem modo appelletur res verisimilis, non vera; in altero veri similitudo, altero autem veritas deficientes fabulae nomen formant.¹⁰ Fabula etiam pro eo accipitur, quod homines aut fantur aut fabulantur. Iuuenalis: “It noua nec tristis per cunctas fabula coenas.”¹¹ Et cum huiusmodi in omni actione paratam fa- | [186]bulam affirmet Plinius, de eo quod rumoribus disseminatur intelligit. Sic etiam Suetonius in Augusto, “Coena quoque eius secretior in fabulis fuit”,¹² ita vt huiusmodi fabulae non sint veritatis penitus expertes.

APPENDIX

Galeotto Marzio, *On Many Different Affairs* [ante 1490, *princeps* 1548]

[[174] *On philosophers, who, while living, are dead. Chapter 20.*

[...]

[[183] Therefore, Polemon, made dead in life, despised the charms of the body and followed all that is proper for philosophers. When these men, consecrated to the speculative life, find something worthy of consideration, they study it. Therefore, as it is said in the *First Philosophy*: “The philosopher is, in a certain way, a lover of fables, because they consist of wonder.” Consequently, it is wonder that invites the philosopher to contemplation. This is the reason why the wise man—whom we already proved to be dead—is in a certain way, as we said, a lover of fables, where the things worthy of admiration are deposited.

[[184] *On the many kinds of fables and on the true ones, and why they affect men differently, and what constellation makes men lovers of fables. Chapter 21.*

1. Cicero in the *Rhetoric to C. Herennius* defines a fable as that which is neither true nor plausible, and from these words we understand that some fables, such as comedies and tragedies, are not true, while others, as when a man is transformed into a lion or a wolf, are not plausible. And that comedies are called fables is attested by Terence when he says: “He made these fables in order to please the people.” In these and in tragedies there is not a lack of verisimilitude, but rather of truth, because fictitious things are told; and in the transformation of men into beasts and other similar things, although verisimilitude is lacking, they can contain an underlying truth, for Sacred history tells us that Lot’s wife was turned into a pillar of salt. So, according to Cicero and some other excellent men both in doctrine and ingenuity, things that truly happened are enclosed under the name of “fables,” and they receive this name because they lack verisimilitude.

2. The narrative [*narratio*] of an orator establishes neither truth nor verisimilitude; hence it is said that a narrative needs to be either true or plausible, yet in such a way that what is true is seen to be plausible, while it is enough for it to be plausible without being true. Credulity—that is, persuasion—is the daughter of verisimilitude and this is a way to understand the word “fable”: as something fabulous that happens to be true and not plausible, and likewise as something plausible which is untrue; lacking verisimilitude in the former, and truth in the latter, both can be said to be a “fable.” “Fable” refers also to what men say or chatter, [as in] Juvenal: “The untragic news [*noua... fabula*] passes round all the dinner parties.” And when Pliny states that there is a fable in all action, he understands that every action is divulged by rumors, as Suetonius does in his *Life of Augustus*: “There were also stories [*fabulis*] about a rather secret dinner he arranged;” consequently, fables are not completely untrue.

3. Sed ea fabula, vt supra diximus, cuius amici sunt philosophi, ex miris constat, et mira vnunquenque in sui cognitionem rapiunt, quod est sapientiae principium; horum nanque auiditate allecti, ad perscrutandas causas rerum se conuerterunt.¹³ Vnum tamen non est obliuioni tradendum, etiam fabulas quae videntur commentitiae in religione antiquorum vim sinceræ veritatis habere. Dicente Plinio decimo sexto *Naturalis historiae* smilacem¹⁴ “infaustam esse in sacris omnibus et coronis, quoniam sit lugubris virgine eius nominis per amorem iuuenis Croci mutata in hunc fruticem: id vulgus ignorans plerunque festa sua polluit, heredam¹⁵ existimando.”¹⁶ Huiusmodi autem fabularum, quae comentitiae sunt, amatores maxime videntur hi, in quorum genitura Luna dominatur cum Mercurio infortunato,¹⁷ vt mathematici afferunt.¹⁸ Sed illud Ciceronis in tertio *De natura deorum*, cum Zenonis, Cleanthis, Chrysippique philosophorum in reddenda ratione commentitiarum fabularum curam mo- |[187] lestam ac minime necessariam narret, expostulare videtur vt haec eadem tela in eum retorqueamus, cum haec Ciceronis cura de cura philosophorum minime sit necessaria.¹⁹ Nam in rebus omnibus, et maxime sacris, si velatarum rerum explicatio negligatur, plurima quae mystica sunt ridicula putabuntur. Et ne hac in re tempus teramus, satis erit hoc adduxisse quod in libro Geneseos est: “Et audiuit Adam vocem Dei deambulans ad auram post meridiem”²⁰ quod, si ita vt sonat intelligatur, esset profecto ridendum.²¹ Sed haec diuina ex sententia Thomae necesse est aliquo humanitatis radio vestiantur vt comprahendi possint,²² vnde maximam laudem Zeno, Cleanthes, et Chrysippus merentur, qui laborarunt vt in lucem venirent quae sub vestimento fabuloso latitarunt.²³

4. Fabula igitur cum multifariam accipiatur, inter medicos tamen in vna tantum significatione versatur. Prima enim quarti Auicenna ad somni conciliationem leuationes vocum cum fabulis faciendis narrat.²⁴ Et apud Suetonium in *Vita Augusti* legitur si interruptum somnum recuperare vt euenit non posset, lectoribus, aut fabulatoribus accersitis resumebat.²⁵ Fabulas ergo pro narrationibus siue fictis siue veris ponit, ac si dice- |[188] ret locutiones, narrationesue, aut historiarum, aut aliarum rerum hoc efficiunt. Hoc autem non est leuiter pertranseundum, quandoquidem problema Aristotelicum inquit, cur est quod ex fabulis alii resoluuntur in somnum, alii autem dormitantes excitantur.²⁶ Plurimi enim vt somnum fugiant, legere incipiunt, et alii vigilantes cum legere incipiunt dormitant, et vt de lectione, sic de auditione contingit. Nam in homiliis²⁷ saepe accidit, vt praedicantis oratio alios²⁸ sopiat, excitet alios, huius autem tam diuersi affectus audientium legentiumue habitudo varia causam praestat.

