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THE GROTESQUE 'WORLD BEYOND'
FROM BOCCACCIO TO CURIONE. NOTES ON THE
PARODIC VISION BETWEEN THE MIDDLE AGES AND
THE RENAISSANCE

If it is legitimate to talk about the presence of the Middle Ages in the Renaissance in the sense of the continuity of the ecstatic and visionary literary tradition, one tied to the mysticism of the old and new religious orders (see Ossola), it should be no less legitimate to talk about the presence of the Renaissance in the Middle Ages, that is, of a derisive and parodic literary current that flourishes, from Boccaccio onwards, on the margins of the 'high' tradition of devotion. The *Pasquillus extaticus* (*Pasquillus in Ecstasy*) (c. 1540) by Celio Secondo Curione, masterpiece of a heretical literature of exile that is still an integral part of Italian Cinquecento culture, has behind it a lively Quattrocento production.

Giovanni Boccaccio is the father of Renaissance irony. Feeling compelled to compare himself to the model provided by Dante, the author of the *Decameron* translated the objectivity of Dante's divine vision into terms that are purely subjective and readily intelligible.¹ He confined the terribleness of vision, as a revelation of the eschatological future, to a personal existential level. Boccaccio, the man who loved profane literature too much, feared being castigated in Hell, as he himself had confessed to Petrarch.² The dream of Saint Jerome, who was chastised for being too Ciceronian and not sufficiently Christian, functioned for the generation of Petrarch and Boccaccio — the latter was at the time rediscovering the Patristic writers — as a powerful *exemplum*.

It was Lorenzo Valla, a layman proud of his political and Christian militancy, who succeeded, in the preface to the fourth book of his *Elegantiae* (Elegance of the Latin Language), in distancing this spectre.³ Boccaccio had jokingly derided so-called visions, and Valla followed his example. He did not do this as a pastime; rather, he sought to carry on, in the very heart of both pagan and Christian Rome — a few metres, in fact,

from the Pantheon —, an anti-monastic and anti-theological polemic. And now that the historical context no longer called for the vehement tones used in the *De professione religiosorum* (*On the Profession of the Religious*) or the *Declamatio* (*Declamation*) against the false donation of Constantine (it was after the peace of Terracina and Valla's Neapolitan trial of 1444), he preferred the more subtle weapons of irony and insinuation. In the *Encomium Sancti Thomae Aquinatis* (*In Praise of St. Thomas Aquinas*) Valla sets a parodic dream vision against the revelatory one of the Dominicans. In the latter, conceived as a celebration of the Order, Saint Thomas is celebrated in heaven as the most acute interpreter of the Scriptures.⁴ He is recognized as the fifth Father of the Church and, although this appears on the surface to be a glorification of Thomas, it serves in fact to emphasize the inferiority of his theological philosophy compared to the rhetorical and philological theology of the ancient Doctors.⁵ This singular eulogy acts as a counterpoint to Valla's other attempt in the field of sacred oratory, a text with a very different tone: Book 3 of *De vero bono* (*On the True Good*). Here the Roman humanist writer confers on his version of the Celestial Jerusalem, with its flying angels and its victory over the devils, a voluptuous corpulence.⁶ The Hell that had frightened Boccaccio no longer interests Valla. Among people of a high social and cultural level, such as the interlocutors typical of Ciceronian dialogue (see Marsh), one does not lower oneself to the level of such *terrimenta* (frightening sights).⁷ As Erasmus will state later on, the Christian tradition is to be interpreted *civiliter* (in a more civilized manner).⁸ When, in 1434, Valla sent his exemplary sermon-vision to Pope Eugene IV, he hoped to see this piece of Christian oratory officially recognized. In 1457, with his eulogy to Saint Thomas, he established the limits of his humanist adhesion to the Papacy, as set out in his academic prologue (*Oratio in principio sui studii*), and this did not imply substantial concessions to the dominant theological forms. We thus find reproduced in him that dualism between parodic and serious treatments of visionary literary forms, a dualism that was present in Boccaccio. This is proof of the vitality of this literary model: it was one that could be used in very different historical and stylistic contexts.

In the meantime, the diffusion of Platonism, starting with the tradition established through Leonardo Bruni's translations, put back into circulation an elitist eschatology distinct from the more popular Christian one, and this was the moving force behind a visionary literature *sui generis*. The first example of such a literature is an *Intercoenale* (Dinner Piece) by Leon Battista Alberti, entitled *Fatum et fortuna* (*Fate and Fortune*). In this text a philosopher has an eschatological dream in which the funda-

mental structure of human life is revealed to him in allegorical form. Not unlike Boethius, the philosopher meditates on the problems of fate and destiny. A shade similar to Boethius's Philosophy appears to him and shows him a line of innumerable souls. These descend from a mountain and immerse themselves in a river; we learn that they are divine fires on their way to acquire bodies from the River of Life. They will fight to save themselves from the pointed rocks of iniquity and envy, and will make their choices from among the kinds of lives outlined by Plato. Seeing that the man who governs the ship of state risks far too many dangers, Alberti favours instead the contemplative life. For the architect Alberti, the contemplative ideal has no transcendent dimension; it is contained in the invention and/or utilitarian improvement and perfection of the *bonae artes*. Using Plato and Origen as prudently disguised sources,⁹ Alberti delineates an eschatology that is undoubtedly serious. It is translated into a philosophical 'vision,' one that is completely divorced from the dichotomy of hell and paradise still present in Boccaccio and in Valla. The author of the *Intercoenales* (*Dinner Pieces*), however, is not blind to the parodic possibilities inherent in the theme of 'vision,' whether pagan or Christian. To the sublime 'dream' of the philosopher (*Fatum et fortuna*) (*Fate and Fortune*), the author juxtaposes the degraded dream of the 'bibliophile' in *Somnium* (*The Dream*): Platonic wisdom is replaced by 'the wisdom of the gutter.' In an age of invective, Alberti uses instead allegorical subtlety to utter imprecations against Niccolò Niccoli. He immerses his protagonist, Libripeta, in a landscape of grotesque objects — hair, beard, lice — that in the oneiric tradition foretell an unlucky future.¹⁰ The figurative contents recall *Fate and Fortune*.¹¹ Alberti substitutes the ample allegorical structure (mountains, river, boats) with an accumulation of heterogeneous objects capriciously set side-by-side. It is not a scene based on perspective but a grotesque consisting of suspended elements. The 'fields of wisdom,' popular in the encyclopedic Middle Ages, are not the backdrop for the slow and solemn procession of learned individuals, but the locale for the unseemly race of the envious, slanderous and falsely learned Libripeta. He is followed by a swarm of harmful insects, the same ones that Alberti's archdevil Momus uses to question the perfection of the universe newly created by the hand of God.¹²