3. But the fable we mentioned above, that is, the one that philosophers love, consists of wonder, and wonders draw every single one of them into their knowledge, which is the principle of wisdom; for men, enticed by desire, become inclined to find the causes of things. It should not be forgotten that even the fables that seem capriciously forged in the religion of the ancients have the force of unvarnished truth. As Pliny comments in the sixteenth book of his *Natural History*: “It is unlucky to use smilax in any sacred rites or for wreaths, because it has a mournful association—a maiden of the same name as the plant was turned into this shrub because of her love for a youth named Crocus; this the common people ignore and usually pollute their festivals with it, because they think it is ivy.” It seems that those who take more pleasure in fables of this kind—which are inventions—are those in whose geniture the moon is ruled with an unfortunate Mercury, as astrologers attest. But when, in the third book of *On the Nature of the Gods*, Cicero refers to the attention of philosophers such as Zeno, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus in explaining these forged fables, he says it is annoying and wholly unnecessary; but this seems to require that we turn the same darts back on him, as his brooding on the philosophers’ pensiveness is equally pointless. Because in all matters, and especially in those that are sacred, if the explanation of veiled things is despised, most of them, which are mysterious, would be thought laughable. And, to avoid wasting more time on this, it will suffice to recall what is written in the book of *Genesis*: “And Adam heard the voice of the Lord walking in the garden in the evening.” This, understood the way it sounds, would be laughable. But these divine matters, according to Thomas Aquinas, need to be dressed in some glimmer of humanity in order to be apprehended, and therefore Zeno, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus deserve the utmost praise, as they worked to shed light on those things which were hidden under the guise of fable.

4. Although the term “fable” has multiple acceptations, among physicians it is understood univocally. In the first of the fourth of his *Canon*, Ibn Sina says that making fables aloud helps one go to sleep. And in Suetonius, in the *Life of Augustus*, we read that when he could not go back to sleep after awakening, as happened, he sent for readers and story-tellers. Fables, therefore, are understood as narrations either fictional or true, as if he would have said that speeches or stories about either historical events or other matters, produce [the desired effect]. And this issue is far from trivial, as Aristotle in one of his *Problems* enquires into the reason why there are people who fall asleep when they listen to fables, and why others are roused from drowsiness by the same. For this reason, there are many who start reading to avoid sleep, and others who, as they start to read in a wakeful state, doze off; and this applies both to reading and listening. With homilies it happens frequently that the preacher’s sermon lulls some to sleep and rouses others, and the disposition of the audience or readers is the reason for such a different response.

5. Alii enim sunt qui cerebrum pituita humoribusque crudis repletum habent, vel melancholicos ac frigidos, tam euaporationi quam inflationi obnoxios, eodem in loco tenent. Et tales viri sine stimulis cogitationum facile vigilant. In vigilia autem calor humanus foris versatur, et propter hanc causam, illos tam crudos tamque frigidos vapores mouere non potest, nimis enim ab his distat. Sed cum legere aut audire fabulas incipiunt motus in spiritibus et in calore ventriculorum cerebri necessario fiunt, horum autem motuum, causa est ipsa cogitatio.²⁹ Ex illo igitur et spirituum et caloris cerebri congeminato calo- [[189] re illius tam crudae tamque frigidae massae sint quaedam euaporatio, quam ob causam spiritus illi cerebri ventriculos obsidentes crassescunt, et crassitudo motum caloremque ipsorum impedit, ita vt iam nequeant ad exteriora diuertere, quae res vigiliam faceret, sed infrigidati intus remanent, et hoc dormitionis est causa. Huiusmodi igitur naturae viri, quorum cerebella talibus grauantur, reuocato ad interiora calore, quod somnum facit, ex lectione auditioneue fabularum resoluuntur in somnum. Sed in aliis qui diuerso se habent modo, e contrario propter diuersitatem naturae accidunt. Nam si auditor lectorue fabularum aut librorum in cerebro habuerit materiam biliosam acutam, euaporationi idoneam atque aptam, cito enim labitur, quam cogitatio mouet, statim pulso ad exteriora calore, vigilabit et dormitans excitabitur. Calor duplicatus in illis superioribus cruditate ac ineptitudine irretitus minime valens foras prosilire somniculosum fecit; et in his propter facilem agilemque materiam, concitatus calor exteriora petens, vigilem reddidit. Et hoc pacto pro diuersitate naturae auditio aut lectio diuersa operatur.

6. Praeterea haec varietas nascitur ex inaequalitate intellectuum. Nam qui hebeti ingenio [[190] crassaque Minerua vtuntur, cum quae leguntur aut narrantur non intelligunt, et acutissimi quoque cum etiam lecta aut audita non percipiunt cum hebetioribus concordantes in hoc duntaxat, quia et ipsi quoque non intelligunt, obdormiscunt, nisi essent aliqui tardi, et non obtusi ingenii. Nam de his alia ratio est, vt declarabimus. Causa autem huius dormitationis est, quoniam non intelligentes tristitia afficiuntur, et haec infrigidat, hic est quod calor extrinsecus, vt subueniat infrigidationi intrinsecae ad interiora decurrit, et huiusmodi dispositio somnum creat, ideo dormiendo melius concoquimus, calore ad interiora reuocato. Est etiam alia causa, nam in legentibus et audientibus fit duplex motus, animae scilicet et corporis. Motus siquidem animae est cogitatio, corporis vero motus est ex vaporibus et tenuibus humiditatibus per capitis portiones diffusis, quae mouentur cursitantibus spiritibus, cursitant autem in actu cogitationis. Cum lector aut auditor ingenii obtusi³⁰ est, non habet spiritus suos in motu, quoniam eorum mobilitas hominem solertis ingenii effecisset. Hoc autem accidit quia motae humiditates

5. There are others who have their brains full of phlegm, and thick or melancholic and cold humors, subject both to evaporation and inflammation. And such men easily keep awake without intellectual stimulus. During wakefulness human heat is lost, and precisely because of this, it cannot move vapors that are so thick and cold, because it is far from them. But, as soon as these men start reading or listening to fables, their spirits start to move, and they get the necessary heat in the ventricles of their brain; and the reason behind these movements is thinking itself. Thus, the double heat from the spirits and from the brain produces a certain evaporation of that thick and cold matter, and for this reason those spirits around the ventricles of the brain expand, and their expansion traps both their movement and their heat, in such a way that they cannot now leave—a situation that would cause wakefulness—and they remain inside within the cooled areas, and this causes somnolence. Therefore, men of such a nature, who have their cerebella burdened with such things, fall asleep because of reading or listening to fables, having regained inside their brain the heat that produces somnolence. But those with a different disposition—such is the diversity of nature—experience the contrary effect. For if one who listens to or reads fables or books has his brain filled with a keen, bilious substance, suitable and apt for evaporation, which flows quickly as it is moved by reasoning, when the heat is immediately expelled to the outer parts, he will stay awake, and the drowsy person will be roused. In the former case, the double heat trapped due to their [mental] constipation and to the impossibility of it leaving the body provokes drowsiness; and, in the latter, whose substances move rapidly and easily, as the heat is pushed to the exterior parts of the body they keep awake. And thus reading and listening act differently according to the diversity of nature.

6. Moreover, this diversity is [also] born from the inequality of intellects. Both those dull and ill-educated and those sharp-witted coincide at least in one thing: when they don't understand what is read or told to them, they slumber, even if they are not dull or obtuse. For this there is another cause, as we shall declare: as they don't understand, they feel sorrow, and sorrow cools them down. So extrinsic heat runs down to the inner parts of the body to relieve the intrinsic chilliness, and this disposition causes drowsiness; for this reason, when we sleep we digest better, because heat has retired to the inner parts of the body. There is yet another cause, for in those who read and listen there is a dual motion, that is, a movement of the soul and a movement of the body. The movement of the soul is thinking; that of the body stems from vapors and thin moistures spread throughout the regions of the head which are moved when spirits move, that is, in the act of thinking. When the reader or the listener is dull-witted, he has not his spirits in motion, as their mobility would have made him intelligent. This happens because the moistures become thicker as they move, as we said above, blocking and restraining the force of the spirits, hence follows inaction; but the inaction and immobility of the spirits is accompanied

redduntur crassiores, vt supra diximus, vim spirituum irretientes ac mollientes, vn-
|[191] de sequitur quies, quietem autem et immobilitatem spirituum aut morbus
comitalis aut attonitio aut mors aut somnus comitantur. Auditores vero et lectores
solertes, intelligentes, laetantur, l[a]etitia est causa vigiliae et excitationis, laetatur
nanque humana natura cum habere intelligit quae sibi conueniunt, conuenit enim
naturae humanae vigilatio, nam dormitio est quaedam mors, hinc illud poeticum:
“dulcis et alta quies placidaeque simillima morti.”³¹

7. Accedit etiam ad hoc quod in homine acutioris ingenii motus cogitationis
mouet spiritus, ac stimulat ita, vt acriter et saepe excitet et roborat, adeo vt a
vaporibus opprimi non possint, sicuti accidit in hebetibus et obtusis, in quibus³²
spiritus irretiuntur. Sed quoniam de tardo mentionem fecimus, necesse est aliquid
in medium adducamus. Continget aliquando vt lector auditorue non obtusi³³ aut
hebetis ingenii, sed tardi sit, vt legitur de Catone: nam tarditas ingenii sapientiae
adscribitur, non enim statim acquiescit his quae narrantur, et propterea non
apprehendit. Is igitur qui tardo est ingenio, cum audit aut legit non percipiens
contristatur, ita enim natura porrigit, omnes enim homines natura scire desiderant.
Cum igitur quae natura desiderat |[192] assequi non potest, doleat ac tristetur
necesse est sicuti omnibus in reb. desideratis et non habitis euenit. Tristatur
ergo et non dormitati, immo auiditas sciendi illam tristitiam in stimulos quosdam
vigiliarum exacuit. Nam appetitus perfectionis—scientia enim perficit—animam
magis ad vigiliam incitat, quia se bestiis non praestare, dedecus cum ignominia
maximum esse ducit. Timor autem dedecoris et infamiae acuit et inflammat, ita
vt omnis inertia secordiaeque excludatur, vt ad ea, quae dudum percipere nequiu-
it, capescenda promptior paratusque³⁴ sit. Et talia hominibus tardis grauissimas curas
ac sollicitudines³⁵ iniiciunt, qua non modo excitant, sed aduersos ac penitus alienos
a somno homines reddunt.

8. Tristitia enim dupliciter in nobis operatur, si de praeteritis est, soluit in
somnum, si autem de futuris erit, excitat. Timor enim ille qui tristitiam creat, propter
ignominiam aut infamiam futuram insomnes penitus reddens, vt solertius caueant
efficit. Timere autem honoris amissionem est actus prudentiae, et hoc pacto vt
diximus de tardis alia ratio fuit. Sed propter haec quae narrauimus fortassis nonnulli
acclamabunt saepenumero contigisse doctissimos acutissimosque viros ex lectione
aut auditione non |[193] lassitudine aliqua, nam hoc cuique contingere potest, vt
defatigatus dormiat; sed eorum natura fuisse in somnum resolutos, quod verum
esse fatemur. Sed hoc in sapientibus³⁶ et acutis duobus modis potest contingere: vel
quia iam ad finem talem deuentum est, vt reliqua ex se pateant, et hoc modo calor
ad interiora tendens, illos in somnum resoluit aut quia docti viri ingenium eiusmodi

by either epilepsy, stupor, death, or sleep. On the other hand, bright and intelligent readers and listeners rejoice, and joy is a cause of wakefulness and arousal, because human nature takes joy when it understands that it possesses the things that are good for it, and wakefulness is good for human nature, because sleep is a sort of death, hence the verse: “Deep and delightful stillness, resembling the stillness of dead men.”