Compared to *Fatum et fortuna*, the vision in *Somnium* contains elements of self-parody. Yet, not unlike Boccaccio's version, the privileged object of Alberti's parody is still the visions of preachers. If the author of the *Decameron* limited himself to satirizing the coarse inventions of preachers, as in the story of Fra Cipolla and the feather of the Angel Gabriel, then

Alberti appears to ridicule the apocalyptic current in Christian preaching (see Simoncini). The apocalypse must have meant very little to one who secretly inclined toward a Stoic-Platonic determinism. Alberti prefers a visionary inventiveness directed toward a few subtle readers capable of grasping the serious and comical nuances of his symbolism. He thus tends instead to disparage the existing forms of popular eschatology, forms that were also socially censured insofar as the Church, whose organizational structure was centred on the functions of the bishop (seen almost as a civil magistrate), was hostile to the idle and vagabond preaching of the mendicant friars.

After the Quattrocento, the parodic use of the visionary genre derived new momentum from two sources: the polemics surrounding the Reformation, and the extraordinary fortune of Erasmus's *Colloquia* (*Colloquies*), which were translated into Italian in 1542 by Pietro Lauro of Modena. Ariosto continued the tradition started by Boccaccio. He gave to Dante's *Inferno* a purely human dimension through the adventures of Astolfo¹³ and, as Alberti had already done, he took up once again the theme of immortality, through the episode of Saint John's discourse. Other authors, younger than Ariosto and more engaged in religious discussions,¹⁴ abandoned the purely literary camp. They transformed the 'vision' — the revelatory ecstasy dear to monks — into a form of propaganda against those same institutions that had used it to lay claim to a transcendent legitimization. They set the Boccaccio who was a stylistic model in opposition to the Boccaccio who was a master of anti-clericalism.¹⁵ To Cicero, meanwhile, they opposed the 'miraculous' author of the *Sileni Alcibiadis* (*Sileni of Alcibiadis*). And to the tinsel of classicism they opposed the *utilitas* (moral teaching) of the Bible and the *veritas* (truth) of its stories in opposition to the views of Livy, who, according to Erasmus, was in error.¹⁶ Ortensio Lando repropose, through the indirect approach of his irony, the validity and relevance of the anti-clericalism of Boccaccio. With his *Funeral Profession* (*Funus*) he furnishes a singular example of parodic apotheosis, one which takes up Erasmian models and turns them against the emerging cult of Erasmus, a cult which was beginning to leave its imprint on the more moderate humanism of Basel. As Silvana Seidel Menchi (1974) has correctly pointed out, the *Funus* is an important precursor of the *Pasquillus* by the 'Erasmian' Celio Secondo Curione. *Pasquillus*'s link to Erasmus, however, is not likely due to its theological content; the distance between Curione's rigid Zwinglian predestinationism and the synergism of Erasmus is far too great.¹⁷ But in *Pasquillus* the author clearly never loses sight of the literary model provided by Erasmus's *Encomion* (*In Praise of Folly*) and

Colloquia (*Colloquies*). In the latter work especially Erasmus succeeded in acclimatizing the comical spirit of Boccaccio to northern humanism, thus conferring upon it a militant religious value.

As is well known, in *Pasquillus* the great humanist of Rotterdam is punished for his neutrality; he is condemned to oscillating between the 'Christian' heaven and the 'papist' one. Curione's judgment, however, is anything but negative: Pasquillus deplores the unhappy fate of the man who is refined, learned, and, above all, witty (516). To be sure, on a literary level the influence of the *Encomion* and the *Colloquia* proves to be persistent and profound. The polemical motif of Christ as the eternal infant derives from the *Peregrinatio religionis ergo* (*Religious Pilgrimage*).¹⁸ Even the recourse to the Gospel of Saint John as an instrument of magic is common in the *fictio* of Erasmus and of Curione.¹⁹ Erasmus helps Curione to re-think the diversified Lucianic and satirical-paradoxical tradition of the Quattrocento. Following upon the *Iulius exclusus* (*Julius Excluded From Heaven*),²⁰ which Curione anthologizes in *Pasquillorum tomi duo*, the traditional pasquinade or lampoon, a brief satire *ad personam*, is transformed into an ample dialogue, one that can serve as an introduction to Protestant doctrine.²¹ The pasqualesque collection establishes a whole tradition and is an indispensable point of departure for the present discussion, for it establishes the authority of the *flagello* (scourge) of the princes of Rome: as a pamphleteer the protagonist Pasquillus has obtained substantial merits in his contribution to the Reformation, and these allow him to assume the role of catechist *sui generis* to Marphorius. But the character of Pasquillus, who has been nourished on the terrain of curial back-biting and slander,²² is in a certain sense rendered noble under the influence of Erasmus. As often happens in Erasmus's *Colloquies*, the Socratic interlocutor, who brings with him a more mature ethical awareness, uses his dialectical and maieutic technique to demolish the prejudices of his interlocutor. He guides him to the recognition of the truth of the therapeutic discourse, the *iatròs lógos* of the Platonic tradition. Even Curione's Pasquillus (a stone statue that paradoxically reveals itself as a herm, a Silenic emblem), argues socratically.²³ If Curione constructs a bridge between Socrates and Lucian, his imitation of Lucian is nevertheless neither classical nor mythological;²⁴ it takes on, rather, the form of a 'grotesque escatology' that seems to lend itself particularly well to a polemical assault against monastic culture and tradition. The *Pasquillus*, like *Funus*, *Exorcismus*, *Peregrinatio religionis ergo*, satirizes the ridiculous escatology of the friars, especially the Franciscans. Curione, the 'reformed' propagandist, does not ignore the authority that popular consciousness places in the religious visions of persons possessing

the odour of sanctity. But this fact is used to expose heterodox opinions; ironically, both the protagonist and the content of the ecstatic vision are altered: the protagonist is no longer an ascetic, but Pasquillus himself, the mad commentator; the content of the revelation no longer describes sensational events and future prodigies, but rather the unmasking of the hypocrisies of the 'papist' heaven.²⁵