7. To this it must be added that, in a more sharp-witted man, the movement of thinking puts his spirits in motion, and stimulates the spirits in such a way that they are sharply and frequently excited and invigorated so they cannot be subjugated by the vapors, as happens in the dull and slow-witted, whose spirits remain trapped. But, because we have mentioned the slow-witted, it is necessary to make an insertion here. It will happen at some time or other that the reader or hearer will be, not obtuse or dull, but slow, as we read about Cato, because slowness of wit is ascribed to wisdom, since as wisdom does not immediately acquiesce in what it is told, and therefore does not grasp it. Thus, this man who is slow of wit, not understanding as he hears or reads, is saddened—nature is present to such an extent, that all men by nature desire to know. And when nature cannot achieve what she desires, perforce she suffers and becomes sad, as happens to all men when they desire something and don’t attain it. She becomes sad and incapable of sleep, and the desire to know sharpens that sorrow in the stimulus of wakefulness. Therefore, the appetite for perfection—as science makes men perfect—entices the soul to stay awake, because not to surpass the beasts is a great dishonor and shame for her. And the fear of dishonor and disgrace has a sharpening and inflaming effect, so that all unskillfulness and dullness are excluded, with the aim that she will be faster and ready to understand that which shortly before she was unable to learn. And such things cast on the slow-witted the most burdensome worries and anxieties, which not only rouses them, but makes men adverse and wholly alien to sleep.

8. Sorrow, therefore, operates on us in two different ways. If it stems from past things, it moves us to sleep; if its origin relies on future affairs, we will be excited into wakefulness. Because that fear that produces sorrow, by rendering them sleepless on account of future ignominy or infamy, causes them to be diligently on their guard. And to fear a loss of honor is an act of prudence, and in this regard, as we have already said, the slow-witted have a different condition. But, with regard to the things said, perhaps some will claim that the most educated and sharp-witted men have fallen asleep reading or hearing [fables], not from a certain weariness—for it is possible for anyone to sleep from exhaustion—but that their nature has put them to sleep, which we confess to be true. But this can happen to the wise and sharp-witted in two different ways. Either because they have arrived at such an end-point that the rest of the issues [under consideration] are understandable by themselves, and in this case heat moves to their inner parts and leads them to sleep, or because the temperament

est, vt etiam tota rei materia intellecta quosdam nodos secum iterum atque iterum reuoluendo, omniaque solertissime contemplando defatigatum multos ex spiritibus consumpsit. Acerrima enim mentis agitatio et rerum arduarum discursus spiritum resoluit, resolutionem cuius quies cum somno sequitur, natura enim defatigata quietem quaerit vt eos quos amisit spiritus recuperet instaurationemque faciat, dormitio enim quieta spirituum creatrix materque est.

9. In his tamen omnibus ante narratis et somnus et vigilia possunt contingere ex modis seruatis in lectione aut auditione fabularum, nam si semper eadem in fabulis, eodemque tenore repetantur, nulli dubium est, vel tedium vnde dormitatio, vel risio ex qua vigilia in medium prosiliat necesse esse. Horatius: “Male si mandata loqueris,/ aut dormitabo aut ridebo.”³⁷ Nam [[194] in tali pronunciatione, est quaedam quies, quae somnum imitatur; nisi agitatio irrisionis excutiat, varietas enim fabularum et in ipsa pronunciatione et materiae diuersitate nec non in inflexione vocum et harmoniae aut soporandi aut excitandi, vis est quae enim ad risum aut misericordiam aut ad iram inseruntur, animum in diuersa distrahunt. Ita vt affectibus concitatis audiens aut lectitans necessario vigelet, nisi diurnitas laboris auida quietis, nimia resolutione spirituum resoluatur in somnum, sed in audiente pro diuersitate naturae somnus aut vigilia nascitur, cum lectitans carminis labore, et vocum difficultate vigelet tantum, nisi langore vincatur.³⁸ Ex his igitur nouimus, lectione aut auditione fabularum pro habitudinis diuersitate in hominibus diuersa contingere, de his hactenus.

10. Nunc ad illa me conuertam quae poetae narrarunt fabulae siquidem poetarum aliquando meram ac nudam historiam sine figmento referunt, vt de Ceneo³⁹ et Iphide⁴⁰ mutatis Ouidius loquitur. Plerunque naturalia inserunt, vbi veritas simplex apponitur, vt idem XV. *Metamorphoseos*⁴¹:

Clitorio⁴² quicumque sitim de fonte leuauit,
Vina fugit gaudetque meris abstemius vndis,

et de tineis agrestibus et aliis huiusmodi, vt ipse et Vir- [[195]gilius in *Georgicis* factitarunt, quaedam vero sub velamento tractantur, quae historiae faciem habentia, aliud sub veste occulunt. Et inter caetera illud Martis et Veneris,⁴³ indicio Solis in adulterio retibus Vulcani deprehensorum abstrusam mathesim continet, fuerunt nanque ab omnibus conspecti vt “haec fuit in toto notissima fabula coelo indicat.”⁴⁴ Haec igitur fabula ex intimis matheseos penetralibus originem trahit. Nam adulterum, qui publica poena plectitur, facit Martis Venerisque coniunctio in Tauro,⁴⁵ et haec est illa ficta concatenatio, ex Tauro Venus in Leonem mittit antiscium,⁴⁶ Leo est Solis domicilium et signum igneum, et hinc Solis indicium et opera Vulcani, quae retia

of a wise man is such that even if he fully understands the issue under consideration, going over it again and again raises some knotty points, and so, considering everything with utmost skill, he becomes exhausted due to the consumption of many of his spirits. Therefore, the keenest agitation of the mind and the running to and fro over exhausting matters release the spirit, and quietness with sleep follows its release, as nature when it is exhausted seeks quietness so that the lost spirits may be recovered and renewed, for a peaceful sleep is the creator and mother of spirits.

9. Nonetheless in all these things we previously said, not only sleep but also wakefulness can have a place in the patterns [of speech] observed in reading or listening to fables. For if one always repeats the same things in fables, and with the same tone, they undoubtedly would lead either to tedium, and consequently to sleep; or to laughter, and therefore to wakefulness. Horace says: “If your speeches are out of harmony with your feelings, I shall either fall asleep or burst out laughing.” Because in such declamation there is some quietness that imitates sleep; unless the agitation of laughter casts him out, or the diversity of fables and their varied delivery and topics, along with vocal inflection and harmony move him to sleep or to excitement, it is necessary that they move him to laughter, compassion or anger, and draw the soul in different directions. And, once the listener’s or reader’s affections have been aroused, he will necessarily be awake, unless a lengthy work-day, eager for quietness, does not lead to sleep for the release of the spirits. But drowsiness or wakefulness in the listener arises from a difference in natures; but the reader, due to the fatigue in his delivery and the difficulty of the speeches, would keep awake only if he had not been defeated by fatigue. From this we know that reading or listening to a fable has different effects on men according to the differences in their dispositions—enough about this.

10. Now I will turn my attention to those things told by the poets, since indeed poetic fables do sometimes recount mere, bare history without fiction, as Ovid does with the transformations of Ceneus and Iphide. Most of the time they introduce natural things not far removed from where the simple truth lies, as in Book 15 of the *Metamorphoses*:

Whoever slakes his thirst from Clitor’s spring,
shuns the wine-cup and abstemiously enjoys pure water only,

and on the silkworms and on other similar things, as he himself and Virgil in the *Georgics* did. Some are treated in veiled fashion; having the appearance of history, they hide something different under their garment. And among [many] others is that of Mars and Venus, who were caught in adultery by Vulcan thanks to the disclosure of the Sun, trapped in a net and displayed to everybody, so that “the tale [*fabula*] was long most noted in the courts of Heaven.” This fable finds its origin in the innermost secrets of the astrologers [*matheseos*]. For adultery, which is punished publicly, is represented by the conjunction of Mars and Venus in Taurus, and this is the fictitious sequence: from Taurus, Venus sent the antiscium to the Lion, the Lion is the home

fecerunt. Vulcanus enim ignem significat, vnde coitus Martis et Veneris in Tauro, vbi Luna exaltatur, amantium complexum effecit, quem poetae finxerunt. Laqueus vero et retia sunt Veneris antiscia in signum igneum iacta, et huius adulterii index Sol; nam Leo calidus antiscio Veneris inflammatus, simile enim simili additum facit furere, hoc adulterium publicauit. Domus enim Solis Leo qui cum de trigono igneo⁴⁷ sit Vulcanum retia machinantem sub figmento continet, et hoc pacto totius mali causa in Solem reiicitur, a domici- |[195] lio enim eius deprehensio et publicatio adulterii manauerunt.⁴⁸

11. Sed de Argo qui ob singularem prudentiam centum oculos habuisse traditur, fabula manifestam habet historiam: victus enim rex Argus, et occisus est a rege Mercurio qui Trismegistus hoc est ter maximus dictus est, fuit enim summus philosophus, summusque sacerdos, et denique rex summos. Is enim Aegyptiorum ordo erat, vt ex philosophis sacerdotes, et ex sacerdotibus reges eligerent, et in his omnibus Trismegistus obtinuit⁴⁹ principatum, et hinc ter maximus, vt Lactantii verbo vtamur.⁵⁰ Dictus est sopitum dulcedine harmoniae fabula refert, vt Trismegisti Mercurii vaframentis delinitum prius, postea occisum Argum ostendat.

12. Sed antiquitas fabulamentis plurimum oblectata est. Sunt enim res poetice vt quaedam pictura, teste Flacco:

Vt pictura poesis erit...⁵¹

et

... Pictoribus atque poetis
quidlibet audendi semper fuit aequa potestas.⁵²

In poemate ergo fictio vt pictura potestatem habet, pictura autem teste philosopho in *Politicis*, inuenta est pro rudioribus.⁵³ In poemate sunt et sensa abstrusa et facies picta; pictura rudibus excogitata est. Nam in praelio multa hominum milia vario caedis genere vir sapiens ex se coniectat, qui rudis est nisi haec |[197] picta videat, non intelligit. Vnde pictores et ruentes equos et calcatos perfossosque homines, et fugientes alios, alios vero insequentes cum pingunt, rudibus satisfaciunt, qui haec coniectare nequiuierant. Sed ex rebus fictis et pictis sensa elicere, hoc es sapientis opus, et ob hanc causam philosophos fabularum amatores testimonio Aristotelis praedicauimus, et hoc modo ars poetica et doctis et indoctis perutilis est.

of the Sun and a fire sign, and hence is the indication of the Sun and the works of Vulcan which made the net. Vulcan means fire, from which the coitus of Mars and Venus in Taurus, when the Moon is in the ascendant, causes the embrace of lovers, as the poets write. The trap and the nets are Venus's antiscia cast into the fire sign, and the Sun is the indicator of this adultery, because the warm Lion, inflamed by Venus's antiscium—for like added to like leads to rage—, made this adultery public. For the Sun's house [i.e., its zodiacal sign] is Leo which, being from the fire trigon, figuratively contains the nets of the skillful Vulcan; and thus the reason for such great mischief is founded in the Sun, because the discovery [of the lovers] and the publication of their adultery flowed from his house.

11. But also concerning Argos, of whom it is said that he had a hundred eyes on account of his singular prudence, the fable contains a true history, because Argos was a king defeated and killed by the king Mercury, who was called Trismegistus, i.e., 'thrice maximus,' because he was the highest philosopher, the highest priest, and finally the highest king. And such was the law of the Egyptians, which stated that priests were selected from among the philosophers, and kings from among the priests, and Mercury was the first of each of these groups, and hence called 'ter maximus,' quoting the words of Lactantius. The fable recounts that he was stupefied by the sweetness of harmony, to show that Argos was first tricked by Mercury Trismegistus's stratagem, and slain thereafter.

12. But Antiquity found much entertainment in these fables, because poetic matters are in a way a picture, as Flaccus attests:

A poem is like a picture...

and

... painters and poets
have always had an equal right in hazarding anything.