Curione's characters, much like those of Erasmus, imitate the techniques of the friars in order to ridicule their pretentious holiness. In a quarrelsome, Ariosto-like monastery from which Silence has fled, Pasquillus studies the preliminary exercises. Halfway between asceticism and necromancy, these are used by the monks in order to induce visions. After studying them, Pasquillus uses them in the same way.²⁶ Traditional forms are recognizable not only in the descriptions of the vision itself,²⁷ but also in the representation of the thought process that introduces it and renders it necessary. The protagonist is tormented by a state of doubt that cannot be resolved by reading and meditation. The Christian meditates on divine providence and is disturbed by the contrast between, on the one hand, the optimistic theology of the dignity of man and the perfection of the universe, and, on the other, the fact that the historical and social worlds are dominated by evil. He is thus subject to the temptations of Epicureanism and Manichaeism. In fact, the cult of saints appears to him to be very close to the propitiatory and apotropaic cult of evil gods. Yet he is not able to negate the factual reality of miracles and the intervention of supernatural powers in human affairs, irreducible to the beneficent and well-ordered action of a supreme being.²⁸ The solution to this philosophical-theological doubt is referred to a private revelation, a vision which does justice to the cult of saints, and which shows that the many ridiculous impostors who populate the papist heaven²⁹ are anything but the true friends of God. The parody of a revelatory vision coincides with a positive revelation: the heaven of the papists is empty, or, better yet, is full of objects without significance or coherence; it is a deep valley containing all the things lost by human *stultitia* (folly), and upon it is built the fragile and arrogant edifice of the papacy.³⁰ This depiction, articulated according to the different levels of the ecclesiastical hierarchy,³¹ alternates with a commentary full of Biblical rationalism. Rigorously literal and scriptural, it reinforces, contrary to the degeneration of the Church, a positive model of the cult of the spirit and of truth. The parody transposes into Christian terms the alienated stare of Lucian's *Icaromenippus*,³² and confers visual evidence — as well as an effective polemic — in favour of the elimination of a vast part of traditional devotional practice.

The parodic eschatology also includes some seriousness. The imaginary voyage to heaven to examine up close the nature of the supposed saints is anything but a joke: it becomes, rather, the confirmation of a radical theology of the anti-Christ.³³ The miracles of the 'saints' are real; they are a testimony to the fact that the time of the anti-Christ has arrived. The world, then, is apparently governed by the devil, or by a demiurge that is Gnostic and Manichaean (he of course collaborates with the elect for the greater glory of God). The eschatological 'joke' is an authentic apocalypse, and here Curione diverges from Erasmus: for the Italian humanist there can be no sense of serene superiority over the monks who are ridiculed, as there is for the cultivated and witty Erasmians. Even among the Lucianic pleasantries, *Pasquillus* echoes the Reformation theme of the Pauline conversion on the road to Damascus. If the setting for the *Colloquia* are the open spaces through which the itinerant cleric wanders, always caught between academic *gravitas* and the desire to write pungent satire,³⁴ the backdrop of *Pasquillus* is, by contrast, substantially closed. The trip across the sky is a parenthesis placed between two catacomb-like spaces: the never-specified corner of Papal Rome where the dialogue between the ever-threatened *Pasquillus*³⁵ and Marphorius takes place, and the underground passage through which the Reformers hope to penetrate the fortress of the Catholic Babylon. One spies and is spied upon, and the circle (*sodalitas*³⁶) is formed not in the well-ordered gardens of Erasmian reason, but in the invisible hypogean Church. In this context, any aspiration to a comical representation of a daily life of moderation vanishes, as does the program of educating Epicurean and Christian elites through humour and graceful pleantry. Erasmian humour is founded upon a supple manipulation of language; the humour of Curione, rather, derives from violent caricature. The grotesque element emerges forcefully in his portrayal, with its cursive Latin filled with Italianisms: opposites placed side by side stand out all the more. Curione transforms the images of the *Legenda aurea* (*Golden Legend*) into an elaborate caricature. This caricature emphasizes the inconsistencies both of the Catholic theology of good works and of a forensic conception of the Last Judgment, one that ignores the benefit or good favour of Christ.³⁷ The absurd position of the papist adversaries comes to light as soon as one makes a concrete attempt to imagine their conception of the world beyond: the pictorial tradition, with its popular depictions and its inevitable banalizations, indirectly confirms the Reformist argument.³⁸ As a good spiritualist, Curione proves to be reticent when it comes to portraying paradise in terms that are accessible to the imagination. The anti-theoretical structure of *Pasquillus* naturally calls for a description of the

Christian heaven, but this description remains sketchy and is limited to generalities — luminous radiance, Pythagorean musical harmony — that are quite removed from the rich figurative descriptions of the papist heaven. This different treatment of the two heavens corresponds to their diverse natures: the reformist Christian heaven is Being itself, *ousia*, and individual entities are absorbed by Christ. The papist heaven, on the other hand, is nothing more than an image, a disquieting product of the imagination.³⁹

This explosion of grotesque writing involves the reinterpretation in a grotesque key of the current, imaginary treatment of the sacred, and has close ties to a rudimentary philosophy of religion. Curione raises the question of the origin of idolatry, which he explains as the misinterpretation of an emblematic image⁴⁰: the saints are considered the hypostasis of certain allegorical figures devised by the learned as a means of instructing the populace. It is evidently necessary to rediscover in its pure conceptual form the Christian truth that lies behind the imaginative universal. On the other hand, Curione recognizes the existence of an original wisdom common to both Christians and pagans, expressed through images and parables. These have been altered and corrupted by the people, who are deaf to the paradoxical truth of Pythagorean metempsychosis as they are to the teachings of Christ.⁴¹