Therefore, in a poem fiction has power, as painting does; and painting, as the Philosopher states in the *Politics*, was invented for the less cultivated. In a poem, not only are the ideas concealed, but also the façade is painted; painting is crafted for the uncultivated. Therefore, a wise man of his own accord infers that in a battle many thousands of men suffered different sorts of death; he who is short-sighted does not understand it unless he sees it painted. Hence painters satisfy the uncultivated—incapable as they are of inferring it by themselves—when they paint horses falling violently, and men trampled and pierced, and others fleeing, and others chasing them. But to tease out the meaning of fictions and pictures is the mission of the wise man; and for this reason we mentioned before that philosophers are lovers of fables, citing the authority of Aristotle, and thus poetics is very useful to both the learned and the unlearned.

¹ The following edition is based upon the *editio princeps* of the Latin text: G. Marzio (1548), *De doctrina promiscua liber varia multiplicique eruditione refertus ac nunc primum in lucem editus*, ed. Lorenzo Torrentino, Florentiae: apud Laurentium Torrentinum. The *princeps* has been compared with the only extant manuscript (Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 52. 18) and the relevant variations have been added in notes.

² The attribution of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* to Cicero was common during the middle ages and the Italian *Quattrocento*.

³ Plut. 52. 18: verisimilis.

⁴ *Rhetorica ad Herennium* I. VIII. 13.

⁵ Plut. 52. 18: Comediarum.

⁶ Plut. 52. 18: placerent.

⁷ Terence, *Andria*, *Proem.*, 3: “Populo ut placerent, quas fecisset fabulas.”

⁸ Plut. 52. 18: magnificat.

⁹ Plut. 52. 18: accoemptio.

¹⁰ Apart from the idea of rhetoric or forensic practice as fable, the tradition of mythological fables as a means of persuasion also had a long tradition, for instance in Plato, *Leges* 886a–890e; Cicero, *De divinatione* I. LVII. 105; and nn. 21 and 22 below. Criticisms against ancient legislators for using fables of this sort became a commonplace during the *Quattrocento* and the *Cinquecento*.

¹¹ Juvenal, *Satires* I, 145: “It nova nec tristis per cunctas fabula cenas.”

¹² Suetonius, *Augustus* LXX. 1.

¹³ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* *a* 2 982b11–21.

¹⁴ “Similacem” both in the *princeps* and in Plut. 52. 18.

¹⁵ Plut. 52. 18: hederam.

¹⁶ Pliny, *Nat. hist* XVI. LXIII, 154–155.

¹⁷ Plut. 52. 18: in fortunato.

¹⁸ Iulius Firmicus Maternus, *Matheseos libri octo* IV. IX. 8: “The waxing or full Moon moving away from Saturn into aspect to Mercury makes the natives obscure, secluded, silent, students of secret and illegal writings, or involved in celestial religions, or experienced in interpretation of the stars. They will be managers of affairs, public teachers of the liberal arts, orators of outstanding eloquence, or well known physicians” (*A Saturno defluens Luna Mercurii se stellae coniunxerit et sit crescens vel plena luminibus, facit obscuros et absconsos et tacitos, secretarum et illicitarum litterarum scios aut caelestibus religionibus occupatos aut peritis computationibus interpretantes siderum cursus. Facit etiam negotiationibus praepositos et liberalium artium publicos magistros, facit oratores eloquentiae splendore fulgentes aut medicos cunctorum testimoniis adornatos*), tr. Jean Rhys, p. 124, eds. Kroll and Skutsch, t. I, p. 210–11; see also IV. VII. 1 and IV. XIX. 29,

¹⁹ Cicero, *De natura Deorum* III. II; III. VII. 15–19.

²⁰ *Gen.* 3: 8.

²¹ Compare Pomponazzi, *De incantationibus* [1520] X. 68, ll. 331–342: “Moreover, even in the Ancient Law, many things are told that cannot really be understood as they appear—for example, when it is said that God spoke and that his face was carried on the waters. These are, in fact, mystical meanings, and said precisely for the ignorant people, who cannot understand incorporeal things. The language of the Laws, as Averroes states in his *Poetics*, is similar to the language of the poets, as poets imagine fables that, understood literally, are impossible; however, they contain a profound truth, as Plato and Aristotle relate. Poets make up these

fables precisely to guide us towards the truth and for the instruction of the uncultivated people. [To teach them] that it is necessary to be good and to avoid evil, we likewise induce children to good and keep them away from evil, that is, with the hope of a reward and the fear of punishment. And we must lead ordinary people to the knowledge of incorporeal things through these bodily images, as we lead the children from a softer food to a stronger one” (*Nam in Veteri Lege multa feruntur quae re vera non possunt intelligi ut littera sonat, ut cum dicitur Deum esse allocutum et eius faciem ferri super aquas; sed sunt sensus mystici et dicti propter ignavum vulgus, quod incorporalia capere non potest. Sermo enim Legum, ut inquit Averroes in sua Poesi, est similis sermoni poetarum: nam, quamquam poetae fingunt fabulas quae, ut verba sonant, non sunt possibilis, intus tamen continent veritatem, ut multoties Plato et Aristoteles referunt. Nam illa fingunt ut in veritatem veniamus et rude vulgus instruamus, quod inducere oportet ad bonum et a malo retrahere ut pueri inducuntur et retrahuntur, scilicet spe praemii et timore poenae, et per haec corporalia ducere in cognitionem incorporalium, veluti de cibo teneriore in cibum solidiorem ducimus infantes*), eds. Perrone Compagni and Regnicoli, p. 110, my translation.

²² Aquinas, *Summa Theol.* I, q. 84, art. 5; Id., *Super I. Tim.*, ch. 1, lectio 2: “Fabula enim secundum philosophum est composita ex miris, et fuerunt in principio inventae ut dicit philosophus in poetria, quia intentio hominum erat ut inducerent ad acquirendum virtutes, et vitandum vitia. Simples autem melius inducuntur repraesentationibus quam rationibus. Unde in miro bene repraesentato videtur delectatio, quia ratio delectatur in collatione. Et sicut repraesentatio in factis est delectabilis, ita repraesentatio in verbis: et hoc est fabula, scilicet dictum aliquod repraesentans, et repraesentando movens ad aliquid. Antiqui enim habebant aliquas fabulas accommodatas aliquibus veris, qui veritatem occultabant in fabulis. Duo ergo sunt in fabula, quod scilicet continet verum sensum, et repraesentet aliquid utile. Item quod conveniat illi veritati. Si ergo proponatur fabula, quae non potest repraesentare aliquam veritatem, est inanis; sed quae non proprie repraesentat, est inepta, sicut fabulae de Thalmuth;” Id., *Super Epistolam B. Pauli ad Titum lectura*, ch. 1, lect. 4; Id., *In libros Aristotelis De caelo et mundo expositio* I, lect. 22, nn. 7–8; *ibid.*, II, lect. I, n. 8: “Et primo excludit errores; secundo concludit veritatem intentam, ibi: si itaque quemadmodum et cetera. Circa primum excludit tres opiniones. Quarum prima est fabularis. Et dicit quod, quia motus caeli non est laboriosus nec contra naturam, non est nec leviter suspicandum quod se habeat sempiternitas caeli et motus eius secundum antiquam fabulam Homeri et aliorum poetarum, qui dicebant quod caelum, ad hoc quod conservetur in suo situ, indiget quodam gigante, quem vocabant Atlantem, stantem super duas columnas et sustentantem humeris caelum. Illi enim qui istum sermonem fabularem composuerunt, videntur eandem opinionem habuisse de corporibus caelestibus, quam habuerunt quidam posteriores, scilicet ut essent gravia et terrea, ut sic indigeret sursum contra suam naturam detineri per aliquam virtutem animatam, vel alicuius rei viventis, puta Dei vel cuiuscumque substantiae separatae. Et si quidem hoc dicant caelo esse necessarium propter hoc quod caelum habeat gravitatem, fabula est omnino reprobanda: si autem intelligant quod caelum habeat naturam talis situs et motus, et tamen natura est ei ab alio causante et conservante, sic fabula aliquid divinum continet;” Id., *Scriptum super Sententiis* quaest. I, *Prooem.*; Id., *Sententia super Meteora* II, ch. 1; Id., *Sententia libri Metaphysicae* I, lect. 4, nn. 15–16; *ibid.*, II, lect. 5, n. 3; *ibid.*, III, lect. 11, nn. 3–4; *ibid.*, XII, lect. 10, n. 31: “... Reliqua vero introducta sunt fabulose ad persuasionem multitudinis, quae non potest capere intelligibilia, et secundum quod fuit optimum ad leges ferendas, et ad utilitatem conversationis humanae, ut ex huiusmodi

adinventis persuaderetur multitudini, ut intenderent virtuosos actibus et a vitiis declinarent ...;” etc.; Nicolaus of Gorran, *In VII epistolas canonicas expositio*, pars III, ch. 1.

²³ Cicero, *De natura Deorum* II. XXIV. 63.

²⁴ Ibn Sinna, *Liber Canonis. Expositio prima in fen quarti* II. XVIII. *De profunditate somni, quae accidit eis*: “Oportet ut remoueat a profunditate somni cum fabulis, et his similibus per voces. Et ligentur membra eorum inferiora ligatione dolorosa, postquam non fuerit quod prohibeat. Et supponatur collyrium subtile si natura fuerit restricta, et in hora quietis, aut in hora tempois in assidua et inseparabili et ventosetur quod est inter ambas spatulas et spondyles.”

²⁵ Suetonius, *Augustus* LXXVIII. 2.

²⁶ Aristotle, *Problemata* XVIII. 1. 916b1–19. See also Albertus Magnus, *De somno et vigilia* III; treat. 2; chap. 8, ed Borgnet, pp. 205–206.

²⁷ Plut. 52. 18: omeliis.

²⁸ Plut. 52. 18: alios alios.

²⁹ Marzio’s theory of spirits is further developed in two chapters of *De doctrina promiscua* (XIV and XXI; Florentiae: apud Laurentium Torrentinum, 1548, pp. 109–135, esp. 120–121, and 197–211). His position on the topic is fundamentally based on Galen and Ibn Sinna’s *Liber Canonis*. According to Lynn Thorndike—*A History of Magic and Experimental Science. III–IV. Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (New York, Morningside Heights: Columbia University Press, 1934), p. 404—, his exposition of the relation between planets and metals, diseases, and spirits stems from Peter of Abano’s *Conciliator*. The reader will find useful information on Ficino’s use of the theory of the spirits in Clark and Kaske’s introduction to Marsilio Ficino’s *De vita libri tres*: Tempe, AZ: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies—The Renaissance Society of America, 1998, pp. 43–44.

³⁰ Plut. 52. 18: optusi.

³¹ Virgil, *Aen.* VI, 522.

³² The *princeps* reads “in quibus,” most certainly due to a printer’s error. Plut. 52. 18 reads “in quibus.”

³³ Plut. 52. 18: optusi.

³⁴ Plut. 52. 18: paratiorque.

³⁵ Plut. 52. 18: sollicitudines.

³⁶ Plut. 52. 18: insipientibus.

³⁷ Horace, *Ad Pisones* 104–105.

³⁸ Plut. 52. 18: iuncatur.

³⁹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* XII, 459–532.

⁴⁰ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* IX, 666ff.

⁴¹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* XV, 322–333.

⁴² The *princeps* reads “Sitonio,” as does Plut. 52. 18.