Curione's *Pasquillus* is situated at the confluence of the two visionary traditions discussed up to this point, one serious and the other parodic. The serious tradition can be seen as the presence of the Middle Ages in the Renaissance. It presents an eschatological truth in the form of a privileged revelation, one that is verified during sleep or ecstasy. The parodic vision replaces the eschatological content with an imposture or fraud, either conscious (as in the Boccaccian examples) or imposed (as in the case of Alberti's Libripeta, who believes he is raving without impunity in the country of dreams, and is punished for his surly misanthropy). The serious vision, as an ecstatic moment in the sermon, constitutes a fundamental aspect of sacred oratory. The parodic vision inserts a critical element into the celebratory nature of the epideictic rhetorical genre (as in Valla's *In Praise of St. Thomas Aquinas*). *Pasquillus extaticus* contains both didactic and satiric aspects: revelation is possible only when it involves the demolition of an imposture. The Italian Reformation could not admit any other source of eschatological truth if not the enlightened study of the Bible. Its heaven, stripped of all colour, could only be concretely portrayed as the antithesis of a pagan and papist heaven. The city of the seven walls is not the Celestial Jerusalem, but the City of Dis that has risen to heaven thanks to the miracles of the Anti-Christ. The Reformation notion of justification

by faith alone resulted in the emptying out of hell. It becomes identified rather with that despair of divine mercy that had consumed Francesco Spiera of Cittadella, who had been elevated to the level of symbol of the unhappy conscience. "Not all of us will rise again," proclaimed the Anabaptists, reading St. Paul according to Valla and Erasmus, as if the inconsolable conscience of the man who has no faith or religious wisdom (*insipiens*), of the Pomponazzian philosopher, were enough to replace hell: "Death is the same for men and beasts" (see Stella 74). In this religious context, the lines between sacred and profane, serious vision and parodic vision, literary tradition and grotesque invention, tend to become blurred for Quattrocento writers and for Ariosto too. Hell is neither below the earth nor at the source of the Nile in the mysterious country of the priest Gianni-Senapo: hell is in heaven, at the vertex of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The real heaven is hidden behind the appearances of the imposture. Similarly, in the *Sileni* of Erasmus the visible world veils the spiritual one, and in Curione's *De amplitudine beati regni Dei* (*On the Grandeur of the Blessed Kingdom of God*) the exteriority of the ecclesiastical sacraments conceals the universal, invisible efficacy of grace. The precious gems of the cathedrals (more precious when they are mounted on the walls of Paradise) are not symbolic of the papist Jerusalem. Much more symbolic are the mitres, the crosiers, and the other liturgical objects that those gems had ennobled. They have been rendered profane, snatched away from the sacristies only to be hoarded up in heaven. Like the foolish prayers of the men of the Lucianic tradition, or the obscene materials found in the dreams of Libripeta, they indecently clutter it. The traditional heaven, the one of Aristotle, Ptolemy and Scholastic theology, is reduced to a literary backdrop for mimics, comics and hystrionic Sileni. Curione, the religious pantheist of the *Araneus on Divine Providence* will be followed by Giordano Bruno, the speculative pantheist of *The Cause, Principle and One*. The Counter-Reformation will once again place the ecstatic vision in all of its sublime seriousness on the altar, but it will not be able to remove the grotesque image of superstition: the parodic vision (see Stoll) will remain a part of European art right up to the enlightened Romanticism of Goya.

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Latin quotations translated by Edward Moore.

NOTES

¹I refer obviously to the famous novella of Nastagio degli Onesti (*Decameron*, 4:8).

²The source for this episode is Petrarch's *Seniles*, 1:5 (May 28, 1362). See Branca 123-124.

³Valla, *Oraciones y Prefacios*, 228-246.

⁴"Non me fugit quosdam, qui de hac re, hoc die, ex hoc loco orationem habuerunt, non modo nonnulli doctorum Ecclesiae secundum Thomam fecisse, sed etiam omnibus anteposuisse. Qui cur nulli secundum facere debeamus ex eo probabant, quod quidam integerrimae vitae frater inter orandum viderit Augustinam, quem summum theologum statuunt, et una Thomam, mirabili utrumque praeditum maiestate, Augustinumque dicentem audierit Thomam esse sibi in gloria parem" (Ibid., 304-306). Valla, "In Praise of Saint Thomas Aquinas" in *Renaissance Philosophy*: "I am quite well aware that some men who have spoken on this subject from this podium today have not only placed Thomas second to none of the doctors of the Church, but have even set him ahead of them all. As to why we should consider him second to none, these men give this proof, that a certain Brother of very holy life, in the midst of his prayer, saw Augustine, whom they consider the greatest of the theologians, and with him Thomas, both surrounded with wondrous majesty, and he heard Augustine declaring that Thomas was equal to him in glory.") (22).

⁵"Erunt itaque quinque paria theologiae principium, ante thronum Dei et agnum, continentia cum viginti quatuor illis senioribus. Canunt enim semper apud Deum scriptores rerum sanctarum: primum par Basilius et Ambrosius, canens lyra; secundum Nazianzenus et Hieronimus, canens cythara; tertium Chrysostomus et Augustinus, canens psalterio; quartum Dionysius et Gregorius, canens tibia; quintum Damascenus et Thomas, canens cymbalis" (Ibid., 316-318). ("And so there will be five pairs of princes of theology singing praises before the throne of God and the Lamb with the twenty-four elders; for writers of sacred things sing forever before god; the first pair, Basil and Ambrose, playing on the lyre; the second, Nazianzen and Jerome, playing on the zither; the third, Chrysostom and Gregory, playing on the psaltery; the fourth, Dionysius and Gregory, playing on the flute; the fifth, the Damascene and Thomas, playing on the cymbals") (26). The Quattrocento audience could not possibly miss the Pauline reference to the "cymbalis," full of science but lacking *caritas*. This is not the only ironic passage in the *Encomium*: "So that it may be clear that, though our Thomas Aquinas is a confessor, still he is not for that reason to be relegated to a place below the martyrs; it is my opinion ... that he is in no way inferior ... to Thomas the archbishop of Canterbury, who, good shepherd that he was, died for his flock to protect his clergy from being fleeced" (19). "Ut appareat Thomam nostrum Aquinatem, etsi confessorem, non tamen esse continuo post martyres reponendum, ut mea fert opinio, nihilo inferiorum ... Thoma episcopo Cantuariensi, qui tamquam pastor bonus pro grege suo, *ne clerus bonis spoliaretur*, occubuit" (Ibid., 296 [emphasis added]). On the parodic component in the *Encomium Thomae Aquinatis*, see Blanchard 48-52.

⁶Valla, *De vero falsoque bono*, 121-136.

⁷Cf. Ibid., 117-118.

⁸Erasmus, "De pueris statim ac liberaliter instituendis," in *Opera omnia*. After criticizing teachers for their excessive use of corporeal punishment, Erasmus refers to the severity of the Old Testament, and comments: "Hic quidam occinent nobis Hebraeorum oracula ... 'Curva cervicum filii in iuventate et tunde latera illius dum infans est.' Eiusdem castigatio fortasse congruebat olim Iudaeis. Nunc oportet Hebraeorum dicta *civilius* interpretari [emphasis added]" (62). ("At this point someone may din into our ears such Old Testament proverbs as ... 'Bend your son's neck in his youth, and bruise his sides while he is a child'. Perhaps for the Jews of a long time ago this sort of discipline was appropriate, but nowadays we must interpret these sayings from the Old Testament more liberally") (*Collected Works of Erasmus*, 26.332).

⁹As usual, Alberti expresses his ideas with caution. However, while the text seems to indicate the pre-existence of souls, the figure of God as creator is completely absent: "Nam ut primum in fluvium umbrarum quaeque descendisset, ita illico infantum ora et membra induisse videbantur, ac deinceps, quo longius fluvio raperentur, eo illis quidem aetatis et membrorum personis adcrevisse intuebar" (Alberti, *Opera inedita*, 137). ("As soon as each shade had entered the river, it seemed at once to take on an infant's face and limbs. Then, the further the river carried the shades, the more I saw their age and members increase") (*Fate and Fortune*, in *Dinner Pieces*, 23). The souls declare: "Sumus enim coelestes, ut et ipse tu quidem es, igniculi qui humanitati debemur." ("Like you, we are celestial sparks destined for human life.") They urge that the investigation not be pushed too far, by tackling the question of the origin of souls: "desine, homo, istiusmodi dei deorum occulta investigare longius quam mortalibus liceat." ("Cease, O man, cease searching into the secrets of the gods deeper than mortals are allowed") (23-24). We should not forget the influence that Origen had on the culture of Florence in the early Quattrocento; this is documented in Matteo Palmieri's *Città di vita*.

¹⁰Cf., for example, Artemidorus, "Having a few lice ... is a good sign ... but if there are many lice and they appear in great numbers, it is unpropitious and signifies a lingering illness, captivity or great poverty. For lice also thrive under these conditions" (*The Interpretation of Dreams*, 160). It is likely, however, that the derivation is not direct: Artemidorus's text was not reintroduced into the West until after the fall of Byzantium.

¹¹The allegorical backdrop is the same: "at the foot of a very high mountain, where human destinies are determined, there runs an impetuous river. Its swift torrent is said to swell with the tears of wretches and mourners" (*The Dream*, in *Dinner Pieces*, 68). Once again, it is the River of Life, exposed to the uncertainties of fortune. The stylistic register, however, is quite different. Parody is obvious, for example, in the substitution of the grotesque and repugnant old women, used as rafts, for the imperial ships and for the planks of the arts used by men in *Fate and Fortune*. Another figurative detail common to the two texts are the bladders, which in *Fate and Fortune* symbolize adulators and in *The Dream* political power. *The Dream* emphasizes the expressionistic and grotesque details: thus the rocks of

Fatum et fortuna become the biting faces of the slanderers that populate the River of Life.

¹²Cf. Alberti, *Momo o del principe*: "Inde igitur [Momus] rem se dignam excogitavit. Universum enim terrarum orbem cimice, tinea, fuconibus, crabronibus, statanionibus et eiusmodi obscenis et sui similibus bestiolis refertissimum reddidit" (32). (Therefore he [Momus] then devised a plan worthy of him. For he made the entire world to abound in bed-bugs, maggots, bees, wasps, cockroaches and foul insects of this sort, which shared his likeness.)

¹³Cf. the episodes of Senapo and of Lidia in *Orlando Furioso*, 33.101.34 and 47.

¹⁴Cf. Ariosto, "Satire," 6.43-58, in *Opere minori*: "Se Nicoletto o fra Martin fan segno / D'infedele o d'eretico, ne accuso / Il saper troppo, e men con lor mi sdegno: / perché, salendo lo intelletto in suso / Per veder Dio, non de' parerci strano / se talor cade giù cieco e confuso. / Ma tu, del qual lo studio è tutto umano ... / dimmi, che truovi tu che sì la mente / Ti debbia avviluppar, sì tòrre il senno / Che tu non credi come l'altra gente?" (563) "If Nicoletto and Brother Martin show signs of unbelief or heresy, I accuse their excessive knowledge and am less angry with them; when the intellect ascends on high to see God, we must not think it strange if sometimes it falls down blind and bewildered. But you, whose study is entirely human ... tell me, what have you found that so confuses your minds and so deprives you of your sense that you do not believe as others do?" (*The Satires of Ludovico Ariosto*, 155).

¹⁵Cf. the effective irony of Ortensio Lando in his *Paradossi*: "Ditemi per cortesia o Bocacceschi, cercò egli altro nella novella di Gianotto Giudeo, che di puorci in odio la santissima Romana corte, sempre chiamando la vita de preti hor scelerata, hor lorda, non ponendo mente alla sua più d'ogni altra brutta. Che pensò egli quando scrisse di frate Rinaldo, dello agnolo Gabriele e di Don Felice? se non di metterci in disgratia e frati, che pur sono la siepe e il bastione contra de gli Heretici e infelici noi, se essi con le lor buone dottrine e tanti essempli non ci havesser diffesi dalle pestilenti heresie. Nella novella di Ser Chiappelletto a che altro attese che a levarci dal cuore la riverentia et divotione de santi?" (99r-v). (Tell me, please, you followers of Boccaccio, did he ever attempt, in the novella of Gianotto Giudeo, to do anything other than to make us hate the most holy Roman court, always calling the lives of priests now wicked, now filthy, never realizing that his own life was far worse than all others? What was he thinking about when he wrote about Frate Rinaldo, the Angel Gabriel and Don Felice, if not to disgrace holy friars, who are the barrier and the bastion against heretics, and to make us unhappy, as would happen if the holy friars with their good teachings and many good examples did not defend us from the pestilence of heresy? And what else did he set about to do in the novella of Ser Ciappelletto if not to remove from our hearts the reverence and devotion of saints?)