⁴³ The allegorical interpretation of the adultery of Mars and Venus had an important and long tradition both in Greek and in the Latin West, as for instance in Cornutus, *Theologiae Graecae Compendium* 19. 34; Ps-Plutarch’s *De vita et poesi Homeri*, 101; Proclus, *In Platonis Rempublicam Comentariis* diss. V. XV. K141–K143—*Proclus the Successor on Poetics and the Homeric Poems*, eds. Kroll and Lamberton, trans. Lamberton (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), pp. 192–199—; id., *In Platonis Timaeum Commentaria* III. 27–28, ed. and trans. D. Baltzly (Cambridge—New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006, III. 1), pp. 73–74; Albertus Magnus, *Politica*

II. 7, ed. Borgnet, p. 163; Ficino, *Epistulae* III. 10. *Venus subdues Mars, and Jupiter Saturn* (*Venus Martem, Iupiter Saturnum domat*), tr. members of the Language Department of the School of Economic Science (London: Shephard-Walwyn, 1978), pp. 15–16; id. *Il libro dell'amore* V. VIII, ed. Niccoli (Firenze: Olschki, 1987), pp. 96–97; etc. Heraclitus the Grammarian's *Allegories* and his pseudo-alchemical interpretation of the myth (69) were printed for the first time by Aldus Manutius in 1505: *Habentur hoc uolumine haec, uidelicet: Vita, & Fabulae Aesopbi cum interpretatione Latina...* [Venetiis]: [apud Aldum], [mense Octobri 1505], sigs. h5r–i6v, wrongly attributed to Heraclides Ponticus. The work had a relatively extensive circulation in manuscript before that date, see Gombrich's *Symbolic Images. Studies in the Art of the Renaissance. II*, Oxford—New York: Phaidon Press, 1978, pp. 67–69 and 82–84. However, Marzio's astrological interpretation of the myth seems to be original.

⁴⁴ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* IV, 189.

⁴⁵ Iulius Firmicus Maternus, *Matheseos libri octo* VI. XXXI. 60–61: “If Venus is in those degrees of Taurus in which the Pleiades are located, and Mercury and Mars are either in conjunction with the full Moon or in square aspect to her, the native will be captured by bandits and killed, struck by a sword. If Venus is found in Taurus, on the ascendant in square aspect to the full moon on the MC, this indicates the same as above” (*Si <Venus in Tauro fuerit> constituta, et eas Tauri partes teneat, in quibus sunt Pleiades positae, et sit Luna plena luminibus, et Mercurius et Mars aut cum ea sint aequata partium societate coniuncti, aut de quadrato latere superiores effecti minaci eam radiatione respiciant, qui sic eos habuerit a latronibus captus peribit, sed minacis gladii mucrone percussus. Sed <et> si Venus in Tauro cum horoscopo fuerit inventa, et Lunam in MC. constitutam plenam luminibus quadrata radiatione percutiat, hoc idem quod diximus simili ratione perficiet*), tr. Jean Rhys, p. 216, eds. Kroll and Skutsch, t. II, pp. 164–165.

⁴⁶ *Antiscium/a*, also *antiscion*, is an astrological term that refers to the opposite degrees of the zodiac. See Iulius Firmicus Maternus, *Matheseos libri octo* II. XXIX. Georgius Trapezuntius wrote an opuscle on the topic—*De brevis antiscii tractatus* [1454–1456, princeps 1524]—accompanied by his own horoscope and a brief autobiography, see Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science. III–IV. Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (New York, Morningside Heights: Columbia University Press, 1934), pp. 395–396, and *Collectanea Trapezuntiana. Texts, Documents, and Bibliographies of George of Trebizond*, ed. John Monfasani, (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies in conjunction with The Renaissance Society of America, 1984), pp. 695–697. Giovanni Pontano also devoted an extensive chapter to *antiscicia* ([20.] *De antisciiis et gradibus sibi respondentibus et signis se videntibus*) in his *De rebus coelestibus* [1475/1495, thoroughly rewritten]: *Ioannis Ioviani Pontani Opera omnia soluta oratione composita* (Venetiis: in Aedibus Aldi et Andreae Soceri), 1518–1519, III (1519), sigs. 0008v–ppp2v.

⁴⁷ There are four elemental trigons or triplicities, one each for fire—i.e., Aries, Leo, and Sagittarius—, air, earth, and water respectively. They are called trigons because each sign of the triplicity is 120° away from the next sign of that triplicity, and all three together make a triangle. These are also related to the so-called planetary “aspects,” the significant angular relationships between the planets, as Ptolemy discusses in the *Tetrabiblos* I. XVIII [XIX]. See different and complementary approaches in Manilius, *Astronomicon* II, 273–286, and Iulius Firmicus Maternus, *Matheseos libri octo* VI. III–VIII.

⁴⁸ Claudius Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos* III. XV. 11: “And the rising and morning positions of both Mars and Venus have a contributory effect, to make them more virile and notorious” (Ἀρεωὺς

καὶ τοῦ τῆς Ἀφροδίτης πρὸς τε τὸ ἐπανδρότερον καὶ εὐδιαβοντότερον, οἱ δὲ δυτικοὶ καὶ ἑσπέριοι πρὸς τε τὸ θηλυκώτερον καὶ τὸ κατασταλτικώτερον), ed. and trans. Robbins, pp. 370–371.

⁴⁹ Plut. 52. 18: optinuit.

⁵⁰ Together with Lactantius—*Div. Inst.* I. 7—, the other main classical source for the legend can be found in Cicero, *De natura Deorum* III. XXII. 56; Ovid—*Metamorphoses* I, 666ff.—lacks the identification between Mercury and Hermes Trismegistos. Ficino collected the identification for his *argumentum* before the *Pimander*—F.A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964, p. 116—as Pico della Mirandola did in one of the gatherings at the *Academia Marciana* and Petrus Crinitus recorded in *De honesta disciplina* (III. 2. *Disputatio habita inter Hieronymus Savonarolam et Picum Mirandulanum, de philosophia veterum cum Christiana Academia. Et quid item vetustissimi de ipso Deo senserit, idest Moses, Mercurius, Zoroastres et Pythagoras*). The chapter was edited by Eugenio Garin in G. Pico della Mirandola, *De hominis dignitate, Heptaplus, De ente et uno e scritti vari*, Firenze: Vallecchi, 1942, pp. 79–81 (the passage in pp. 80–81) and commented by D.P. Walker, *The Ancient Theology. Studies in Christian Platonism from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1972, pp. 48ff.

⁵¹ Horace, *Ad Pisones* 361.

⁵² Horace, *Ad Pisones* 9–10.

⁵³ Aristotle, *Politics* VIII. V, 1340a25–40. See also *Nic. Ethics* 1181b and *Parva naturalia. De Memoria et Reminiscentia* 450b20ff.