¹⁶Cf. Erasmus, *Il Ciceroniano*: "Hic mihi confer, si libet, fabulosum Herodotum cum Mose ... confer libros ludicum et Regum cum Tito Livio, qui non raro secum ipse dissidet in rerum gestarum narratione, tantum abest, ut

nusquam aberret a vero" (154). ("So just compare, if you please, Herodotus, that teller of tales, with Moses ... compare the books of the Judges and the Kings with Livy, who doesn't even write a consistent account of Rome's exploits, let alone a true one") (*Collected Works of Erasmus*, 28.393). For Valla's attitude toward Livy, see the *Invectivae in Bartholomeum Facium*, in *Opera omnia*, 460-632.

¹⁷Cf. Luca D'Ascia, "Celio Secondo Curione: erasmista o antierasmista."

¹⁸Cf. *Pasquillus*: "M[arphorius]: Sed ubi erat Christus? P[asquillus]: Illum non vidi: sed iussus exire concilium, ante palatium vidi ludentem cum quibusdam Geniis puerulum, de quo cum meum ducem interrogarem, dixit Christum esse, qui ibi luderet, et omnia commisisset matri" (514). (M[arphorius]: But where was Christ? P[asquillus]: I didn't see him, but having been ordered to leave the council, I saw a little boy playing with some genii in front of the palace. When I asked my guide about him, he said it was Christ who was playing there and who had entrusted all things to his mother.) Cf. also Erasmus's *Religious Pilgrimage*: "They demanded everything from me alone, as if my Son were always a baby (because he is carved and painted as such at my bosom), still needing his mother's consent and not daring to deny a person's prayer; fearful, that is, that if he did deny the petitioner something, I for my part would refuse him the breast when he was thirsty" (*Colloquies*, in *Collected Works of Erasmus*, 40.625).

¹⁹"Collo vero oportebat appensum esse Evangelium Divi Ioannis, In principio erat Verbum" (*Pasquillus*, 449). But it was fitting for the Gospel of St. John, "In the beginning was the word," to be hung from the neck; Cf. Erasmus, *The Exorcism and the Ghost*: "On the neck [of the vase] was placed the so-called sacred robe from which the beginning of the Gospel according to St. John was hanging. In addition, a sacred stole (as it is called), with the opening verses of St. John's Gospel hanging from it, was hung over Faunus's shoulders" (*Colloquies*, in *Collected Works of Erasmus*, 39.537).

²⁰The paternity of *Julius Excluded* is a much debated question. I feel that the undoubtedly Erasmian core of the dialogue was reelaborated in a philo-French and openly conciliar direction before the edition of 1517, probably by a humanist from Basel belonging to the circle of Boniface Amerbach. Nevertheless, the attributions to Hutten and to Fausto Andrelini are certainly unfounded. Cf. Ijsewijn.

²¹The *Pasquillus* indeed performed this function in numerous cases, as can be seen from the Inquisition documents: cf. Menchi, 1987, 92 (the trial of Guido Rangone, gentleman of Modena), 97 (Giovanni Antonio Maffei, a schoolmaster from Padua), 242 (Aurelio Cicuta), 244 (Franco Pasaggio, the Genoese governor of Corsica), 288 (Fra Bonaventura Clozio of Venice), 447 (Nicolino Vitalba di Nembro of Bergamo); Biondi 30 (captain Antonio da Cervia, burned at Bologna in 1567, read the pamphlet of Curione to his soldiers), 31 (Pietro Carnesecchi and an anonymous servant of Pietro Paolo Vergerio, bishop of Capodistria). Francesco Riccio, secretary of Cosimo I de' Medici, also had a copy of *Pasquillus*.

²²Pasquino attempts to enter the papist Heaven, but the old guardian sends him away: "hoc coelum non patere momis aut mimis" (*Pasquillus*, 455). (This

heaven is not open to a Momus or a mocker.) Pasquino, however, is not impressed: "Risi subito, intra me dicens, Oportet hic multa ridicula esse, quod momos vitant et mimos." (I laughed immediately saying to myself, there must be many ridiculous things here, since they shun mockers and the likes of Momus.)

²³M[arphorius]: Nimis Socratice mecum disputas: non satis hoc intelligo, hos sorites" (*Pasquillus*, 436-437). (M[arphorius]: You argue too socratically with me: I don't understand this well enough, these tricks of logic.)

²⁴"De dijs Christianorum loquimur, Pasquille: mittamus nugas Lucianicas suo auctori" (*Pasquillus*, 428). (We speak of the gods of the Christians, Pasquillus; let's leave Lucianic pleasantries to their author.)

²⁵M[arphorius]: Sed unum te interrogabo, cuius pene iam eram oblitus. Si isti tot visionibus scatent, cur tantis superstitionibus, tantisque mandacijs (ut soles dicere) adhuc involvuntur? P[asquinus]: Quia veritatem rerum sacrarum ostendi sibi non postulant, sed alias nugas, quae interim contra pietatem sunt" (*Pasquillus*, 450). (M[arphorius]: But I will ask you one thing, which I had nearly forgotten. If those people abound in so many visions, why are they (as you often say) wrapped up in so many superstitions and deceits? P[asquinus]: Because they don't ask that the truth of sacred matters be revealed to them, but rather they ask for other pleasantries, which are sometimes impious.)

²⁶The description of sorcery in Curione is very close to a famous episode in Cellini's *Vita* in which Cellini describes a necromantic experiment that ends miserably and is quickly forgotten by the adventurous protagonist himself. Cellini's sarcastic conclusion is highly emblematic: "Con questi ragionamenti noi arrivammo alle case nostre, e ciascun di noi tutta quella notte sognammo diavoli" (Cellini, *La vita*, 133-137). ("Engaged in this conversation, we reached our homes, and each one of us dreamed all that night of devils") (*Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini*, 152).

²⁷Thus we find the sphere of fire, the appearance of the Angel, the biblical model of the chariot of Elijah. Cf. *Pasquillus*, 451-452.

²⁸P[asquillus]: Interea dum video omne meum studium male collocatum iri, coepi nonnihil dubitare de rebus humanis, qua sorte regerentur, haesitabam mecum de Dei providentia, de Dei iustitia, videns iustorum passim afflictionem, et impiorum fortunatam sortem. Saepe mecum cogitabam, quid est quaeso quod inter homines dispensat iam? persuasus aliud fere quiddam esse, quam in rebus caeteris naturae. M[arphorius]: Ista erat vera ad Epicurismum via" (*Pasquillus*, 430). (P[asquillus]: In the meantime, while I saw that all my learning would be poorly arranged, I began to doubt some things concerning human affairs and by what chance they're governed; to myself I was unsure of God's providence, of God's justice, seeing here and there the affliction of the just and the fortunate lot of the impious. I would often think to myself, what is it (I ask) that governs things now among men, convinced almost that it was something other than that which governs the other affairs of nature. M[arphorius]: That was the true way towards Epicureanism.)

²⁹Cf. *Pasquillus*, 461-463, where the following saints appear: Saint Domenic, maker of rosaries, Saint Bernard, concerned that the devil may soil Clairvaux, and Saint Thomas Aquinas, apologist for the ox Api in his dissertation on *lâtrea*, *doulia* and *hyperdoulia* (cf. Sancti Thomae de Aquino, *Summa Theologica*, IIa, IIae, qu. 103, satirized in Erasmus's *Praise of Folly*). As in Erasmus, provocation is linked to the traditional fight against 'paganism.'

³⁰"M[arphorius]: Nullam vidisti materiem fundamentorum? ... P(asquillus): Erant cuculla, rosaria, vestes sordidae, detonsi crines, vela vestalium, mille vestium, mille calceorum, mille rituum formae. Ad haec putres pisces, mitrae coronae triplices et varii libelli, quae omnia tophis erant et calce commixta et haec erat basis fundamentorum" (*Pasquillus*, 458). (M[arphorius]: Have you seen no foundational material? ... P(asquillus): There were cowls, rosaries, coarse clothes, tonsured hair, the veils of virgins, the forms of a thousand clothes, shoes and rites; along with these, add rotten fish, the threefold crowns of the mitre and various little books, all of which had been mixed together with tufa stone and lime, and this was the base of the foundation.)

³¹The papist Babylon is a fortified city divided into seven levels: monks, confessors, martyrs, virgins, prophets. These are followed by the tribunal and finally by the palace of the Lady of the Apocalypse where the secret consistory is held; and the churchmen deliberate on how best to keep the princes and peoples of Europe in ignorance. The first levels are a parodic echo of the Dionysian tradition. In his description of the 'Christian' heaven, on the other hand, Curione eliminates all hierarchical elements (there are no distinctions between angelic orders, no gradations of beatitude among the elect), insisting instead on absolute equality.

³²"Cum diu mecum disquisivissem aliquam in coelum viam, nunquam hanc invenire potui, quamvis in dies de Protheo, *de Icaromenippo* multa legerem, qui eo dicebantur contendisse: sed qua via, silebatur" (*Pasquillus*, 445 [emphasis added]). (Although for a long time I had sought out some path to heaven, I was never able to find this path; although I read much concerning Protheus and *Icaromenippus*, who were said to lead there, there was but silence as to which path to take.)

³³"Mirra narras. Ergo ista administratio rerum ad veris sanctis non egreditur [sic]. P(asquillus): Non, Marphori. M[arphorius]: Scisne a quibus? P(asquillus): Scio, ab immundis spiritibus, qui hominibus pulchris titulis illudunt. Nescis Dominum in Evangelio dixisse, Antichristum miraculis fidem eversurum? (*Pasquillus*, 525). (You tell of wonderful things. Therefore such administration of matters doesn't proceed to the true saints. P(asquillus): No, Marphorius. M[arphorius]: Do you know by whom? P(asquillus): I know: by impure spirits, who deceive men with beautiful titles. Don't you know what the Lord said in the Gospel, that the Antichrist would overturn faith through miracles?) Cf. Rotondò 19-164.

³⁴Cf. "Spongia adversus aspergines Hutteni" (*Sponge Against Hutten's Aspersions*), in Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, 9.1: "mihi placet haec libertas in conviviis et familiaribus colloquiis, qua saepe utor immodice, aliorum animos ex meo aestimans ... Quoties in conviviis imperium transtulimus in Iulium pontificem et summum pontificium in Maximilianum Caesarem! Deinde collegia monacharum

mattimonio copulavimus collegiis monachorum. Mox descriptissimus ex illis exercitum adversus Turcas, deinde colonias ex iisdem in novas insulas. Breviter universum orbis statum vertebamus. Sed haec senatusconsulta non inscribebantur aureis tabulis, sed vino, sic ut sublatis poculis nemo meminisset quid a quo dictus esset" (172). (This freedom in banquets and friendly conversations pleases me, and I often over-indulge in it, assessing the minds of others from the standpoint of my own ... How often in conversation did we transfer the empire to Pope Julius and supreme power to Emperor Maximilian! Next we joined in marriage the communities of nuns to the communities of monks. Soon from them we formed an army against the Turks, then from the same we established colonies on new islands. In short time we overturned the entire state of the world. But such "Senate decrees" were not inscribed in gold tablets, but in wine, so that once the glasses were born away, nobody remembered what was said by whom.)

³⁵Cf. *Pasquillus*: "M[arphorius]: Agnosco errorem, tu deinceps mihi eris pro Gratiano Pasquille. Sane debebas ista in triviis declamitare. P[asquinus]: Auditoribus fakinis scilicet. Non tamen id me puderet, nisi timerem decretum Pontificis illius Germani revocatum iri ... ut rursus efficerer pater Tyberinus ex Pasquillo" (422-423). (M[arphorius]: I acknowledge the error; you will stand then for me in place of Gratianus, Pasquillus. Clearly you were obliged to declaim those things in the streets. P[asquillus]: Namely, to those listening porters. However it wouldn't shame me, unless I feared that the decree of that German pope would be revoked ... so that, out of a Pasquillus, I would again be made a father Tyberius.)

³⁶Cf., for example, *Pasquillus*: "Nolim hunc nostrum congressum cuiquam notum esse: quando iam omnibus exosa veritas, quae hic apud te perquiritur" (529). (I would not like this meeting of ours to be known to everyone, when already the truth, which is diligently sought in your presence here, is despised by all.)

³⁷Typical of this way of proceeding is the reference to Saint Michael. Curione argues against the legend which claimed that the Archangel had installed himself on Mount Gargano. The cowherd, from whom the mountain had supposedly gotten its name, had gone in search of a lost bull. Upon finding him, he fired a poisonous arrow at him in a fit of anger, an arrow that instead turned around and struck the person who had fired it. With this miracle, Saint Michael announced to the citizens of the area that he would from then on establish himself on the mountain as guardian (cf. Jacobus de Voragine [sic], *The Golden Legend*: 2.201-202). Curione further distorts the text of the *Golden Legend*: "P[asquillus]: Dicebant illum esse D. Michaellem. M[arphorius] Illum qui in monte Gargano dicitur amasse taurum? P[asquillus]: Ille ipse" (*Pasquillus extaticus*, 503). (P[asquillus]: They used to say he was Saint Michael. M[arphorius]: You mean he who is said to have loved a bull on Mount Gargano? P[asquillus]: The very same.) He criticizes the author of the *Legenda aurea* because Lucan had already named Mount Gargano in the *Bellum Civile*. But above all he invents in pure legendary style the struggle between the Archangel and the devil (not found in Jacopo da Varagine) for the possession of a soul: "Iratius [Michael] gladio caedit daemonem,

et cruce rubra quam in pectore gerit minatur et quietum esse iubet. Daemon vero tandem ad officium reductus, capite stat contracto, non aliter ac solet vulpes gallinam suffurata, quam si rusticus in furto offendat, baculoque minetur, illa se totam contrahit, suam nihilominus gallinam mordicus retinens" (*Pasquillus*, 502). (Angered, [Michael] struck the demon with his sword, and he threatened him with the red cross which he bore on his chest and ordered him to be quiet. Indeed, the demon, reduced at last to obedience, stood with his head bowed, just as a fox will do who has stolen away a hen. If the peasant comes upon him and threatens him with a stick, he withdraws completely, nevertheless still holding the hen in his teeth.) This comparison has an exactness that recalls Dante, and is very far from Cinquecento canons of decorum, especially in connection with the Last Judgement; the humanistically educated reader cannot but exclaim with Marphorius: "Pulchra comparatio per Iovem." (A lovely analogy, by Jove.)

³⁸"Porro antequam haec argumenta haberem, ipsi pictores fecerunt me saepe de hoc igne [purgatorio] dubitare. Nam cum pingerent homines elevatis in altum brachijs et pedibus, crinibus et barba integrum et inviolatum corpus demonstrantes, putavi hunc ignem non magnam habere efficaciam" (*Pasquillus*, 473). (Moreover, before I would accept these arguments, painters themselves often caused me to have doubts about this [purgatorial] fire. For when they depicted men with their feet and hands raised in the air, showing their bodies complete and their hair and beards unharmed, I thought that this fire was not greatly effective.)

³⁹"P[asquillus]: Oportet te scire, esse magnam differentiam inter solem et lunam qui hunc orbem quotidie ambiunt, et inter eos qui hanc reginam [the Lady of the Papist heaven] vestiunt. M[arphorius]: Si ea est differentia, *quae inter res fictas aut pictas et veras invenitur*, certe erit magna differentia [emphasis added]" (*Pasquillus*, 506). (P[asquillus]: You should know that there's a great difference between the sun and the moon, which circle this world daily, and between those who dress this queen. M[arphorius]: If it is that difference *which is found between fictional or depicted things and real things*, certainly the difference will be great.)

⁴⁰"Ne tibi persuadeas Pasquille, hunc tam vastum Gigantem unquam fuisse, sed veterum et sapientissimorum Graecorum, crescente iam republica Christiana, esse inventum, qui totum Christianum hominem et vitam eius, omnibus exponere volentes, in una imagine omnia complexi sunt, cuius effigiem vocaverunt Christophorum: quod unumquemque Christianum, qualis esse deberet, referret ... Et fuit istud nihil aliud, quam Christianorum *gnothi sè autòn*" (*Pasquillus*, 481-483). (Don't persuade yourself, Pasquillus, that this giant was ever so large, but rather it was an invention of the ancient and wisest Greeks during the time when the Christian republic was still growing. Desiring to explain to everyone the complete Christian man and his life, they combined everything in a single image, which they called Christopher: this would relay to each and every Christian what he ought to be ... and this was nothing other than the "know thyself" of the Christians.)

⁴¹Cf. Curionis, *Araneus seu de Providentia Dei*: "Haec cum paulo subtilius Pythagoras, ille reconditae philosophiae princeps, disputaret, ut tunc erant nova,

secus ac debuerant accepta sunt, estque ipse ludibrio habitus quorundam prava aemulatione ... Adeo periculosum est, Paradoxa et remotiores paulo sententias efferre: quod verum esse facile comperiet, qui quonam pacto Christi placita, cum primum vulgari coeperunt, accepta fuerint, animadverterit" (41-42). (Since Pythagoras, that founder of recondite philosophy, somewhat more subtly disputed these things, they were accepted, as they were then new, but had deserved otherwise to be accepted; and he himself was exposed to mockery through the base envy of certain people ... Therefore it is dangerous to express paradoxes and somewhat more obscure opinions. He who considers in what way the pleas of Christ were accepted, when they were first spread among the people, will easily discover this to be true.) Curione's positive assessment of Pythagoras derives naturally from the Florentine Platonic tradition: cf., for example, Marsilio Ficino's proem to Plato's *Parmenides*: "Pythagorae Socratisque et Platonis mos erat ubique divina mysteria figuris [*sic*] involucris obtegere, sapientiam suam contra Sophistarum iactantiam modeste dissimulare, iocari serio et studiosissime ludere" (Ficino 1137). (It was the custom of Pythagoras, Socrates and Plato everywhere to conceal divine mysteries in figurative guises, discreetly to distinguish their wisdom from the boasting of the Sophists, to joke with serious intent and to play most studiously).

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